

!Unexpected End of Formula

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

To attempt a commentary on **Revelation** is a tricky business at best. Martin Luther indicated this same thought in the 1545 introduction of his own commentary on **Revelation**. “Many have tried their hands at it, but until this very day they have reached no certainty; and some have brewed into it many stupid things out of their own heads.”¹ Martin’s statement was true then, and, unfortunately, continued to remain true right into the twentieth century. Throughout history, gifted people of God have tried and failed to unravel the profound mysteries of **Revelation**. If this is true, we must ask why? This seems to be contradictory to the very meaning of the word *revelation*. This Greek noun, *apokalypsis* comes from the verb, which means *to take off* or *disclose*. Why has the cover been on for nineteen centuries? Why has **Revelation** been called an extraordinarily difficult book: Why have commentaries been more apocryphal than apocalyptic?

The answers to these question are given by an angel in **Daniel 12:9**. Daniel saw many of the same visions that John saw. He wanted some explanations, but Michael said: “**Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end.**” It would seem that much of Daniel and almost all of John’s revelations were written primarily, if not exclusively, for the believers living shortly before the Second Coming of Christ. Consequently, the church at large has backed off from the apocalyptic sections of Scripture and concentrated on the safer portions of the Bible. A smaller section of the church has embraced them wholeheartedly at the expense of the rest of God’s Word, and has become dangerously charismatic.

Regardless of all the above, I find myself embarked upon a task I find both difficult and time consuming. If this is Spirit-led it will be done well; if not, it will never be finished. I do believe that the Holy Spirit is now opening up the book of **Revelation** to searching souls. In the last twenty years an abundance of spiritual writing about prophecy and revelation has emerged that is better than anything done before. As we begin Christianity’s third millenium, sincere Christians must consider the times and ask themselves if this is “**...the time of the end.**” If it is, then the Book of **Revelation** is not just a fascinating book of mystery, but is a survival book given by God for the security of His children. It seems obvious that we should listen to the Spirit and find out what it says.

Before getting into the body of writing it is helpful for the reader to know a few things about how this will be done. First and foremost in any study of God’s Word is to understand that only Scripture can interpret Scripture. Anyone wishing to understand **Revelation** must be conversant with the sixty-five books that come before it. When I was first asked to teach **Revelation** I was smart enough to realize that I didn’t know

¹ Works of Martin Luther, Vol. 6, p. 480

enough to teach others. Thirty years later I still feel like a novice every time I teach it because every time I do, new insights emerge that I never thought of before.

The second guideline for a study of Scripture is to look for the most logical and normal meaning of the words and situations presented, and consider what they would have meant to the people who first read or heard them. Consider that you are hearing them for the first time, and listen to what you are being told. It is dangerous to come into any part of Scripture with a preconceived idea of what it says. Forget what you have been told it says, and listen to what the Spirit of Truth teaches.

The third guideline is primarily for the study of the apocalyptic sections of Scripture. Most Biblical prophecies are overlapping or corresponding with other prophecies. In the Book of **Revelation** only fourteen chapters are apocalyptic, and ten of these all tell the same story, but in slightly different ways. Many prophecies also have more than one level of fulfillment. I will be referring to them as double-headed prophecies; others call it the law of double reference. One example of this is found in **Daniel 11:21-45**. In this chapter Daniel is giving a detailed prophecy of Gentile history three hundred years before it happened. In **verse 31** he tells of a king who will be set up as “...**the abomination of desolation.**” Classical scholars can immediately identify him as Antiochus Epiphanes who did great harm to God’s people between 167-164 BC. But Jesus said in **Matthew 14:15**, “**Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place – whoever reads, let him understand--.**” We have a double-headed prophecy, and the reader is ordered to think about it. Jesus is speaking of the anti-Christ that is yet to come and to learn more about him, we must examine his prototype in Daniel’s account.

A reader of any commentary on **Revelation** should know from the onset what theory of interpretation is going to be used. Throughout church history, five major theories have developed: The *preterist*, which applies **Revelation** exclusively to the end of the first century; the *continuous historical* is the revealing of historical events from John’s day to the end times; the *futurist* deals exclusively with the final outcome of the church and mankind; the *dispensational*, the most recent, deals mostly with the Rapture, Tribulation and Millenium; and the *spiritual* or *symbolic* finds in **Revelation** great spiritual principles which apply to Christians of all ages. I know of these simply because I have been accused of using most of them in my teaching career, so I had to look them up to find out what I was being accused of. Actually, all of these do apply to some portions of **Revelation**, but none of them apply to all of it. If I must find a term for my approach it would be *allegorical*. An allegory is telling truths or generalizations about human experience through symbolic figures. In other words, this is the opposite of a parable, which tells a spiritual truth through an earthly story. With exceptions of Chapters 2, 3 and 18, all of **Revelation** is allegorical. I believe this was done deliberately to make it difficult to discern. Jesus did not tell the parables to be understood more easily, but quite the opposite; and I believe God gave the apocalyptic portions of Scripture in allegoric form for the same reason. Of course, this is opinion, because who can discern the mind of God? But I feel strongly that God has intended to keep it covered until the time was near and then reveal it only though the Holy Spirit. I also believe that

God fully intended every generation to think that the end was near and to search Scripture for proof of it. He expressly stated in both the first and last chapters of **Revelation** that “...the time is near.” **Revelation 1:3** and **22:10**. So we join a long line of searchers, thinking that we are the last generation but also knowing that we could be wrong. It is also necessary to know that every chapter in **Revelation** is interrelated. To understand the whole, one must understand all the individual parts. The only way to do this is to begin with Chapter 1, verse 1 and carefully puzzle out each piece of information as it appears. It is not a matter of reading as much as it is problem solving. Once you solve one problem, you can move on to the next. If you make an error on a problem, all the following problems will also be wrong. It is dangerous to pick and choose various sections of **Revelation** to prove preconceived ideas.

It is helpful to know that in the first eleven chapters Jesus has told us the whole story of **Revelation**, and the book could have ended there. If it had, we would feel just as Daniel did: “**I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me...and I asked him the true meaning of this. So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things.**” **Daniel 7:15-16**. And this is what Jesus does in the next eleven chapters of **Revelation**. Each chapter is given in chronological order. Each tells the same story. Each one adds new information so that gradually, like a kaleidoscope, the picture begins to come into focus. The graph on the next page is designed to give an overview of each chapter. The line on the top of the page should tell what time frame each chapter is about.

The New Testament Age is the time from Jesus’ first coming until the time of the anti-Christ. The Age of Tribulation is named by Jesus in **Matthew 24:21**. He tells us it will be the most devastating time in the history of the world for the church, but it will be short. After that will come the Age of Vengeance and then Armageddon. Fortunately Christians do not have to worry about these two periods of time. They are exclusively for the unbelievers.

The final thought is to explain the text. It is a transliteration of the Greek text written by John. More and more I find it important to find out exactly what the original text said without any helpful additions by a translator. I have also added my outlines at the beginning of each paragraph. I also need to apologize to the reader for seeming to be over dramatic with the opening credits of my outline, but I have always asked my students to view **Revelation** as they would a movie or a videotape. Almost all of it is visual rather than verbal. John was told to write down all that he saw, **Revelation 1:11**. It helps us to try and see, as much as possible, what John saw and to try to become as emotionally involved as John was with these great and wonderful things.

STUDY AID TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION

C H A P T E R	100AD	AGE OF THE GENTILES OR NEW TESTA - MENT AGE 6th KINGDOM	AGE OF TRIBULA - TION 7 TH KINGDOM	AGE OF VEN- GEANCE	2 ND C O M I N G	8 TH K I N G D O M	J U D G M E N T	H E A V E N
1	Patmos							
2	Seven Memos							
3	To the Churches							
4								Throne of God
5								Jesus' Glory
6		The Six Seals The Four Horseman	Souls under The altar	Sun made black				
7								144,000
8				7 Angels with				
9				7 Trumpets of Wrath				
10	Little Book							
11		Two Candle- Sticks & Two Olive Trees	3-1/2 Days	The 7 th Trumpet				
12		The Woman & the Dragon						
13		The Beast of the Sea	The Beast of The Land					
14		The Lamb The New Song	The Seven Angels of History And the Harvest of the Earth					
15								God's Altar
16		The 7 Bowls of Wrath	Euphrates River	Armageddon				
17		The Prostitute and the Beast						
18		The Fall of Babylon						
19					Two Feasts			
20		The Millenium			Satan Loosed	Satan Lost	Dead Are Judged	
21								New Jeru- salem
22								River of Life

Chapter 1

- I Opening Credits, vs. 1-20
 - A. The cast, vs. 1-3
 - 1. Jesus Christ, v. 1a,
 - 2. God, v. 1b,
 - 3. Angel(s), v. 1c,
 - 4. John, vs. 1d-2,
 - 5. Us, v. 3.

1. “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him to show His servants, what things must shortly take place. And He made (it) known by sending His angel to His servant John, 2. Who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ and everything he saw. 3. Blessed (is) he who reads, and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep the things written in it; for the time (is) near.”

The prologue of this remarkable document begins with a stunning cast of protagonists. We are immediately shown the chain of command through which this **Revelation of Jesus Christ** has been revealed to us. God initiated the process and gave it to Jesus. I would guess that John was thinking of another occasion as he wrote these words. More than half a century earlier Jesus told His disciples a condensed version of the future events recorded in this book, **Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21**. Jesus concluded this discourse by saying, **“But of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray: for you do not know when the time is.” Mark 13:32-33**. Obviously things have changed. Now the Father has told the Son, who told it to an angel, who communicated it to John because **“...the time is near,” v. 3**.

In spite of the firepower presented in verse one, the most common question I get is always, “who is the angel?” There are a number of angelic beings presented in many forms throughout the document, but one angel is the dominate message-giver. He is introduced here at the beginning and again at the end in **22:16a, “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches.”** In **Daniel**, the angelic messenger is named; but none is given here, nor is one needed. Every reader must understand at the very onset that the **Revelation of Jesus Christ** is just that. Whatever is going to happen to us or to the church in some near or distant future is of little importance compared to the centrality of Jesus in this book and in our lives. Throughout **Revelation** there is only one question that really matters: “Who do you follow – Jesus or Satan?” Anything that takes our eyes off Jesus is a threat. What the angel’s name is could be a distraction, so it is left out. Even John was guilty of fixing his eyes on the angel rather than the message, and was scolded for it twice, **Revelation 19:10 and 22:9**.

The angel was sent to show John and us what was soon to take place. The verb I have translated *made known* in **v.1**, is *semaino*. The noun root of this verb means *miraculous sign, portent or warning sign*, so the King James translation, *signified*, is

probably giving us the fullest meaning of what John said. We are going to be given symbols or allegories that are not immediately crystal clear in their meanings.

In **v. 2** John states that he had born witness to everything he has seen. John uses the word *witness* both as a noun and a verb more often than any other writer in the New Testament. The Greek noun *martus* and verb *martureo* simply means *witness* or *testify*, but by the end of the first century so many believers had been killed that it had already changed its meaning to *one who suffers for his testimony*. We can easily see in the Greek our words *martyr* and *martyrdom*. As early as **Acts 22:20**, translators have Paul using this changed meaning of the word, “**And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death...**” Since John is writing much later in the first century than the other apostles, it is not surprising that he has an affinity for the word.

In **v. 3** we, the readers are suddenly asked to enter into this remarkable picture. We are looking at the first of seven beatitudes found throughout **Revelation**. The second one does not occur until **Chapter 14:13**. The significance of this one is where it appears and how important it is to us. At the very beginning of this book of prophecy, God makes us a promise. He says that there will be a blessing to all who hear and remember the things that appear in this book. He does not ask us to understand it all, only to keep in mind the pictures He has shown us. The Greek verb translated *keep* is *tereo*, which means *to guard from loss or harm by keeping an eye on it*. Although *remember* is not one of its meanings, it would be appropriate in this verse. It is important to our Father that those who are around during the days described here will understand what is going to happen before it does. Then they can make choices and not be victims. It is so important to Him that He makes a pact with us. If we pay attention and remember, like good students, He will give us a reward. If it is important to God, it should be just as important to us even without the blessing; but God understands His children and knows that if He sweetens the pot a little, His desire for our safety is more likely to occur.

Every time I teach **Revelation** I stress this beginning beatitude as strongly as possible. I have found over the years that many people come to the study out of a morbid fascination with the bizarre and supernatural aspects of the apocalypse. They are like people who stop to gawk at a traffic accident. They love to look at the misfortunes of others but do not want to get involved themselves. They are apocalyptic dilettantes who have only a superficial interest in this branch of knowledge. The best students are not necessarily the smartest students, but they are always the hardest working students. God is letting us know at the beginning that we need to apply ourselves, and, if we do, we will be blessed. Jesus said the same thing in **Luke 11:28** “**...more than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.**” As both a student and a teacher of **Revelation**, I have found the blessing every time I’ve gone through it; but that is of little importance to you, the reader. You need to discover this for yourself. Once having experienced this you will develop a pattern of experiential expectations. We know that God keeps His promises, but for most of us, because of our human shortcomings, it is not until the promises really happen that we truly believe. Now, having experienced His grace, of course we expect it to continue.

- B. The producers, vs. 4-8
1. The Father, v. 4a,
 2. The Holy Spirit, v. 4b,
 3. Jesus Christ, vs. 5-8.
 - a. who He was, v. 5,
 - b. what He did, vs. 5-6,
 - c. what He will do, v. 7,
 - d. who He is, v. 8.

4. “John, to the seven churches which (are) in Asia: Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits which are before His throne, 5. and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from among the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, 6. and made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. 7. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they who pierced Him, and all the races of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. 8. *‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,’ I says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’*”

John begins his second paragraph in the familiar style of an apostolic letter: first naming the writer, next the recipient, then following with a doxology incorporating grace and peace as a blessing to the readers. In this case John expands the doxology by providing us with a profound description of the Holy Trinity. He gives us a name for God the Father that has never been used before, **“from Him who is, who was and who is to come.” V. 4a.** He could have simply said “from the eternal Father,” but John uses past, present and future tenses to describe the name of God. He seems to be establishing a contrast between God and Satan, His polar opposite. In **Chapter 17** we will find Satan described as the beast that was, is not and yet shall be.

The apostle continues by saying **“and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne,” v. 4b.** What does he mean? The questions must always be asked or the study of **Revelation** will be practically worthless. There will be hundreds of questions yet to come, and almost all of them can be solved by the time-honored method of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. There are only a few times in **Revelation** where this is not possible, and then we are reduced to using personal opinion which is high untrustworthy. In this case, the answer is found in Isaiah 11:1-2. Verse one is a Messianic prophecy calling Jesus the **“Rod from the stem of Jesse,”** and verse two gives us the seven aspects of the Holy Spirit. **“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,** (describing the dove at Jesus’ baptism, **Matthew 3:16**), **the Spirit of wisdom and understand, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.** So Isaiah has answered our question. The seven Spirits of the sevenfold Spirit is the Holy Spirit, and when they occur again in **Chapter 3:1, 4:5** and **5:6** we will know at once what they mean.

John completes the trinity with **“and from Jesus Christ,” 5a**. No question is needed here as there was about the Father and the Holy Spirit. The centrality of Jesus in the book of **Revelation** is everything, the beginning and the end of all prophecy, so John leaves us no possible error in identifying Him. The apostle then concludes his doxology with the most beautiful Gospel message I have ever found in Scripture. In two short verses he tells us who Jesus was and what He did. **Verse 5b** tells us that Jesus was **“the faithful witness”** who was prophesied in **Isaiah 55:4**. He was the living, breathing Word of God, **John 1:1**, open and available to all. Even his mortal enemies recognized that, **“...(you) teach the way of God in truth.” Mark 12:14b**. Despite this, Jesus had to repeatedly tell His disciples that He was telling them the truth, and many Christians today hear His words with skepticism. Jesus taught us that if our primary goal is the kingdom of God and its righteousness, we would never have to worry about anything, **Matthew 6:25-34**, and few saved souls accept that as absolute truth.

Jesus was also the **“firstborn from the dead, 5c**. Jesus was resurrected on first fruits Sunday. He was and continues to be the only tangible evidence available that we, too, can survive death and live forever. He is called the *firstborn* because Jairus’ daughter, the son of the widow of Nain and Lazarus, though resurrected, all had to die again. But Jesus, our firstborn, tells us **“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” John 11:25-26**. It always stuns me that the vast majority of my earthbound brothers and sisters would prefer not to believe this.

Since Jesus is the only cure for the fatal disease called *sin* that all mankind is suffering from, it is only logical that He is also **“the ruler over the kings of the earth.” 5a**. Political leaders of our planet rarely accept this, but King David not only accepted it, he understood and wrote about it. **Psalms 2** tells about the Messiah’s victory and His kingdom to come. David talks about God laughing at the kings of the earth who **“...take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, (saying) ‘Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.’” Psalm 2:3**. This Psalm is so appropriate that Jesus Himself quotes **verses 8 and 9 in Revelation 2:27**.

John began **verse 5** by telling us who Jesus was, and at the end of the verse he begins a series of three things that Jesus did for us. The first thing John relates is that Jesus **“loved us,” 5e**. This should be no surprise. John is called the apostle of love because he uses this word more often than any other writer in Scripture, but John was not always a loving man. It is not by accident that Jesus gave him and his brother the nickname, **“Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder,” Mark 3:17**. They were aggressive and ambitious young men who often created conflict within Jesus’ small group of disciples; but John had a remarkable personality change. I believe this began to happen the night before Jesus was crucified. John is the only gospel writer who gives us the sermon Jesus preached on Thursday evening of Passion Week. One of the reasons for this sermon was because of an argument caused by James and John, **Luke 22:24**. This sermon is found in **Chapters 14-17** of John’s gospel, but the sermon text is **John 13:23-35**, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples,**

if you have love for one another.” John was a good student. He listened and applied to his life the words of Jesus and became a loving disciple. It is easy to see why the first thing John wants to tell us about what Jesus did was that He **“loved us,”** and through that give we can love others.

The second thing Jesus did for us was that He **“...washed us from our sins in His own blood,” v. 5f.** The sanitized version of the twentieth century church often feels a bit queasy about all this reference to blood. Just as the Jewish Passover lost the message of the blood splattered door post and became a liturgical tradition, so, also, does most Christians’ view of the Eucharist cloud up the significance of the blood splattered cross. For them Holy Communion becomes just a repetitive practice, but the blood of Jesus Christ is the very core around which all of our doctrines orbit. Even Jesus offended some of His followers by talking about it **“..truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” John 6:53.** After hearing this cannibalistic type of language some of His disciples **“...walked with Him no more.” John 6:66.** (Whenever I say or write this, a fleeting thought flashes through my mind, “could this be the number of the beast?” **Revelation 13:18.**) But John is very correct in his organization of Christ’s work – Jesus first loved us, and because of this love He was willing to shed His blood for us. It is very clear in both the Old and the New Testaments that blood was the basis for God’s work in liberating us from the killing curse of sin. John said it best in his first letter, **“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” IJohn 1:7.**

As John nears the end of his doxology, we see a significant progression of thought. First Jesus loved us. Then He washed us; and finally He made us a royal priesthood, **v. 6a.** The full impact of this change in our social status is monumental. Once we were nobodies, **“...at that time you were apart from Christ excluded from the citizenship of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” Ephesians 2:12.** But now, **“...you are a chosen nation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;” IPeter 2:9.** No matter how we are viewed by the world, we must see ourselves the same way our Father does, as royalty. We are the children of the King, and by human standards this is the highest social position possible. Our royalty is a privilege granted by God, and like all privileges, it comes with a corresponding responsibility. We are also priests. Paul describes our ministry in **II Corinthians 5:9-21.** He explains our changed social status as a *new creation* and says that God has **“given us the ministry of reconciliation,; v. 18,** and describes us as **“...ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us...” v. 20.** If we enjoy being royalty, we must also learn to enjoy being ministers. This is so important that God presents this to us again in **Revelation 5:9-10.** There we will see the beings around the throne of God singing a *new song*, which ends with **“You have made us kings and priests to our God and we shall reign on the earth.”** I do not use the word *importance* lightly. We will learn in **Revelation 14:3** that no one gets into heaven without knowing and singing the *new song*.

John then concludes his doxology with **“to Him the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen” v. 6b.**

John seems to have been so overcome by all this glory (Greek noun *doxa* means *glory*) that he cuts off his doxology with an ‘amen,’ but he is not yet done. He has told us what Jesus was and what He did; now he tells us what He will do, **v. 7, “Behold, He is coming with the clouds...”** This is the primary aim of the book of **Revelation**. It warns us about the Second Coming and the things that will occur just prior to this monumental event. Jesus will return just he left, in the clouds, **Acts 1:9**. The prophet, Daniel, in a vision, looked down through the centuries and saw the same thing, **Daniel 7:13**. And when Jesus, Himself said it at His trial, it brought about His death sentence, **Mark 14:62**. So John is not telling us something new. He expects we will remember these references and rejoice with him now that we are going to learn more about it, and perhaps even take part in it. But not all will rejoice. Most who see it will be terrified, **v. 7b**. Again it is helpful to look at other references in Scripture to examine this frightful reality. Like Daniel before him, Zechariah sees a future so distant that he cannot begin to understand what he is writing about because it wasn’t written for him. It was written for us. **Zechariah 12:10-14** tells us about a time of mourning that has yet to occur in Israel, and Jesus warns us in **Matthew 24:30**, **“..all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”** John feels so emphatic about this that he stresses it with a double positive. He ends it with *nai*, which means *certainly* or *surely* and *amen* which means *truly*.

The speaker of v. 8 authenticates all that John has said. There is some question as to who is speaking, God the Father or God the Son. All red letter Bibles tells us that it is Jesus, but some original texts are translated **“...who is, and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” V. 8b.**

- C. The setting, vs. 9-11
1. John in exile on Patmos, v. 9,
 2. Sunday in the Spirit, vs. 10-11

9. “I, John, both your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos because of the word of God and because the witness of Jesus Christ. 10. I became in the Spirit on the Lord’s day and I heard behind me a loud voice, as a trumpet, 11. saying ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, and, what you see, write in a book and send (it) to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”

John now gives us the circumstances surrounding the introduction of this book. He first unites himself with us as our partner in **“...tribulation and the kingdom...”v. 9**. The tribulation of John and the first century Christians was brutal persecution. Tribulations take many forms. The twentieth century church must examine its own tribulations. Are we being persecuted, or are we comfortable and free of afflictions? Jesus guaranteed us that if we follow Him, we will be persecuted, **John 15:18-25**. If we

find no tribulations in our life, our church, or both, we are not doing our job. Satan is not concerned about passive churchgoers; but active workers of the Lord always stir him up. Jesus concluded His Beatitudes with **“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake.” Matthew 5:11.** It is too easy to compromise with the world’s view of things and condone what God condemns. When this occurs, we are no longer a **“companion in tribulation”** with John.

Next we hear that John has been exiled for his apostolic preaching. Patmos is a tiny barren island located sixty miles Southwest of Ephesus in the Aegean Sea. We are told by such early Christian writers as Eusebius and Irenaeus that John’s banishment occurred near the end of the reign of Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD), and was freed by Nerva (96-98 AD). *“After fifteen years of Domitian’s rule Nerva succeeded to the throne. By vote of the Roman senate...those unjustly banished returned to their homes and had their property restored to them...at that time too the apostle John, after his exile on the island, resumed residence at Ephesus, as early Christian tradition records.”*² Although we cannot pinpoint the exact year John wrote **Revelation**, we do know from early church fathers that it happened near the end of the first century AD.

The apostle now gets down to the specific details surrounding the sudden appearance of the Lord. He relates **“I became in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day,” v. 10** that would be Sunday. From early on, Christians gathered together for worship and fellowship on the first day of the week, **Acts 20:7; ICorinthians 16:2**, because that was the day on which Jesus rose. This is the first time in Christian literature that the first day of the week is called *the Lord’s Day*. My translation **“I became in the Spirit”** may sound strange to the reader, but John is saying more than just *I was*, as all translations give. The Greek word *ginomai* is a primary verb whose basic meaning is *to become*, but it is used with great latitude (literal, figurative, intensive, etc.). It is used dozens of different ways in the New Testament, from *become* to *ended* or from *divided* to *married*, depending upon the context surrounding it. Here I have relied upon the basic meaning and leave the reader to his/her own devices. Any Christian who spends a decent amount of time in Word and prayer understands that living in the Spirit is an ongoing process of swelling and subsiding, depending entirely upon the individual and the Spirit.

Suddenly John hears a voice as loud as a trumpet. It fascinates me how many times (28) John relates voices from heaven or heavenly beings to high volume. He uses adjectives such as great, loud, mighty, thunderous, many waters or trumpets. John is choosing the loudest things a first century man can relate to, and I am grateful he did so. From little on, I have thought of heaven as a quiet place, much like a funeral parlor. Now, from John’s own experience, I find it is very noisy. The younger you are, the better this sounds to you. Only once in **Revelation** is there silence in heaven, **8:1**, and then only for a half an hour.

This is clearly the voice of the Lord Jesus. He tells John, **“...what you see, write in a book...” v. 11.** Ecclesiastical critics often argue that the writer of **Revelation** cannot be the same John as the one who wrote the Gospel and three letters of John

² Eusebius, The History of the Church, Book 3, 20.4

because the language is dramatically different. **Revelation** is somewhat crude by comparison to the classic Greek of the others. These critics have been out of the classroom too long. John is taking notes, writing as fast as he can to keep up with what he is hearing and seeing. Any student can tell you that if they wrote a thesis the same way they dashed off their notes, they would never get a passing grade. Writing to the church at large he had time to be classic. Writing as Jesus instructed he had to write on the run and then send it. He is told to send it “**...to the seven churches which are in Asia...**” v. 11b. All seven churches were located in what is now Turkey. They are listed in chronological order if you traveled clockwise from Ephesus to Laodicea, a distance of about two hundred and fifty miles.

- D. The Protagonist, vs. 12-20
1. His characteristics, vs. 12-18,
 - a. physical, vs. 12-16,
 - b. spiritual, vs. 17-18.
 2. His order, v. 19,
 3. His explanation, v. 20.

12. "And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13. and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, garbed in a robe down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14. His head and hair (were) white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes as a flame of fire. 15. His feet like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16. and having in His right hand seven stars, and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His face like the sun shining in its strength. 17. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18. (I am) He who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. 19. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these. 20. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw on My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.'"

Suddenly John is jerked out of one spiritual exercise into a very different one – from quiet worship to a frightening personal experience. He turns and sees the lord Jesus as he had never seen Him before, v. 12. John saw the glorified Christ earlier, first on the Mount of Transfiguration and again after His resurrection, but this figure was so profoundly different that John collapsed in fear, v. 17. So the vivid description of the Lord written in vs. 13-16 was not recorded until Jesus picked him up and said, “**Do not be afraid.**” As John relates each detail of what he saw, we need to feel some of the same emotional impact the apostle felt. To help accomplish this I asked my students to draw what they were seeing. Some loved it and other hated it, depending on how adept their artistic abilities were; but they all had to do it because it helped to feel and to remember better than just reading. As you will see, all these things must be remembered so that we

may solve later questions about the meaning of what John saw and wrote. All of the illustrations in this book were done by students and used with their permission.

Two common questions about vs. 13-15 are ‘why does John call Him “**Son of Man**,” and ‘why does Jesus appear so strangely?’ The answers to both of the questions are inter-related. Both answers are found in **Daniel**. This wonderful prophet was the first one to call the Messiah the Son of Man. **Daniel 7:13** “**I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the ancient days...**” Jesus called Himself the Son of Man countless of times rather than the Son of God. John’s reason for referring to Jesus this way is not stated, but almost certainly one reason was to turn the minds of his readers back into **Daniel**. It is always a good idea to study **Daniel** before tackling **Revelation**. **Chapter 7** of **Daniel** is absolutely necessary for the understanding of apocalyptic writings. **Daniel** was written in two languages. **Chapters 2:4-7:28** was written in Aramaic, the business and political language of the then known Gentile world. Everything else was written in Hebrew. So Daniel seems to have known that he was seeing the future of two separate species, Jew and Gentile, and was telling us so by the language he wrote it in. In **Daniel 10:5-12** we see the same figure John described in **Revelation 1:13-17**. Daniel reacts the same way John did, and is touched and spoken to in the same way. Commentators rarely try to name the messenger in **Daniel 10**, but who else could it be but the Lord Jesus? He also spoke in **Daniel 8:16** and **12:7**.

The second question, “Why did he appear that way?” is a little more difficult. Primarily it is again to cause John and us to recognize the similarity between **Daniel** and the imagery of Jesus in **Revelation 1:13-17**. More importantly we should already know that everything we see at one point in **Revelation** equips us to understand better what is yet to come. In this case it is the churches in the next two chapters. Each of the seven churches are related to one or more of the characteristics we are seeing here, and then we will be able to get a clear view of their purposes.

At the close of **Chapter 1**, Jesus Himself shows us how to deal with the allegorical symbolism of **Revelation**. This kind of help will not be given again until **Chapter 17**, where we will really need it. In v. 20 Jesus says He will explain “**The mystery of the seven stars...and the seven golden lampstands...**” We really should have figured out these symbols before we get to v. 20. If we didn’t relate the *seven lampstands* in v. 12 with the *seven churches* in v. 11, we are not really trying. If we have, then Jesus is showing that we did it right, and that is not all that difficult. It is also interesting that when John turned to see the voice, the first thing he saw was “**...seven golden lampstands**” v. 12 and then Jesus “**in the midst of the seven lampstands**” v. 13. Jesus is the protagonist, the focal point of everything in **Revelation**, but the church is the heroine – the Bride of Christ; so, it is appropriate that she appear first of all his characteristics. Jesus tells us that the “**seven stars are the angels of the seven churches:** v. 20. The Greek noun *aggelos* means *messenger* or *one who is send*, so anyone who speaks the truth of God’s word is an angel. I wonder how many Christians think of their minister as an angel. It is comforting to see that these angels are held in the hand of Jesus.

Chapter 2

Chapters 2 and 3 are different from the rest of **Revelation**. They are short memos to seven churches in Asia Minor. There is no explanation as to why these seven churches were chosen from the many established by Paul and other evangelists. Perhaps it was because they were all within a hundred miles of Ephesus, which was John's home base before and after his exile. John probably knew and visited them all. Also, though they were specific churches in John's day, it seems that they were also selected as *parable churches* for all the existing and future bodies of believers. These seven churches, I believe, represent all types of congregations regardless of location or time. If that is true, and I'm sure it is, then Jesus is speaking to every clergyman of every parish that ever existed when He said **"To the angel of the church of...write."** Consequently every pastor should know which of the seven churches he is ministering to. Won't it be interesting on Judgment Day when Jesus asks the clergy if they received His memo?

There are two other points, which are common to all seven churches. Each memo closes with the word **"overcome,"** and the phrase **"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."** *Overcome* is translated from the Greek verb *nikao* which means *conquer*. It is imperative for Christians to know that they are in a brutal battle with evil. Jesus won the war, but Satan has not surrendered and there is no détente. If a believer relaxes and tries to live in peace with the enemy, this believer will be overcome rather than be an overcomer.

The phrase related to listening to the Spirit is something Jesus used repeatedly in the Gospels. After telling the parable of the sower and the seed, He said **"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Matthew 13:9.** When His disciples asked Him why He was now teaching in parables, He replied **"...I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand."** **Matthew 13:16.** It seems that Jesus is saying the same thing to us in **Revelation**. He is giving us an allegorical insight into the future. Many will neither see nor understand what He means, but the faithful will listen to the Spirit and be blessed. Now this sounds a little intimidating. If you are confused by all these allegorical concepts, does this mean that there is something spiritually wrong with you? No, but it probably does mean that you are listening to the commentator rather than the Spirit. You should never trust anyone except the Spirit of God to explain to you the truths of God.

II Words to the Seven Churches, Chapters 2 & 3

A. Ephesus 2:1-7.

1. Lampstands and stars, v. 1,
2. Doctrinally sound, vs. 2-3,
 - a. **Acts 19, Ephesians 1:15-17.**
3. Losing their enthusiasm, vs. 4-5a,
4. Warning, v. 5b,
5. Promise, vs. 6-7.

1. "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'these things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2. I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them false; 3. and you have endured and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4. But I have (this) against you, that you have left your first love. 5. Remember therefore from where you have fallen and repent, and do the first works, but if not, I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. 6. But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7. He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'"

Jesus introduces Himself to the Ephesians by referring to what John had written about Him in **1:13 & 16**, **"These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands."** **2:1b**. We know what the stars and lampstands represent. We don't yet know why the Lord uses these two characteristics of Himself for this particular church. As we go through these seven verses, the Spirit should open our eyes and ears so that we will understand. The opening words of **verse 1** tell us that this message is being sent to the spiritual messenger of the Ephesian church. We know that Ephesus was John's church before and after his exile. It is hard not to wonder what John thought about as he wrote this memo, in a sense, to himself. He must have been alarmed at some of the words he heard.

For the Ephesians there is both good news and bad news and, as usual, Jesus begins with the positive things first. This church had a wonderfully strong foundation in the faith. It was established by Paul in a very brief stay during his second missionary journey, **Acts 18:18-21**. After Paul they were taught by Apollos, one of the better apologists of the first century church, who in turn was instructed by Priscilla and Aquila, **Acts 18:24-26**. After Apollos left to work in Achaia, Paul returned on his third missionary journey (October AD 53) and taught them for two years, **Acts 19**. During this time the Ephesian Christians saw many amazing and remarkable things, and all of these elements jelled to form a rock solid foundation for the church in Ephesus. We know this because in Paul's letter to them a decade later, he had nothing but high praise to say about them, **"...I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints," Ephesians 1:15**. But something had gone wrong between AD 64 and the writing of **Revelation**, and we at the start of a new millennium had better look at it carefully.

Verse 2 tells us of five spiritual activities that Jesus finds satisfactory. He is not applauding them for their good deeds; He is just stating the facts. There is no evidence in Scripture that Jesus ever congratulated His disciples for their deeds of faith. Once when they asked Him to make their faith stronger, He told them a parable and ended it by saying, **"So likewise you, when you have done all these things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"** **Luke 17:10**. As a believer, I have to say "thank you, Lord, I needed that. It is

so easy to become a pagan in serving the Lord. The Latin verb for worship is *colo*, but its primary meaning was *cultivate* or *till the soil*. Religion was a business deal for the Romans. They served their gods, expecting rewards like farmers expected good crops because of their hard work. To often Christians view themselves as the caregivers and expect God, the recipient, to thank them for it. Jesus reminds His disciples and us **“...God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” John 3:16.** This is not a ‘you scratch my back, I’ll scratch your back’ type of deal. Whatever good we do in the service of the Lord is a continual paean of thanksgiving and a rather poor one at best.

In **verse 2** Jesus says, **“I know your works, and your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not...”** The words *work* and *labor* are not synonyms. They are two different activities. The Greek word for work is *ergon*. It is generally used in the New Testament for *good deeds*. *Labor*, on the other hand, is *kapon*, which always means *strenuous manual labor often accompanied with tribulation*. The Ephesian Christians were living visibly Godly lives and suffering the difficulties and persecution that inevitably goes along with it. They were also patient in their struggles, which is a good definition of Christian maturity. They also had the courage not to condone evil, but to call it what is was, an abomination to both God and man. They were not just puritans, but doctrinally sound puritans. Because of their sound early training by Paul and others, they were not easily deceived. They tested all who claimed to be sent by God and discerned quickly the truth tellers from the liars. In **verse 3** Jesus expands upon what He said in the preceding verse. He lets the Ephesian Christians know that He was fully aware of how they had struggled to keep their doctrines pure. He also states that they had done this for the right motive by saying **“...for My name’s sake and have not become weary” v. 3b.** By using the words *My name’s sake*, He is reminding them and us to go back to His beatitudes which end with this blessing: **“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.” Matthew 5:11.** They did not grow weary because their motives were right.

As good as all this sounds, suddenly Jesus throws cold water on their brief feeling of pride by saying **“but.”** Whenever someone says, “You do good work, but--,” I cringe because I know something bad is coming. Among the seven there were two good churches, two bad churches and three who were so-so. Ephesus is the first of the so-so churches. The two others will also hear that frightful word *alla* translated *but*, *nevertheless* or *however*, and know that bad news is coming. In Ephesus there is just one thing that Jesus was unhappy with. He said, **“...you have left your first love.”** This was only one criticism, but it exposes a dangerous shortcoming they had slipped into. The first generation Christians in Ephesus loved Jesus Christ with such a fervency that, even in Rome, Paul heard about their loving acts, **Ephesians 1:15.** Now, three decades later, their children, the second generation Christians, have lost their enthusiasm for the Lord. They had all the correct insights and maturity of Christianity, but without even knowing it, they shifted their focus away from the object of their faith.

There is a chilling familiarity to this for many modern Christians. Many belong to a denomination that is centuries old, not just forty years. They have been instructed and confirmed by church traditions more than by the Word. They don't know Jesus Christ; they only know about Him, and there is a vast difference between the two. You can only love someone you know personally. If you only know what you have been taught, you haven't lost your first love, you never had it!

Jesus continues by giving the solution to the problem. He says, **“Remember, therefore from where you have fallen and repent...” v. 5a.** The Ephesians could remember what the church was like when they were young. They must have been both surprised and alarmed by what they heard. They obviously did exactly what the Lord commanded because they were still alive and active in AD 431 when the third ecumenical council of the church was held there. They remembered and repented. But how can you remember what you have never learned, and, if you cannot remember, how can you repent? Here lies the dilemma for too many Christians today. Their churches are dying, and they don't know why. Jesus warned us by saying He would come to us **“...quickly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.” V. 5b.** What didn't happen to the Ephesian church in the first century is now happening to an appalling number of twenty-first century churches.

Perhaps because of the serious charge just made, Jesus returns to one of their more favorable attributes, their intolerance of false teachers. **“But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.: v. 6.** Most commentators skip over this for two reasons: First, because we cannot be sure who the Nicolaitans were, and secondly, because it seems to relate just to the Ephesians and the church in Pergamum. When God inspires something we must try to discern what He meant. When uncertain about historical church matters I generally rely on the writings of the early church fathers. Eusebius wrote *“In their day, too, the very short-lived sect of the Nicolaitans came into existence. It is mentioned in the Revelation of John. These sectaries laid claim to Nicolaus, who like Stephen was one of the deacons appointed by the apostles to assist those in want.”*³ Clement of Alexander also mentioned Nicolaus in Book III of his *Miscellanies*. He reports having been told that followers of Nicolaus grossly misinterpreted some of his teachings and practiced outrageous promiscuity, which seems to have been going on in Pergamum, **Revelation 2:15.**

Most modern church writers reject these as scurrilous rumors about a man whom Luke called **“...a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” Acts 5:5.** Nevertheless, these historians were eighteen centuries closer to the event than we are, and I am inclined to accept their views as true as any other historical documents. Whether they are true or not, we can relate to the danger of false teachers and root them out of our churches today as the Ephesians did then. When the matter comes up again in the church at Pergamum, I will go into greater detail concerning who are the most dangerous false teachers.

³ Eusebius, The History of the Church, Book 3, 29.4

Jesus concludes this memo with the command He gives to all seven churches, **“...hear what the Spirit says...”** and **“overcome” v. 7**, which were explained in the introduction of **Chapter Two**. He then makes a promise to those who follow these commands, which is different for each of the seven churches. For the Ephesians it was **“...I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” v.7**. This promise is not just given to the Ephesians but to all who *overcome*. Jesus could have just said “and you will be saved.” But he wanted to bring us back in time to when humanity was ejected from the Garden of Eden, **Genesis 3:22-23**, and let us know that our exile will be over and we will experience ourselves what Adam and Eve experienced before the fall. We must take this as literally as we do **Genesis**. We will hear a more detailed account at the end of this book. **Revelation 22:1-6**.

- B. Smyrna 2:8-11.
1. First and last, dead but now alive, v. 8,
 2. Poor and persecuted, vs. 9-10,
 3. Promise, v. 11.

8. ”And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: 9. I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty...but you are rich; and the blasphemy of those who call themselves Jews and are not, but (are) a synagogue of Satan. 10. Do not fear any of the things, which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to cast (some) of you into prison, that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death and I will give you a crown of life. 11. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He that overcomes shall not be hurt in any way by the second death.’”

Smyrna was a prosperous port city about forty miles North of Ephesus. It was known as the crown city of Ionia, renowned for its beautiful buildings, fine public works and good climate. The reputation of Smyrna was such that it was called the golden city. The Christian church at Smyrna seems greatly out of place in this wealthy commercial city. By Smyrnaean standards it was poverty-stricken.

Jesus introduces Himself by repeating what He said in **Chapter 1:17-18**, **“...the First and the Last,”** which is the same as Alpha and Omega, **“who was dead, and came to life:” v. 8**. As we read through the next three verses we can easily see why the church at Smyrna needed to hear these two characteristics of their Savior. This is the first of the two good churches. But as we read what Jesus said He knew about them, **“your works, tribulation and poverty...” v. 9**, we have to wonder. If we are honest, we must admit that this does not sound good. If we were church shopping, would we join the church at Smyrna? Probably not, we live in an affluent society. Our mindsets are more Smyrnaean than Christian. By Jesus’ standard they **“...are rich.”** We have to consider why.

As we look at the four aspects of their faithful endurance, we see that work is the best of the four. The word again is *ergon*, meaning *good work*. The noun *thlipsis* translated *tribulation*, when used in classical Greek always referred to heavy, crushing

pressure. They were also very poor. I would guess that they also had a very small congregation. I, personally, only know of one modern Smyrna type church. It is very small and will probably stay small. Hypocrites don't stay with them very long. They can't stand the pressure. Also at the church at Smyrna, in addition to these rather grim blessings, a large Jewish community that was bitterly anti-Christian is also maligning them. Jesus' view of them was **“who call themselves Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” v.9.** Of course they were Hebrews, but they reminded Jesus of the Jews who called themselves the children of Abraham, when in reality they **“...are of (their) father the devil...a liar and the father of lies” John 8:44.**

When Christians suffer from many and varied tribulations, we often reach a point where we think it can't get any worse, so it has to get better. Perhaps that is what the church in Smyrna felt when they heard Jesus say **“Do not fear any of these things...” v. 10a.** Imagine their shock when He continues with **“...which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to cast (some) of you in prison.” v. 10b.** It can get worse, and it did for the church in Smyrna, but Christ identified their real enemy. It wasn't their pagan and Jewish fellow citizens but the devil himself, *Satanas*, v. 9 and *Diabolos*, v. 10. The Lord gives them some solace by saying their tribulation will only last *ten days*, which was a Hebraism for *just a short while*. Like most Jewish catch phrases, it was usually based upon an Old Testament event. This one seems to be related to the words of Rebekah's mother in **Genesis 24:55.**

The reference to Himself as the one **“...who was dead and came to life;” v. 8,** probably has already let the Christians in Smyrna know that some of them were going to die. Jesus now confirms this by His next statement, **“Be faithful until death and I will give you a crown of life.” v. 10c.** It is perfectly normal for us to wonder how faithful this poor little church was in their flood of sorrows; and it is our old friend, Eusebius who tells us that they did just fine. As a young man, Eusebius met Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, who had been a disciple of John, the writer of **Revelation**. Polycarp was burned alive in the stadium in Smyrna AD 155. Eusebius wrote about it: *“In this Asia was thrown into confusion by the most savage persecutions, and Polycarp found fulfillment in martyrdom. As a written account of his end has come down, I am in the duty bound to enshrine it in my pages. I refer to the letter, sent on behalf of the church over which he himself had presided, to inform the Christian communities everywhere of what happened to him. It begins thus:*

‘The church of God in Smyrna to the church of God in Philomelium and all communities of the Holy Catholic Church everywhere...We are writing, brethren, to tell you the story of those who have suffered martyrdom, especially blessed Polycarp, who as though he had set his seal on it by his martyrdom, brought the persecution to an end.’

“After this, before giving an account of Polycarp's death they relate what happened to the other martyrs, vividly describing the heroism which they faced their torments, ...Sometimes they were torn with scourges to the innermost veins and arteries, so that even the secret hidden parts of the body, the entrails and inner organs, were laid bare;...After going through every kind of punishment and torture, they were finally flung to the beasts as food...From that point the letter tells us the rest of the story as follows:”

*'...the proconsul...in the middle of the arena announced three times that Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian...The whole mass of Smyrneans, Gentiles and Jews alike, boiled with anger and shouted at the tops of their voices...that Polycarp must be burnt alive...When he had offered up the Amen and completed his prayer, the men in charge lit the fire, and a great flame shot up...to the elect belonged this man, the most wonderful apostolic and prophetic teacher of our time, bishop of the Catholic Church in Smyrna...But when the evil one, the enemy of the household of the righteous, saw the greatness of Polycarp's martyrdom...and how he had been crowned with the crown of perishability...in jealousy and envy he saw to it that not even his poor body should be taken away by us, though many longed to do this...So the governor was induced not to give up to body...These suggestions were made under persistent pressure from the Jews...When if it proves possible, we will assemble there...to celebrate with joy and gladness the birthday of his martyrdom, both to the memory of those who have contended in the past, and for the training and preparation of those whose time has yet to come.'*⁴

As we read through this letter, we begin to understand the richness that Jesus saw in this church. They not only endured; they were truly victorious. They didn't whine; they rejoiced. Consider also that the *ten days* Jesus mentioned turned out to be fifty years. God's concept of time is obviously different than ours. I believe that their letter had survived all these centuries to do just what they wanted it to do: To train and prepare us for our own trying time yet to come. Thank you, God for such a blessing.

The promise Jesus gives in **verse 11** to the church in Smyrna was a perfect fit for those who were about to die. **"He who overcomes shall not be hurt in any way by the second death..."** The phrase *second death* is used only in **Revelation**, once here and twice in **Chapter 20:6 & 14**. It refers to eternal damnation, and we will look into it more fully when we reach that important chapter.

- C. Pergamum, vs. 12-17.
1. Sharp two-edged sword, v. 12,
 2. Strong in the midst of temptation, v. 13,
 3. Tolerant of false teachers, vs. 14-15,
 4. Warning, v. 16,
 5. Promise, v. 17.

12. "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword; **13.** I know your works and where you dwell, where Satan's throne (is). And you hold fast to my name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My faithful witness, who was put to death among you, where Satan dwells. **14.** But I have a few things against you, because you have there (some) who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. **15.** Likewise you also have (some) who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. **16.** Repent, otherwise I will come to you quickly and will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. **17.** He who has an

⁴ Eusebius, The History of the Church, Book 4, 15.1, 9, 23 & 40

ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white pebble, and on the pebble a new name written which no one knows except him who receives (it).”

About sixty-five miles North and slightly East of Smyrna was Pergamum, the capital of Roman Asia. Next to politics, it was best known for its large number of beautiful temples, which dotted the city and surrounding countryside. They were consecrated to various Greek and Roman gods, but the temples dedicated to the Roman emperors were probably what caused persecution to the Christians. By the latter part of the first century AD, it was necessary to worship the emperor by a token gift offering of wine and incense at the foot of his statue. Not to do so was considered disloyal to Rome, and under Domitian (81-96 AD) it had become a capital offense.

Jesus chose to introduce Himself to the Pergamum church with the phrase **“He who has the sharp two-edged sword:” v. 12**. The sword almost certainly was a gladius worn by every Roman soldier. The Roman legions were the police force for the whole empire, so this sword was seen every day on every street corner. It was short and pointed, much like the one on the cover picture. The significance of this weapon is where it is, not in the hand, but in the mouth, **1:16b**, and **2:16b**. Paul used the Roman legionnaire as an example for spiritual armor. He refers to the breastplate, the footwear, the shield, the helmet, and **“...the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God:” Ephesians 6:13-17**. So the Christians in Pergamum should already know that Jesus found them a so-so church. The sword was the Word of the Lord, and it was two-edged because it cut both ways. They could be blessed or cursed depending upon how they responded to this memo.

Jesus begins His comments with **“I know your works” v. 13a**, the same words He said to all seven churches. As I sit here thinking and writing, a troubling thought crosses through my mind. I find myself wishing that Jesus had said, “I know your faith.” As a Protestant, I have been instilled with a Protestant mind set about justification by faith alone. There is nothing wrong with that; but, there is also an inordinate fear of synergism or work righteousness among many Protestants. Consequently, we feel very comfortable with **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; (it is) the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9**. But we are rather uncomfortable when we hear, **“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” James 2:20**. In short, we are overtrained in Justification and undertrained in Sanctification. Jesus is telling us that He knows our faith through our works and, like the seven churches, we all need to hear this.

Jesus continues in **verse 13** by letting the Christians in Pergamum know that He was aware of their strength in a difficult environment. They lived in a city **“...where Satan’s throne (is) and “...where Satan dwells.”** In spite of their hostile surroundings, they had maintained their faith. It is possible that Jesus used these references to Satan because of the type of city Pergamum was. It was the religious center of the emperor worship cult in Asia and a capital city. Satan has always gravitated toward the political and religious power centers.

We have no knowledge of who Antipas was or what kind of life he led. Nor do we need to know. Throughout the centuries Christians have read and envied his epitaph. Who wouldn't desire to be remembered by the Lord, Himself as **"...My faithful martyr, who was killed among you," v. 13b.**

In spite of their strength against pagan persecution, Jesus found two serious deficiencies without their own body. Both of them were related to false teaching. Contrary to the sound doctrine of the Ephesians, the church in Pergamum was dangerously liberal. They had allowed themselves to be compromised by heretical teachings which Jesus said *He hated*, **Chapter 2:6 & 15.**

The first one is the **"...doctrine of Balaam," v. 14.** Balaam is also referred to in **II Peter 2:15, "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam..."** and in **Jude 11 "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam..."** With such powerful criticism against the man it is necessary to find out all we can about him. His story is told in **Numbers, Chapters 22-24.**

A searching soul could scan through these three long chapters and not find a clue as to why Balaam was such a bad person. While he was not a Hebrew, he was a gifted man of God who religiously asked for God's will before doing anything. He was a little impatient with his donkey, but other than that, he seems fine. He was hired by Balak, King of the Moabites, to curse the Israelites who were threatening his people. Balaam asked God about it and was warned by God not to curse His people. At the urging of Balak and a promise of a lot more money, Balaam did ask God about it three more times. Each time he ended up blessing the Hebrews rather than doing what he was hired for, so Balak was outraged and Balaam went home. **"Then Balaam rose and departed to his place; Balak also went his way." Numbers 24:25.** And that seems to be the end of the story, for the next verse says **"The n Israel remained in Shittim and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab." 25:1.** So, what Balaam couldn't do with a curse, the Israelites did to themselves with adultery and idolatry. God sent a plague and 24,000 died.

If the readers are patient and continue on in **Numbers**, they will find that Balaam is mentioned again. After Moses got his house back in order, the Israelites defeated the Moabites and their allies the Midianites. Then Moses ordered all women who had been intimate with a man to be killed. His reason was given in **Numbers 31:16, "Look these (women) caused the children of Israel through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord."** This is another one of those untold stories in Scripture that you can figure out by filling in between the lines. Balaam didn't just go home. Before he left, he placated Balak and got his money by giving him some sound advice. He suggested they seduce the Israeli warriors and make love, not war. Balaam managed to circumvent the command of God and got paid for it. This is never wise. Balaam didn't live long enough to enjoy his ill-gotten gain: **"They fought against Midian as the Lord**

commanded Moses and killed every man... They also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword.” Numbers 31:7-8.

In **verse 15** the Nicolaitans are identified as the second compromise of the church at Pergamum. They became the very opposite of the Ephesian church who identified and hated the teaching of the Nicolaitans. The Christians at Pergamum, on the other hand, had embraced the Nicolaitans as fellow believers with a different opinion. They were sliding to the wrong side of Jesus’ two-edged sword, so he warns them to **“Repent, otherwise I will come to you quickly and make war against them with the sword of My mouth.” v. 16.**

The Christian church today needs to look long and hard at the style of Balaam and Nicholaus. They are both prototypes of the most dangerous false teachers. They were both men of God gone bad. They both appealed to the baser instincts of mankind, promiscuity and greed. The church doesn’t need to worry about the pagans; the greatest danger is from within, and far too many churches are modern Pergamums who need to hear and repent. Peter warned us **“For the time (has come) for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if (it begins) with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the Gospel of God.” IPeter 4:17.**

Again Jesus concludes His memo with promises to those who listen to the Spirit and overcome the trials and difficulties of Christian living. For the believers in Pergamum He said, **“I will give some of the hidden manna to eat” v. 17a.** The term *manna* immediately takes us back to the bread from heaven, which sustained the Israelites through their forty years in the wilderness, **Exodus 16.** Because the Lord said *hidden* it seems to indicate that He is referring to the omer of manna kept permanently in the Ark of the Covenant: **“...Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness...” Exodus 16:32.** So the *hidden manna* was more for education than for supplying food. In the New Testament our bread from heaven is Jesus Christ. **“I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die.” John 6:48-50.** This is what Pergamum needed. To avoid compromising they needed a deeper spiritual discernment about those in their midst; they need to eat the meat of God’s Word, not just remain milk drinkers.

If the church at Pergamum does this, then Jesus says **“...I will give him a white pebble, and on the pebble a new name...” v. 17b.** Anyone living in the Roman Empire at the time **Revelation** was written would assume the white stood for ‘not guilty.’ In a court trial, all jury members were given two pebbles – one white, one black. At the end of the trial they would drop one stone in a pot, and if there were more white than black, they had found the prisoner not guilty. The new name written on the stone was Jesus’ own imprint upon a believer who now belongs to Him eternally. Jesus loved to give nicknames. Simon became Peter and Saul became Paul. It is wonderful to think that Jesus continues this loving intimacy with all of His.

- D. Thyatira, vs. 18-29.
1. Eyes like fire, feet like bronze, v. 18,
 2. Growing spiritually, v. 19,
 3. Tolerating immorality, vs. 20-21,
 4. Warning, vs. 22-23
 5. Promise, vs. 24-29.

18. "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass; **19.** I know your works, love, faith, ministry, and your endurance, and your works, the last (are) more than the first. **20.** But I have a few things against you, that you permit that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess to teach and to seduce My servants to commit sexual fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols. **21.** And I gave her a period of time that she might repent of her sexual fornication and she did not repent. **22.** Indeed, I will throw her into bed and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their works. **23.** And I will kill her children with death. And all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each of you according to your works. **24.** But to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, and who have not known the depths of Satan as they call (them) I will not cast any other burden on you. **25.** But hold fast what you have till I come. **26.** And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; **27.** *'He shall rule over them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces.'* **28.** And I will give him the morning star. **29.** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

In contrast to the coastal cities of Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum, Thyatira was a small inland city composed primarily of blue-collar workers. These laborers united themselves into groups called trade guilds such as metal smiths and garment makers. One of Paul's first converts was Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, who was from Thyatira, **Acts 16:14-15**. It is remarkable to discover that labor unions can trace their sources back to such early dates. Like all other forms of Roman society, each trade guild honored a special god or goddess as its protective deity. It must have been difficult to be both a Christian and a trade worker in Thyatira, which was probably the basis for the displeasure Jesus expressed about their social activities. Although Pergamum and Thyatira had totally different classes of citizens, they practiced the same kind of activities that displeased the Lord,

Eyes like fire, feet like bronze v. 18.

Jesus introduces Himself to the Thyatirians as the "**Son of God.**" To the other six churches He simply uses the pronoun "**Him.**" Even in His portrayal in **1:12-16**, John uses the name "**like a son of man.**" **1:13**. But here Jesus says "**Son of God.**" While the reason for this is debatable, it seems that this church needed to be shocked into the full reality of whom Jesus Christ really was. And they were going to hear, in no uncertain terms, what was going to happen to them if they didn't change their ways. Jesus gives them two of His characteristics first presented in **1:14-15**, "**who has eyes like a flame of**

fire, and His feet like fine brass;” 2:18. This would immediately remind the Thyatirians of the intense fire in the smelters of their metal workers as they refined and separated the pure metal from the dross. We hope that the church realized, as do we, that Jesus was not interested in the forging of metals, but the forging of their souls. Jesus penetrating stare cuts through all the external things we do and say and exposes the very heart of the matter. And if the necessary changes are not made, those fine metallic feet become weapons to crush the unrepentant.

Growing spiritually, v. 19

Even though the Thyatirians see in the countenance of the Lord that they are in some trouble, Jesus begins with words of encouragement and praise. With those **“eyes like a flame of fire”** He first recognizes five things in the church that please Him. Human beings seem to notice the negative characteristics of others first. It is comforting to know that Jesus first sees the positives. He places **love** at the top of the list because without love (*agape*) the other four are not good works (*ergon*) in God’s eyes. **Faith** is a confident trust trusting in God; **ministry** is the use of God’s gifts for the benefit of the church and **endurance** is a cheerful acceptance of the problems your faith and ministry will produce in your life. The result of all this spiritual activity was **“the last are more than the first.”** The church was growing in their love, their words and their deeds. The Thyatirians should have been very pleased with what they heard. So before they can become too self-satisfied, Jesus again used that dreadful word **“but.”**

Tolerating immorality, v. 20

The Lord is offended by the activities of a self-proclaimed prophetess and the compromises of the Thyatirians. It is unlikely that any Christian leader, even a false teacher, would intentionally use the name “Jezebel.” Jesus could have used her real name, but that would mean nothing to us today. Instead He uses the symbolic name, “Jezebel,” to turn our thoughts back to the Old Testament so we may know how catastrophic her activities were to God’s people. Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, systematically executed the prophets of God and installed her Canaanite gods, “Baal and Asherah” as the state religion for the northern kingdom of Israel, **IKings 16:29-33** and **18:1-19:3**. Both the king and a vast majority of the citizenry compromised themselves through this seductive woman. The consequences were the wrath of God and three years of drought and famine, so Jezebel of the Thyatirians has joined Balaam and the Nicolaitans in using immoral sexual activity to attract a following. False teachers through history have discovered that by appealing to mankind’s most basic instincts of sex and food, they will attract followers quickly. In Thyatira, the trade guilds would have found Christianity a little more attractive with a bit more sex in the church. They were accustomed to it because in the Roman Empire, temple prostitution was considered a healthy spiritual activity. Unfortunately, Thyatira growing in **agape** love was also sinking in erotic love. Regarding the matter of food, the apostle Paul explains the danger of eating food offered to idols in **ICorinthians 10:18-22**.

The warning, vs. 21-23

The flaming eyes of Jesus now become punitive for the Thyatirian church in response to what He has seen in their midst. So much so that He threatens them with the

death penalty unless they repent. This is the strongest threat made to any of the five churches that needed reprimand. We would like to think that the Thyatirians would have reacted properly to such a threat. But they apparently did not for the church quickly disappeared. Neither did the Jezebel-like member of the church repent. Jesus had patiently given her time to change and return to the fold, but she did not. Consequently she is going to receive a punishment, which corresponds to her crime, a bed of suffering for her bed of adultery. Jesus' warnings were not for her, it was too late. She had ignored God's patience and joined Satan. The warnings were for her followers. In John's letters he called his parishioners "**My dear children,**" **I John 2:1**. By calling Jezebel's followers her children is almost a parody of the term. Jesus explains the danger they are in and what He will do to them as an example for all churches of the danger His eyes and feet can be. Jesus also says to them, "**I will give to each of you according to your works.**" **V. 23b**. We, the readers, must remember that He is speaking to the corrupted members of the church in Thyatira, not to us.

The promise, vs. 24-29

Jesus now turns His attention to the more mature church members. However He begins with a few last words to weaker members, "**But to you I say,**" then to the others, "**and to the rest in Thyatira.**" **V. 24a**. He is telling the corrupt to listen and learn from the promises He is going to make to the just. The Lord identifies the just as those who have not accepted the false doctrines of Jezebel. However, they haven't thrown them out yet either, but at least they have recognized them as unorthodox. Nor have they gotten involved in the Satanic cult Jezebel seems to have instituted. Satan loves to draw people away from God by implying that he, Satan, can give them spiritual power and intangible secrets that make life more exciting. Inexplicably more members of the human race are intoxicated by Satan's dark side than God's bright side. So Jesus tells the Thyatirians that they have more than enough problems among them already, so He will not give them any more.

Just as Jesus gives Thyatira the strongest threats of any of the churches, He also gives them the most remarkable blessings. The Lord promises to give those who overcome the very gift His Father gave Him in **Psalm 2**. He said, "**I will give authority over the nations...**" **v. 25** and then He quotes **Psalm 2:8-9**. This, for me, is the most stunning of all the psalms of David. In twelve short verses you read the dialogue of four different speakers: David, the political leaders of the earth, the God of Heaven and His Son. God the Father says to the Son, "**Ask of Me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter, You will dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.**" Verse 7 of this psalm is also quoted in **Hebrews 5:5** and **Acts 13:33**. This gift of God to His Son is now given by the Son to the Thyatirians and to us. In addition, He also gives us "*the morning Star.*" The second last thing Jesus says to us in **Revelation** is that He is, "**the bright Morning Star.**" **Rev. 22:16**. Remarkable is a modest adjective for two such divine gifts. We could use words like Homeric, heroic or epic, but all pale in comparison to the reality of it all.

At the end of this memo, Jesus suddenly changes His procedure. The casual reader might easily miss it and it really wouldn't affect the over-all content of

Revelation. But whenever Jesus changes something it is wise to try and understand why. The word "overcome" and the phrase "**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches**" were explained in the introduction of this chapter. But now Jesus changes their order. For the first three churches Jesus began His concluding arguments with "overcome" and ends with "**he who has an ear...**" For the last four churches He has reversed them. There is no help in Scripture so any explanation will be an opinion, but the following seems reasonable to me. We human beings are creatures of habit. We like things orderly and to be done as we expect them to be done. We don't like surprises. Order is good. Our God is a God of order, but if our desire for order is simply so we don't have to think, it is no longer good. Our orderly Father wants His children to think so He often jolts us out of the habitual into the worshipful. I believe Jesus is doing that here. He often did it for His disciples. In His Sermon on the Mount He gave us the Lord's Prayer, **Matthew 6:9-13**. Later when His disciples ask Him to teach them how to pray He gave them the Lord's prayer again, **Luke 11:2-4**. However it is shorter and different than the **Matthew** account. I'm surprised that most Christians don't realize there are two different Lord's prayers. Jesus likes us to think.

Sardis, Chapter 3:1-6

Sardis lay thirty miles south of Thyatira and fifty miles east of Smyrna. The history of Sardis was glorious. Under the rule of Croesus (560-546 BC), proverbial for his wealth, it was the most opulent city of Asia Minor. It was destroyed by an earthquake during the life of Christ, but was rebuilt at the order of the Emperor Tiberius. He even promised them ten million sesterces to help their reconstruction. But Saris never recovered its former glory. Rather its inhabitants acquired a bad reputation because of their voluptuous life styles. They had fallen from opulence to decadence.

Seven Spirits and Stars, v. 1a

1a. "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write; these things says He that has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars:"

Jesus introduces Himself as one possessing two things from **Chapter 1. The Seven Spirits 1:4** which is the **Holy Spirit** and **seven stars 1:16**, which He held in His right hand. Jesus called the stars angels for the seven churches. We interpreted that to mean the leaders or shepherds of the churches. The Holy Spirit is the source of all spiritual activity. If there is no spirit, there is no Christianity, regardless of what a church calls itself. The shepherd of a church must feed and protect his flock. Jesus told Peter to "**Feed my lambs**" **John 21:15** and to "**Take care of my sheep**" **John 21:16**. We need to remember that Jesus is speaking to two audiences: the church of Sardis and to future generations who will read this letter. Each church today must ask itself "are we like Sardis?" Is Jesus introducing Himself to us just as He is to Sardis?

Dead or Dying, vs. 1b-2

1b. "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die, for I have not found your works complete before God."

In Sardis there is no Spirit and no spiritual leadership. In all the churches thus far, the Lord began with at least one positive statement. Here there is none. What a dreadful thing to hear from the lips of the Lord, **“You are dead” v. 1b**. What is even more frightening is they are dead and don’t know it. They have a reputation of being a church of Christ, but they are not. Today we call that hypocrisy. Jesus warns about hypocrisy more than any other sin, probably because it is the most dangerous of sins. I know of no other sin that hides itself from the sinner. A hypocrite is someone who thinks himself or herself something they are not. The parishioners of Sardis thought they were true believers, but they were not. Their leaders thought they were speaking for God, but they were not. What a sorry state of affairs. But I have been in churches like Sardis and it is devastating. It is also very dangerous. The inertness of spiritual deadness is contagious. Even the active Christians begin to slow down. Here in Sardis there are some remnants who are hanging in because the word of God never returns to Him void **Isaiah 55:11**. But they are sliding into dangerous waters and Jesus warns them to wake up and **“Be watchful, and strengthen...” v. 2**. That is start growing again rather than diminishing because He finds their works incomplete. They are incomplete because they are not **“fruits of the Spirit” Galatians 5:22**. The Spirit is not being used there. The few who are still alive are surrounded by walking dead men, spiritual zombies, and their leadership has succumbed to the environment of their city. If you were going to bet on their outcome, the odds would be quite high.

The Warning, v. 3

“Remember therefore in what way you have received and heard and hold fast and repent. If therefore you will not watch, I will come as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.”

Jesus asks them to remember, not only what they have received, but **“in what way”** they have heard it. There is some uncertainty about the meaning of Jesus’ words. Two things are certain, one was the founding of the church by the apostles, probably John, who were eye witnesses to the story of Christianity. And the second would be to remember the astonishing message they were getting from the Lord Himself. There must be other things that would prompt this sort of remark from Christ Jesus, but it was only necessary for Sardis to know what they were. They were ordered to **“hold fast”** and **“repent.”** This is not a suggestion from the Lord, but a command because if they wouldn’t obey there is a penalty. If they are not alert, He is going to return like **“a thief”** and they will not be ready for Him. New Testament Jews understand this concept better than Gentiles. Jesus desired to be viewed as the bridegroom of the church **Rev. 19:7-9**. He taught this in parables, **Matthew 25:1-13**, and His first miracle was done at a wedding in Cana, **John 2:1-11**. A Jewish wedding in Jesus day was performed by the bridegroom abducting his bride like a thief in the night. We will look at this in more detail when we get to **Chapter 19**.

The Promise, vs. 4-6

4. “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white for they are worthy. 5. He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the book of life; but

I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. 6. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Though the church at Sardis is at a spiritually low ebb, there were some signs of life. A few precious souls have figuratively **“not defiled their garments.”** Jesus finds some who have resisted the lure of the decadent society they lived in but were not part of. He says they shall walk with Him in white, a sign of innocence as opposed to the guilty stain of sin. They are worthy to do this because they clung to their faith not their works and were cleansed by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. There is a vivid picture in **“Rev. 7:9-14** of a vast multitude of people in heaven who have **“...washed their robes in the blood of the lamb” 7:14b.** Jesus promised that He will acknowledge them in heaven. He told His disciples this several times, first when He sent them on their missionary journey, **Matt. 10:32**, and later in **“Luke 12:8.** This acknowledgment depends upon overcoming the obstacles placed in the way of the faithful so their names may remain in the **“book of life.”** It is like being inducted into the spiritual hall of fame. The book of life is referred to throughout Scripture. Moses mentioned it first when he suggested that God remove his name from it, **Exodus 32:32**, (I don’t think he really meant it). David requested that God blot out the names of his enemies, **Psalm 69:28.** Gabriel mentions it in **Daniel 12:1.** Paul mentions it in **Philippians 4:3**, and it occurs seven times in **Revelation.** The Lord tells Sardis to listen to what the Spirit is telling them, and history tells us that they did. We know the church survived at least four more centuries.

Philadelphia 3:7-14

The city of Philadelphia was about twenty-five miles south of Sardis and one hundred miles east of Smyrna. Its name was given by its founder, King Eumenes of Pergamum for his younger brother, Attalus Philadelphus (159-138 BC). It means “brother love,” and it is used seven times in the New Testament. **“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brother love...” Rom. 12:10**, and **“Let brotherly love continue...” Heb. 13:1**, are two prime examples. For reasons we can only guess at, this city had its name changed three times after the birth of Christ – to Neocaesarea, Flavia and Neokoros, but it always came back to Philadelphia. Perhaps this is why all the promises Jesus gave to Philadelphia refer to names. We have no information about the beginning of the church in Philadelphia, but it has remained in existence right into modern times.

Holds the Key of David, v. 7

7. “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David. He who opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens.”

Jesus’ introduction of Himself to Philadelphia differs from the first five churches in Revelation. There He used various characteristics from the vision John saw of Him in **Chapter 1:12-18.** Here He uses appellations that are used throughout scripture in reference to the Messiah. It begins in the Psalms of David, **“For you will not leave my soul in hell, neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption” Psalm 16:10.** It continues in the Gospels, **“...I know who you are, the Holy One of God” Mark 1:24b,**

spoken by an unclean spirit, for even they had to be obedient to Him. And for the last time, by souls tormented in the persecutions of the church, **“...how long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood...” Rev. 6:10.** For Jesus to call Himself **“He who is true”** seems redundant; of course he speaks the truth. He is the Savior of the world. But Jesus had to say that continually to both followers and enemies alike. More often than not He was not believed by either. **“And because I tell you the truth, you believe me not” John 8:45.** Jesus had to introduce most of His favorite sayings with the Greek word, *“amen”* which means truly. Both of these words were given to Philadelphia because they truly believed He was holy and were being persecuted because of it. These were words of comfort to them in a time of need.

Jesus also says He has, **“The key of David.”** In **Chapter One** He has the keys of death and hell, **v. 18.** The key of David is something quite different. Christ is using the same language as found in **Is. 22:22, “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder so that He shall open, and non shall shut, and He shall shut and none shall open.”** But the application here is something other than Isaiah applied to Eliakim, who was a political aide to King Hezekiah. For him the key of David was for the king’s house, not the house of God. Just as Eliakim had access to the king’s palace, Jesus had access to Gods. **“I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes unto the Father except through Me” John 14:6.**

The Open Door, v. 8

“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”

Jesus affirms that He is aware of the situation in Philadelphia and immediately asks them to look at what He has for them, **“an open door.”** I’m not sure how the Philadelphians felt about that gift. They were a good church and had every right to expect a blessing or two from God, but probably not an open door. Nor am I sure what they understood that to mean. It could be the door of eternal life is being offered to them as their reward for their works. Jesus called Himself the door in **John 10:9, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved...”** But they probably understood that it would mean more work for them. The open door generally referred to mission work in the New Testament. Paul used it often, **“For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries” ICor. 16:9. “Furthermore when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel and a door was opened to me by the Lord” IICor. 2:12. “And when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” Acts 14:27.** All three verses are related to mission work and the church in Philadelphia, being a biblically sound church, would be aware of them.

Jesus now tells them two more things He knows about them. The first doesn’t sound very good, but it was and the second sounds great but it probably wasn’t. He said, **“You have a little strength.”** We live in a society that dotes on strength and sneers at weakness. God, However, prefers the weak. They are easier to save and keep saved

because they know they can't take care of themselves. They need a savior. The body builders think they can deal with life's problems by themselves, but they can't. When Paul asked God for a little more strength, God told him, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" II Cor. 12:9**, so Jesus is complimenting the Philadelphians for understanding God's program for spiritual health.

The second thing Jesus was aware of in the church was that they, **"Have kept My word, and have not denied My name."** In the previous paragraph I said this sounded good but probably wasn't. I was speaking as a twentieth-century Christian. When we look at these words we think of ourselves as good church-going people who keep the faith and protect the doctrines of the church. This is relatively easy because we feel little persecution for our belief. I'm not sure how we would deal with tribulation, but I think we will soon find out. At the time of John's writing, there was fierce persecution going on in the area of these seven churches. A Roman writer named Pliny the Younger was a pro-consul or governor in Asia Minor. He was a decent man of peace and disliked violence so strongly that he refused to attend the gladiatorial contests in the Roman arena. The following is a portion of a political letter from Pliny to the emperor:

"I regularly refer to you, my lord, all matters about which I am in doubt; for who is better qualified to guide my uncertainty or instruct my ignorance? I have been in no little doubt on the following questions. Is any distinction made as to age, or are the very youngest treated no differently from the adults? Is pardon granted for recantation, or is it of no avail, once a person has been a Christian, to have ceased being one? Is the name of Christian itself, unaccompanied by wrongdoing, ground for punishment, or must it be so accompanied?"

"In the meantime, this is the procedure I have followed in the cases of alleged Christians. I asked of them whether they were Christians. Those who admitted it I threatened with the death penalty, then interrogated a second and third time. If they persisted I ordered them executed, for whatever it was they were confessing, I could have no doubt that their perversity and inflexible obstinacy deserved to be punished. There were some similarly deranged persons who were Roman citizens; they I designated for dispatch to the capital."

After reading this we understand more clearly what the church in Philadelphia was going through and how life threatening it was to not deny the name of Jesus.

The Conversion of the Jews, v. 9

"Behold I make them of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but do lie, behold I will make them to come and worship before your feet and to know that I have loved you."

If it were not the Lord Jesus speaking, this passage would be too incredulous to believe, considering the Jewish attitude toward both Christians and Gentiles. We have no historical accounts of what was going on in Philadelphia. But if we can read between the lines, it appears that most of the persecution against the church was done by Jews. The Israelites were aggressively attacking Christians by following the pogrom started by Saul a half century earlier. **"As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison" Acts 8:3.** Jesus refers to them as those, **"Who say they are Jews and are not."** This confuses commentators because we like to take the Lord literally. Here, however, they were indeed descendants of Abraham, but by New Testament standards they were not

Israelites. The Philadelphian Jews went to the synagogue every Saturday and worshiped the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and truly believed they must eradicate these Christians because they were proselytizing so effectively among the Jews. But they were not true Jews. Under the new covenant, believing Gentiles were the new Israel of God. Paul established in **Romans 9 and 10** that the Hebrews had abrogated their relationship with God by rejecting Jesus Christ. **“For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” Rom. 10:2.** The Philadelphian Christians were feeling some of that Jewish zeal, so Jesus tells them that their attackers are not Jews but liars under the control of Satan. He said a similar thing to the Jews in Jerusalem, **“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own, for he is a liar and the father of it” John 8:44.**

The Lord also said, **“I will make them come and worship before your feet.”** Considering the Jewish prejudice against Christians, it is hard to imagine how this could happen. But we know it did because Jesus said it would even though it is not recorded in history. By using Scripture we can even find out how it happened. For Jesus said, **“...I will make them...”** but not how He would make the Jews convert. Obviously He was going to do it the way He so often does things, through the example of mature Christians to reach out to others. In this case the mature church at Philadelphia was going to persevere in their persecution in such a Christ-like way that even their persecutors are impressed and joined in the very worship they were so outraged at. Paul explains this strange metamorphosis by quoting **Proverbs 25:21-22**, **“Therefore if your enemy hunger feed him; if he thirst, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”** Then Paul adds the Lord’s concept of a normal Christian life, **“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” Romans 12:21.** This may sound like reading a little too much between the lines and indeed it may be, but I always find it more satisfying to know something rather than nothing. What we do know is that the Jews are going to recognize how much Jesus loves the Philadelphian church by how they persevere in their persecutions.

The Promises, vs. 10-13

10. “Because you have kept the word of My patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test them who dwell on the earth. 11. Behold I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 12. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, 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 I will write on him My new name. 13. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

In response to their endurance in times of distress Jesus promises that they will be protected from, **“...the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world.”** I find it fascinating that both of the good churches were persecuted. One, Smyrna, was told that it would continue for a little while. The other, Philadelphia, heard that it would never

happen again. Why? If we were members of either of these churches we could answer that question. We aren't, so we can't. But God seems to deal with churches the same way He deals with individuals. He does what needs to be done. In Smyrna's case they needed a little more tribulation and Philadelphia didn't. The trial Jesus refers to is persecution, and looking back in history we can clearly see two centuries of holocausts perpetrated upon the Christian church by Roman Emperors Trajan, Aurelius, Decius and Diocletian. While it is not stated in history that Philadelphia somehow escaped these persecutions, we know they did. It was a promise of God. But it was given to the church body, not to individuals.

The rest of the promises were made to individuals, and the first one involves not being complacent. The body is good, but individual part must hold fast to their own salvation. Jesus said, **"Hold fast to what you have."** We have an enemy who would love to steal that crown away from us. If we hold fast and **"overcome"** there are some impressive blessings awaiting us. We will be a permanent part of heaven, the pillars in God's house. Jesus, Himself, is writing names on us. At the very beginning of God's church, Aaron, the high priest wore an inscription on his forehead, **Exodus 28:36-38**. At the very end of the church, Jesus will inscribe us, I'm guessing, on our foreheads. He will seal us with the names of God, of Jerusalem and the new name of Jesus mentioned in **Philippians 2:9**. The New Jerusalem will come down from heaven in **Revelation 19** where we will understand it a little better. John's conclusion here, as to all the churches, is pay attention to the Spirit.

Laodicea, 3:14-22

The city of Laodicea was forty-five miles southwest of Philadelphia and one hundred miles east of Ephesus. It was named by Antiochus II (261-426 BC), a Greek king of Syria, in honor of his wife, Queen Laodice. It was a city comprised of many wealthy citizens. Laodicea was known throughout the empire for its exquisite black wool, its medical school and medicinal compounds made for eye and ear diseases. The city had a mint, which produced its own coinage. It is not surprising that after Laodicea was destroyed in 61 AD, these wealthy citizens rebuilt without any financial help from Rome. This is probably the reason for their smug sense of pride and self-sufficiency. Laodicea was also a resort city used by many for its natural baths. These were products of thermal vents only a few miles from the city. The hot, calcium laden water flowed down to Laodicea and by the time of arrival had cooled to a perfect lukewarm temperature for a spa bath. Laodicea is the easiest of the seven churches to understand because both their material wealth and spiritual poverty is painfully obvious.

The Faithful and True Witness, v. 14

14. "And to the angel of the church of Laodiceans write; 'These things say the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God:'"

Laodicea is in such a sad state of affairs that Jesus must identify Himself more clearly than for any of the other six churches. He calls Himself the **"Amen."** As stated earlier, "Amen," as an adverb, was used extensively, but as a proper noun it can be found in only two other places: **Is. 65:16** and **II Cor. 1:20**. The passage in **Isaiah** is translated

as **“The God of truth,”** in all the versions I checked. The correct rendering, **“The God of the Amen,”** is done nowhere. I have no idea why translators have missed this. Perhaps, as a so-so translator myself, I find we are good at transliterating language, but often poor at seeing the true meaning of the text, which is the purpose of translation. In this case, the entire Messianic prophesy of **Isaiah 65:16** is missed by not translating **“Amen,”** as the proper noun it is. Paul helps us to understand in **II Cor. 1:20, or all the promises of God in Him are yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”** And Jesus Himself settles it for us by calling Himself the **“Amen,”** the one who is the fulfillment of all that God has promised to the churches.

Jesus designates Himself as **“The faithful and true witness,”** which is first given by John in **Rev. 1:5**. In **Rev 19:11** the same words were used as proper nouns for Jesus as He comes again in His glory. **“Then I saw heaven open and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.”** In a court of law it is helpful to have witnesses to judge properly. In Jesus’ case, He is both judge and witness. The Laodiceans should be trembling in their boots by now. Jesus is going to be the witness of their folly and a judge preparing to make war. To be sure they understood the scope of His power, He calls Himself **“The beginning of the creation of God.”** The church at Laodicea understood this fully. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul wrote, **“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him” Col. 1:15-16.** At the end of this letter Paul said, **“Now when this letter is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” Col. 4:15.** The letter from Laodicea was probably Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, which was passed on to the other six churches. So we can be sure that Paul’s letter to the Colossians would be copied, then sent to Laodicea, only ten miles away from them. The full impact of Jesus’ words in **v. 14** should do what He intended, to make them think.

Lukewarm, vs. 15-16

15. “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you cold or hot. 16. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth.”

The symbolism Jesus uses here is letter perfect for the church in Laodicea. They are confusing their materialism with spirituality and have become so casual that they have neutralized their faith in Christ. They have become spiritually lukewarm and it revolted the Lord. The Laodiceans could easily draw the comparison between the living water of Jesus Christ and the tepid thermal waters they love to bath in. Jesus called Himself the one who gives, **“living water. ...Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst... John 4:14a.** The church in Laodicea could drink the living water and live or their bath water and vomit. In daily living it often seems safest to avoid extremes and take the middle road. Jesus, on the other hand, prefers commitment. If we are to follow Him, we must be ardent and enthusiastic in our faith and our love for Christ must

be evident to all. This is always difficult and often dangerous just as Jesus promised it would be. Consequently many take the safer path, as did the Laodiceans. A lukewarm Christian is indistinguishable from a pagan. So Jesus said He would rather we be cold, an outright enemy, rather than a lukewarm friend. An indifferent Christian does more harm to the church than any hostile atheist could ever do. Seeing this from God's perspective we can understand why Jesus is so graphic in His description. It makes Him sick.

Hypocrisy, v. 17

17. "Because you say, 'I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing' ...and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, ..."

The Laodiceans were in trouble and they didn't know it. It is always sad to see someone who is seriously ill, living in denial of reality. But it is much more dangerous to possess a fatal disease and not even know about it. That's where the church in Laodicea was. They were well fed, housed, clothed and financially secure. They had forgotten what God said to the rich farmer who said, **"...Soul, you have so many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, 'you fool! This night your soul will be required of you'..." Luke 12:19-20a.** They had forgotten what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount; **19. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ...33. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you" Matt. 6:19-33.** The church was in denial; they were hypocrites. They were secure in their material possessions, the very things Jesus identifies as their liabilities. The Laodiceans must have heard about the persecution in Smyrna and Philadelphia, the two good churches. They must have wondered about the absence of persecution in their church and if they did, I'm guessing they would have thought it was because they were such a fine church. The truth of the matter was quite the opposite. Satan didn't need persecution to corrupt them, he already did.

The Warning, vs. 18-19

18. "I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich and white garments that you may be clothed that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve that you may see. 19. As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. Therefore be zealous and repent."

At the end of **v. 17** Jesus tells the church how spiritually poverty stricken they were. In **v. 18** He tells him how to correct these deficiencies. Their wealth much be forged into spiritual **"gold refined in the fire,"** that is, forged by persecution as Smyrna and Philadelphia. They are to wear white garments to cover their guilt and use spiritual eye salve to see God's truth. If this sounds a little extreme to the church, Jesus tells them the same things conscientious parents say to their children, **"As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline."** Discipline is not punishment. It is training, and all children need to be taught. It is embarrassing to have an eighteen year old who acts like a two year old in public. It is equally embarrassing for the Lord to have someone bearing His name to

grow up chronologically but not spiritually in the church. When necessary Jesus disciplines, so work hard, “**be zealous**” and grow up to maturity.

The Promise, vs. 20-22

20. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to Him and dine with him and he with Me. 21. To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Jesus has asked the church to repent. They were not dead, but they were dangerously tepid. What had happened to them? Here Jesus said they put Him out of their hearts. As in Bethlehem a century earlier, there was no room in the inn. Now, in Laodicea, there was no room in their hearts. Wealth in itself is not a sin. It becomes so if it takes the place of the Lord in the core of our being. This has happened in Laodicea and Jesus had to stand outside the church and pound on the door. God has justified the church. They don’t need to be converted, but they do need to be sanctified, that is to mature spiritually. The promise Jesus makes, if they will repent, is rather ordinary compared to some of His promises to the other six churches. But it is one we can all rejoice in. Eating is such a normal, daily pleasure that we tend to take it for granted. There is some danger here because we think of what an honor it will be to have Jesus as our dinner guest. But how easy it becomes to start the meal with a prayer and immediately forget that Jesus just sat down there with you. The Lord knows that spiritually growing up and eating with Him is never easy. But if we overcome our difficulties and tribulations, there is a throne waiting for us. Just as He acquired His Father’s throne through suffering, crucifixion and death, should we expect an easier path to heaven? The Spirit is saying to the churches, “**No!**”



The Throne of God

Chapters 4 & 5

Chapter Four

An Open Door, v. 1

1. “After these things I looked, and behold a door opened in heaven. And the first voice, which I heard, was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, “Come up here, and I will show things which must happen after this.”

John opens **Chapter 4** with **after these things.**” The things referred to are the letters to the seven churches, which John was ordered to write down; and he did. The first three chapters of **Revelation** related primarily to John’s bishopric in Asia Minor at the end of the first century AD. It was written by John, an earth bound prisoner, exiled on the island of Patmos. Suddenly the scene changes, John and we are looking up to heaven rather than down at the planet earth. The first thing John saw was a door being opened in heaven. The Greek verb is a perfect passive participle, which indicates that John saw the door “*being opened*” as opposed to most modern translations “*standing open.*” The first thing John heard was a voice like a trumpet. Many commentators think John recognized the voice to be the first one he heard in **Rev. 1:10**, and they may be correct. The Greek would admit that interpretation, but it is not the most probable. The first voice in **1:10** was Jesus on Patmos with John, and He had just finished his dictation to John in **3:22** when a door opened and another voice came out of heaven. In fact, Jesus does not speak again in **Revelation** until **Chapter 22**; all other messengers are angels. I know this seems a bit irrelevant, but I believe we should see all the options. We do know that both voices sounded very loud, as does every sound coming out of heaven. The first thing said to John was that he was going to be paroled for a time at least. He was going to get off the island. The voice said, “**Come up here.**” I apologize ahead of time to my readers, but I can’t get past this phrase without hearing, “Beam me up, Scottie” racing through my mind. But this is not science fiction. This is the last prophet of God, who is about to see into the future and share it with us.

The Throne of God, 4:2-3

3. “Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was set in heaven and (One) sat on the throne. 3. And He that sat was like a jasper and sardine stone and a rainbow was around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.”

In **Chapter 1:10**, John told us he “**was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.**” The apostle is still in the Spirit, but now John has a different experience. It sounds like an out-of-body experience, but probably not. Although both events are translated the same, “**was in the Spirit**” they are different in Greek. In **Rev. 1:10**, “**was**” is given as an “*ingressive aorist*,” which implies an entrance into. In **Rev. 4:2** it is an “*effective aorist*,” implying sequel or result. The best translation would then be, “**at once I found myself in the Spirit.**” This has happened twice before to men of God. Ezekiel and Paul both saw the same symbolic vision of God’s throne that John saw. Ezekiel describes it fully, but Paul was ordered not to. Ezekiel also understood the manner in which God moved him, “**12c. “Then the Spirit took me up and I heard behind me a voice of a great thundering: ‘Blessed be the glory of the Lord from this place.’ 13. I also heard the voice of the wings of the living creatures that touched one another, and the noise of the wheel beside them, and a great thunderous noise. 14. So the Spirit lifted me up**

and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was upon me” Ezekiel 3:12-14. Paul, on the other hand, didn’t understand his mode of transportation. He is obviously referring to himself in **IICor. 12:3-4**, “**I knew such a man – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.**” So, in John’s case, it seems to be that he was moved physically. It will happen to him two more times in **Rev.** and in each case he wrote, “**He carried me away in the Spirit to...**” **Rev. 17:3** and **21:10**. So we shall take the voice literally who said, “**Come up here,**” and see through John’s eyes a manifestation of the glory of God. John, like Paul, is looking directly into heaven and sees, “**One that sat on the throne.**” But when Isaiah saw God on the throne, He was in the Holy of Holies in the temple. “**In the year that King Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple**” **Is. 6:1**. Ezekiel also saw the majesty of God by the Chebar River. It would have been nice if one of these men could have given us a better description of God, but they didn’t. Rather, they used stones, gems, noise and a rainbow to describe God’s splendor. The rainbow is both beautiful and symbolic of God’s promise to Noah.

Twenty-four Thrones, v. 4

4.”And around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads.”

As I indicated in the preface, the understanding of **Revelation** is a continuous challenge of problem solving. All understanding of the Bible involves using Scripture to explain Scripture. We have seen in **Chapters 2 & 3** how Jesus sent us back in the Word to fully understand His new words. In this verse we again must look backward. However, most of **verse 4** is quite clear. The “**twenty-four thrones**” were identical to the “**throne**” they surrounded. In the ancient world, thrones were only for kings and political leaders of any other name. The “**crowns of gold**” were also emblematic, solely for royal authority. “**Clothed in white robes**” takes us back to the church in Sardis where Jesus said, “**He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments**” **Rev. 3:5a**. The only real problem to solve is the “**twenty-four elders.**” The Greek word translated elder is “*presbuterus*” from which comes presbyter which the dictionary calls priest or minister. So we are looking at clergymen in white, which stands for holiness, and crowns, which is for royalty. If we stopped here, it seems we are looking at our clergy standing around the throne of God; and, of course, we would be wrong. The crowns of royalty and priestly clothing should take us back to **Rev 1:6a**, “**and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father...**” John is letting us know from the very beginning that we are all now the clergy. There is no longer a laity. These same elders said the identical thing in a new song in **Rev. 5:10**. It should be exhilarating to look at **Rev. 4:4** and see ourselves. If you prefer to think of the elders as symbolic of the church triumphant, by all means do so; we are still a part of it. The only remaining thing is the number, why twenty-four? In **IChron. 24** David organized the descendants of Aaron into twenty-four priestly classes or work shifts to insure an uninterrupted service of prescribed ritual for the church. Throughout **Revelation** the elders are involved in

worship and praise, and twice an elder gives John needed information, **Rev. 5:5 & 7:13-17.**

The Seven Spirits of God, v. 5

5.”And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and voices and thunderings. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.”

Again there is a great sound coming out of heaven. Now it comes from the throne and, though God is not mentioned, obviously He is the source. It reminds us of God on Mount Sinai in **Ex. 19:16**, **“Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.”** Which is the proper reaction to the majesty and glory of God who is about to give them the Ten Commandments? These sounds are also used as weapons of God. Hannah in her prayer of Thanksgiving said, **“”The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces; from heaven He will thunder against them. The Lord will judge the ends of the earth” ISamuel 2:10.** The **“seven Spirits of God”** was explained in **Rev. 1:4.**

The Sea of Glass, v. 6

6.”Before the throne was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne were four living beings full of eyes in front and back.”

This short verse is so intertwined that it is difficult to examine the individual parts without losing the whole picture, which seems normal when seeing the throne of God and His glory. To look too closely to any one section is to lose the universal view intended by an allegory. The glass sea is connected to the eyes on the beings, which are connected to sea, which take us ahead in **Revelation** and back to the Old Testament. To study all of this constitutes a book-sized commentary based on one small verse, so I will try to be brief.

There is little help in Scripture for understanding the purpose of the **“sea of glass,”** so some opinion is necessary. The only other time we see that phrase is **Rev. 15:2**, **“...a sea of glass mingled with fire.”** The addition of fire, which is the wrath of God, helps us a little. The glass was **“like crystal,”** which gives us a sense of purity and also a sense of vision. You can see through it, nothing is hidden. Its intent also seems to carry us back to the building of Solomon’s Temple. We read about Hiram crafting a sea in **IKings 7:23**, **“Then he made the sea of cast bronze, ten cubits from one brim to the other...”** If you continue on in this chapter you are struck by the similarity of Hiram’s full creation to the throne of God found in **Rev. 4, Ezekiel 1** and **Isaiah 6.** These four beings are obviously messengers of God. They are **“full of eyes,”** which again refers to vision, in this case the omniscience of God. Their tasks seem to carry out the will of God in a more global scope than other types of angels. John tells us they are **“in the midst of the throne, and around the throne.”** To get a mental picture of this, they are moving around all the time, or it is like a biology book with overlays of

the human body. First you have a skeleton. The next plastic overlay is the bowels, then the muscles and finally the skin. Here we see the throne of God **“and one sat on the throne” 4:2**, then **“the seven Spirits of God” 4:5**, then **“the sea of glass...and four living beings full of eyes in front and back” 4:6**. The final overlay is the appearance of Jesus as **“a Lamb” 5:6**. Whatever picture you see of this verse, the purpose of **Chapters 4 & 5** is to get us ready for the apocalyptic chapters to come. Our Lord wants us to be so emotionally involved with this that we, like John, will even shed a tear or two.

The Four Living Beings, vs. 7-8

6. “The first living being was like a lion, the second living being like a calf, the third living being had a face like a man, and the fourth living being like a flying eagle. 8. And the four beings, each one of them having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, (who) is and was and is to come.”

There is a tendency here to try and get too specific in identifying the **“four living beings.”** It is appealing to see them as the four gospel writers, **Matthew, Mark, Luke** and **John**, but there is not one biblical fact to support this opinion. The only similar comparison is in **Ezekiel 1:10**, **“As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man, each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had a face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had a face of an eagle.”** The four angels described here all have four faces and four wings as opposed to the four beings in **Rev. 4** who have one face and six wings. Again we are struck by the similar but different examples of the **“throne of God”** in the three places it is given: **Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1** and **Revelation 4 and 5**. There is no explanation other than the fact that our God does not like carbon copies of anything. Just look at His creation. The example in **Ezekiel** is so majestic and detailed that I would love to include all 28 verses, but in the interest of time and space, I will pick and choose from the verses that apply to **Rev. 4**. John does not help us much in his description of what he was seeing. I need to see in my mind’s eye what is there holding up the **“Sea of Glass.”** So most of the following is guesswork. I see the four beings as humanoid in form as the angels in **Ezekiel 1:5**, **“Also from within it came the likeness of four living beings. And this was their appearance. They had the likeness of a man.”** Their use of wings I see as did **Ezekiel**, **“...their wings were stretched upward; two wings of one touched one another, and two covered their bodies” Ezekiel 1:11.** The last two wings are used for transportation as in **Isaiah 6:2**, **“Above it stood seraphin; each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.** The four angels in **Ezekiel** didn’t need that extra pair of wings for movement because they had wheels. **Ezekiel 1:12-21**, **“...when those (angels) went, these (wheels) went; when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up together with them, for the spirit of the living beings was in the wheels” v. 21.** I enjoy this kind of Scriptural guesswork, and if you have traveled with me through this circuitous path, I thank you for the company.

The appearance of these four beings can easily be seen as extensions of God’s divine control over what is transpiring on our planet. The **Lion** is an emblem of royal

authority and power, **“The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy” Amos 3:8.** The **Calf**, or more exactly the young bullock, symbolizes strength and power of service in the area of agriculture. **“Where no oxen are, the manger is clean, but much increase comes by the strength of an ox” Proverbs 14:4.** The **Man** represents the God-given ability to think and conceive of something as remarkable as an invisible God. **“Brethren, do not be children in understand; however, in malice be children, but in understand be mature” ICor. 14:20.** The **Eagle** was a favorite for the writers of Scripture in representing the mobility and omnipresence of God in the execution of His designs. **“The Lord shall bring a nation against you from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose tongue you will not understand” Deut. 28:49.** It is also used to demonstrate the uplifting power of a loving god. **“But they that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not weary, and they shall walk and not faint” Isaiah 40:31.** These four beings are in constant movement without ever taking a rest; a remarkable but rather unenviable life style from the human point of view. They lift their voices in reverence and call Him by name, **“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!”**

The Song, vs. 9-11

9.”Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10. the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 11. You are worthy, O Lord to receive glory and honor and power; for you created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”

While this is not stated, I call this a song because it seems impossible to voice the **“glory and honor and thanks to Him”** without bursting into song. John goes on to say that whenever the four beings sing praises to God, the twenty-four elders join in. In other words, we on earth join in the heavenly choir in praising our God. The elders act exactly as humans should; they **“fall down before Him...”** and **“cast their crowns before the throne.”** We may be the church triumphant, but we must never forget that we owe our victory to Him. It is unflattering but true that we earthbound mortals need to be reminded by heavenly voices that our God is **“worthy...to receive glory and honor and thanks...”** We need to be assured time and time again that our God created us and our universe, Darwin notwithstanding.

Chapter Five

A Scroll with Seven Seals, vs. 1-4

1.”And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. 2. Then I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals. 3. And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look on it. 4. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.”

John now adds a hand holding a scroll to the scene he presented in **4:2-3**. Literally the Greek text says the scroll *lay upon the open right hand*, which implies the holder intended to give it to someone. The scroll is written on both sides. In the ancient world official documents or letters were never written on both sides; it was considered miserly or rude or both. Just like today, a theme typed on both sides of the paper would be given an F by a college professor. But in the case of some monumental task or a letter containing a great amount of important information, it could be done. The Roman scientist, Pliny the Elder, left his nephew, Pliny the Younger, a hundred and sixty commentaries written on both sides. And Roman authors and poets often wrote on front and back. Since this scroll was filled with such an enormous amount of information, as the voice said in **4:1**, “...I will show you things which must take place after this,” it had to be “**written within and on the backside.**” This papyrus or vellum scroll was sealed with **seven seals**, probably placed on the margin of the rolled scroll so that they could be opened and read, one at a time. The number 7 is used by John 54 times in **Revelation** as God’s number, implying completeness. Seals were made with soft wax, which was impressed with the signet ring of the sender. This scroll is obviously an official document. A will in Roman law bore seven impressed seals of the seven witnesses. The seven seals **here have only one witness, God Himself**; and we will see an angel carrying God’s signet ring in **Rev. 7:2**.

John now sees a **mighty angel**. There are two more coming in **Rev. 10:1 and 18:21**. A mighty angel seems to be needed here in order to have a voice stentorian enough to reach the farthest limits of the universe. He was looking for someone who was suitable to take the scroll from the hand of God and open it. And there was none to be found. This seems to project to us the image of Adam, **Gen. 1:26-28**, handing over his inheritance of the earth to Satan, and heaven is still waiting for someone to take the title to the planet earth, symbolized by this scroll containing the future of all mankind. No wonder John wept. And he did not just drop a tear or two; he wept profoundly. It isn’t that John didn’t know the story. He understood the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and its inexpressible value to human kind. But he was told that he would learn about the future, **Chap. 4:1**, and now it seemed that he wouldn’t. So he wept, and if we were in his place, so would we.

The Lamb, vs. 5-7

5.”But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.” 6. And I looked and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7. Then he came and took the scroll out of the hand of Him who sat on the throne.”

There is no particular reason why “**one of the elders**” should be God’s messenger. Perhaps because of John’s deep depression, one of the living beings or the mighty angel would have been more frightening than comforting. At any rate, an elder detached himself from the choir and soothed John by asking him to stop crying and look,

behold, the lion of the tribe of Judah.” Now John has never heard that name given to Jesus before, but he would relate it to **Gen. 49:9, Judah is a lion’s whelp; my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?** And **Hebrews 7:14, “For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning the priesthood.”** Since Jesus was from the tribe of Judah, the title of **Lion** is appropriate. **“The root of David”** would connect Him directly to the line of David and **Isaiah 11:1, “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of its roots.”** Both of these metaphors clearly indicate that Jesus is worthy because He has **”prevailed”**. The primary meaning of the verb is *conquering*. Jesus has conquered; He has the right to open the seals.

John was told to look at a **lion**, but what he saw was a dead lamb. We seem to have a paradox. However, a dead lamb was the centerpiece of the Jewish Passover. The words of **Isaiah 53** would ring in their ears, **“But he was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we were like sheep and have gone astray; ...He was lead as a lamb to the slaughter,”** but it became so traditional they missed it when the real Passover Lamb came to them. Now the slain lamb appears again in **v. 6** and **“stood”** in the midst of the **throne of God**. And we remember Jesus’ words back in **Chapter 1:18, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.”** So this seemingly paradoxical Passover lamb and lion suddenly turn from an allegory to the reality of the crucified and resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The **“seven horns”** are symbols of the power and authority of God. The **“seven eyes”** represent the omniscience of God and the **“seven Spirits of God,”** or **The Holy Spirit** leads us back to **Isaiah 11:2, “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.”** With all of this power and might, the Lamb **“Came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”**

The New Song, vs. 8-10

8.”Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9. And they sang a new song saying: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open the seals; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.”

Now that someone was **“worthy to open and read the scroll”** all of heaven rejoices with adoration **“before the lamb.”** There are two additions to the scene around the **“throne of God.”** They are harps and bowls. Purists may be unhappy to hear that they were not harps as we know them, but more like guitars. Something of a shock to our psyche to think of angels sitting on clouds playing guitars. Josephus refers to it as a lute with ten strings which are plucked with a small piece of ivory. At least we now know that the music around the throne is not a cappella. Bowls of incense were used in

synagogues, **“according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord” Luke 1:9.** Here it is used as a metaphor for the **“prayers of the saints.”** It is healthy for us to be told that our prayers waft up to heaven as the sweet smell of incense. **“Let my prayers be set before You as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice” Ps. 141:2**

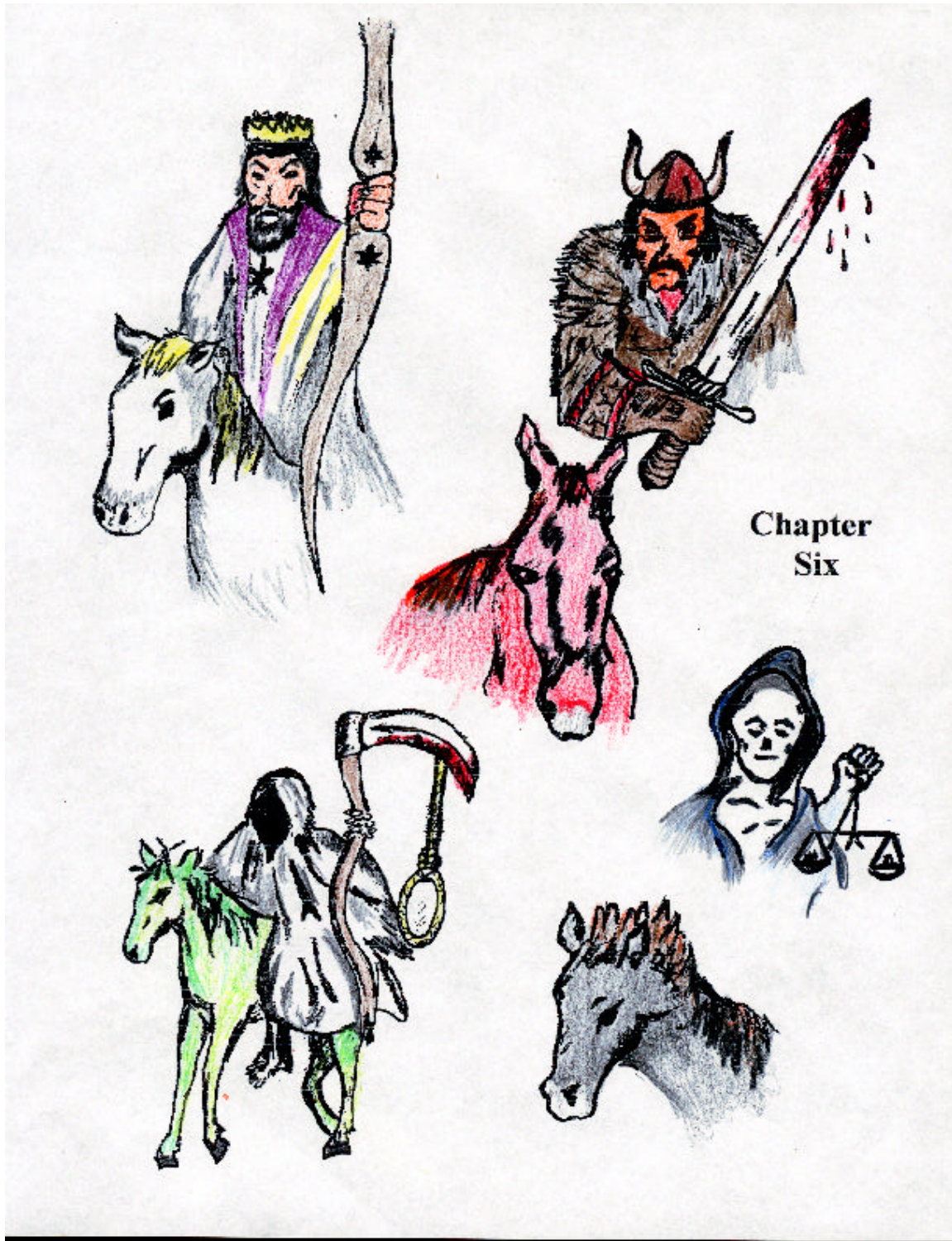
In vs. 9-10 we get **“a new song.”** There was an old song in 4:8 & 11. The old song was one of adoration for God, the Creator of the universe who was and is **“worthy to receive glory and honor and power” 4:11.** The **new song** is a song of redemption because Jesus is now in the picture, bringing us justification and sanctification. God has done all the work in our salvation. This is called justification. That is how He made us **“kings.”** Sanctification is the process of growing up to spiritual maturity so we may be **“priests.”** David understood the value of music, **“Praise the Lord with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy: Ps. 33:2-3.** Most of this song was explained in **Rev. 1:6.**

Armies of Angels, vs. 11-14

11.”Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living beings, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, 12. saying with a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” 13. And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and are in the sea and all that are in them, I heard saying: “Blessing and honor and glory and power to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” 14. Then the four living creatures said “Amen!” and the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever.”

In the previous verses we heard the four living beings and the twenty-four elders **“sing a new song”** to the Lamb. Suddenly these twenty-eight voices are enhanced by myriads of voices. The number of angels given match the number given in **Daniel 7:10,** **“...a thousand thousands ministered to Him; and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him...”** The doxology given in v. 12 we are told was spoken. I wish it had been sung. In my mind’s ear I want to hear majestic sounds like Handel’s Messiah at full volume pouring out of heaven. But John used the Greek verb *“lego.”* It always means, *“say”* never *“sing.”* So I must yield to the text and hear all these voices saying, **“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.”** The point of this doxology is the same as vs. 9-10, that Jesus is **“worthy to take the scroll.”** Here the angels give Him seven attributes of grace which are similar but different from those in **Isaiah 11:2.** God is telling us not to limit His power to a number like seven, but to recognize it for what it is, immeasurably and uncountable. We need to recognize that once again we are seeing the Holy Spirit being presented as He was in v. 6, **“...seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God...”** It is important that we understand what we have seen in **Chapters 4 & 5; The Holy Trinity in all its glory,** because it is remarkably similar to **Chapters 12 & 13, the unholy Trinity in all its evil.**

In **v. 13** the entire universe joins this impressive array around the **throne of God** in this paean of praise and adoration for the Lamb. Now they connect the **new song, vs. 9, 10 and 12** to the old song, **5:11, “You are worthy, O Lord to receive glory and honor and power.”** Now the **“Lamb who was slain”** is united with the Father and the Holy Trinity is once again united. Now the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fall down and worship **“Him”** as they did in **4:10**. One last thought or addenda, I don’t think the pronoun in **v. 14** refers only to Jesus. I believe **“Him”** is the compilation of the Godhead, the Trinity, as represented in **Chapters 4 & 5**.



Chapter
Six

Chapter Six

And now gentle reader, we have arrived at the crux of the matter. I look at the material ahead with some feeling of trepidation; not because of its difficulty in understand, but at the importance of explaining it properly. We are now beginning the true revelation, which this book is named after. The first thing we will see is Jesus opening the seven seals. It helps to realize that there are three more series of seven on the way: **seven trumpets 8:2 – 11:19, seven visions 12:1 – 15:4 and seven bowls 15:5 – 16:21.** We also know that God has prepared us for this feast of imagery through the first five chapters of this book. In **Chapters 1 – 3** we saw our **Lord of Revelation** and His church. In **Chapters 4 – 5** we saw the splendor of the **throne of God** and should be so emotionally charged about learning of our future that, like John, we would weep if we couldn't.

The problem we face in the first eight verses of this chapter is interpreting it correctly. If we use our modus operandi of only allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture, we can be right and yet be wrong. In this case there is only one other set of horses like these in the Bible: **Zechariah 6:2-3, "With the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses, with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot dappled horses, strong steeds."** More than this, **Zechariah** is the most apocalyptic and Messianic of all the Minor Prophets, so it seems very obvious that his horses should help explain John's horses; but they don't. We need to remember that **Zechariah** wrote primarily for the Jews, an Old Testament book of **Revelation**. John wrote primarily for the Gentiles, and though they both use much of the same imagery, they do not always have the same intent. So we need to find something in Scripture that is more applicable to **Revelation 6**. It helps us to know that Jesus' disciples also had a deep interest in their own future and asked about it. In **Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21**, Jesus answers their questions about the future, from the fall of Jerusalem to His second coming. In doing so, Jesus also provides us with a method of interpreting all the apocalyptic chapters in **Revelation** because He is telling us the same thing, but much more literal than allegorical. So it seems logical to do the **Gospel** accounts first and then, armed with the **Word**, attack **Rev. 6**. To simplify this I have united the three Gospels into one harmonized version.

Jesus Foretells The Fall Of Jerusalem And The End Of The World

MAT. 24:1-51 Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and some of His
MK. 13:1-37 disciples spoke of the temple, how it was decorated with beautiful
LK. 21:5-36 stones and consecrated gifts. They came to point out to Him the impressive
structures of the temple and one of His disciples said to Him, "*Teacher, see what wonderful stones and structures (are here).*" And Jesus answered and said to him, "***Do you not see all these things? Do you see these great structures? Truly, I say to you, the days will come in which not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down.***"

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, the disciples came to Him and Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, saying, "*Teacher, tell us, when will these things be? And what sign (will there be) when these things are about to take place, Your coming*

and the end of the world." And Jesus answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name saying, 'I am the Christ,' and, 'The time has drawn near,' and will deceive many. Therefore do not follow them. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars and insurrections, see that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass first, but the end is not yet." Then He said to them, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences and troubles; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven. All these (are) the beginnings of birth pains. But watch out for yourselves, for before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute (you). They will deliver you to city councils, and up to the synagogues and you will be beaten in the synagogues. And you will be brought before kings and rulers for My sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. But when they arrest and deliver you up, settle (it) in your hearts not to worry beforehand, nor to meditate on what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you that speak, but the Holy Spirit. For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or withstand. Then they will deliver you up to prisons and tribulations and kill you. You will be betrayed, even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends, and they will send you to your death. Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father (his) child; children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And not a hair of your head will be lost. By your patient endurance possess your souls. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."

The Fall Of Jerusalem

"But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you know that its desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."

The Great Tribulation

"Then when you see the 'abomination of desolation', spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing, where it ought not, in the holy place" [whoever reads, let him understand], "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. And let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those with nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the sabbath. For then, (in) those days, there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world, the creation which God created, until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He will

shorten these days. Then if anyone says to you 'Look, here (is) the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe (it). For false christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He (is) in the inner rooms!' do not believe (it). For as lightning comes from the East and flashes to the West, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass may be, there the eagles will be gathered together."

The Second Coming

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days, there will be signs in the sun, in the moon and in the stars. The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. And on the earth (will be) distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things, which are coming on the earth. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven."

The Parable Of The Fig Tree

And He spoke to them a parable: *"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. When its branch has already become tender and budding, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near, at the very doors. Truly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."*

Therefore Watch And Pray

"But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only My Father. But as (in) the days of Noah, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two will be in the field: One will be taken and the other left. Two grinding at the mill: One will be taken and the other left. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Take heed therefore, watch and pray, for you do not know when the time is and you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what watch of the night the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect."

All of this has been an introduction to **Chapter 6**, not so much for you, the reader as it is for me, the writer. There has been a short writer's block caused by the trepidation

stated at the beginning. But God always provides, and in this case it was through the prophet, **Amos**. **“Surely the Lord God does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy?” Amos 3:7-8.** So let us begin!

As we see the Lamb opening one of the seals, a statement from **Isaiah** comes to mind. The prophet is stunned by the stupidity of the majority of the Jewish Nation. They are a literate and intelligent people who act as if they are not. **“The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which prophets deliver to one who is literate, saying ”Read this, please;” and he says, “I cannot, for it is sealed.” Then the book is delivered to one who is illiterate, saying, “Read this, please;” and he says, “I am not literate” Isaiah 29:11-12.** We are living in an age of civilized, intelligent people who are blind to, or ignorant of all the signs that Jesus warns us about. **“All these are the beginning of birth pains” Matthew 24:8.** Our age has already gone beyond these into full-blown labor. The next stage is the birth of the Antichrist, then **Tribulation, Matt. 24:15:22.**

Since I am looking at this text as John looked at the scene, I would like to know which living being is talking to John. In my mental video I see the lion. It doesn't say the first being, but the next three are all numbered in **v. 3, v. 5 and v. 7.** The being said **“come and see.”** His invitation is to both John and us. Some think he is calling out the horse and rider, but this is rather unlikely. So as we obey the command, and as the scroll is unsealed and partially opened, we suddenly see a remarkable special effect. Hollywood has shown us how effective these special effects can be, but they are simply imitating what God has done centuries ago. We see a **”white horse...a bow...a crown.”** The rider is not described for us. The first question then is what does this allegory represent? Most modern commentators see it as the Anti-Christ, but there is nothing in Scripture to support this. The only other rider in Scripture on a white horse is Jesus in **Rev. 19:11-16.** The opponents to this view say that while they are both riding a white horse, the two riders are obviously different. I think the reason for this difference is because they represent different times. The rider in **6:2** is Jesus in His first coming, and **19:11** is Jesus in His second coming. I also believe the first horse and rider represent Jesus because as we progress in **Revelation**, we will discover that all apocryphal chapters are chronological in form. As we interpret each chapter we must follow a chronology of time beginning in the first century AD until the second coming. So **Rev. 6** begins the New Testament Age with the first coming of the promised Messiah. The crown represents royalty and the bow represent war, in this case victorious warfare. The combination of Jesus and warfare bothers some believers who only see Jesus as humble and meek, but they must also see the Savior of both **Psalms 68:18** and **Ephesians 4:8**, **“When He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.”** There is the Messiah of **Rev. 6:1-2.** The very Savior who, on the cross said, **“It is finished” John 19:30.** This is a statement of victory. The work He came here to accomplish is now finished. Every living being is a slave or captive to one of two owners, either to Jesus who bought us with His blood or to Satan who bought us with a piece of fruit. **Revelation** makes it very clear that it has only one question. Who owns you? So the **“White horse...and He who sat on it”** is Jesus whom believers have followed throughout the New Testament Age.

The four horsemen of the apocalypse is one of the most familiar images in Scripture, but it is often skipped through so casually that the proper overview is missed. If the first horse and rider represent Christ, it would seem that the next three horses would also be more than the obvious. Certainly the red horse is war, the black is famine and the pale is death. But these are natural disasters, and we expect them to be supernatural because the white horse was spiritual in nature. And they indeed are what we expected. They are not causes; they are symptoms. Their source is Satan. We are looking at a spiritual war between the white horse and evil. Satan is the embodiment of evil. He desecrates and pollutes everything he touches. The last three horses are the carriers of his disease.

The Red Horse and Rider, vs. 3-4

3.”And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second living being say, “come and see.” 4. And another horse came out, having the color of fire. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take the peace from the earth, and that (men) should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.”

As the second seal is opened we hear the second living being who looked like a young bull say, **“Come and see.”** Each of the four horses are introduced with the same phrase. This seems to be an appropriate time to discuss this simple little verb, *come*. It is used throughout Scripture and most often as an invitation. Philip used it as a witnessing tool in **John 1:46**, **“And Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”** John closes out his book of **Revelation** by using *come* seven times in **Chapter 22**. **“And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” Rev. 22:17.** All the saved got that way through an invitation, not a request. Sometimes Christians tend to make it seem more complicated, and that’s a shame. We lose souls that way. Once saved there are only two little verbs we need to hear and obey. We need to *come* and see Jesus Christ personally as Nathanael did; and *go* which means to do what Jesus demanded, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” Matt. 28:19.** We are pretty good about *coming* because it is the only way we can get saved. But we aren’t very good about *going*. One final thought about the verb *come*, there are twelve different Greek verbs translated *come*, but the one used here, *erchomai*, is the only one that I know of that means both *come* and *go*. When Simon Peter told his fellow disciples that he was going fishing, they said, **“We are going with you also...” John 21:3b**, they used the verb *erchomai*.

The rider on the red horse was given a great sword. This reminds us of Jesus’ statement in **Matt. 10:34**, **“Do not think that I have come to bring peach on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.”** The purpose of the rider was to take the peace from the earth. In the Greek text, the article is used in front of *peace*. This is rarely done and never translated, so we wonder why it is here. If we look at history we will find only one period of time where *the peace* will fit. It is called the *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome. A multitude of angels said it differently, **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace toward men of good will” Luke 2:14.** We can thank the

Roman Empire for producing a perfect time for the birth of the Messiah and the growth of Christianity. But as John is writing **Revelation**, this time of peace and tranquility is coming to an end. Since the reign of Hadrian 117-138 AD mankind's history was and still is the way of the red horse, whose sole purpose was that **“men should kill one another.”**

The Black Horse and Rider, vs. 5-6

5.”And when he opened the third seal I heard the third living being say, “Come and see.” And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of balances in his hand. **6.** And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living beings saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.”

When Jesus unscrolls and opens the third seal, we hear the third living being with a face like a man, invite us to **“Come and see.”** As we look we see a black horse. In Scripture black is often used to imply famine, **“Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine” Lamentations 5:10.** The rider on the third horse is holding a scale, and we are told its purpose by a voice that comes from **“the midst of the four living beings.”** Who this voice comes from is not revealed and if we chose one it is only a guess. In **Rev. 1:10** the voice is Jesus, in **Rev. 9:4** it is an angel, and in **Rev. 21:3** it is God Himself. Who it is really doesn't matter as much as what the voice says, **“A quart of wheat for a denarius.”** It is a verbal confirmation of our interpretation of the black horse. There will be famine, which throughout history has been the inevitable grim reaper that follows war. Wheat throughout time has been man's necessity of life. This is why Jesus related Himself to bread, **“and Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger...” John 6:35.** Grain is not measured by weight but by the bushel; here, however, it is by weight, indicating a time of scarcity. **“When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied” Leviticus 26:26.** And wheat will be scarce indeed because a denarius was a day's wages. **“Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard” Matt. 20:2.** Barley was an inferior grain to use for bread so it was cheaper. **“...three quarts of barley for a denarius.”** The staff of life is now scarce and expensive.

There is some difficulty in understanding the imagery of the last statement, **“and do not harm the oil and the wine.”** We cannot even be sure of whom it was said to. I'm guessing it was said to the rider on the black horse. If not, then it was certainly said to those who follow him, purveyors of evil doing Satan's work. Why then were they told not to damage the vineyard and olive groves? Again we can only guess. Oil and wine were used in a variety of ways in Scripture. They were used for healing in **Luke 10:34**, **“and went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine...”** and for festive occasions and every day cooking and drinking. Perhaps since the black horse represents a time of scarcity and famine, only the rich could afford these staple foods. Now they had become luxury items. In times of need it seems only the poor suffer. The

wealthy just get wealthier. Judgment rarely comes alone. We have war, then famine and of course death follows.

The Pale Horse and Rider

7.”When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living being saying, “Come and see.” 8. And I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on him was Death, and Hades followed with him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.”

Again Jesus opens the seal, and the fourth living being invites us to view this dismal panorama of human despair. Man’s humanity to man is displayed by its icon, Death. Even the color of the horse, *chloros* in Greek, means a pale green, which is the bloodless pallor of death. I can’t help but wonder what John saw. What did Death look like to him, and **“Hades following with him?”** Was Hades riding on the horse, was it flying or running behind?

There are four different places in Scripture, which we generically call hell, and they all seem to have different uses. Peter is the only writer who uses the word Tartarus, a prison for the fallen angels. **“For God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to Tartarus and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” IIPeter 2:4.** A demon begged Jesus, **“...that He would not command them to go out into the abyss” Luke 8:31.** Possibly this is the same place as Tartarus, but it seems to be another place. In **Revelation** we hear the most frightening and final term for hell, **“The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” Rev. 20:5-6.** The only people being judged are unbelievers. The lake of fire is the place of punishment we think of when we talk or curse about hell. Hades is apparently a holding pen for pagans until the Day of Judgment. The word translated *hell* or *Sheol* in Scripture is generally *Gehenna*, which was a garbage dump just south of Jerusalem called the valley of Hinnom. So Hades is a personalized form of Gehenna. It is rather alarming to think that going to hell is like being tossed into the dumpster.

What we are seeing through the fourth horse and rider is a slaughterhouse of epidemic proportions caused by the war, famine and death. As grim as this sounds, we have to see this as the judgment of God because we are told that, **“Power was given to them...”** The last judgment allowed was **“the beasts of the earth.”** These four judgments are found in **Ezekiel 14:21, “For thus says the Lord God, “How much more shall it be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem, the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence, to cut off man and beasts from it?””** After seeing the devastation of the red, black and pale green horses, we need to look back at the white horse with thanks and gratitude. If we were not following Him, we would be victims of the next three. Without Jesus Christ, history is just a sorry story and, as you will see in the rest of **Chapter Six**, it only gets worse.

Souls Under the Altar, vs. 9-11

9.”And when He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. **10.** And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” **11.** And a white robe was given to each of them; that they should rest for yet a little while, until their fellow-workers and brothers that will be put to death as they were, should be completed.”

As Jesus opens the fifth seal we are suddenly peering into heaven. The last three horsemen represented the sad state of affairs on our planet earth. This new allegory lets us gaze into heaven itself. If we agree that each chapter is chronological in order, then this vision occurs after the horsemen, which represent the New Testament age. So the souls under the altar must explain what Jesus calls a time of tribulation under the anti-Christ, **“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, nor ever shall be” Matt. 24:21.** In addition, the four living beings are no longer involved. I’m guessing, because their work is done. Remember back in **Chapter 4:1** when we were invited to **“Come up here,”** and we saw the throne of God and the four living beings? We guessed then that they were to participate in God’s dealing with mankind. Here in **Chapter Six** they asked us to look down at what was transpiring on earth. As the fifth seal is opened, we don’t have to look up to heaven because we are still there.

We now find, **“under the altar the souls of those who had been slain.”** The souls are obviously martyrs, put to death by persecution throughout recorded time. These souls are not just those killed in the last days. I believe we are all being told that our faith could be the cause of our death. Jesus guaranteed us that this would happen, and told us to expect it, **“11. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” Matt 5:11-12.** This is one part of the Beatitudes that Christians tend to skip over. It doesn’t sound like a blessing or something to **“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad”** about. But throughout His ministry, Jesus forewarned us. In His last sermon He said, **“...the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service” John 16:2.** It is such normal Christian experience that if we don’t have any persecution in our life, we are not doing our job properly. But if our sharing of God’s Word and the testimony of our life is pleasing to God, Satan will attack us with a vengeance.

The altar the souls are under is a problem to commentators. What altar are we looking at? It hasn’t been mentioned before in **Revelation**. Most consider it to be one of the two altars in the temple in Jerusalem – the altar of burnt offering or the altar of incense. But the temple and its altars were destroyed decades before John saw this vision, so we need to look elsewhere. Even though John has not mentioned it before, there was an altar before the Throne of God. It will be described in **Chapter 8:3, “Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar.”** It will be mentioned again in **Chapter 9:13, “Then the sixth angel sounded. And I heard a**

voice from the four horns of the golden altar, which is before God.” John would certainly see this as a sacrificial altar relating to the Levitical practice of sin offering for the guilty, **“And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tabernacle of meeting; and he shall pour the remaining blood of the bull at the base of the altar of the burnt offering, which is at the door of the tabernacle of meeting” Lev. 4:3.** The apostle Paul saw himself in a similar light in **Phil. 2:17, “Yes, and if I am being poured out as an offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.:** So you see my fellow believers, we are saved by the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ and joyfully praise God for this. But we must also see that a time is coming when like the souls under the altar, we may also be sacrificed for the testimony we hold, so let us, **“Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven.”**

The souls in **verse 9** are rejoicing, but they don't sound joyful. They sound somewhat vindictive. They ask God **“How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood...”** It seems as if they are a little impatient with God's slowness. We understand this. We also get a little impatient when our prayers seem slow in attaining fruition. So we tend to inject some of our own emotions into the perfectly good question of the souls under the altar. They understand their God; they know Him as **“holy and true.”** They remember God's statement, **“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay” Rom. 12:19.** The souls are simply asking when? When will the Lord Jesus come again and end the tribulation that has beleaguered His church throughout the ages? We, too, wish to know. And God responds to us the same way He did to the souls under the altar. He first gives us a white robe, a sign of purity and innocence, the very garments Jesus promised to those who overcome their personal tribulations, **“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments and I will not blot out his name from the Book of life” Rev. 3:5.** And then, like the loving Father He is, He pats us on our spiritual heads and says, **“...rest a little while longer.”** He asks us to be patient because there are a few more elect to be placed on the altar of sacrifice. And when the last one is offered, the time of tribulation is completed and the time of vengeance has arrived.

The Vengeance of God, vs. 12-17

12. “And I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair and the moon became like blood. 13. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. 14. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place. 15. And the kings of the earth and the magistrates and the political leaders and the rich men and the military leaders and every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, 16. and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17. For the day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?””

As we near the end of **Chapter Six**, it is important to recognize the steps in time we have taken so far. **Verses 1-8** cover the New Testament Age, **9-11**, the Age of Tribulation, and now, **12-17**, the Age of Vengeance. We found it a little difficult to

anticipate the tribulation with a song of gladness. It is going to be a time of great distress for Christians, so we should be happy to know that the Age of Vengeance will not affect us, the believers. This statement cannot be proven until **Chapter Nine**, so for the time being, let us look back in Scripture to when a similar thing happened around God's people. The vengeance of God in **vs. 12-17** is a shortened version of **Chapters Eight and Nine**, the catastrophes produced by the seven trumpets. The only other time something similar happened was the ten plagues in Egypt, **Exodus 7-11**. The Egyptians were plagued, but the people of Goshem were not. **"And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshem, in which My people dwell, that no swarm of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the land" Exodus 8:22.**

Jesus opens the sixth seal and we suddenly see the same thing the Lord told us about in **Matt. 24:29**, **"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."** Since this does not refer to us, it is not necessary to explain its meaning. However, it is going to affect the unbelievers we live among so we should be able to explain to them what is going to happen to them and why. It is a direct result of the question asked by the souls under the altar in **verse 10**, **"How long, O Lord."** Whatever method God's vengeance takes is of little relevance to us now. It is a future event, so it seems unwise to get too didactic about how it will occur. **Verses 12-14** sound like natural disasters of such catastrophic proportions that they seem supernatural even to the pagans in **vs. 15-17**. Isaiah is foreseeing the same event in **34:4**, **"And all host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falls off from the vine, and as a dropping fig from the fig tree."** It appears that the unbelievers, categorized into seven categories in **v. 15**, are no longer able to repent. Even though they now know God, they are trying to hide from Him, **"...hide us from Him who sits on the throne."** We will discuss this further in **Chapter Nine**. This will be one of the more fortunate times in history to be a Christian, **"1. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3. though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling."** **Psalm 46:1-3**. We are protected by the blood of the Lamb. They are exposed to the wrath of the Lamb and, **"...who is able to stand?"**

Chapter Seven

As I indicated in the introduction to **Chapter Six**, I still have the same feeling of trepidation I sensed then, but not for the same reasons. In fact, they are quite the opposite. **Chapter Six** was easy to understand, but difficult to explain properly. **Chapter Seven** is difficult to understand, but easy to explain. And there, patient readers, you must see the dangerous problem a commentator faces. We have to make guesses. If we wish to understand an event, which has no clear precedent in Scripture, we must guess. Fortunately for us, God rarely makes us do that. Why does He do it here? Again I can only guess, but there are two possible reasons. The first is because in **Chapter Seven** the elect are already sealed and saved. It is etched in stone; whether we understand it or not is irrelevant. We can only thank God for giving us a brief glimpse of a short time, or more exactly, a time out before the Age of Vengeance begins in **Chapters Eight and Nine**. If this is true, then we are looking at a fuller description of the souls under the altar, the fifth seal in **Chapter 6:9-11**.

The second possibility is that in **Chapter Six** we could be correct in understanding the symbols and still be wrong in our explanation. Here in **Chapter Seven** we can be wrong in our understanding and still be right in our explanation. If this confuses you, think how I feel about it. Whenever I get confused I jump into Scripture and things get clearer; so let us do just that.

The Sealing of the Saints, 7:1-3

1. "After these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. **2.** And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to harm the earth and the sea. **3.** Saying, "Do not harm the earth nor the sea, nor the trees till we sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads"."

The question asked at the end of **Chapter Six**, "Who is able to stand?" was asked by unbelievers who already knew the answer. It was a rhetorical question. They were under the vengeance of God. They now knew and understood the truth, but after the fact. It was a sad, sad day for mankind. But what about the believers? That is the question being answered in **Chapter Seven**. It is a pause in the action, a calm before the storm, a time out before God's four agents of destruction do their work. They were represented by four angels holding back the four winds of the earth. They were retaining the very power God had given them to use against His own creation.

The reason for this delay is explained in the next two verses. John tells us that a fifth angel had appeared and instructed the other four with great emphasis, "with a loud voice...saying, "do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees until..." John says the last angel came, "ascending from the east." Why the east? Either John didn't know or decided not to reveal it and let us think about it ourselves. Again, it is guesswork. The only help in the Word is from the wise men coming from the east asking Herod, "Where

is He who was born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” Matt. 2:2. Some interpret the fifth angel to be Jesus based on this verse. If this is what John wanted us to understand, why didn't he apply the sobriquet he used for Jesus in **Rev. 1:13, “like the Son of Man,”** or like **“...a Lamb as though it had been slain” Rev. 5:6.** In short, we don't know. We all do know that God sent this messenger, so whoever we as individuals think him to be, we are all correct.

This mental meandering is quite irrelevant I know, but there is something else in **verse 3** that is relevant. The second part of the angel's order was **“until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”** If you were a Roman citizen around 100 AD, you would understand this immediately. Sealing an object was a way of identifying the owner of something. A letter would be sealed with soft wax and then stamped generally with a signet ring. But owners of recalcitrant slaves often sealed them on their foreheads with a branding iron. Almost two millennia later we must think a little more deeply about this. Like it or not, we are sealed. The Old Testament example of this can be found in **Ezekiel**. Six hundred years before the birth of Christ, God's people had begun to ignore Him and behave so badly that severe discipline was necessary. But first the Lord had to protect His remnant from the coming devastation. He gives Ezekiel a vision of the destruction of Jerusalem, which is very similar to the one we are looking at in **Revelation Seven**. But before it began God gave an order to one of the six angels He sent to destroy to: **”Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it” Ezekiel 9:4.** The apostle Paul gives us an even more comforting picture of ourselves in **Ephesians 1:13, “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.”** We all belong to someone; the only question is to whom – God or Satan? Who put a seal on our foreheads, the angel in **Rev. 7:3, “...until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads,”** or was it the beast of **Rev. 13:16, “And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads”?**

The 144,000, vs. 4 – 8

4.”And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: 5. of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed; 6. of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed; 7. of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.”

In **verse 3** the fourth angel said, **“...until we have sealed the servants of our God...”** In **verse 4** we hear John saying, **“And I heard the number of those who were**

sealed.” If John saw the sealing, he chose not to share it with us, which would have been very unkind of him. It would have been majestic as well as instructive to see such an event. In **Ezekiel, Chapter 9**, Ezekiel almost certainly saw the sealing but he didn't tell us either. In either case, who are we to complain about it? John heard the number. He apparently did not see who was speaking. We can only guess that we didn't see the sealing or the speaker because they were not important to what God was showing us. The importance seems to be in the number 144,000. There is no precedent in Scripture, so again we must guess at what it might represent. We do know that symbolically the number twelve represents completeness in Scripture. After the death of Judas the eleven apostles quickly chose another to complete their number, **Acts 1:20-26**. So if we square the number twelve, we reach 144,000, the total number of those to be saved, not literally but allegorically. This sounds probable, but we must be careful lest we pick too quickly like the disciples did in making the wrong choice. I often think about how Mattias must have felt when he discovered he was not God's choice to be the twelfth apostle.

If 144,000 represent the entire saved, why are they all Jews? Why is Dan left out? Why is Manasseh, one of the son's of Joseph, listed as one **“...of all the tribes of the children of Israel”** **verse 4**? Israel was the name God gave to Jacob after their wrestling match in **Genesis 32:24-28**. Why do we have an exact number given in **verse 4** and an uncountable number coming in **verse 9**? There are a lot of whys, but no answers other than best guesses. So being forewarned, these are my guesses.

It is easy to get lost in the puzzling problems of the twelve tribes, so it is important to look back and remember what it is that we were doing. We were absorbing allegories. We were working in symbols using Scripture to explain Scripture. While there are no precedents for **Chapter Seven**, we can use what we know about God's Word to try and solve our problems. Obviously the twelve tribes can't represent Jews alone because the Assyrians carried ten of the twelve tribes away in 722 BC, never to be found again. The different order of the tribes doesn't seem important. It was listed five times in the Old Testament, **Gen. 29-30, Gen. 49, Deut. 33, twice in Ezekiel 48** and each were listed differently. When James wrote his letter, **“to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations”** **James 1:1**, he knew there were only two tribes left. Who was he writing to? Paul explained in **Romans 9** that the New Testament Israelites were not necessarily Jews, **“For not all who are descended from Israel are of Israel..., it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring”** **Rom. 9:6b-8**. So we are the New Covenant Jews; the twelve tribes represent us.

The number also cannot be taken literally. If there are only 144,000 saved, heaven is going to be a very small town, but it does seem to imply a small number compared to the multitude of Earth's inhabitants, living and dead. Sealing only 12,000 from each tribe is just a small fraction of their total population. The angel is clearly letting John and us see the truth of what Jesus told us in **Matt. 7:13-14**, **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way**

which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” So heaven will be well filled as is implied in **verse 9**, but the path taken to get there is rather lonely.

A Crowd Without Number, vs. 9-12

9.”And after this I looked and behold a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations and tribes and people and tongues standing before the throne and before the lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10. and crying with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! 11. And all the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living beings, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12. saying: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen!””

John now sees another vision. His previous vision was a rather grim premonition of total planetary devastation. This is more pleasant; he sees heaven. **“A great multitude ... before the throne of God”** is introduced by John with one word – **“behold”** which indicates his surprise. The earlier scene contained comparatively few who were sealed, the 144,000. Suddenly this has become a cast of **“ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” 5:11**, which he now simply calls innumerable. He collates us all into four categories – **“nations and tribes and people and tongues.”** The apostle sees mankind again in a universal fellowship, not known since the tower of Babel, **“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech” Gen 11:1**. We are together before the **“throne of God and ... the Lamb.”** Nations are joined in worship not conflict, a remarkable thing in itself. The sealed worshipers are wearing the white robes Jesus had given to those **“who overcome” 3:5 & 6:11**. The palm branches in their hands are significant in both the Old and New Testament. The Hebrews were instructed to **“...take for yourselves on the first day of foliage of beautiful trees, branches of palm trees,...” Lev. 23:40**, for the feast of tabernacles, the last festival of the Jewish church year. We can’t help but associate palm branches to Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. **“The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him” John 12:12-13.**

In **verse 10** we can only imagine the volume of sound that John is hearing as a vast multitude raise their voices in praise of their God. They begin their doxology by joining David in saying, **“Salvation belongs to the Lord” Psalm 3:8a**. They identify the objects of their worship by referring back to **Chapter Five**, **“and I saw the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll ... And I looked, and behold ... a lamb as though it had been slain ...” 5:1 & 6**. The beings around the throne join the saints in their doxology. They ascribe to God seven similar but not identical attributes they gave to Jesus in **Chapter 5:12**. It becomes more and more obvious that there is a divine aversion to being predictable.

A Dialogue With an Elder, vs. 13-17

13.”Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?” 14. And I said to him, “Sir, you know.”

So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him a day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. 16. They shall neither hunger any more nor thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; 17. for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Upon seeing these two remarkable visions, John’s mind must have had questions, as do we, which need to be answered. Fortunately for us John now gets divine answers. Although they were not asked aloud, **“one of the elders answered”** him, not with a solution, but with two more questions: **“Who are these ... and where did they come from?”** John doesn’t guess, he knows a rhetorical question when he hears one. So he says, **“Sir, you know.”** The reply John gets I referred to earlier as a divine answer. But it is important to note that it did not come from an angel but one of the twenty-four elders. God is letting us know that our apocalyptic questions need to be answered through His church using only His Word for our solutions. The elder gives us a quick precise explanation for both who and why. First, **“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation.”** The verb *come* is a present participle, which indicates a continual arrival. We see one of the wonderful blessings of salvation; as the elect perish on earth, they continue to enlarge the throng around the throne of God in heaven. We are clearly told in Scripture that believers will always be under tribulation of one type or another. Jesus said, **“... the world hates you. ... if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” John 15:19b-20.** The term used here, the great tribulation, points us to the climatic time of the church concerning which Jesus said: **“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor shall ever be. And unless these days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elects’ sake these days will be shortened” Matt. 24:21-22.** We shall see these days, if not personally, then allegorically in **Chapters Eight and Nine.**

The second part of the elder’s reply tells us how the throng of worshipers got there, by the blood of the Lamb. This picture of purifying is graphically stated in **Hebrews 9:14, “how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”** This is what we are doing in **verse 15.**

As strange as they may sound, this does not appeal to many of our fellow human beings. Heaven sounds good, but standing around **“... the throne of God, and serving Him day and night in His temple”** sounds like a perpetual church service and just once a week is more than enough for most of us. Lest we become dangerously shallow, we need to look more deeply at what we are being told. God created man to be a loving obedient sharer of His creation. He placed him in a perfect paradise. But sin entered, man failed, and perfection disappeared. **“Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat the bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for**

dust you are and to dust you shall return: Gen. 3:17b-19. This was the product of Satan's work. **Verses 15-17** show us the product of Jesus' work, **"... the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" I John 1:7b.** Because of the cleansing blood of our Lord we are once again a part of God's family and He dwells among us. We can joyfully look beyond the tribulation and see paradise. **Verses 16 and 17** are paraphrases of verses from **Isaiah 25:8 & 49:10** **"He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord will wipe away tears from all faces; ... they shall neither hunger nor thirst, neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by the springs of water He will guide them."** For me this sounds more like a prolonged Hawaiian vacation than a perpetual church service.

Chapter Eight

As I read through **Chapter Eight**, I sense the same sort of discomfort I have mentioned at the start of **Chapters Six** and **Seven**. I feel inadequate to explain the majesty of heaven in **verses 1-5** or the global devastation of earth in **verses 6-13**. I never felt this while teaching Revelation. I am guessing that was because I was speaking to an audience that would soon leave and forget what was said or who said it. However, putting down on paper is quite another matter. I am reluctant to put my opinions into words for again we are looking at scripture, which is not explained by scripture. So, opinion it must be, but only if we trust God to do what He promised and fill our opinions with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. He tells us in **Psalm 25:14**, “**The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.**”

My first response to this is that it is not my job. We have trained professionals for this. But God has anticipated our reluctance and gently reminds us of the new song He provided for us in **Revelation 5:10**, “**And have made us kings and priests to our God...**” We are a royal priesthood and we need to be willing to serve in the capacity He has given us.

Before jumping into **Chapter Eight** with a plethora of opinions, it is helpful to look back at the materials preceding it and identify the time frame it represents. Also, it is useful to realize that we are beginning another unit of sevens that extends through four chapters, **8-11**. We need to look back at **Chapter Six** and remember what we were feeling as that chapter progressed. Jesus was opening seals and revealing our past, present and future history in allegorical form. When He opened the sixth seal, we were waiting with bated breath for what the church has been expecting for twenty centuries, His second coming. Instead God takes our eyes off the planet earth and focuses them on heaven. This extends through **Chapter Seven** and into **8:6**. If we study this with prayerful consideration, we begin to see the wisdom of God. He has provided us with a time out, a lull before the storm, a calming transition between the prayers of the martyrs, “**How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?**” **6:10**. His response to them is in **8:7 – 11:19**.

Having done this, we begin to realize that we are looking into mankind’s future. **Chapter Eight** is a fuller description of what will happen after the opening of the sixth seal. We are beyond the Age of Tribulation and step right into the Age of Vengeance. I say we, but true believers need not fear the wrath of God. They are exempt, **Revelation 9:4**. Now we begin to more fully see what we could only wonder about after the opening of the sixth seal in **Chapter Six**.

Dramatic Pause

1.”And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.”

Like us, John was probably expecting something quite different from what actually occurred. And we can remember how he wept when he feared that no one was able to open the scroll with seven seals in **Chapter 5:4**. Now the seventh seal has been opened after a long pause, and what happened must have seemed anti-climatic to him. In **Chapter Seven** he reported to us the loud angelic voices in **verses 2 & 4**, and now there is only silence. But since He was in heaven looking on all that has occurred, He can't really display any dissatisfaction. Nor can we, except to wonder why.

Time is a relative thing. If someone says, "I have something important to tell you," and then pauses briefly to get your full attention, it accomplishes its purpose. But if one second of silence becomes eighteen hundred seconds, it becomes disconcerting. Now I don't think God wants to make us uncomfortable. Obviously He has not finished preparing us for the dramatic events to come, so He provides us with a dramatic pause to get us ready. We can immediately see that this is not an empty thirty minutes, but a short space of time during which a number of majestic things occur. It is just that they are done in absolute silence. So now we can lean back and consider subjectively what God has shown to us objectively.

Eight Angels with Seven Trumpets

2."And I saw seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. 3.Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And he was given much incense, that he should offer (it) with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne.

The apostle now proceeds to narrate what he saw taking places during those 30 minutes, but without any explanation, probably because he didn't have any. It was not necessary for John, a first century man, to know about the Age of Vengeance, but it is needed by Christians of the 21st century for we seem to be on the very precipice of **"that great and dreadful day of the Lord."** **Malachi 4:5**. Even though we are exempt from what is going to occur in the rest of **Chapters 8-11**, we must be able to explain why it will be great for us but dreadful for unbelievers. God has warned us in **Ezekiel 3:18**, **"When I say to the wicked 'you shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but I shall hold you accountable for his blood."** So we need to know and then to warn. I have never met an unbeliever who has read this portion of scripture. And, while they are personally responsible for their own agnosticism, I am still responsible to tell them what God is saying to them.

There are always a lot of questions about, **"...the seven angels who stand before god."** Who are they? What are they doing there? And there are also many others, all of which are irrelevant. Seven are there to receive the trumpets from God and blow them, not for musical but martial purposes. They are instruments to initiate the wrath of God. There is only one place in the New Testament that helps to identify them. When Zacharias is burning incense on the altar of incense, an angel appeared to him and said, **"I am Gabriel who stands in the presence of God..."** **Luke 1:19**. There is also one interesting occasion in the Old Testament apocryphal book of Tobit 12:15, "I am

Raphael, one of the seven holy angels which represent the prayers of the saints, and go in and out before the glory of the Holy One.” So let us go on to the eighth angel whose purpose is much more difficult discerning. **“3.”Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. And was given much incense.”** Since the priestly act of Zacharias and the reference here to altar, censer and incense, it seems clear that we are seeing heaven as a temple with an altar and all the accoutrements related to worship. Paul tells us about the altar in **Heb. 9:3-4, “Behind the veil, the part of the temple which is called the Holiest of All, 4.which has the golden altar of incense...”** Moses tells us what Aaron was told to do on the Day of Atonement in **Lev. 16:12-13, Then he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet incense beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. 13.And he shall put the incense on the fire before the Lord that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that is on the testimony lest he die.”** There is such precise detail about these orders that we are left with a strong sense of importance in understand and even foreboding about the last three words. Aaron’s own sons took them too lightly, and died. **“Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord which He had not commanded them. 2. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.”**

What does this all mean for us? What Aaron was doing on the Day of Atonement, now known as Yom Kippur, was to offer up sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of the sins of all Israel, and the high priest had to do it every year. Under the New Covenant, this is no longer necessary. Our High Priest is Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for the forgiveness of all sins for all times. **Hebrews 9:22-25, “...and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. 23. Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in heaven should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us, 25. not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the most holy place every year with blood of others;”**

With this in mind, we have a new perspective of the heaven that **Chapter Eight** is portraying. **“4. The smoke of the incense, with the, with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.”** There is no blood in this picture. The time of forgiveness is past. There is only the smoke of the incense and prayers. Personally, I believe the smoke is a reference to the blood of Christ. And the prayers of God’s people are not for forgiveness, blessings or thanksgivings, but are the prayers of the souls under the altar, **“How long O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Rev. 6:10.** And with these souls, the whole church, **“all the saints”** pray for an end of the Age of Tribulation.

Answers to Prayer

5. “Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake.”

Every story has a beginning and an end. The beginning of this saga is **John 3:16**, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** We are now looking at the end of the story. Through this eighth angel, God responds to the prayers of His saints. The angel scoops coals from the altar. This is a new element to our picture. In the view of God’s throne in **Chapters 4, 5 and Seven**, there is no fire. There is some **“...flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder...” 5:5**. This gives us a premonition of what was to come, and now we have arrived at it. We have reached the Age of Vengeance and it has a startling introduction. Remember we are still involved in a thirty-minute period of absolute silence. In my mind’s eye I see all of this divine grandeur being done not only in silence but also in slow motion. So this hurling of fire and sudden pandemonium is like being jerked out of a pleasant dream into a grim reality. I can’t help but think of Jesus’ own statement about this in **Luke 12:49**, **“I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled.”** The fire represents the wrath of God, and the loud noises symbolize His power represented in nature.

The First Trumpet

6. “So the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.
7. The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.”

This section of **Chapter Eight** through **Eleven** is superficially similar to **Chapter Six**. The first four seals of six and trumpets of eight deal with natural disasters, but the similarities end there. The first four seals of six predict disasters produced by man. In eight the first four trumpets are environmental disasters produced by God. The seals are prophetic; the trumpets are punitive. As for the phrase, **“The seven angels.... Prepared themselves to sound.” Verse 6**. I have no idea what to comment about. These seven angels have already been prepared in the previous verses. They were standing before God who gave them the trumpets. They have heard the prayers of the saints and seen the action of their colleague with the golden censer. What more preparation would they need other than to puff up their cheeks, purse their lips and blow. It seems that there are a hundred more significant things John could have shared with us about the onset of our doomed planet’s demise. At this juncture I must stop and adjust my bad thinking. I need to remember what Paul said to young Timothy, **“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” IITim. 3:16**. Thank you Lord. I have been reprovved. As Christians we need to stop reacting and start acting. We must **prepare** ourselves every day of our lives by seeking wisdom, patience, understanding and love from our heavenly father so that we may, **“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matt. 5:16**.

In **verse seven** the first angel sounded his trumpet and what follows has occurred only once before in all recorded history. **23. “When Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the Lord rained hail on the land of Egypt. 24. So there was hail, and fire**

mingled with the hail..." Exodus 9:23-24. David also seems to be predicting this in Psalm 18:13-14, "The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire. 14. He sent out His arrows and scattered the foe, lightnings in abundance, and He vanquished them." These things happened in Egypt. They are literal disasters, but are on a much grander scale by burning a third of the trees and all the grass in **Revelation Eight**. Joel was speaking of the last days when he said, "I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke." Joel 3:30. The first angel now reveals God's method. We need to remember what was said after the opening of the sixth seal in 7:3, "...Do not harm the earth, the sea or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." The sealing was done in **Chapter Seven**, now the devastation can be done in **Chapter Eight**.

The Second Trumpet

8. "Then the second angel sounded: And, as it were, a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood; 9. and a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed."

In past readings and teaching of this section, I have taken a rather indifferent approach to what God is telling us. After all it is not going to touch us; it is only for the pagans. As I put this into writing, I find I must take a more literal consideration of it. I had assumed that the second trumpet incited volcanic activity and then went on to the next trumpet. But, as I look closely, I see that I had assumed wrongly. First, it is not a huge mountain; it is only something like one. Secondly, it is thrown down into the sea while all volcanic activity spews up from the ocean floor. And finally, lava does not pollute seawater or turn it to blood. All we can say for sure is that it is more meteoric than volcanic. The only burning mountain in scripture is **Deut. 4:11-12**, "You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness cloud, and thick darkness. 12. And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire..." So what John recorded seems to be a molten mass of matter plunging into salt water and turning it noxious. Modern readers tend to alter the phrase, "the sea turned into blood," by saying "like blood." But God has done this before on a smaller scale. **Exodus 7:20**, "...and all the waters that were in the river turned to blood."

The Third Trumpet

10. And the third angel sounded and there fell out of heaven a great star, burning as a lamp and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the springs of the waters; 11. The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third part of the waters was turned into wormwood and many of men died from the waters, because they were made bitter."

This second meteoric phenomenon crashes down upon our atmosphere and bursts into flame. When it explodes upon landing, it makes fresh water polluted enough to be deadly. It is even given a name – "Wormwood." The Greek word for it is *apsinthos*

now called absinthe. It is a bitter, mildly poisonous herb used to make an alcoholic drink. The name seems to be given so we would look back to the past and see God's wrath against an idolatrous and corrupted people, **Jeremiah 9:13-15**, **"And the Lord said, 'because they have forsaken My law...behold I will feed this people with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink.'"**

The Fourth Trumpet

12. "Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened; and a third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night."

These first four trumpets seem to reveal a progression of punitive disasters that occur between the opening of the fifth and sixth seal. This series of calamities has weakened the environmental immune system to the point described after the opening of the sixth seal. The cosmic collisions described after the second and third trumpets have hurled so much debris into our atmosphere that sunlight is diminished, and mean temperatures dropped to a point where animal and vegetable life gradually will die out. God has warned of this critical time over and over again that nobody should be taken by surprise. **Isaiah 13:9-10**, **"Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. 10. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine."** **Joel 2:31**, **"The sun shall be turned into darkness, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.:"** **Amos 8:9**, **"And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord God, that I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight."** Jesus himself tells us in **Luke 21:25**, **"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring."** Peter also related it in **Acts 2:10**.

Woe, Woe, Woe

13. "And I looked, and I hear an angel (eagle) flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, 'woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound.'"

Most of the oldest manuscripts use the word *aetos* (eagle) as opposed to *angelos* (angel). I am guessing that John saw an eagle flying. In the first century AD, an eagle was automatically associated with Rome's power. Every Roman legion carried a bronze figure of a flying eagle to lead them into battle. To lose one was an unforgivable disgrace. This seems to give us a hint of the legionary forces we will see in **Chapter Nine**. Whichever was intended, neither one will alter the words that are spoken. The four ecological disasters have been mind-boggling. But they are only the preliminaries, now we hear **"woe, woe, woe,"** or, to use a more vernacular phrase, **"You ain't seen nothing yet."**

Chapter Nine

The Fifth Trumpet

1. “Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. And to him was given the key to the bottomless pit. 2. And he opened the bottomless pit, and the smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. And the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit.”

In **Chapter Eight** the four angels sounded their trumpets and initiated the wrath of God upon our environment. But mankind was relatively untouched. Perhaps this explains why the chapter ends with, **“woe, woe, woe.”** The disasters in **Chapter Nine** are spiritual, not natural, and they will cause pain and death to unbelieving souls. I believe that men could still repent and be saved in **Chapter Eight**. God gave them a time out in **8:1-6** and then made His wrath very visible in the four natural disasters. At that point, the time for repentance is passed. As demons pour out of the abyss, it is no longer a matter of faith; it is now reality.

At the sounding of the fifth trumpet, we see through John’s eyes, **“a star fallen from heaven to the earth.”** There are two questions here, who and when? We are seeing the same event that Jesus saw in **Luke 10:18**, **“...I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”** It appears that Jesus’ vision was prophetic and ours was after the fact. This needs some proving. How can we know it was Satan? In the Old Testament account of the fall of Lucifer, we are told, **“...O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, ...you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God...I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Shoel, to the lowest depths of the pit.”** **Isaiah 14:12-15.** So John is not seeing an angel falling from the heaven, but a fallen angel who still has great power on earth. Paul tells us in **Ephesians 2:2**, **“In which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.”** And Jesus said, **“I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”** **John 14:30**

The second question is when was Satan cast out? We know from Old Testament examples that Satan had access to the very throne of God. We can actually see him in heaven debating with Jesus Himself in **Zechariah 3:1-5**. And we can see him boasting to God in **Job 1:6-7**, **“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan also came among them. 7. And the Lord said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ So Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.’”** Some may say, “How can he do that?” The answer is quite simple. God gave the world to Adam, and Adam turned it over to Satan for a piece of fruit. But the question still remains, when was he cast from heaven? I believe we can pinpoint the time down to the very day, hour and minute it happened. It was 3 PM on Good Friday when a voice from heaven said, **“Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to**

you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.” Rev. 12:12. But I can’t prove this until we get to **Chapter Twelve**. Jesus however informs us of this on Tuesday of Passion Week when He said: **“Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.” John 12:31.** Some may argue about when Satan was cast out of heaven by using Jesus’ own statement in **Luke 10:18, “I saw Satan fall...”** He was using the past tense so it must have been earlier than Good Friday. We need to remember that God is not limited as we are to the dimensions of time and space. Before His incarnation, Jesus, like His Father, knew all things. He said in **John 8:58, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was, I AM.”** If we had said something like that, it would be at best, bad grammar or worse, lunacy. But when Jesus says it we must take it literally. It gives us a new insight into God’s description of Himself, **“I am who I am.” Gen. 3:14.** He is every place, everywhere, all the time.

Satan was, **“given the key to the bottomless pit.”** Jesus said in **Rev. 1:18, “... I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”** God alone has power over life and death, so it is appropriate that Jesus owned the key to death. He used it to resurrect Jairus’ daughter, the widow’s son and His friend, Lazarus. He also had the key to Hades. This is not the hell or lake of fire to which the unrepentant are sent after judgment. It is rather a holding pen for the dead, not for believers, only the rebellious ones, angelic and human. We are told in **Rev. 20:13, “..., and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged each one according to his works.”** There are three different Greek words translated hell in the New Testament, *gehenna*, *Hades*, *tartarus*. They are probably all referring to the same place mentioned in **9:1, “... the bottomless pit” abussoos**, also translated abyss. Even demons used this term in **Luke 8:31, “And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss.”** Jesus had the key to the abyss because he was to go there after His death, **“.. and preached to the spirits in prison.” I Peter 3:19.** The abyss, this prison of the lost, is separated from the material world by an impenetrable barrier, which only Jesus could unlock. In Jesus’ parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus, He said, **“And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.” Luke 16:26.** Now Jesus has given the key to Satan for Hades was his domain. Up to now he has been restrained. But his time of limited power is over and he is permitted to unlock the demonic dungeon and infest the world with Hades’ inhabitants, the denizens of the black hole.

2. “And he opened the bottomless pit.” From this juncture on in **Chapter Nine**, there is little point in trying to comment. We are looking at a holocaust of biblical proportions that is unparalleled in the history of man. Many commentators believe this is similar to the destruction of Sodom in **Genesis 19:24-28, “24. Then the Lord rained down burning sulphur on Sodom and Gomorrah.... 28. ... and behold the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.”** The language certainly seems similar, but the only resemblances between **Genesis 19** and **Rev. 9:2** are the inhabitants. They are corrupted, unrepentant and deserving of punitive damage. Their punishments, however, were totally different. For Sodom and Gomorrah God **“Rained down burning sulphur.”** In **9:2**, Satan **“opened up the bottomless pit.”** What came out of the abyss was not literally smoke and fire. What comes out are living things that are malignant in disposition and abhorrent in form. They are armed to afflict and torment both body and

mind of all they attacked. Joel was seeing the very thing John is reporting when he said: **1. "... For the day of the Lord is coming. For it is at hand: A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, ... 10. ... The sun and moon grow dark and the stars diminish their brightness."** Joel 2:1-10. We are looking at spiritual darkness, a stream of demonic wrath.

Lethal Locusts

3. "Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4. They are commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5. And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. And their torment was like the torment of the scorpion when it strikes a man. 6. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. 7. And the shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads were crowns of something like gold and their faces were like the faces of men. 8. They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. 10. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. And their power was to hurt men five months. 11. And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is *Abaddon*, but in Greek he has the name *Apollyon*. 12. One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things."

John calls these malevolent beings locusts, which may seem strange to some of us who see grasshoppers as rather cute as far as insects go. But for the Israelites, locusts represented plagues, which occurred too often. **Exodus 10:4-5, "If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. 5. They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left..."** Or, a locust might be a metaphor of divine displeasure as in **Isaiah 33:4, "Your plunder, O nations, is harvested as by young locusts, like a swarm of locusts men pounce on it."** For whatever reason John chose locusts to identify what is coming out of the smoke, he must have known he was seeing what Joel prophesied nine centuries earlier. Through his eyes we are also seeing the release of the fallen angels Peter mentioned, **"For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to *tartarus* and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment."** II Peter 2:4. Now the darkness is unchained and released, we can only imagine what their violent passion will do before they are cast down again. They were given limited power to do harm, not to the environment, nor to believers, but only those **"...who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads."** 9:4b. They could not kill them either; this will come during the second woe. They are given a limited time to do their tormenting: **"for five months."** The purpose for this time frame escapes me. There is no help in scripture and guesswork is pointless. And yet the Holy Spirit uses it twice in both **verses 5 and 10** so it must be important. I'm just happy it won't apply to me, a believer.

7. **“The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle.”** Again, spending time on their appearance while fascinating seems fruitless to try and compare them to something that isn’t going to sting us, only those who have **“quenched the Spirit.”** **I Thess. 5:19.** But it does help to go back to **Joel** and look at what he was in **2:4-7**, **“Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like swift steeds, so they run. 5. With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array. 6. Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color. 7. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, they do not break ranks.”** This demonic army has a leader, **“The angel of the Abyss,”** who is Satan. He is even given two names: *Abaddon* and *Apollyon*. So we have seen a preview of the first woe, and what a woe it will be.

The Sixth Trumpet

13. “Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14. saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’ 15. So the four angels, who had prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.”

As a scribe, I am embarrassed by having to say, “I don’t know” so often. But here we are again, I can’t lie, I can’t steal from other commentators, and the sixth trumpet has just blown me away. The fifth trumpet surprised me with the half hour of silence, and the sixth surprises me again with the speaking altar and the four manacled angels. The **“golden altar, which is before God,”** is mentioned in **Chapter 8:3** so now, like John, we take our eyes off earth and look again into heaven. But instead of seeing when the trumpet sounds, we hear **“a voice from the four horns.”** Whose voice is this? John must not have known either since he doesn’t tell us. Why is the voice using the four horns of the altar like a microphone? So many questions, so few answers, so readers beware. I believe the altar we are looking at is the same altar we saw after the opening of the fifth seal in **Chapter 6:9-11**. When the voices of the souls under the altar said: **“How long O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”** Their prayer will now be answered. This altar is more fully described in **8:3** and **9:13**. It is overlaid with gold which indicates it to be the Altar of Incense which stands before the veil, **Exodus 30:1-6**. In **Chapter 8:4**, **“...the prayers of the saints ascended before God...”**. In **9:13** the mysterious voice seems to be going in a different direction. The horns of the altar are ornamental and have no useful purpose until now, when they become vocal.

The sixth angel is asked to do more than just blow his trumpet, like the other five. He is asked to go down to the planet and get involved: **“Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”** More questions: what kind of angels and why are they bound? Even though this section does not refer to any persecution of believers, my natural curiosity wants to at least guess. I believe the angels are fallen angels. Why should good angels be bound up? Back in **Chapter Seven** we saw four unbound angels. They were **“holding back the four winds of the earth”** to temporarily

prevent the natural disasters we saw in **8:7-12**. They were obviously the good guys. The four angels in **9:14** would be, by our standards, the bad guys. They **“were released to kill a third of mankind,” v. 15**. Whether divine or demonic, they were angels of death, unseen before in scripture. Because of Hollywood’s version of Moses and the Ten Commandments, we see an angel of death flying over Egypt to kill the firstborns. But Moses wrote, **“And it came to pass at midnight that the Lord struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt.” Exodus 12:29**. These angels of death had only one purpose. They **“had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year.”** There is certain poignancy for these poor creatures, bound throughout all history for just this one horrible moment in time. The fact that we had to guess about the who, what and why so far brings up the question, why are we now told where **“Four angels who were bound at the great river Euphrates**. It seems insignificant at first glance, but it is interesting to note its importance in both the first and last book of the Bible. In **Genesis 2:14**, **“...the fourth river is the Euphrates,”** which went around the Garden of Eden. After the flood it was flowing past Babylon, which replaced the Garden of Eden, and it is still an important waterway in Iraq. It will continue until it dries up, **Rev. 16:12**, and begins another account of the Age of Vengeance.

200 Million Horsemen

16. “Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million, and I heard the number of them. 17. And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. 18. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. 19. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm. 20. But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21. and they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

We are now seeing a vast cavalry of horsemen, which John heard was 200 million, **“and I heard the number of them.” V. 16**. We have to guess from whom he heard this. Was it the voice from the horns on the altar, or the sixth angel or the angels he unbound or are you thinking as I am, that it is not important whether we know it or not. God said it, so let’s take it literally and go on. The army seems to be the same one, which carried out the first woe in **9:3-12**. Here is a fuller description of these demonic forces and it still seems fruitless to spend time trying to untie the enigma of what it all means. It is enough to know now they will kill an enormous amount of human beings. Even so, the survivors will still not repent. As stated earlier, I think they don’t because they can’t. They seem to be hardened to the point where they are beyond the time of repentance. They continue to live out their lives as they always have, **vs. 20-21**. One last thought, the word translated **‘sorceries,’ v. 21**, is *pharmakeia* from which we get pharmacy, or if you prefer, drugstore. So what John is describing is anything we ingest to alter our thinking process, a drug possession. Doesn’t this sound like reading today’s newspaper?

Chapter Ten

As we draw near to the midpoint of our voyage through **Revelation**, it seems germane to take a few pauses. The first is to look back at what we have assumed to be intended so far. There has been such a glut of data that it is easy to get lost and, so to speak, lose sight of the forest because of all the trees in our way. So I need to tighten up the picture and find the common thread that holds together this survivor book for believers.

Chapter One gave us a view of a Jesus we have never seen before. He provided us with the information we needed to unravel the mysteries that were to come. In **Chapter Two** and **Three** Jesus addressed the seven churches in Asia minor who were prototypes of all churches to come. In **Chapter Four** and **Five** we had a pause to receive an allegorical view of heaven and the throne of God. **Chapter Six**, the first real apocalyptic section so far, presented Jesus opening six of seven seals. **Chapter Seven** was another pause to get us ready for what was to come. **Chapters Eight** and **Nine** began with the opening of the seventh seal, which produced the seven trumpets, six of which brought the wrath of God upon mankind and its ecosystem. This brings us to **Chapter Ten**, which is another time out that goes all the way to **Chapter 11:15**, where the seventh trumpet will blow. This is followed by another brief time out and the third of four units of sevens. It is rather easy to see that the common thread is seven, God's number.

An Awesome Angel

1. "And I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. 2. And he had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, 3. and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. And when he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. 4. Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them.' 5. And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven 6. and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, 7. but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as he declared to His servants the prophets."

At the beginning of **Chapter Nine** we saw **"a star fallen from heaven to earth."** We are conditioned to feel that anything coming from heaven would be good; but instead, the angel opened the abyss and out came a hoard of horrors, so monstrous that we look away in dread. Now we again see **"another mighty angel coming down from heaven."** To erase any concern we might have, this angel is immediately described in majestic almost Christ like appearance. The term mighty is not an adjective we would normally attach to an angel, but it seems appropriate here because we hear that he is both huge and noisy. He must not be a one-of-a-kind because John says, **"another mighty angel."**

Probably he is referring to the one mentioned earlier: **“Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice.” Rev. 5:2.** Angels today are often depicted as cartoon characters sitting around on clouds doing nothing. This angel is **“clothed with a cloud,”** which reminds us of Daniel’s vision of Jesus’ second coming. **“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven.” Daniel 7:13,** or of His ascension in **Acts 1:9, ..He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.”** The throne of God is often cloaked with a rainbow to remind us of God’s promise to Noah after the flood, **“...and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.” Rev. 4:3.** Here we see it on the angel’s head, which seems to validate his authority. His face and feet look just like Jesus in **1:16, “...His countenance like the sun shining...”** and **1:15, “His feet were like fine brass as if refined in a furnace...”** So could he be Jesus, Himself? Yes, possibly, except John didn’t identify him as the Lord, just as a messenger, an awesome one, but still just an errand boy.

The first four verses of this chapter show us an almost pompous, even gaudy display of majestic power. Beyond his attire, this angel was gigantic in size, **2. “...and he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land.”** Another reason for identifying him as a **“mighty angel”** might be that he had a mighty voice. **3. “and cried with a loud voice , as when a lion roars,”** which produced seven thunders, then another voice with instructions we don’t like at all. If this sounds a bit irreverent, I apologize, but we are in a study of **Revelation** so we can learn what is going to happen as was promised in **1:19.** So when I suddenly discover that there are some things we can’t be told, I feel thwarted. I want to complain to John and say, “why did you even write it down? I would have been happier not to have heard about your seven trumpets.”

Of course, these are my own mental meanderings while I struggle through this beautiful but perplexing chapter. It is easy to get mesmerized with all the glory, size and sound reported here and in the process to skip over the small quiet thing that is the most important element of this chapter: **“The little open book.”** As I sit here and think about the meaning of this remarkable phrase, an alarming fact bubbles to the surface. Of the thousands of students I have taught, not one of them ever used these two adjectives to describe the Bible. Quite the opposite; they often complained that it was too big and difficult to really understand so I shouldn’t expect too much from them. This is a satanic lie of monstrous proportion, and it is still working in this enlightened age of the third millennium. Obviously my students were baby Christians. My job was to show them how to grow up so that can, **“as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3. if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” I Peter 2:2-3.**

How do we know when we are spiritually mature? Very simple, when we view the Bible as being too little and very open. How do we know it is the Bible that the angel is holding? What else would he be holding? The Greek word for book is *Biblos*, which is, of course, our Good Book. The word used in **10:2** is *biblaridion*, which means a booklet. I can’t think that our loving God would send us anything other than the love letter we are now studying. And, as I often asked my students, “if you receive a love letter from a loved one, would you give it to me to explain it for you? The thought was

repulsive to them, but I made my point. The Word of God is personal, and much too short for those who love him. Just as you would not pass your love letters on to your mother to tell you what they say, why would anyone trust someone like me to explain what God is telling them? All I am able to teach anyone is what He is teaching me. This is also an **“open book,”** the Greek word is a combination of two words translated *to open up* or *reveal*. There is no excuse for not understanding. I have had mentally handicapped students who received spiritual insights that humbled me. How insulting it must be to tell God that His love letter was too difficult to read.

We need to remember that we are seeing and hearing an apocalyptic angel. His message is a warning for God’s people of what is to come. The booklet he is holding is not yet compiled. The gospels, epistles and letters of the New Testament, including the one John is writing at this very moment, has been debated by the church for centuries. We are the beneficiaries of this effort. We are also the product of where the angel is standing: **“And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land.”** It is mentioned again in **verse 5** so we know it is important; it is planet wide. The Gospel must circle the globe before this angel’s oath of **verse 6** could take place. Out of all this pomp and circumstance of roars of thunders John hears one voice speaking just for him. He was just about to write down what the **4. “seven thunders uttered.”** When the voice said, **“seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered.”** This is very different from what he is going to hear from an angel in **Rev. 22:10, “...Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.”** The vast bulk of this book of prophecy is for us who are tottering on the brink of destruction. But what John was asked not to write down was just for him. We can’t know, nor should we want to know the contents of this personal message from God to John alone. John was having what is called a theophanic experience. All who are teachers of the word should have this experience. There are times when I get a remarkable insight into some section of scripture that as a teacher I can’t wait to share with anyone who will listen. But on occasions, there is a nudge from the Spirit that says it is just for me. Just eat and enjoy the nourishment. Unfortunately, too often I neglect this good advice and blab it out. The result is the listeners look at me strangely and wonder what in the world I am talking about. My typist and readers must be having that same thought about now.

The first four verses of **Chapter Ten** have drawn our eyes to the gospels and lifted the spirits of John, the banished apostle of Jesus Christ. Now this tableau becomes animated in **verses 5-7**. The angel presents his message and the scene suddenly becomes a courtroom. The witness stand up and **5. “...lifts up his right hand 6. and swore by Him who lives forever and ever.”** His message was succinct and to the point, **6. “...there shall be no delay.”** The interval of time, translated *delay*, refers to the Age of the Gentiles, which Jesus mentioned in **Luke 21:24, “...until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”** It has been a long delay. Pious Simeon thought the end was near when he picked up the eight-day old baby Jesus and said his wonderful *nunc dimittis*, **29. “Lord, now let your servant depart in peace... 30. For my eyes have seen Your salvation...” Luke 2:29-32.** The apostles believed it would come in their own lifetime, and Peter had to scold some in the church for being impatient. **“The Lord does not delay concerning His promise, as some count delay, but is patient toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” II Peter 3:9.**

The Annas and Simeons of today are as rare today as they were when Jesus was born. Now, as then, we live in a world of cynics, skeptics and scoffers, whom Peter also predicted, **2. “That you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets... 3. knowing this first; that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4. and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’” II Peter 3:2-4.** So the words of this angel should be a wake up call. The long wait is over, the Word has been dispersed and the mystery of God made known. The mystery that God has dispensed in bits and pieces throughout the ages by His prophets is about to unfold.

An Interesting Meal

8. “Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, ‘Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.’ 9. And I went to the angel and said to him, ‘Take and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.’ 10. And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. 11. And he said to me, ‘You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.’”

The same voice as in **verse 4** gives John another order, **“Go, take the little book, which is open in the hand of the angel...”** John now leaves heaven. For he says in **verse 9**, I departed or went away to the angel. He must now be quite confident as a result of the seven-trumpet salute he received in **verse 4** since he changes the script. Instead of taking the book, he give an order of his own. He said, **“Give me the little book.”** Angels are much better at following orders than humans, so he ignored John and repeated God’s command and adds three words, **“Take and eat it.”** As a politically correct man of the 21st century, I probably would have tried to correct the angel, “I’m sorry, sir, but don’t you mean, read?” However, John understood. He was receiving the same direction Ezekiel got seven hundred years earlier, **“...Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this book; then go and speak to the house of Israel.” Ezek. 3:1.** So John probably knew what was coming before the angel finished his message, **“...and it will make your stomach bitter, but it will be as sweet as honey in your mouth.”** If you read all of **Ezekiel, Chapter 3**, you will not find a word about having a bitter belly, but if you look at the marching orders of both Ezekiel and John, they are much alike. At the end of **Chapter 2**, we find that he did read the book before he ate it, **“Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. 10. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe.” Ezek. 2:9-10** that would turn anyone’s stomach.

So John does understand what is coming and he acted quickly to do what he was ordered. There are four chronological steps in the process of being equipped. The first step is making a choice. God always give us a choice. Not choosing immediately deletes the next three steps. And if we choose not to take what God offers, the wrath of God will not come crashing down upon us as punishment because of our bad decision making for

then it wouldn't be a choice. But if we, as John, take what God is offering us, we can then move on to the next step and eat. We need to understand the eating of the word means to ingest it. If you walk out of a church service without a clue, you have not ingested the word. You have only heard words. Jesus said, **"If you live in Me, and My word lives in you, you may ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you..."** **John 15:7**. Taking in the word is nourishment for the soul, just as food is for the body.

The devouring of the Word is something of a two-edge sword, which is probably why Jesus appeared with one protruding from His mouth in **Rev. 1:16**, **"... out of His mouth went a sharp two-edge sword..."** On one side the word is **"... as sweet as honey in my mouth."** Being in God's word provides us with such epicurean dining delights that our spiritual palates become quite cultivated. **Jeremiah**, the weeping prophet said, **"Your words were found, and I ate them, and your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart..."** **Jer. 15:16**. And David, the warrior king, said, **"How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"** **Psalm 119:103**. Moses tells us, **"But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."** **Deut. 31:14**

The last five words of Moses to the Israelites bring us to the third step. We must act; our spiritual digestive tract requires it. Paul makes it explicitly clear when he expands on the words of Moses. **"But what does it say? 'The word is near you, even in your mouth and in your heart' that is, the word of faith which we preach: 9. That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."** **Rom. 10:8-9**. My human nature tells me to be a passive confessor of my faith. I don't consider sharing the Word with a room full of bibliophiles who believe and think as I do as work. This is a sweet avocation. I am reluctant to take my faith and confess it in the marketplace, as Paul did in Athens where he preached **"And when they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some mocked..."** **Acts 17:32**. Ridicule makes cowards of us all.

But by the power of the Spirit and the indwelling presence of Christ We will go on, as John, onto the fourth step, the bitter aftertaste for all who follow after Jesus. For John it was probably that his job wasn't done. I'm only guessing about what John felt, but he was well beyond the retirement age. All of his fellow disciples are long dead and gone to their reward. If that were me, I would have been a little bitter. John was told that he was going to preach again, but not back to his beloved churches in Asia Minor. This would be like going home after a long exile. Instead, the angel said, **"You must prophesy again among many peoples, nations, tongues and kings."** Many people think the bitterness refers to the law as opposed to the sweetness of the Gospel, but that makes little sense. The law has a harsh beauty that makes us uneasy. That is good, not bitter. Paul said, **"The law is holy and the commandment holy and just and good."** **Rom. 7:12**, and, **"For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."** **Rom. 7:22**, and **"Therefore the law was our teacher to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith."** **Gal. 3:24**. For me the bitterness is to know the truth that Jesus said will **"set me free"** **John 8:32**, and still fail to communicate this to people I care about, often those dearest to me. Each Christian has a bitterness of their own. Many are embarrassed, thinking there is something wrong with them because they aren't

enthusiastically overjoyed all the time. Don't be; bitterness is a part of the job. John and Ezekiel knew it well.

Chapter Eleven

Our omniscient and omnipotent Lord continues to keep us off balance. Even though by this time we should be expecting it, we are still surprised. **Chapter Eleven** is so different from any before it that if we approach it thinking to continue our commentary in the same style we worked so hard to develop for the first half of **Revelation**, we are already doomed to frustration. The reason is simple. **Chapter Eleven** is unsolvable. In the last few chapters we were looking at things that did not apply to us. They dealt with the future of God's enemies. Certainly we could examine them and develop opinions about what they would ultimately mean, but they are still opinions. As interesting as **Chapters 8** and **9** may be to God's elect, they are still irrelevant. We may be as wrong as Darwinism or as right as Balaam's ass, however, we must remember what mouth these opinions come out of. But this approach is no longer permissible. We are now entering the section of **Revelation** that was hinted at in **Chapter Six** and continues on to the end of the book. These are allegorical history books of mankind from heavens perspective. The vast majority of the time depicted here is our future history. If that is the case we must be very careful to avoid opinion and allow Scripture to interpret Scripture. How do we do that? We must look ahead. We need to know that **Chapter Eleven** is only the first piece of a divine puzzle. The following chapters are all parts of the puzzle, and the full picture cannot be discerned until they are all in place. All I am trying to explain to you is that from this point on, I will be sharing truths that are not provable yet. I am asking the reader to be patient and expect the inexplicable to be explained; but not right now. I can tell you from past experience that the picture will begin to come into focus about **Chapter Seventeen**. I must also say that if you are still as confused at **Seventeen** as you were at **Eleven**, you probably have to start over. So let's try to get it right the first time through. God does expect His children, that's all of us, to remember every detail of **Revelation**. If we start with uncertainty, we will end up with skepticism. We cannot forget God's promise at the opening of this book. **"Blessed is he who reads, and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and remember the things written in it; for the time is near."** Rev. 1:3.

Measure the Church

1. "There I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. 2. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.'"

Just as **Chapter Ten** provided a brief preparation for **Chapter Eleven**, so will **Eleven** be an introduction to the detailed prophecies to come in **Rev. 12 – 20**. In the last chapter, John suddenly became an integral part of the story, and this activity continues here. **"Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod."** We are not told who gave him the yardstick, but the connection to the last chapter implies that the angel who gave him the little book also gave him a tool to measure with. The most reliable texts do not contain **"and the angel stood."** The New International Version and many others omit it.

More than likely it was added later by some scribe who believed he was adding the obvious to help the less erudite readers see the whole picture. Again, it is unessential to the context whom or what was the giver. In my own mental image I see the angel standing up, otherwise the measuring stick is doing the talking, and this disrupts the perspective of my picture. John is told to **“Rise,”** which also affects my picture. There has been no previous indication that they were sitting down. Now I have to alter my scene, so I have them sitting down to eat in **Chapter Ten**, where John eats his dinner scroll. Then the angel stands up and orders the apostle to **“Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.”** I assume he did just as he was told, and we have none of the measurements because they had little to do with the message God wished to give us.

To discover this we must first ask the right questions and then find the right answers somewhere in Scripture. What temple should we see? Readers of the second century A.D. would probably picture the temple of Zerubbabel built in 536 B.C., **Ezra 3:8**, which Herod rebuilt on a grander scale in 20 B.C. But that temple was destroyed thirty years before John was asked to write these things down, plus the fact that the New Testament contains nothing about this last and greatest of Jewish temples. Our information comes almost exclusively from the works of Josephus. So, what is John measuring? What is the true church? Paul has answered this for us in **I Cor. 3:16**, **“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”** Suddenly we find ourselves in **Revelation 11**. John is doing a head count of us who represent the house of God and whose job it is to worship at the sacrificial altars of our hearts. It is fascinating how detailed God gets here. John is told what to do in **verse 1** and what not to do in **verse 2**, **“But leave out the court which is outside the temple...”** The Herodian temple had a surrounding outer court so that proselytes and unclean Jews may have a place for worship. It was called the court of the Gentiles. The Greek words *ekbale exo* for *leave out* is a much stronger word than *omit*, rather it means *to throw out with force*. John is told **“...and do not measure it...”** In all of this detail, it is easy to lose sight of the full picture.

What is God telling us to think about? It helps to consider what John would think. He would go to what we call the Old Testament to find precedents of similar events. There are many, but one is enough for right now. In the latter stages of the Babylonian captivity, **Zechariah** received a very similar message to the one we are getting. **“Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold a man with a measuring line in his hand. 2. So I said ‘Where are you going?’ And he said to me, ‘To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is.’” Zech. 2:1-2.** In fact, it may be the identical message. In **Revelation** it is very clear that there is only two kinds of human beings: Those who follow Jesus and those who follow Satan. Here John, like Zechariah, is told to be concerned only with true believers and eliminate the rest. In case there is a question in anyone’s mind, God explains, **“...for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months.”** There are two critical points here, which must be understood correctly. If we are wrong on these, we will be wrong for the next nine chapters. The first point concerns the control over Jerusalem by the Gentiles. We must thank **Luke** for giving us an important fact that **Matthew** and **Mark** left out of their apocalyptic chapters. Jesus said, **“...And**

Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”
Luke 21:24. Jesus is predicting the fall of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. The Jews did not regain their independence until 1948 and not of the temple mount until 1967. So the Age of the Gentiles has been over for more than a half a century. We must consider what this means to us and ours. The first point was easy because Jesus explained it for us. I believe He did this so we don’t have to form opinions about these two critical facts.

The second point is **forty-two months**. Do we take this as literal or figurative? Accepting Jesus’ prophecy as fact, we can see it is a symbolic term for the New Testament Age, which Jesus called **“The times of the Gentiles.”** The importance of this is clearly shown by how often we find this time frame used in **Chapters 11 – 13**. They are expressed in a variety of ways: 1260 days, 42 months and time, times and half a time, all of which are the same length of time, three and a half years. We need to remember that the Jewish calendar was lunar, not solar, so every month was 30 days. Later in this study we will examine more closely what **Daniel** said about the importance of days and times related to prophecy.

The Two Witnesses

3. “And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand and two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. 4. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. 5. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. 6. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of the prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire.”

Each new verse seems to provide another fork in the road. Both go somewhere, but which one takes us where we need to go? Suddenly we hear God say **“...to my two witnesses.”** It is easy to jump on the number and try to find names for these two. This is counterproductive for there are too many choices to choose from and no Biblical proof to support your selections. Only in legal situations does Scripture use the phrase **“two witnesses.”** **“One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” Deut. 19:15.** So, I suggest we concentrate on the word *witness*. It is true that in Jesus’ lifetime, witness (*marturos*) simply meant *to bear evidence*. But by the end of the first century, its meaning among Christians had changed to mean *one who suffers and/or dies for his faith*. When John hears this from the mouth of God, that is what he would interpret it to mean. Today that is the only meaning for martyr.

With this in mind, we can be sure that we are seeing again the innumerable nameless believers who paid the ultimate cost for their belief. Whether they are depicted as the **“Souls under the altar,”** or **“Two witnesses,”** they are us. Another important word is one that isn’t here. The translators added the noun *power*, but that word is not

there in the Greek text. It is **“I will give to my two witnesses,”** so each reader can insert his or her own word.

While God’s people are countless in number, we are individuals in relationship with God. Each one of us has been gifted with the ability to be of value to the whole body. We need to cross out *power* and inject our own assets: wisdom, knowledge, patience, kindness, charity and all the serving or speaking gifts. These are the only kinds of prophecies God now gives to a questioning and unbelieving world. Jesus said, **“...This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. 30. For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation.” Luke 11:29-30.** This is our message, our prophesy or our power if you prefer that word, but we are the only witness this world is going to see, so get it right!

Back in **Chapter 2:13** Jesus mentioned one unknown witness by name, **“...Antipas My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”** The only reward we may get for our bold witnessing may be the same epitaph Antipas received. But his still rings out loudly through the mist of time to encourage and strengthen Christians to pay the price, whatever it is to garner our faith and hear those precious words, **“My faith witness...”** You may not think much of our attire, **“sack cloth,”** but it is very appropriate. These are funeral garments, which become an emblem of mourning. Thus we are being told that our job is to preach in the midst of grief, calamity and despair. We do have to work for our blessings.

So much for the two important words reported here and the one left out. Now we must struggle to make some sense of what we see in **verse 4. “Two olive trees and two lampstands...”** Again we must ask, what would John think of this explanation God is providing for him? His first thought would probably turn once again to **Zechariah**. There is a similar, but not identical vision in **Zechariah, Chapter 4**. There are two olive trees, but only one lampstand and an angel who gives a further description of their purpose than we have in **Revelation 11:4**. While this version is primarily for the Jews returning from the Babylonian captivity, it provides some important insights for us today. It helps to read the whole chapter, but for the sake of time and space, I will copy only a few verses. **6. “...This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power but by My Spirit’... 11. Then I answered and said to him, ‘What are these two olive trees, one at the right of the lampstand and the other at its left?’... 13. Then he answered me and said, ‘Do you know what these are?’ And I said, ‘No, my lord.’ So he said ‘These are the two anointed ones who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.’”** This gives us a little insight for interpreting the meaning of trees and lampstands but as fascinating as this is, its still disappointingly meager in its application for today.

If that were John’s thought also, where else would he look? He would of course be familiar with Paul’s letters to the churches, so he probably remembered Paul discussing olive trees in **Romans 11:11-25**. He was warning Gentiles not to be arrogant about their faith at the expense of the Jews. **17. “And if some of the branches were broken off, and you being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with**

them became a partner of the root and fatness of the olive tree, **18. do not boast against the branches. But if you boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you...** **24. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more will these, who are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? 25...When the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”** Now we see why olive trees were an excellent metaphor for Christians of the New Testament Age. Also we understand why two witnesses were chosen. Under Jesus’ new covenant there are no longer Jews and Gentiles, only the one body. **4. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, 5. so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” Romans 12:4-5.** Unfortunately the church has not done a good job promoting this oneness throughout the centuries, and the natural olive tree has been castigated and avoided for so long by the Gentile church, that it should be no surprise if there are few Jewish members of our churches today. What was supposed to be a blessed marriage has become a bitter divorce.

If by chance this explanation is not satisfactory to those who were taught other possibilities, consider now the lampstand, another allegorical symbol of God’s messengers. This is easier; John understood it immediately. We know this because he began his Gospel talking about this light. **“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” John 1:4-5.** Jesus passed on this magnificent light to us and described us figuratively, **“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16. In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and praise your Father in heaven.” Matt. 5:14-16.** I am guessing that the vast majority of Christians today know these verses or could paraphrase them without much trouble. So where are their lights? If we sit on our hands and say nothing, whom are we delighting most, God or Satan? I suppose we could blame the church but what a lame excuse that will be on Judgment Day. Just as Adam excused himself by blaming God, **“The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate.” Gen. 3:12.** Our church may not be creating effective disciples, but that is not its purpose. Jesus told us it was His: **“Come follow Me and I will make you become fishers of men.” Mark 1:17.** If we are not lights in this sin-darkened world, should we fault the Lord Jesus? What a risky business this light and lampstand stuff can be, **“... Standing before the God of the earth.”**

Verses 5-6 present us with visual evidence of the power of the word: **“...fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies.”** Our first thought takes us back to **II Kings 1:10-14** where Elijah calls down fire from heaven to prove that he was a prophet of God. But a more exact account is found in **Jeremiah 5**, where the nation of Israel had become totally idolatrous and rejected the warning of God’s messengers. **12. “They have lied about the Lord, and said, ‘It is not He. Neither will evil come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine. 13. And the prophets become wind, for the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them.’ 14. Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts: ‘Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my**

words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes.” There is an interesting play on words in **verse 13**. The Hebrew word *Ruah* means both spirit and wind. The Spirit of God was speaking through the prophets, but the people called them windbags. The consequences came upon them almost immediately by the Babylonian assault and destruction of Jerusalem. Throughout history those who scoffed at God’s message brought catastrophic calamities upon themselves. **Verse 6** continues with Old Testament examples of men of God cloaked with power to control nature. In **I Kings 17:1** Elijah brought years of drought upon Israel, and in **Exodus 7-12** Moses called forth the ten plagues upon Pharaoh and Egypt. There is no doubt that God is reminding us of His protective hand over His witnesses throughout history. We have also learned enough so far in **Revelation** to realize that as the end grows near, the persecution will grow more intense.

The Age of Tribulation

7.”Now when they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. 8. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. 9. Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three and a half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. 10. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.”

Two things catch our attention immediately, their testimony and the beast. What are we to surmise by the first words, and who is the second one? If we have deduced the data correctly so far, we can continue to trace by reasoning the problems here. We have discerned from Scripture that the two witnesses are us, so the first question is easier because of past problem solving. The verb finished, *teleo*, almost always relates to time. It will also be used again in **Rev. 20:3**, **“Till the thousand years shall be fulfilled.”** The apostle Paul used it beautifully in **Tim. 4:7**, **“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”** This mini-pause, I believe, is intended to tighten up our belts, or if you prefer, **“To gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” I Peter 1:13.** Peter has prognosticated the exact point in time that John is depicting for us here. We need to know that witnessing is not the casual confession of our faith that we have been taught it to be. But it is a knockdown, drag out brawl, more like professional football than badminton. Paul is not timid about comparing evangelism to an Olympic sport. He uses both wrestling and racing competition to describe his life. So we can be comforted to know that we also are competitors, and what good role models we have to emulate. Now, with our minds at peace and our emotions soothed, we should be ready to look our enemy in the face. We are told in **James 4:7**, **“... Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”** But we also know that the time is coming when he will not flee, and that time will be soon.

Concerning these things we can look the beast in the eye and boldly conjecture that it is Satan. Future chapters will confirm our guess if we can agree that Satan has

many manifestations. But now we must think about the unthinkable. There will be a time when he will stop fleeing and begin attacking and killing. Just like any animal when trapped in a corner will attack, so will the devil, and he will do it with a vengeance because he is not alone. We were warned in **Chapter Nine** that he had **“... The key to the bottomless pit. 2. And he opened the bottomless pit and smoke arose out of the pit...” 9:2**. This forewarning is now occurring in **Chapter 11:7**, which will be a time of **“... great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.” Matt. 24:21-22**. Jesus is letting us know that His church, which was watered by the blood of martyrs in its growth, shall end its mission in an even more brutal death. The prophet Daniel gave the same message six and a half centuries earlier, **“I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints and prevailing against them.” Daniel 7:21**. We will examine all of **Daniel 7** when we begin **Revelation 13**. As grim as this gory carnage appears to our sophisticated minds, it is better to know than not to know. Jesus does not want us to be surprised victims when the inevitable occurs. We are studying a survival book for the elect. We will be able to make choices if we just remember what we were taught. Although Paul is writing about Jesus’ second coming, it applies just as well to the coming of the anti-Christ, **“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.” I Thess. 5:4**.

Verses 8-10 shows us in graphic detail the contempt the world will have for the saints. Not only will they be killed, but will be held in such disdain that their dead bodies will be left **“...In the street of the great city ...”** unburied. The term **“great city”** will be used seven more times in **Revelation** and always refers to Babylon. It is compared in a spiritual sense to other cities that were enemies of God: morally **Sodom**, slavery **Egypt**, hypocrisy **“...where also our Lord was crucified.”** Jesus told the Scribes and Pharisees of their guilt in **Luke 11:49-50**, **“Therefore the wisdom of God also said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and persecute,’ 50. That the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation.”** We will see later that Babylon, the great city used in **Revelation**, in all probability does not refer to Baghdad, the capital of Iraq; that would be too easy. More likely it is someplace we are much more familiar with.

Even more shocking than their contempt is the people’s of all nations rejoicing in our death and purification for **“...Three and a half days,”** not to be taken literally, but it is the short time Jesus mentioned in **Mark 13:20**, **“And unless the Lord shortened those days, no flesh would be saved.”** We have to ask, what are they so happy about? Certainly human beings, good, bad or indifferent could not be so calloused and uncaring as to rejoice in planet-wide fratricide, but they will. Why are they going to celebrate carnage like Christmas by exchanging gifts? What could we do that would produce such vile and despicable behavior? John tells us why, **“...Because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.”** We can think long and hard about that phrase and find no possible way that this could relate to us or anyone we know. We are not sadistic people who enjoy going around **“tormenting those who dwell on the earth.”** If this is true, we had better look again at our lifestyles. Yes, I have never

intentionally tormented the unbeliever, but I ended up doing it anyhow, by telling them about damnation. They don't mind hearing about heaven, but Hell scares them, so they bury such unpleasant thoughts and avoid church with a passion. Their ignorance is bliss and conservative Christians are crackpots. But even their subliminal thoughts will on occasion pop up and ask, "but what if those crazy Christians are right?" So, it is not surprising that during the great tribulation pagans will rejoice out of relief, seeing that they were right all along and believers were now quiet because they were dead.

Again we are in good company. Jesus on the cross was mocked and sneered at by all segments of society, the general population, **"And all the people answered and said 'His blood be on us and on our children.'" Matt. 27:25**, the clergy, **"Likewise the chief priests also together with the scribes mocked and said among themselves 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. 32. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.'" Mark 15:31-32**, the political leaders, **"And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered," Luke 23:35**, the men who nailed Him to the cross, **"And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine," Luke 23:37**, and even those who were crucified with Him, **"Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing." Matt. 27:44.** Talk about lonely! Yet, we must always remember that Jesus allowed Himself to be murdered in just this fashion, not to win our pity, but to set an example for those who will follow Him. One last thought about this most crucial point in the history of mankind, I can understand the hatred and then the pleasure of the clergy at seeing Jesus die. They had everything to lose if He was who He said He was. So His death was a relief for them, but it is hard to explain the reviling of the others. Perhaps it is to prepare us for the mob hysteria that bloodletting always seems to produce. Satan will still be alive and attacking us in a last ditch attempt to alter the inevitable.

The Rapture

11. "Now after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, 'Come up here.' And they ascended to heaven in a cloud and their enemies saw them. 13. In the same hour there was a great earthquake and a tenth of the city fell. In the earthquake seven thousand men were killed, and the rest were afraid and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14. The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly."

Upon hearing the statement in **verse 14, "the second woe is past,"** we must back up for a moment and consider how all this woe began. The series of three began in **8:13 – 9:12**, the second and longest was in **9:13 – 11:14** and the last woe will finish in this chapter. So the paragraph we are examining now seems to be the culmination of a long account about the struggle between good and evil or the church and her enemies. Knowing that this chapter is only the first of nine future chapters all telling different facets of the same story, we can fudge a little here at the beginning. And I will do that with **22. "Now after three and a half days..."** As said earlier this represents a short time, but if we consider the message given to Daniel by the angel Gabriel on March 14, 445 B.C., let's try to be more exact. The angel told Daniel and us, **22. "...I have come**

to give you insight and understanding... **24 Seventy weeks are determined for your people... 25...To restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the prince, there shall be seven weeks** (forty-nine years, probably the time it took to rebuild the temple and city), **and sixty-two weeks** (434 years)... **26. And after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah shall be cut off...**" (April 6, Palm Sunday 32 A.D.). **Daniel 9:22-26.** I shall not try to explain my dates here. It has been done for us by good Biblical scholars, nor is it really relevant at this point. I am trying to explain ahead of time about my opinion on **"the three and a half days."** If you noticed, only sixty-nine of the seventy weeks are used up in Jewish history. I seriously believe that last week or seven years is what we are looking at in **Chapter 11:9 & 11.** I don't think **verse 11** is a repeat of **verse 9**, but rather an addition. We are looking at a seven-year time frame for the Age of Tribulation. Is it important to be correct? No, only time will tell, so accept it for what it is, an opinion.

More important is to consider some of the details given here, particularly, **"...They stood on their feet, ...Come up here... and they ascended to heaven in a cloud..."** What happened to the martyrs is an obvious reminder of **Gen. 2:7, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."** Job fully understood his origins, **"The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the almighty gives me life."** **Job. 33:4.** The voice commanding their ascension is not named, but Jesus would be a good guess. We will see this more fully in **Rev. 19:11-14.** **"They ascended"** is generally called the rapture, and I have no problem with that even though it is not a word from Scripture. The difficulty is not that it occurs, but when it occurs. If **Chapter 11** is chronological, and it is, then the rapture occurs after the Age of Tribulation, not before. Then why is the church so bitterly divided about that? Actually I would prefer to be raptured up before the holocaust rather than die and then be resuscitated, but that's wishful thinking. Why does a large part of Christianity think they will avoid the tribulation? You have to blame a teenage Scottish girl named Margaret McDonald. In 1830 she had a vision of the Virgin Mary who told her the rapture story, she told the church and the church believed it. We need to remember what Jesus warned us about, **"A wicked and adulterous generation ask for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah."** **Matt 12. 39.**

Verse 13 gives us a very sketchy view of global disaster of catastrophic proportions. This is probably what Gabriel was prophesying in **Daniel 9:27, "Then he (the anti-Christ) shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be the one who makes desolate even until the end that is decreed is poured out on the desolate."** We can only guess that this might refer to Armageddon because **verse 14** tells us this is only **"The second woe."**

The Seventh Trumpet

15. "Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!' **16. And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17. saying:**

‘We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. 18. The nations were angry and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that You should reward your servants and prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.’ 19. Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thundering, an earthquake, and great hail.”

We were surprised at the opening of the sixth seal because we expected one thing and received an unexpected, **“...Silence for about half an hour.” Rev. 8:1.** So there is no astonishment at the sound of the seventh trumpet, when our eyes are pulled from the devastation on earth to a joyous celebration in heaven. The angels and elders are not rejoicing in the havoc falling upon mankind, but the fact that the whole bloody history of man is over at last. The sin of Adam has grown to such monstrous planet wide proportion, that its demise produces an equivalent response of exultation in heaven. The promise of **Psalm 2** has finally reached fulfillment. David, with incredible insight said: **1. “Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? 2. The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and His Anointed. 2. “Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us...” 7. I will declare the decree the Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today have I begotten You. 8. Ask of Me and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possessions. 9. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”** Now this prophecy has come to fruition and all the saints should shout with **“loud voices.”** I include us in this spiritual reveling because of the pronoun used at the beginning of this heavenly psalm **17. “We give You thanks O Lord God Almighty.”** It is the elders singing this doxology, but they represent the church and we are the church. So we add our voices to this heavenly choir overjoyed at this long awaited transfer of power and authority to their right owners, **“...our Lord and His Christ...”** So the seventh trumpet, like the sixth seal, is there to introduce the next series of sevens. We shall see that the phraseology in **verse 15** is repeated with greater detail in **12:10.** In fact, this pause we are looking at is a brief synopsis of what is subsequently provided in greater detail through the next seven startling visions presented in full color, wide-screen and Dolby sound. Without the information we have at our disposal, Old Testament prophets were quite aware of the last blowing of the trumpet. One good example would be **Joel 2:1, “Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand.”** The apostle Paul was also informed of this event when he explained it in his first letter to the Thessalonians, **“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” 4:16.** And we also were informed earlier **“That in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel,... The mystery of God would be finished.” Rev. 10:7.**

With all this preparation for what is coming, you may be ready, as am I, to jump right into the next series of seven. This seems to be the thought of many commentators

because the majority of them leapfrog right over **verse 19** into the first vision of **12:1**; or at best, they suggest that the last verse of **Chapter 11** should really be the first verse of **Chapter 12**. And they may be right, but I don't think so. **Verses 1 and 19** make a wonderful parenthesis for this astonishing chapter. We often refer to the duality or bipolar nature of our present church. Like the Judaic church of Jesus' day we are composed of both believers and hypocrites, and we can't tell them apart. So we talk about the visible and invisible church. Here we see two churches also, but both of them are the invisible variety. John is asked to **"measure the temple of God, the altar and those who worship."** **Verse 1**. This would be the New Testament church beginning in the first century A.D. The second church, in **verse 19**, **"The temple of God in heaven..."** is an analogue of the Holy of Holies in the temple of Solomon. This verse is remarkably similar to the conclusion to the seventh seal in **8:5**, both concluding with a series of spectacular productions. In **8:5**, **"...There were noises, thundering, lightnings, and an earthquake."** In **11:19** we find identical fireworks with one addition. I will let the readers find this addendum for themselves since I have no explanation for this or what it might mean.

As I review this material I begin to suspect my own thought process. I have stated earlier that no word or letter in Scripture is irrelevant or of no importance, and in apocalyptic sections all is of ultimate value. It seems to be our human nature to discard things we don't understand or throw them in our mental junk drawer. We hate to appear stupid, yet that is when we display our ignorance most clearly. I am not trying to excuse my own ignorance, which is simply the noun form for ignore but to show the value of comprehending every detail. Fortunately God has not insisted that we understand all the data, only to download all the facts He has provided us with for later assimilation. Therein lies the truth. If we don't see the intrinsic value of God's Word, it is our own shortcomings being made evident. This is salvageable by trusting the Spirit to do what Jesus promised in **John 16:13**, **"...He will guide you into all truth."** So let us do that together as we prepare to forge ahead into the mysteries of the seven visions.

Chapter Twelve

The Woman and the Dragon

1. “Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. 2. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. 3. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. 5. And she bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And he Child was caught up to God and to His throne. 6. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”

There is always a certain feeling of awe upon reaching this section of John’s writing. He seems to radiate his own reverence and wonder through his descriptions of what he saw. We have a debt of gratitude to pay the apostle for doing so faithfully what Jesus instructed him to do, **“...What you see, write in a book and send it...” Rev. 1:11.** The signs we now see through John’s pen are so graphically drawn that we sense the same emotional inspiration John must have felt as he wrote them. For one thing is they are all larger than life. The woman in the first sign is **“...clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet.”** By general agreement the woman is a personification of the church, but opinions of what church vary greatly. Since the previous chapter ended with a view of the temple of God opening up in heaven, we must connect the woman, **“appearing in heaven”** as an expansion of that picture. Her clothing seems related to Jesus’ appearance in **1:16, “...His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.”** And the wreath encircling her hair contained **“twelve stars”** which at this point in the chapter must refer to the twelve tribes of Israel. So the woman is an allusion to the Old Testament church that will allegorically produce the New Testament church in the next verse. Perhaps Solomon was seeing the same woman when he wrote, **“Who is she who looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?” Song of Solomon 6:10.** Isn’t it fascinating that we could now tell Solomon who she was? Having made this logical transition from **11:19** to **12:1**, we are ready to enter into a more expansive venue.

Our wonder grows in **verse 2** through a very mundane but always miraculous event: a woman having a baby. There is no occurrence where a human being is more vulnerable than a woman giving birth. So there is more than a little concern when suddenly **“...a great, fiery red dragon...”** appears. The Greek word, *drakoon*, properly means *a large serpent*, but throughout **Revelation** it is translated as a dragon. This gigantic serpent is poised in front of the woman giving birth with every intent to kill the child at the moment the infant emerges from the womb. Every time I read this another picture flashes through my mind. I see the grim view of abortionists in untold numbers killing human fetuses. Could this, like the massacre of innocents in Bethlehem, be

Satan's way of venting his anger on the human race because he failed to prevent his defeat at this critical point in time? Please excuse the diversion; I have no desire to clutter up the picture of a birthing mother and a poised dragon with intent to kill. If we didn't know the outcome when we saw this picture for the first time we would see no way the woman and child could possibly survive. Then suddenly comes joy, the joy of the Gospel given in one single verse. We see the thirty-three years of our Lord's life in a condensed version. There can be no doubt about whom the male child is. The quote of **Psalm 2**, "**Who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron,**" gives us proof positive. In **verse 6** we see the woman being metamorphosized from an Old Testament into a New Testament depiction of the church. She is persecuted by Satan and protected and cared for by God for "**one thousand two hundred and sixty days,**" which we determined earlier is the New Testament Age. **Daniel** answers any questions about the form of Satan, the heads and crowns, in his **seventh chapter**. If the story stopped at **verse 6**, we could only wonder how this happened; the dragon seemed unstoppable. This appears to be the question God expect from us as the next paragraph will explain.

Same Story, More Detail

7. "And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, 8. but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. 9. So the great dragon was cast out, but that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. 10. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. 11. 'And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. 12. 'Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.'"

This paragraph begins with what sounds like a contradiction in terms, "**War broke out in heaven.**" We know that in some primordial prehistoric period Satan rebelled against God. But that was then, so what conflict are we looking at now? It seems in total contrast to our view of heaven. We sing in chorus with Jesus' disciples on Palm Sunday as He entered Jerusalem. "**Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.**" **Luke 19:38**. It is fascinating to me that they begin by singing **Psalm 118:26** and half way through the verse they alter the text; "**Peace in heaven**" is not in the psalm. Where did they get that idea? Only **Luke** reports this, the other three Gospel writers omit it. Why? I have no answer for that, but I must thank Luke for the challenge. Perhaps he is reminding us of another passage penned only by him, "**Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!**" **Luke 2:14**. This is another remarkable parenthesis of the first week and last week that Jesus spent on our planet. His birth brought peace between God and mankind. His death and resurrection brought "**peace in heaven.**" From the time of God's curse in **Gen. 3:14-15** until the birth of the Messiah, Satan spent all his time and

effort to thwart the promise by preventing the event we see in **Luke 2**, but he failed and the **“war in heaven”** tells us how.

As I meander through the enigmas of **Revelation**, I begin to understand that this is not a commentary it is a diary. I am just jotting down my own ponderings on the mysteries of God, primarily as a personal resource. After this little apologetic, let's get into the conflict in heaven. Since Satan failed to stop the coming of the second Adam referred to by Paul, **“Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.” Rom. 5:14**, he now had to seduce the second Adam as he had the first. And Satan wasn't alone in this effort, he had an army with him as stated in **verse 4**, **“His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.”** So Satan had seduced a third of his fellow angels to rebel with him and now in desperation they direct an all out attack upon God's solution for sin and death.

We now have the privilege to see a cosmic confrontation that was invisible to the human beings whom this drama was surrounding. The magi, Herod, the church, even the parents were all reacting to consequences of what was being waged in the spiritual world without seeing it as we are now blessed to perceive. Michael was the archangel of Israel who seems to have been a veteran of many such battles. He is mentioned by another archangel three times in **Daniel 10:13 & 21**, and **12:1**. The last one is interesting because it speaks of a battle yet to occur, **“At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found in the book.” 12:1**. So here we have another fascinating parenthesis, which seems to be one of the Spirit's favorite methods. We are informed of a war in heaven at both the first advent of Christ and another at the second coming of our Lord. The battle we are viewing in **verse 7** was taking place throughout the thirty-three years Jesus spent on earth. It became a glorious victory when Jesus said, **“It is finished.” John 19:30**. He is not talking about His life; he is referring to the battle. These might be the most important three words ever spoken, although in Greek it was only one word, *tetelestai* from *teleo*. The first meaning of this verb was *to end* or *discharge a debt*. It was at this very point in time that **“Satan...was cast to the earth and his angels were cast out with him.” 12:9**, as stated earlier in **Chapter Nine**, at 3 P.M. on Good Friday. This is implied in **verse 8**, **“...nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.”** The key words are **“any longer.”** It seems that prior to Good Friday Satan could come and go as he pleased. **“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. 7. And the Lord said to Satan ‘From where do you come?’ So Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.’” Job 1:6-7**. This is after his rebellion, but he still had access to heaven as his birthright. **Verse 8** tells us he and his followers no longer had this right.

Just as Jesus' life was recorded in one verse, **verse 5**, so Satan's life and activity is given briefly in **verse 9**. It is the only place he is given three names. The red dragon is identified as **“that serpent of old,”** which takes us back to **Gen. 3-1-11** and ahead to

Rev. 20:2. The name Devil is Greek for *accuser*, which he displays for us in **Zechariah 3:1**, and Satan is Hebrew of *adversary*. The sole occupation of this adversary is to **“deceive the whole world; and he has done it very well.** John reported to his readers, **“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.”** **John 5:19.** After the heavenly war was won by Michael and his support group the wicked one and his followers were permanently **“cast to the earth.”** **Verse 9.** This is the good news for heaven but a devil of a gospel for earthbound humanity. In **verses 10-12** we hear another victory song. This hymn of victory begins in similar fashion to the song of praise in **Chapter 11:17**, but they relate to very different times. The psalm in **Chapter Eleven** relates to Judgment day; this one refers to the victory on the cross. The psalmist is referring to this very event when he sang, **“This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”** **Psalm 118:24.** So the celestial speaker relates the joy of heaven at Satan’s eviction and gives us a brief account of Christian martyrdom as collateral damage in **verses 10-12.** He then concludes his psalm with one of the most alarming sentences in the Bible. I use the word *sentence* with a designed purpose. It has two meanings. It can be a grammatical speech unit or a period of time one spends in confinement. For us it means both. It is a statement of truth and this truth is a form of bondage to a vicious and incensed adversary who wishes nothing more than to take us down with him. **“Woe to the inhabitants of earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having a great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”** I suppose we need to know this, but we don’t have to rejoice with them about it!

The War on Earth

13. “Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. 14. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. 15. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. 16. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war on the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

It must be understood that we are involved in a colossal conflict of cosmic proportions. It is also imperative that we understand our enemy. If we minimize his power or be arrogant enough to even doubt his existence, we are doomed. So try with me to get inside the mind of Satan. I believe this is why we were allowed to see the war in heaven, so we can prepare to experience the same type of conflict on earth. Just as **verses 7-12** explained **verse 5** more fully, so **verses 13-17** explains **verse 6**, the war on earth. We need to feel, if only for a moment, Satan’s frustration burgeoning swiftly into a violent passion for revenge. Unlike us, he knew his future, and he saw **“that he had been cast to the earth,”** his venue of activity has been diminished. He is now caught in a spiraling vortex from heaven to earth to the abyss and in finality to the lake of fire. Of course he’s outraged, and in his wrath he needs to strike out. We need to perceive this to

fully understand the lengths our great enemy will take to inflict pain upon his creator. Stealing His children would cause heaven to weep. We as parents can understand and cringe at such a cruel form of revenge. He failed to stop the birth of the child and the inception of the New Testament church or if you prefer, the change of the woman in **verse 1** to the woman in **verse 13**, so he attacks the woman.

How did he do that? As we look at history the answer is astonishing. He does it through the church. He actually began within the twelve disciples. When Jesus began to get His disciples prepared for His death, Peter felt it necessary to take Him aside and scold the Lord for talking that way. Jesus said, **“Get behind Me, Satan!” Mark 8:33.** The church is manifested by demonstrating the peace of Christ, **“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” John 14:27.** Satan’s plan is to disrupt this peace with divisions and conflict. It started in the disciples, **“A dispute arose among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest.” Luke 22:23.** And just moments later Jesus tells Peter, **“Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. 32. But I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” Luke 22:31-31.**

I need to diverge for just a moment. This remarkable statement, though directed at Peter, is said to all of us. As we develop a fuller picture of Satan’s battle plan against us, fear also grows. This is dangerous stuff. Would God really allow such a thing? The answer is yes! Not more than we could bear, but yes! Look again at what Jesus has said. Satan has to get permission to assault a child of God; and when it is given, heavenly prayer begins to assist the assaulted. And yes, we will fail, but there is no censure from the Lord, only the advice to learn from our mistakes and become more useful to the church. We have no idea how Peter felt about what the Lord said to him. Perhaps, like most students, it went in one ear and out the other, because we know what happened. Peter was so sifted by Satan that he denied the Lord three times before he realized what he was doing; then he wept bitterly. Since he didn’t even ask Jesus why He was now calling him Simon instead of Peter, he made himself acceptable to Satan. The rest is history. Everyone knows Peter’s sad story, but how many of us can learn by Peter’s mistakes? Unfortunately most of us are not bright enough to be instructed by other’s disasters, we need to experience them for ourselves. Peter would be happy to tell us that this is a much more difficult path to take.

Going back to Satan’s attack on the church, it started as early as **Acts 6:1, “In those days when the number of disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Jews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.”** In the Corinthian Church, divisions were so prevalent that the apostle Paul had to send them a harsh letter of concern. **“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” I Cor. 1:10.** Even Paul could not escape the eroding stain of human nature that produces divisions and conflict. The great teamwork between Paul and Barnabas was broken apart by a rather small matter. **“Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 38. But Paul insisted that they should not take**

with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. 39. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another...” Acts 15:37-39. Throughout the history of the church there has been an abundance of schisms. Are they all a result of Satan’s influence? Weren’t some of them necessary? The answer to both questions is yes. Satan plants the seed of all controversy. The Holy Spirit continues to divert the crops of diversion into productive divisions. So the church remains despite the all-out assault of the old serpent. Protesters, or as we are now called, Protestants, can continue to dispute as long as we lovingly agree to disagree. Paul’s great prayer that we **“be perfectly joined together in the same mind”** seems to be unattainable in the church today. She has been bent and bowed by centuries of stress so the old girl is well beyond the flexibility of youth. But we can and must still love her for the beauty that she was. She is the symbol of the visible church, ever the birth mother of our faith and still bringing forth the congregation of true believers called the invisible church.

The section we are looking at here is a pictorial view of the New Testament Age, giving a fuller description of **verse 6**. We need to decipher the symbols given to understand, so let us use the tried and true system of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. **“The woman was given two wings of a great eagle,”** is still the church transmuted from Old Testament to New Testament now under persecution and in mortal danger. Throughout the Bible, eagles’ wings are symbols of God’s protective care over His people, **“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.” Exodus 19:4.** They also represent the speed of God’s agents, **“...and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle.” Rev. 4:7,** which was explained in that chapter. The church escapes to safety **“into the wilderness.”** The first thought that comes to mind is the dislodging of Hagar from the house of Abram. **“So Abram said to Sarai, ‘Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please.’ And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence. 7. Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness...” Gen. 16:6-7.** Out of this expulsion the seed of Abram became divided. This is another critical point in time, which alters history dramatically. **“And the Angel of the Lord said to her’ Behold you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has heard your affliction.” Gen. 16:11.** The Mid-East is still suffering today because of this ancient sin of discord.

Like Hagar, the early church had to flee **“into the wilderness,”** for three and a half years. Again this represents the entire New Testament Age or Age of the Gentiles. This makes great sense, for every Jew from Abram’s day to our own day recognized Israel as the Promised Land, **“...A land flowing with milk and honey.” Ex. 3:8.** Every other land was the land of the Gentiles, **“The Wilderness.”** We also need to look at the word translated *nourished*. The Greek word *trepho* literally means to *stiffen* or *fatten* and by implication to *pamper* or *bring up*. So what food is God fattening up His church with? Jesus said He was our nourishment, **“...Verily, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” John 6:32-33.** God intended His church to grow and mature into an adult replica of Himself being abundantly nurtured by the Word. Obviously it did not work out that way.

The Word of God is generally not served as a banquet to the church; she is rather fed with a regime of predigested pap. No wonder so many flee in disgust at this concentration camp diet. Can't we hear Peter, who learned the hard way? In his first letter he was telling us from his own experience to **"...desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."** **I Peter 2:2.** If we, the church, prefer Peter Pan to Peter and Paul, we deserve to be disciplined into discipleship. If it takes hardship and a wilderness trek through life, we have asked for it. Paul speaks of this when he talks about teaching the word. **"Let him who is taught in the word share in all good things with him who teaches."** **Gal. 6:6.** But when the teachers are not doing their job, we need to consider the next verse carefully. **"Do not be deceived God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."** **Gal. 6:7.**

Satan again fails to accomplish his primary goal, to kill the church. He did however force her to flee. We need to realize that he will never stop. He is ever present right up to the end. In **verse 6** he pursued the woman with a flood of persecution to divert her attention from God's truth to her own grim reality, so he can **"cause her to be carried away by the flood."** He needed to seduce her to question if what God said was true. He is still using the same one liner he asked Eve – did God really say? He is still asking it because it still works. The large majority of the church today trusts higher criticism far more readily than simple credence. Again the church is rescued from her persecutors, this time by the earth swallowing up the floodwaters of the beast. The symbolization here becomes a bit cloudy. We know that God is doing the saving. It is the how that we have to consider. David commented upon that in **Psalm 18:16, "He sent me from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters."** Now what do we do about the use of earth? If we ask what church is leaving the question becomes simpler to clarify. Remember the first woman was the church of Israel, the offspring of Abram. Everything with Israel was of the creator, God. Everything without was the wilderness or the area of the Gentiles. It seems here that the earth represents this Jewish concept of the wilderness. Luke describes this in **Acts 11:19, "Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only."** Gentile lands contained fertile soil as demonstrated in Paul's enormously successful missionary journeys. We can think of the earth as soil swallowing up the seeds of God's word and germinating a hundredfold. So the persecution, which prompted the flight of the church, only produced more offspring. No wonder **"The dragon was enraged."** His every attempt simply caused the object of his hatred to expand and enlarge. All of this sounds good until we look at the last verse, **"He went to make war with the rest of her offspring."** We are all he has left to disgorge his malignance upon. He has nothing else to do, so we had better be wearing the right coat of arms. **"Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rules of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."** **Eph. 6:11-12**

Chapter Thirteen

There is an eagerness to jump into this chapter and examine the two beasts and dissect them like lab animals in a biology class. Probably because that worked rather well in the last chapter; but there was no identity problem there because Satan was clearly described and named in seven different places. Here, however, we are not told whom we are examining and any mistakes made by guesswork are critical. It helps to go back and look at the benediction in **Rev. 1:4-5**, “**...Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5. and from Jesus Christ...**” We identified this as a clearly defined picture of the Holy Trinity. In **Chapters 12 & 13** we are looking at another trinity whom I will call the unholy trinity. These two trinities are polar opposites. God the Father is in His heaven, Satan is physically locked away in the Abyss, which will be proven in this chapter. The Holy Spirit is now doing all the work of sanctification within the church. The Unholy Spirit is doing Satan’s work to unsanctify the visible church. Christ has returned to His Father and is awaiting the time of His second coming. The anti-Christ is also waiting for his turn in the war against the church. This introductory paragraph is necessary because so many errors have been made in the past because of the enormity of just jumping in. I have found it a blessing to follow Daniel’s example. He was given an impossible task so he asked his friends to pray about it, and that very night the problem was solved. In his joy and relief he poured out a magnificent thank you to God. I would like to use a portion of his prayer before going any further. “**Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His...He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. 22. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with Him.**” **Dan. 2:20-22.** With this comfort may we be ready to proceed.

The Beast from the Sea

1. “Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. 2. Now the beast, which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.”

The purpose of the opening paragraph was to make us think before we leap. Most just leap and make an error of assumption. They assume the unholy trinity is given in the same order as the Holy Trinity that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When in fact, it isn’t. Upon examining this second of seven visions we will see the order is Satan, and anti-Christ. This is the quintessential basis for understand both John’s and Daniel’s vision. Done correctly there is a remarkable evolution of thought process between **Revelation 13** and **Daniel 7**. So let’s turn back to Daniel and sort out the facts, but try with prayer and understanding to avoid the danger of mistaken assumption; in fact, the Spirit makes this an obvious decision by showing us a beast so similar to the vision Daniel saw that we must immediately leap back to Daniel and compare.

However, before returning to Daniel, it is beneficial to examine the appearance of the Unholy Spirit in **Rev. 13:1-2**. First let's question where it came from. In the last two chapters, John had been moved about. In **Chapter Ten** he was lunching in heaven. In **Eleven** he was asked to do some surveying on earth and then be an observer in **Chapter Twelve**. Now he is relocated again. He "**stood on the sand of the sea.**" I need to ask why? I could just accept it as a backdrop for the scene unfolding before my eyes, but like a little child, the why is always there. Unfortunately there is little help in Scripture, but some historical information about the ancient world is useful. The sea was considered a dangerous and dreadful place, full of unknown pitfalls lurking behind every wave to seize the unwary traveler. Even Paul expresses some concern about ocean travel, "**...three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep.**" **II Cor. 11:25**. The sand is considered as a protective barrier between land and sea. God said, "**Do you not fear Me? Says the Lord. Will you not tremble at My presence, Who have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross? And though the waves toss to and fro, yet they cannot prevail; though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it.**" **Jer. 5:22**. So the land which "**helped the woman...and swallowed up the flood,**" **12:16**, is good and the sea is the source of evil.

So, having satisfied my own curiosity, it is now time to examine the first beast. It has "**seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns.**" I realize that hitherto I have chosen some untraveled paths to understanding and I must warn the reader that they will become more solitary as we go along, but not quite yet. The general consensus about the beast, his heads and crowns is correct. The heads represent empires, the horns are political authorities and the crowns signify royal power. The problem develops when we assign names to these symbols. The only difference from Satan in **12:3** and the anti-spirit in **13:1** is the transposing of the crowns. We are looking at a transmitting of power from the crowned heads in **Twelve** to the crowned horns in **Thirteen**. The description of the beast, "**was like a leopard...bear...lion**" is also an order reversal of the four beasts in **Daniel 7:1-7**. So let's return to Daniel and try to find a significant for this somewhat troubling information. One last thought in **verse 2**, "**And the dragon gave him his power, his throne and great authority.**" We need to know what this implies and why Satan did this. Both of these questions will be answered in this chapter.

As reluctant as I seem to be, it is now time to enter into **Daniel 7** on a wing and a prayer, beseeching the Father for wisdom and discernment. We must carry back with us a mental picture of "**the beast from the sea**" and compare him with the "**Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.**" **Daniel 7:3**. There seems to be a paradoxical dilemma at the very onset. In order to understand **Rev. 13** we have to solve **Daniel 7**, and to understand **Daniel 7** we have to solve **Rev. 13**. So we have a closed circle without a beginning or ending. This is a serious impediment that needs to be solved. My method appears to be haphazard, but it works. I just look around. Periodically God apparently gives us a little quiz to see if we are paying attention. It is necessary to stop and search for the clue that the Lord always provides. Here it is just ahead of us in **verse 9**, "**If anyone has an ear, let him hear.**" On the surface this seems so innocuous that often the clue is missed. We need to recognize how similar this is to Jesus' favorite expression when discussing what is critical to the church. We find it in **Matt. 13:9** and **43**, and to all seven churches in **Revelation Chapters Two and Three**.

There is one alarming difference. Jesus said, **“He who has an ear”** but here John relates, **“If anyone has an ear.”** It is almost a prophesy of deafness within the body of the church. So we must find a place to break into this circle. With this in mind, what we are looking at is vital to the well being of the church. If we are correct in our interpretation thus far, we start with the Unholy Spirit and clutching this string of truth we can now dive into Daniel.

I have spent perhaps an inordinate amount of time identifying the beast from the sea, but the purpose should become evident at once in Daniel. The first critical error made by students and commentators alike is assuming that **“...four great beasts that came up from the sea,” Daniel 7:3**, are the same metaphoric vision as King Nebuchadnezzar had in **Daniel 2:31-35**. The king saw a giant statue made of metal, gold, silver, bronze and iron with clay feet. Daniel had to interpret this dream or die, so he prayed and God provided. Modern readers are surprised at this and suggest that God doesn't work that way, or at least not any more. I guess we need more life threatening experiences to get back to trusting God to do what He promised He could do. Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that the statue represented the present and future kingdoms. The gold head was the Babylonian Empire. The other future powers Daniel did not seem able to name, but we know because it is simple history. The silver represented the Persian Empire, 538-334 B.C., the Greeks under Alexander the Great were the bronze, 333-147 B.C. and the iron was the Roman Empire 146 B.C., which will last until the power of the western world is crushed. This all is interesting but of little importance to us at this point, so let's go back to Chapter 7 and see why the four beasts are not the same as the four metals of Chapter 2.

I find **Daniel 7** to be the most enigmatic yet crucial prophetic chapter in Scripture. Daniel is seeing the future of mankind from five and a half centuries before the birth of Christ right up to the end of time, and he tells it three times in twenty-eight short verses. This is the most concise book of history ever written and I, who seem to prefer an ocean of words to a stream of succinct thoughts, am in awe. Considering my last thought, I guess I had better proceed at once to the critical but inexplicably overlooked verse of this remarkable chapter. In **verse 17** Jesus himself explains to Daniel the meaning of his vision. **“The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth.”** The key words are **“will rise,”** *quomuwn* is the future tense of the Aramaic verb, *quwan*. Daniel wrote in Aramaic from **2:4 – 7:28**, and in Hebrew in all other verses. He tells us that this vision occurred **“In the first year of Belshazzar, King of Babylon.** So his dream happened during the last phase of the Babylonian Empire, thus the four beasts represent the next four kingdoms that will arise. Again we can name them for they are past and present kingdoms. **“The first was like a lion”** was Persia, **“...a second like a bear”** represents the Greek Empire, **“...and there was another like a leopard,”** was the Roman Empire. **“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible...It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.”** The number of horns identifies this beast to be the same as the beast from the sea in **Rev. 13:1-10**. The creature John saw, **“...was like a leopard, his feet were like a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion.”** So the beast is a compilation and extension of the first three beasts in **Daniel 7** in reverse order because John is looking back through history and Daniel was looking into the future. Since we

have already identified the beast from the sea as a metaphor for the Unholy Spirit working throughout the New Testament Age, this is easy to identify. No wonder Daniel was so troubled by this beast; it represented a deadly spiritual empire as opposed to merely human empires of the first three beasts. To summarize, the Unholy Spirit is the key, which unlocks the paradoxical dilemma. If this is not done **Daniel 7:1-8** simply becomes an unnecessary addendum, a retelling of history already related in **Daniel 2**.

Worship of the Beast

3. "I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. 4. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?' 5. And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. 6. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. 7. And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. 8. And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. 9. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."

There is a remarkable beginning and ending for this dreadful episode of beastly power. Let's examine the good news first. God has again placed a spiritual parenthesis around the section of grim reality. John lets us know that he is still an observer when he says, **"I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death."** He doesn't tell us which head was maimed, but we will learn later that it was the seventh head. This is one of those timeout moments that scream out "wait a minute. Where did this come from?" And this is good. We need to backup and get a fuller perspective of what John is seeing. The first thought that comes to mind is the analogy, which leaps out about death and resurrection. We have to trust our instincts about each chapter being new insights for prior chapters and each one tells the same story in chronological order. Assuming that we are right, then we are seeing with John something that happened early in the Christian era. We go back to the cross when God brought to fruition His warning to Satan in **Gen. 3:15**, **"...He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel."** If I had been a member of the first Christian church in Jerusalem, I would have believed with them that Satan was dead. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in **Acts 2:1-4** and the vitality and growth of the church, what else could you think? But suddenly that old Devil came to life with a vengeance. It began with arrests in **Acts 4**, hypocrisy in **Acts 5**, deaths of Stephen in **Acts 7:54-60** and John's own brother, James in **Acts 12:2**.

The parallelism between the death and resurrection of Jesus and the mortal wound and the unexpected recovery of the beast is mind-boggling. The difference being that Jesus went up to His celestial realms and Satan into his bottomless pit. Another similar but not exact likeness is their description. Jesus said He was the one, **"...who is and**

who was and who is to come.” **Rev. 1:8.** Satan is described in **Rev. 17:8,** “**The beast that you saw was and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition.**” We look ahead so we can see why “**...the dragon gave him (the beast) his power, his throne, and great authority.**” And it is great authority indeed. The Unholy Spirit has used it so effectively throughout the New Testament Age, “**The forty-two months**” that he has seduced the whole world. “**Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?** His power is continuing to grow, and the darkness of this present age seems to have reached its saturation point. From early on Christians began to feel the oppression of Satan’s power through its exponential growth. The apostles warned them about this vociferously. James told us, “**If you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.**” **James 3:14-15.** Similar warnings are given in **II Peter 2:12 & 18, I John 4:1, Jude 12-13.**

In spite of this sound advice, something went very wrong and we have to ask why? The answer seems to lie in one word used three times in these ten verses – blasphemy. Basically the word means to insult one’s honor; in the biblical sense it means the virtue of God’s word is questionable. So we also need to question whom we are listening to. We are followers of whomever we are paying attention to. The power of the word began in **Genesis.** God said, “**Let there be light**” and creation began. Satan said, “**Did God really say**” and sin began. John said in his gospel, “**In the beginning was the Word**” and here the Unholy Spirit spoke, “**...blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.**” The sad story of mankind tells us whom the world is listening to. Satan has indoctrinated the world into thinking that God has become just a footnote in history and has replaced Him with humanism. While this seems both scientifically sound and scholarly it is merely another form of worship. Without conscious thought, mankind is worshiping the beast and his liturgy is “**Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?**” The product of this festering growth is spiritual anarchy. We are now living in a politically correct society, which is totally controlled by Satan.

I have no intention to demean the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. I am, however, pointing out that Christians have not done their job effectively. Satan has managed to convince us that he can be a good friend if we stop being so sanctimonious about everything. After all, this is a dog-eat-dog world and he is the top dog. James gets right to the core of the matter with his tough blue-collar mentality when he says, “**...Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5. Or do you think that scripture says in vain ‘The Spirit who dwells in us lusts toward envy.’**” **James 4:4-5.** James is not quoting any known biblical verse. He is giving us a very brief statement of truth, which is found in every book of the Bible. The Spirit referred to is probably man’s spirit, not the Holy Spirit. Our human nature has an egocentric desire to own things and this makes us both greedy and envious of others. Lucifer uses this leverage to draw us near to him and to resist God. The exact opposite of **James 4:7,** “**Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.**”

It is astonishingly strange that professed Christians can adorn themselves with a worldly spirit and govern their lifestyles by the same force and still think that they are on

the side of God. They go to church believing the church will make them more pious, but more often than not they create more pollution in the church than piety. Satan has a firm grip upon our genitalia. When we try to draw near to God he begins to squeeze a little harder, and we step right back into his realm of influence believing his seductive spirit saying: **“Who is able to make war with him?”** James answers this question with five words, **“But he gives more grace.” James 4:6.** My first reaction is to wish he had expanded on this spiritual minefield with a little more detail, but what more is there to say? Yes, Satan is a dominant power and we need to respect that danger, but we must also remember that God’s power of grace is omnipotent and it is ours if only we accept it. What an uplifting sense of power our Father has provided us with. We can make the devil flee from us in fear.

In **verse 5** we hear that **“...he was given a mouth.”** John does not identify the beings. He seems to expect that we are keeping up with him in this visual voyage through the spiritual battle going on all around us. Satan is the giver and the Unholy Spirit is the receiver. It is given one human aspect, a mouth, which is used throughout the New Testament Age, which causes appalling consequences. Again the power of the word is overwhelming. On one side is Jesus, **“...and His name is called the Word of God” Rev. 19:13,** and the other side is the beast who **“...opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.”** The word-translated *tabernacle* is *keenen* which means tent, because that is where God was worshiped before the building of the temple. Here it refers to any place where true worship is applied. This is the mother of all wars and we must realize that we are engaged in it. Some are actively involved, but the vast majority is ignorantly passive. They are uninformed because they are so ready to accept the blasphemy of the beast, **“And for this reason God will send them a strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.” II Thess. 2:11.**

I am not sure of what this strong delusion is, but I think Paul defines it for us in the first chapter of his letter to the Romans. In **verses 18-32** he describes a society so corrupted by its own carnal desires that God actually gives up on it. This begins with humanism, **“...but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened” Rom. 1:11,** and then spirals downward to total depravity. **“And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.” 1:28.** This is the product of the blasphemy of the beast. There is an almost perverted admiration for how successful his method has been. As uncomfortable as this is, the next step of his scheme is more alarming. We are told that, **“It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue and nation.”** At first this seems surprising. The beast was given permission to defeat us, the saints. Only God can grant this request, and our loving God said yes. If we understand **Daniel 7,** we already know that many saints will be collateral damage in a brutal war for the souls of mankind. **“As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them.” Dan. 7:21.** All saints must speak with the apostle Paul as one body, **“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Phil. 1:21.** Following Jesus Christ is a costly business. Many who enter the church think since salvation was free, everything

else will come easily. Unless they are truly converted, they will continue to be a part of **“And all who dwell on the earth will worship him.”**

As stated six paragraphs earlier, the Holy Spirit seems to delight in putting parenthesis around important events. From the phrase **“The Book of life”** to the end of **verse 10**, which encloses this parenthetical matter, we can see the vast expanse of time He is presenting. We go from **Gen. 3:15** to **Rev. 13:10**, an almost exact replica of what Jesus describes in **Rev. 1:8**, **“I am the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.”** The reference to the **“Book of Life,”** takes us back to a prophecy in **Daniel 12:2** about the future events we are looking at here, **“...and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation...and at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.”** This book concept continues throughout the New Testament. Jesus referred to it in speaking to His disciples after their successful mission journey, **“Nevertheless do not rejoice that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”** **Luke 10:20.** Paul mentions it in his letter to the **Philippians 4:3**, **“...And the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.”** And the Lord made an alarming comment about it in **Rev. 3:5**, **“He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.”**

Here is another incomparable parallelism. Our names are either confessed or blotted out. Which one is it, and how can we know for sure? Of those seventy disciples whose names Jesus Himself said were **“written in heaven,”** could any of them be blotted out? The answer is yes. Judas was one of them, and John tells, **“...Many of His disciples went away and walked with Him no more.”** **John 6:66.** We are told in **1 Peter 1:10**, **“...to make our calling an election sure.”** How can we be sure? This is not a very complicated issue. We either follow Jesus and stay saved or walk away and are blotted out. Believing in Jesus is easy. My conversion took all of two minutes. But following Him is a lifelong vocation; everything else is an avocation. Jesus said that we have to **“overcome”** life’s distractions in order to stay saved. He never said it would be easy, but quite the opposite. He said, **“Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”** **Mark 8:34.** It continues to boggle my mind that so many of my fellow Christians look at this blithely and walk away unchanged. Don’t they see the meaning of carrying a cross?

While we talk about this heavenly book, we somehow make God sound like an account executive and the Book of Life an auditing ledger containing all the profits and deficits of His children. Does God really need an audit to help His memory? Just writing down such a thing makes me shiver with fear much as Job must have felt when God spoke to him out of a whirlwind and said, **“Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”** **Job 38:2.** Of course God will not need an account, but it seems we will. Jesus explains this in His parable of the sheep and the goats in **Matt. 25:31-46.** Both question God about His choices. We will discover in **Revelation 20:12** that God does indeed have some account ledgers, but they contain only the names of the lost. God is a just God, and the lost must be shown why they are found guilty in a way they can understand. The Book of Life was known and understood as early as **Exodus 32:33,**

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘ whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of my book.’”

This is a fundamental issue that forms a foundation for the ultimate outcome of all mankind. John the Baptist recognized this and said, **“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29.** Peter understood this when he wrote, **“...You were not redeemed with perishable things, like silver or gold, ...19. but with the precious blood of Christ without blemish and without spot. 20. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.” I Peter 1:18-20.** In **Romans 6**, Paul says that we are baptized, crucified, died, buried and resurrected with Jesus Christ. With what we now know about the Book of Life, we may add that we were with Him before **“The foundation of the world.”** It is imperative that we think long and hard about what, by human standards, seem an implausible impossibility. We need to because of what is said in **verse 9, “If anyone has an ear let him hear.”**

The last verse in this section has an intriguing undertow. **“He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity”** applies to the outcome of the Unholy Spirits work, but it immediately reminds us of another captivity. King David is referring to the promised Messiah when he wrote, **“You have ascended on high, you have led captivity captive.” Psalm 68:18.** The apostle Paul calls this a gift of Christ when he quote it in **Ephesians 4:8, “When He ascended on high he led captivity captive.”** In the first century both BC and AD this would bring to mind the Roman practice of having a magnificent parade for a victorious general. All the spoils of victory would be displayed including all the captives of any worth or value. With this in mind, we must recognize what we really are. We are slaves, captives of the victory to be used, as He seems fit. Nobody is free; we are all a slave of either the Lord Jesus or of Satan. The second part of the verse is also addressed to the beast. **“He who kills with the sword...”** But it is for us also? Paul warns us in **Rom. 12:19, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘vengeance is Mine, I will repay’ says the Lord.”** All of which should prepare us to accept the indignities and injustices of our lives during the reign of this beast with, **“...The patience and faith of the saints.”** We like to think of ourselves as independent thinkers. This is dangerous. Jesus said, **“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. 18:3.** Like children are dependent upon parents to live and survive, so we must be dependent upon God and live by our faith in Jesus Christ.

The Beast from the Land

11. “Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. 12. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. 13. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in

the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.”

John continues to consider us as fellow observers of these beastly affairs he is recording. It seems unseemly to devote so much space to this trinity of beasts. They get three full chapters while the Holy Trinity gets only three verses in **Chapter 1:4-6**. We have to ask why? Certainly the Divine Trinity is the very center of our universe, while the beasts are the leaders in a battle already lost. So, again, why is there so much information for the one and so little for the other? I believe it is because as believers, we are far too casual about the other side. Julius Caesar said that in warfare you must understand your enemy to be victorious. We know our Creator God, our Messiah, the provider of our salvation, and the need of the Spirit for our faith. But then we get lazy about our sanctification and expose ourselves unthinkingly to the dark side. Every believer and unbeliever alike know the opening line of the **twenty-third Psalm, “The Lord is my shepherd.”** Yet many think they are saying one thing when, in reality, there are two. Even pagans acknowledge that there exists a divine providence at work in our universe. But to call Him **“my shepherd”** creates an entirely new environment. We are now identifying our owner. Satan understands our tendency to travel the easy path and avoid the narrow and difficult. We will accept a distant God and even thank Him for His saving grace, but we prefer to do our own shepherding. In doing so, we are now opening up ourselves to a full frontal attack by an enemy we don’t understand at all. So God must say to us, **“If anyone has an ear, let him hear.” 13:9.** Know your enemy!

So let us look closely at this third segment of the Unholy Trinity. Those of us who are still around when the Anti-Christ emerges into the limelight have the obligation of identifying him to the world, knowing the danger this will place us under. Since we must still dwell upon beasts for a while longer I will expand a bit on the beast from the sea. In **13:1** I didn’t comment on the **“...seven heads and ten horns,”** but now it becomes necessary. The beast from the land is an extension of the Unholy Spirit and can be understood only by going back to **Daniel 7**. Only there is his advent and purpose explained. Daniel did not see a seven-headed beast as we do in **Rev. 13:1**. What he did see was four beasts emerging from the sea all representing future empires that would affect the Jewish nation. We see one beast with seven heads, each head representing the same thing, just going back farther in time. The heads in chronological order would be Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman and the seventh head is the Unholy Spirit that terrified Daniel. He reports in **Daniel 7:7-8**, **“...It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. 8. I was considering the horns and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.”** He later says in verse **21**, **“I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints and prevailing against them.”**

Daniel did not ask for these visions, and I am guessing, but I think if he had a choice of seeing or not seeing, he would have preferred not to. They troubled him. **“I, Daniel was grieved in my spirit within my body** (literally in the midst of its sheath)

and the visions of my head troubled me.” Daniel 7:15. We also cannot receive this heart-wrenching information with a joyous spirit. However, we can thank our God for providing us with a foreknowledge of things to come so we will not be taken by surprise. The beast from the land is identified by John in his first letter, **“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Anti-Christ is coming, ...” I John 2:18.** Daniel calls him the abomination of desolation in **11:31**, which Jesus quotes in **Matt. 24:15-21**, **“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place”** (whoever reads, let him understand), **“Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains... 21. for then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.”** After such foreboding information about our future we may feel like Daniel did after writing about it. **“And I, Daniel, fainted and was sick for days; afterward I arose and went about the king’s business. I was astonished by the vision, but no one understood it.” Daniel 8:27.** But we, who live two and a half millennia later, can understand his visions and a brief fainting spell is acceptable.

After all this background, let’s look at the first thing we are told about the Anti-Christ, **“...coming out of the earth.”** The beast from the sea was a spirit, he had no human form or substance other than a mouth, but the Anti-Christ, like Jesus, will be incarnate. He, like Adam, will be a man and we think at once of God’s somber words in **Gen. 3:19**, **“In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”** We are next told, **“...The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29.** So it should be no surprise that the Anti-Christ seems to resemble Him. However his real identity comes from the way he talks, **“...He spoke like a dragon.”** In the midst of Jesus’ reference to him in **Matt. 24:15**, Matthew felt the need to enter his own thoughts to the Lord’s words, **“Whoever reads, let him understand.”** He may be telling us to look it up in Daniel to learn more about this abomination. Jesus told His disciples early on to look out for pseudo-shepherds, **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” Matt. 7:15.** Jesus appeared in **Rev. 5:6**, **“...A Lamb standing as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes.”** So the Anti-Christ is only a pale imitation of our Lord, but it seems enough to deceive the earth dwellers.

It is important not to outguess ourselves about what he will do. He is the deadly catalyst for a future holocaust that must occur before Jesus’ second coming. **“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.” II Thess. 2:3.** It is much more vital to know all we can about this **“man of sin”** than to guess about what he will do. We can’t change what we are told must occur, but we don’t have to be victims unnecessarily because we fail to recognize him when he comes. Could this really happen? Yes, indeed. Paul tell us, **“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2. speaking lies in hypocrisy.” I Tim. 4:1-2.** Paul’s term, **“the son of perdition”** tells us his relationship with the beast from the sea and the source of his supernatural powers. So this last horn on the seventh head of the second beast from the

sea will have the power to cause severe damage to the saints. Paul tells us **“The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs and lying wonders.” II Thess. 2:9.** And the Anti-Christ will do just that, **13. “He performs great signs... 14. and he deceives those who dwell on the earth by these signs...”** As alarming as this sounds, we must remember that he is only a lame substitute for our Lamb Savior. These lying wonders were done only by permission of Jehovah, **“...By these signs which he was granted to do... 15. He was granted power to give breath to the image...”** Satan still has to ask permission. God is warning us not to be fooled by flim-flam.

Tribulation

15. “He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. 16. And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, 17. and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. 18. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.”

Once again we must dampen our imagination a bit. These visions have such a powerful effect on our emotions that we have a tendency to create a venue we might prefer rather than what the Spirit is telling us. We could even be right, but preconceived ideas can produce deadly mistakes. Consider the Jewish nation expecting their Messiah to be another King David. This preconception caused them to reject a poor Galilean carpenter as a possibility, despite His miracles which made Him a fulfillment of all their prophesies. Even Nicodemus saw this intellectually, **“...Rabbi we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.” John 3:2.** Yet he could not fully believe until after Jesus’ resurrection. So let us once again look literally at what John saw in his vision and consider it’s meaning based upon what we have learned in **Revelation** so far.

The Anti-Christ will alter the field of play with a brilliant ploy. He will awaken the beast from the sea; the fourth beast described by **Daniel, “...dreadful and terrible exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces and trampling the residue with its feet...” 7:7.** And throughout the New Testament Age he has traveled rampantly through human history. But in a civilized society this blatant visual evidence of Satan’s power is counter-productive so he alters his tactics. The Unholy Spirit goes under cover and even appears dead. Yet it is only sleeping, and in the last day it will be awakened by the beast from the land. We learned and believed that idols of stone or any other material are lifeless. God said in **Habakkuk 2:19, “Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Awake!’ to silent stone, ‘Arise! It shall teach!’ Behold it is overlaid with gold and silver, and in it there is no breath at all.”** And yet the Anti-Christ it seems will do just that, and woe will follow. He ordered human hands to **“...make an image to the beast...” verse 14,** and then he gave life to it, **“...to give breath to the image of the beast...”** There is something very ironic here. Jesus brought

dead human beings back to life, and they killed him for it. The Anti-Christ will bring a lifeless beast back to life, and he will get such absolute power that he can **“...cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” 13:15.**

How can this possibly happen in a civilized society? We may be civilized, but we are more secular than civil. Jesus described the last days by comparing it to the time of Noah. **“But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.” Matt. 24:37-39.** Jesus is not condemning the world; He is just giving a statement of future fact. I find it interesting that He did not say they would die or be drowned, but only **“...took them all away...”** Perhaps this is explained in Peter’s first letter to the churches, **“...He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20. who formerly were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared...: I Peter 3:19-20.** It is no accident that the first ten chapters of the Bible and the last ten chapters bear a striking comparison to one another.

So our question has been answered; the antediluvian society was guilty of ignoring God and exalting itself in His place. The Unholy Spirit has craftily deceived modern man. The educational system has indoctrinated our children into substituting our doctrine of faith with the doctrines of evolution and humanism. This subtle serpent has seduced our society to enact a law against teaching Scripture to its own children. What a world we live in where Darwin is praised and God is outlawed, where the Gospel is rejected and evolution is praised to the sky. Bearing all this in mind, it must be blatantly clear that this immoral society of ours will not only allow us to be killed, but think it just.

There is one last thing to consider in this section. It is, of course, that most enigmatic comment in all of apocryphal writings, **“...The number of the beast, for it is the number of a man.”** It is pointless to blunder around trying to guess what the **“number 666”** really means. It is one of those need to know items that God has used throughout **Revelation**. Why burden His children with things that don’t relate to them. As Jesus said: **“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” Matt. 6:34.** The remnant who are still around when the Anti-Christ comes to power will need to know, and God will open up its full meaning for them. However, we should consider what it represents. The word-translated *mark* is *charagma* in **verse 16** was a tattoo used as a badge of slavery. It tells all observers who the owner was. Christians are given two orders in this chapter. The first is **“If anyone has an ear, let him hear.” Verse 9.** It warns us to know all we can about the beast from the sea. The second is **“Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate...”** The word for *understand* is *arithmus*, which means *add up* and *calculate* is *psayfidzo* meaning *to compute*. So God is telling us to download all this information and draw the logical conclusions He has provided. John couldn’t understand this, but we of the computer-age must. There will be tattoos; the question is, whose? God’s is given in **7:3, “Do not harm the earth, the sea,**

or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” The seal of the Anti-Christ is given here, **“His number is 666.”**

Here is an awkward pause, like a writer’s block. My mind tells me I’m done with this chapter, let it go and get on with the next chapter, but my spirit keeps clinging to something I seem to have missed. All I can think of is more has to be said about **“Here is wisdom.”** But what? Obviously the true believer must be ready and able to recognize the Anti-Christ before he comes to such devastating power. Not in order to attack and destroy him. That is not God’s plan for His people in the New Testament Age. Jesus told us what to do when we see the **“abomination of desolation.”** He said to **“...flee to the mountains.”** **Matt. 24:15.** That may also be why Matthew put in his own addendum to Jesus’ warning, **“whoever reads, let him understand.”** It is much the same as we are reading in **Rev. 13:18, “Here is wisdom. Let him calculate...”** We are told to think to consider and to evaluate what we have been told. This is why it is so strange to me that the vast majority of clergy avoids the difficult sections and dwell only on the simplicities of Law and Gospel. The author of **Hebrews** tells us how to do it. **“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2. Of the doctrine of baptism, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”** **Hebrews 6:1-2.** Now I feel more comfortable, so let us go on to **Chapter 14.**

Chapter 14

A New Song

1. “Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads. 2. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. 3. And they sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. 4. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. 5. And in their mouth was no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God.”

It is indeed a blessed relief to escape the savagery and brutality of the unholy beasts that we had to deal with in the last three chapters. We are now looking with John at the fourth vision with three more to come. Here there is delight rather than the devastation we have just traversed. We leave behind Satan and his forces and look ahead to Jesus and His survivors. What a joy it is to know that we will be involved in it all. John actually begins this section with the imperative *idou* meaning *behold*. It seems that he was just as pleased as we to escape the beasts and view the Savior. This is also more pleasant for commentators because we are again dealing with things we are familiar with and have dealt with earlier, that is until we get to **verse 4**.

We first see “**...A Lamb standing on Mount Zion.**” This must be the same sacrificed lamb we saw in **Chapter 5:6**. But now He is returning not as “**...A Lamb as though it had been slain**”, rather as a military leader at the head of an army. Mount Zion is the southern hill in the city of Jerusalem, but from early on was an allegory for heaven. We are informed of this in **Hebrews 12:22-23**, “**But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect.**” The number **144,000** must be the same as those in **7:3-8**. I am still comfortable with the conclusion made in **Chapter 7** that they represent all the saved and not to be taken literally. So we are looking at ourselves. With this in mind, it is good to know just what sealing we received back in **Chapter 7:3**. All who endured the malignant persecution of the Anti-Christ and retained their spiritual integrity now bear the names of Jehovah and Jesus on their foreheads. What a stark contrast exists between the last verse of the previous chapter and the first verse of this chapter.

John now hears, “**...A voice from heaven, like the voice...**”; by using the word *like* he is relating it to what he remembered from **Chapter 1:15**, “**...His voice as the sound of many waters.**” The apostle also heard harpists playing their instruments. This would be, “**...The twenty-four elders (who) fell down before the Lamb each having a harp... 9. And they sang a new song...**” **Rev. 5:8-9**. John does not inform us whether

they played their harps or not in **Chapter 5**, but here they do. They play and sing the new song again to the entire entourage mentioned first in **Chapter 4 & 5**. We are also told of the integral part the new song plays in our salvation. **“...And no one could learn that song except ... the redeemed from the earth.”** So once again it is imperative to look closely at what we have been taught in **Rev. 5:9-10**. Our resurrected Lord and Savior never intended us to be locked in the old covenant of Levitical priesthood but into a priesthood of all believers as stated in **I Peter 2:5**, **“You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”** We are further told that this song can only be learned by those who have been **redeemed**. This verb used again in **verse 4** is *agorazo*, which refers to items purchased in the marketplace. The hardcore truth of this is that we are bought and paid for by Jesus. We are His slaves. If this is disconcerting, you must understand that Paul, James and Peter all introduced themselves to us as slaves of Jesus Christ. If we don't think of ourselves that way, we are not redeemed and, like the unbelievers of the world, think this is too arcane to be socially acceptable.

We now arrive at one of the most remarkable and misunderstood verses in all of Scripture. The redeemed are described, as **“These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins.”** My first somewhat impious thought is that if this were to be taken literally, heaven will be a very lonely place. My second thought is, “Why haven't homosexuals jumped upon this verse as a spiritual bandwagon for deviant behavior?” The church to explain why celibacy was required for the clergy has also used this. All of which are weak explanations for a difficult passage. The assumption that heterosexual activities are defiling is incompatible with the rest of Scripture. Sexual intercourse between husband and wife is to produce both joy and offspring. Solomon commented on it quite a bit, **“May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth” Proverbs 5:18**. The word translated *fountain* is *magor*, which refers to digging a well to produce water. It is used on occasion as a delicate yet graphic reference to copulation. Considering all this, what shall we do with this provocative verse?

Once again it is Paul who provides us with an acceptable direction to pursue. He writes to the Corinthians, who are neither virginal nor pure, a passionate statement about his concern. **“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” II Cor. 11:2**. The church is depicted as the bride of Christ in **Chapter 19** and we will discuss this in detail when we arrive there. Right now we will accept the answer given here for why we are described as virgins, **“These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”** As wonderful as this sounds, we must remember what the Lord has told us about this difficult time we live in. **“Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved” Matt. 24:11-13**. This cannot be defined as easy living, quite the opposite. Following Jesus on this path which He Himself describes as narrow and difficult in His Sermon on the Mount, **Matt. 7:14**, will require great effort to make our **“...calling and election sure” II Peter 1:10**. So it now

becomes extremely gratifying to hear the high esteem we are given, from heaven itself, for having remained apostles rather than becoming apostates.

This is such a majestic section of Scripture that I have a deep-seated desire to stay with it as long as possible. So it seems beneficial to expand on the word *firstfruits*. Since both Paul and James found this word to be essential for Christian living, we need to explore it further. While discussing the indignities of sin and suffering, Paul states in **Romans 8:22-23**, “**For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. And not only they, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.**” James also in his wonderful section about the lifestyle of God’s children, gives us both the beginning and the end of our spiritual life. He starts with the conclusion in **1:12**, “**Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.**” Then he concludes by telling us how this begins. “**Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures**” **James 1:18**. This term *firstfruits* was used far more often in the Old Testament because it was so essential to God’s grand scheme of mankind’s redemption. So we need to go back to where it all began, **Leviticus 23**.

Having focused on the word *firstfruits*, I suddenly find myself treading upon a somewhat unfrequented area of Scripture. So it becomes necessary to back up and explore the history behind our word, which we are going to find is another name for Jesus. It could have been added to His list of titles given for Him in **Isaiah 9:6**, “**...And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Might God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**” And we can add **Firstfruit**; which I think is provable in **Leviticus 23**. First however we must examine the Jewish calendar. As strange as this may seem, it is an absolute necessity. Israel, like the rest of the nations in the ancient near east began the year in the month of *Tishri*, which on our calendar would be mid-September. But just prior to the tenth plague in Egypt God changed the order of months. “**Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, ‘This month shall be your beginning of months, it shall be the first month of the year to you’**” **Exodus 12:1-2**. So the first of the year now became the month of Nisan, the ides of March by our calendar. And from that time on the Jews began celebrating the feast of the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth day of Nisan. It helps to know that the Jewish calendar was lunar, not solar, so their days ran from evening to evening while ours go from morning to morning.

The second essential piece of background for the concept of *firstfruits* is the appointed feast which God gave Israel to celebrate as they journeyed through the wilderness, “**So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed feasts of the Lord**” **Lev. 23:44**. God ordained seven feasts to be celebrated annually by the Israelites at specific times during the year. Each feast was intended to prefigure important future events affecting the Jewish people. Four of these have already occurred; three are yet to come. The order of these appointed feasts is Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles. It would be interesting to consider all

of these celebrations but they are not all germane to the subject at hand. So let's examine the first three and see if there is a logical course to follow through these somewhat uncharted waters. I say uncharted because the New Testament church began to separate herself from the Old Testament at a very early date. The reasons for this were more prejudicial than scriptural. Anti-Semitism crept into the church already in Paul's lifetime regarding the Jewish festivals. He wrote to the Colossians, **"Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but now the body of Christ"** Col. 2:16-17. Paul, though correct, was ignored and the modern day church suffers from not knowing all it should about Judaism. He recognized the value of these feasts, both past and future, as being symbolic of the whole picture of Christ's sacrifice. The church preferred to create her own sacraments – baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders and matrimony. Few Christians today can tell you which of these seven their own church accepts as means of grace. Most will identify Christmas and Easter, which are not even on the list. And even these two stellar events in the church calendar are celebrated by the world in a more pagan than pious style. Early Christians fought this kind of compromise with their lives. The modern church just shrugs her shoulders and complains about the carnality of the laity.

So we really need to view closely the festivals that God provided and examine how they are relevant to us today. **"These are the feasts of the Lord, the sacred assemblies which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight (6:00 P.M.) is the Lord's Passover"** Lev. 23:4-5. Our prime objective is still *Firstfruits*. We are now ready to channel through this most beloved of all feasts, the Passover, to see the true significance of our Firstfruits Sunday. For the Jews, this was not meant to be a tradition of the church. It was intended to be a personal experience and involvement in their miraculous emancipation from Egyptian slavery. In their liturgy, the Haggadah says: "In every generation, each person should feel as though she or he were personally redeemed from Egypt." Jesus shared this supper with His disciples on Thursday, the fourteenth day of Nisan. This is called the Last Supper, not because He died the next day, but because it was indeed the last Passover feast. Jesus was going to become what He came to be, the Passover Lamb, **"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** John 1:29.

Jesus also instituted a new covenant to replace the old. He told His disciples: **"...Take, eat; this is my body." 27. Then He took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remissions of sins'"** Matt. 26:26-28. Jesus did not formulate a new church tradition but a personal indwelling experience. Paul understood the difference. He tells us in **Romans 6:3, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"** He went on to say that we were also crucified, buried and resurrected with Jesus. How could anything get more personal than that? We need to examine the purpose and use of the Lord's Supper in our church services. Like the Corinthian church, it could be doing more harm than good. **"Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse"** I Cor. 11:17. Jesus emancipated

us from the slavery of sin and death. This is our celebration; this is our true Passover Feast!

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

“On the fifteenth day of the first month the Lord’s Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat unleavened bread” Lev. 23:6. Jews throughout the centuries have celebrated Passover and Nag-Ha-Matzot, the Feast of Bread, at the same time, though they are two distinctly different feasts. The tasteless flat unleavened bread represented their hasty flight from Egypt. Thereafter leaven or yeast developed into a symbol of sin. Paul wrote, **“Purge out therefore the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth: ICor. 5:7-8.** This bread eaten during the two feasts is called, **“The bread of affliction; for you came forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: That you may remember the day when you came forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life” Deut. 16:3.**

It was not by coincidence that Jesus was crucified on Friday, the fifteenth day of Nisan, during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Though there is some question about this, which I will discuss later. On the cross, He asked, **“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Mark 15:34.** Paul answers this question in **II Cor. 5:21, “For He made Him who knew no sin to become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”** Jesus became leavened bread to make us unleavened. He depicted Himself this way for our benefit by saying, **“I am the bread of life” John 6:35.** And He made it very personal when He said, **“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world: John 6:51.** Many believers believe they are doing this when they go to communion. They, of course, are wrong. The Eucharist is a strong reminder of the heroic effort God made to rescue us from the slavery of sin and death; the enormous cost it took to set us free and make us His. Jesus told us to ingest His word. We must know Him in order to resemble Him. He told us, **“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you may ask what you desire and it shall be done for you” John 15:7.** So He who was born in Bethlehem, the house of bread, became **“The Bread of Life.”**

Thus far in this section everything has been leading up to Firstfruits Sunday, the seventeenth day of Nisan. And it seems that we have garnered all the available facts concerning its relationship to the Lord’s passion. So common sense lets us get on with this great event and continue the commentary, but something in the back of my mind keeps whispering and suggests that there is more to consider. So I did. First I considered what I have overlooked in **Leviticus 23** and found nothing. But, lo and behold! It was Moses who skipped over something. He tells us of the fourteenth, the fifteenth and the seventeenth day of Nisan, but omits the sixteenth day entirely. This term was only used once in Scripture. When King Hezekiah ordered the priest and Levites to clean and repair the temple, which had fallen into deterioration because it was unused. So they did,

and we are told in **II Chronicles 29:17-18**, “...**And on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. Then they went to King Hezekiah and said, ‘We have cleansed all the house of the Lord,’...**” There is also an allusion to the sixteenth day of Nisan in **“Joshua 5:10-12, “So the children of Israel camped in Gikal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Now the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.”**”

Now how can we use these two seemingly unrelated events to develop a program of what must have happened on the Saturday before Firstfruits Sunday? I believe we must first look at what we are told in the Apostles’ Creed and in Peter’s first letter to the church at large. We recite in the second article of the Apostles’ Creed that Jesus “...was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell: the third day He rose again from the dead.” We assume He died and was buried on Friday and resurrected on Sunday. We also know that these are in chronological order, so let’s assume He descended to hell on Saturday. Peter explains why in his first letter in **Chapter 3:19-20, “...He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared...”** The spirits He was preaching to are the antediluvians that died before and during the flood. There was no written law, so Jesus seems to be explaining to them why they are where they are.

Now we can look at how the passages from Chronicles and Joshua are pertinent to the subject at hand, the Saturday before Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus came primarily for the Jews. He affirmed this in His dialogue with a Gentile woman in **“Matt. 15:24, “But He answered and said ‘I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’”** The Israelites were lost because their clergy were so hidebound by their tradition that the church was as defiled spiritually as Hezekiah’s was physically. It was by no coincidence that Jesus cleansed the temple in both His first and last Passover journey to Jerusalem. Jesus was bring to fruition the prophecy of **“Isaiah 53:6, “Like sheep we have all gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”** The clergy were offended and troubled by Jesus’ casual attitude toward their church traditions. They even ask Him, **“Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?”** Jesus answered by calling them hypocrites and quoted a prophecy of **Isaiah, “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” Matt. 15:2 and 8-9.** On the sixteenth day of Nisan Jesus had finished the cleansing of the house of the Lord as did the priest of Hezekiah did seven and a half centuries earlier. It was now time for the Jews to understand and accept Him the same way the Samaritan woman did when Jesus said, **“But the hour is coming and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth: John 4:23-24.** Unfortunately they remained true to their clergy and rejected their savior.

The final thought about this sixteenth day of Nisan is Joshua's report of what happened that day on the plains of Jericho, **"Now the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land;" Jos. 5:12.** Immediately after their food supply ceased, Jesus appeared to Joshua, just as He did to Abraham, **Gen. 18:1,** and Jacob, **Gen. 32:24-30.** He appeared as a commanding general because the Israelites were no longer refugees needing constant divine welfare. They were now an army ready and able to care for themselves socially and militarily as long as they remembered who this ability came from. It took them forty years to reach this maturity, and during that time they were forced to trust God to miraculously feed them every day. He did that with what they called Manna, which means *what is this*. There is a mountain of opinions by commentators to answer that question. Most of them are not even good guesses. So we will simply look at what Scripture says, **"And the house of Israel called its name Manna. And it was white like coriander seed and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey" Ex. 16:31. "So when the children of Israel saw it they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat'" Ex. 16:15.**

As I ponder the words of Moses there is a stunning connection between Moses and Jesus. Moses said that Manna was divine food for the body. Jesus said, **"I am the bread of life" John 6:48,** which is food for the soul. The Jews lived on Manna for forty years, and then it stopped. But there was another spiritual food that survived throughout the Old Testament. That was the Messianic prophecies, four hundred and fifty-six of them. They ceased on Saturday the sixteenth day of Nisan on or about 32 AD. In the Apocryphal Book of Wisdom there is a remarkable reference to Manna, **"How different with your people! You gave them the food of angels, from heaven untiringly sending them bread already prepared containing every delight, satisfying every taste" Wisdom 16:20.** This almost sounds like another prophesy about the Messiah. Just as the prophetic passages of Jesus was spiritual Manna, so was the life of Christ a form of Manna. That Manna ended on Saturday the sixteenth day of Nisan. On Sunday a new refrain was shouted and has echoed down throughout the centuries, **"He has risen."** Christians do not live on Manna which **"...When the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground" Ex. 16:14.** Each day we eat His flesh and drink His blood, that is we ponder on His Word, **"...diligently, to make our calling and election sure..." II Peter 1:10.** We are simply following Jesus' orders, **"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If a man eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" John 6:51.**

This has been a long and somewhat arduous path trying to explore all the facets of *firstfruits* and how it relates to us. For the Jews it was a holiday ordained by God in **Lev. 23:9-10,** **"And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.'" This feast became a tradition described by Solomon in "Proverbs 3:9, "Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase." In time this evolved**

into tithing and lost much of its real meaning. The Feast of Firstfruits was celebrated on the seventeenth day of Nisan, which is the day Jesus rose from the dead. Christians throughout the world celebrate this every year calling it Easter Sunday. This term is reprehensible. It is named after the pagan goddess of spring, Aestra, and used only once in the King James' translation of **Acts 12:4**, **"...intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people."** All modern text correctly translates it Passover. Yet, although God has given us a holy title for this day, **Firstfruits**, the church has chosen to adopt the world's term, *Easter*. So firstfruits has lost its wonderful significance given by Paul in **I Cor. 15:20**, **"But now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."** And in **Rom. 11:16**, **"For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches."** Unfortunately for too many church members, Easter is simply a spring break.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that Jesus made it difficult for us to discern exactly what day He died on. Most if not all Christians would glibly say that Scripture says He died on Good Friday. Unfortunately the Bible does not give the day and the words of Jesus contradict this assumption. He replied to the Pharisees insistence that He perform a sign for them, **"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and there shall be no sign given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"** **Matt. 12:39-40**. It would have been simpler for us if He had just said three days and left out the three nights. Then we wouldn't have to think about it. But He said three nights and if we take this literally, it seems Jesus is mistaken or could it be church tradition that is wrong. If He died on Friday, He was only two nights in the grave. So His death date must be moved back. This is provable in Scripture, but it is lengthy and difficult, which I do not wish to do because it is not relevant to Revelation.

Angels of History

6. "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—7. saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.' 8. And another angel followed saying, ;Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.' 9. Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ;If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10. he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast, and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name; 12. Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. 13. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in

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

At the very onset of this section I must first give a sincere apology to any and all readers for my opening comments on **verses 1-5**. I said and I quote, “This is also more pleasant for commentators because we are again dealing with things we are familiar with and have dealt with earlier.” Little did I know that I was entering into a Spiritual minefield, which I had never known or imagined could exist. Doctrine is the curse of the church and I had been indoctrinated. Breaking loose of such training is both difficult and dangerous. One’s first reaction is to throw out all doctrine and start out fresh, which is dangerously arrogant, but it is healthy for one’s soul to examine them carefully and determine which are traditional and which are Biblical. Apology is an interesting word, which has two contradictory meanings. The first definition is a defense or formal justification; the second is an expression of regret. I seem to have done both.

As he has done earlier in **Chapter 10** and **8:1-5**, John uses the first five verses of this chapter as a reprieve. He takes our eyes off the sad saga of our sin-stained planet and gives us respite with a comforting view of heaven. It is now time to look down once again at the earth, our temporary home. We are in the midst of the third series of sevens. In **Chapters 6-8:1** we saw Jesus opening seven seals. In **8:2-11:15** we saw seven angels blowing seven trumpets. The third series of seven are visions, which began in **Chapter 12:1** and we are now looking at the fourth portrayal. In keeping with **Revelation**, it is again Spiritual beings getting involved in human endeavors. Here we see three angels making astonishing pronouncements upon the nations of the earth.

The Age of Evangelism

Like earlier chapters in **Revelation, 6 and 11-13**, we are looking at a chronological view of our history past, present and future. So we are getting new pieces of a puzzle that we might develop a better understanding of the whole picture. The task of the first of three angels was to preach the gospel, “**...To those who dwell on the earth.**” My first question is why? This is a work that Jesus gave to us in **Matt. 28:19-20**, “**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**” John just refers to him as another angel. There are so many references to angelic beings in **Revelation** that it is impossible to know which one John is thinking of, nor is it necessary. I have already called these, the angels of history for lack of a better term. So working on that concept, the first one would be the angel of the New Testament Age, which we are still living in. I think John didn’t name this angel because he expected us to know the answer. We know that Jesus established the priesthood of all believers in **Rev. 5:10** to replace the Levitical leadership of the Old Testament. We also must remember that He called us the angels of the seven churches in **Chapters 2 & 3**. So we are looking at ourselves, “**...flying in the midst of heaven...preaching to those who dwell on the earth.**”

Calling ourselves flying angels elevates our personal worth and spiritual responsibility to a much higher accountability. So high that some may hesitate to even try, thinking they have no talent for such lofty ideals. Or they might have other reasons, like Jonah, for escaping the task God has given to us all. He said to Jonah: **“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.’ But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” 1:2-3.** I believe we all have a Jonah buried or swallowed somewhere within us. It often seems easier to go in our own direction rather than God’s, and, like Jonah, we find unexpected difficulties we have brought upon ourselves. Fortunately for us our gracious God manages to make us useful even when we are rebellious. Although he was unaware of it, Jonah was being an effective witness. After the gentile sailors, **“...picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly and offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows.” Jonah 1:15-16.** I am not suggesting this as an excuse for our irreverent behavior, rather an explanation for Jesus waiting so long for His second coming. Peter fully understood the responsibility of Christian living when he wrote, **“...what kind of people ought you to be? You should live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of the God and hasten its coming” II Peter 3:11-12.** That word *hasten* or *speed up* is interesting. It seems that if our work was less Jonahesque and more Christlike, the, **“...new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” 3:13** wouldn’t have taken over two millennia and holding for the Lord’s second advent to arrive.

Since we are the messengers portrayed in this section of **Revelation**, it seems pertinent to look carefully at what we are to be saying: **“Fear God and give glory to Him.”** This message was much the same throughout the ages. The Persian King, Darius, decreed it to his own people after Daniel and den of lions fiasco. **“I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom all must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth...” Daniel 6:16-17.** We are not angelic beings, nor Persians kings, but we are the messengers God has chosen to use, and He expects us to be as successful as angels and kings in this present age. Our Lord is a patient God, **“...He is long suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” II Peter 3:9.** So most of us had better do some real soul-searching right now or we may have to answer some difficult questions on Judgment Day. Jesus truly expected His followers to be active evangelists. He stated this in **Luke 12:3**, **“...what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.”** We have to wonder if TV evangelism is the rooftop preaching Jesus was referring to.

The Fall of Babylon

A second angel informs us that **“Babylon is fallen.”** Our first reaction is, it serves her right. Even the angel seems to agree for twice he uttered the words **“is fallen”** which makes it a statement of jubilation. This message seems to be a repetition of **Isaiah 21:9**, **“And look, here comes a chariot of men with a pair of horsemen! And he answered and said, Babylon is fallen is fallen! And all the carved images of her god.**

He has broken to the ground.” Isaiah wrote this prophecy a hundred years before Babylon destroyed Jerusalem. And two hundred years later Babylon herself was destroyed by Cyrus the Great. After this defeat, the city began to decay and soon became a desert. So it is obvious that Babylon here is a symbolic term for a nation or amalgamation of powers that enslave or corrupt God’s people. Peter uses this term in his first letter. **“She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son” I Peter 5:13.** This is almost certainly an oblique reference to Rome who was persecuting Christians at the time of that writing. So the question arises, “Who is this Babylon?” We are looking at a future time when a proud and oppressive people collapse into ruin, a great nation that decays and destroys herself from within by her own pride and arrogance. Is that us? It may be bitter and unpleasant to think so; and like some medicines, it is hard to swallow but healthy for our well being, in this case our spiritual well being. By our adulation of Mammon and denigrating of God we have placed ourselves on the side of Satan who has already lost the war. Looking at it from this side, such a choice is criminally insane. The western world has corrupted the civilized world with its materialism. Lord, don’t let it demoralize our faith in You!!

The Age of Vengeance and Condemnation

The first angel in **verses 6-7** loudly proclaimed the task orientated responsibility of God’s people. The second announces, rather softly, to the western world that their idolatry and depravity has reached its breaking point, **verse 8**. Now the third angel of history enters and gives a scathing portrayal of the consequences awaiting anyone who **“...worships the beast and his image and receive his mark on his forehead or on his hand.”** Such a one will receive the full wrath of God, not diluted like wine mixed with water, but pure and unmitigated. As Babylon has been indulging in the intoxicating wine of Satan’s seduction, now she must drink the cup of God’s indignation. Throughout the Old Testament, God considered idolatry nothing less than Spiritual adultery. **“During the reign of King Josiah, the Lord said to me, ‘Have you seen what faithless Israel has done?’ She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there” Jer. 3:6.** Jeremiah is referring to the worship of Baal and Molech, which he will explain in **Jer. 32:30-35**. God’s indignation, like the husband of a cheating wife, is mixed with sorrow, disappointment and anger. So He pours out His wrath, **“...into the cup of His indignation.”** This cup warns us about consequences and prepares for the seven bowls of wrath we will see in **Chapter 16**. It is also the ultimate fulfillment of the prophesy God gave to Jeremiah six hundred years before the birth of Christ, **“...take from My hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all nations to whom I sent you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them” Jer. 25:15-16.**

The outcome of this outpouring upon evildoers is to be **“...tormented with fire and brimstone...”,** an obvious allusion to the consequences of Sodom and Gomorrah’s unnatural crimes. Even the reference to their smoke billowing skyward sends us back to **Genesis 19:28, “And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and behold the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.”** I find it interesting that Jesus is there observing. After His crucifixion He

descended to Hell and during the time of God's vengeance He is a spectator. What a remarkable parenthesis this is around the beginning and ending of the New Testament Age. Where are the Christians while this is going on? Could we also be observers of this like some theater audience viewing the final act of a Shakespearean tragedy? This is a distinct possibility as we will see in **Chapter 19**. Should we cheer like sport fans in a football stadium, or like true tragedy and opera lovers will we understand the pain and sorrow caused by human hubris?

It is not unexpected that John repeats the expression he used before in **Chapter 13:10**, **"...here is the patience and faith of the saints."** In this chapter the apostle leaves out the reference to our faith. I suppose he felt that if we lasted this long in the terrible persecution that is yet to come, our faith was obviously well and truly founded. I commented on patience in **Chapter 13**, but rather briefly, so a little more might be helpful. We need to be startled into a modern reality show. We may indeed find ourselves playing bit parts in the grand finale of the New Testament Age. We, at the end, must understand the drama as John did at the beginning, **"I, John your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" Rev. 1:9**. Are we prepared to suffer in patience as suggested by James, **"Be patient then, brother, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for the autumn and spring rains. You also be patient and stand firm for the coming of the Lord is at hand" James 5:7-8**. If we can be honest with ourselves we might discover that we would much prefer to be raptured up before all hell breaks loose. And if that's the case, we need to look carefully at Paul's prayer for the Colossian Christians, **"...that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, for all patience and endurance with joy" Col. 1:9-11**. And don't forget about that last word. We are to endure, not with a grim and sober countenance, but with joy. Who would ever write that in a job description?

The primary task for a Christian of the third millennium is a daunting one, how to find true joy while living in a stress filled materialistic society, which has chosen to ignore the truism Jesus gave in His Sermon on the Mount. **"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon" Matt. 6:24**. The western world has chosen to serve Mammon. How do we live in a world of greed and yet feel joy? When in doubt, ask. Jesus knows how difficult our lives might be. He told us, **"In this world you will have trouble. But I have overcome the world" Matt. 16:33**. We must remember and believe what our Lord has promised us. **"Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" Matt. 11:28**. What a marvelous verse to cling to as we look at the future of all who chose to follow mammon, **"...they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image..."** What an exact description of the work-a-day world our modern society has

forged. We have to rejoice that we are now free of such stress. The only pressure we need feel is a desire to share this wonderful secret of our success with our neighbors.

The Second Blessing

This second of seven beatitudes found in **Revelation** doesn't sound like much of a blessing: **"Blessed are the dead."** Death has such a finality to it that we have a tendency to sublimate this most absolute of all realities of life. So it is quite normal for us to have a momentary shudder of primitive fear about the grim reaper. Surprising as it seems, this euphemism for death is very close to the truth as we will discover in the last four verses of this chapter. Having exorcized my own demons concerning death, let's look at the blessings. To do so we must examine the voice making these astonishing comments. John says, **"I heard a voice from heaven saying to me..."** The apostle does not identify the speaker, probably because he was not sure himself. But, like us, he would certainly try a guess. Since Jesus was mentioned in **verse 12** and the Spirit at the end of **verse 13**, who is left but the Father. So remarkably we again see the Holy Trinity at work in **Revelation**. Arguably this could be another angel making a statement from heaven. Three angels have already spoken in this chapter, so might this not be another? Yes, possibly, but there is something distinctively different in this message. There is both comfort and promise being made to the martyrs, the souls under the altar, who said loudly, **"How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Rev. 6:10.** God has answered their prayer in this section of verses.

At the beginning John was told by Jesus to, **"write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this" Rev. 1:19.** Here John was ordered by the Father to write a guaranteed promise to all, **"...who die in the Lord from now on."** This is a promise that only God could keep. Jesus said: **"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell" Matt. 10:28.** There is an interesting Greek word at the end of this blessing, *aparti*. Our translation, *from now on*, is an exact translation. This seems to be the beginning of an answer for the often-asked question, "What happens when we die?" This second blessing is telling us that all who die with their faith intact will not molder in the grave but go immediately to their reward. As Jesus said to the thief on the cross, **"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" Luke 23:43.** Then to make it unanimous, the Spirit agrees with a resounding **"Yes."** He goes on to say, **"That they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."** Here again we have another revealing contrast between believer and unbeliever. Such a startling antithesis of one's future should cause the imprudent soul to be more prudent. Two verses earlier we were told what will happen to all who follow the beast. Jesus warned us, **"Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it" Mark 8:35.** Those who choose to obey the anti-Christ will **"have no rest day or night."** All who obey Jesus words, **"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" Mark 8:34,** shall receive **"...rest from their labors..."** So often we make our religion more complicated than it was ever intended to be. Jesus did not insist upon a scrupulously organized system of faith and worship; however, He

did love to use the simple common verb *come* to welcome us into His kingdom. He began His ministry with that in **Mark 1:17**, “**Come after Me and I will make you become fishers of men.**” And He ended His work with it in **Rev. 22:17**, “**And the Spirit and the bride say ‘Come!’ And let him who hear say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirst come.**” So this is a joyful relationship, not a somber and solemn religion. But because of our misconception of the church, most teenagers have some doubts about rest being a very exciting reward in heaven, probably because they have not yet been involved in a great deal of labor.

The term labor in this verse is *kopus*. This means grief, more than any kind of effort or work. Isaiah described the expected Messiah as “**...A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... But He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and the punishment for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed**” **Isaiah 53:3-5**. Jesus understood that for sinful human beings life would be a vale of tears. So he accepted our grief and sorrow so that through Him we could find true peace and joy, both in this life and in the next. This is the rest we crave. Why is it that some Christians don’t seem to have either peace or joy? It is probably because they haven’t asked for them. Jesus taught us what to do. “**Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you**” **Matt. 7:7**. And if that is not clear enough, Paul explained it more fully in **Hebrews 4:9-12**, “**There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword...**”

As we come to the end of these remarkable angelic proclamations a few thoughts are needed about the last few words, “**And their works follow them.**” They seem to be the only things we can carry with us to the grave. But what are they? What does scripture say about this? The fact that it is part of a beatitude leads us quickly back to Jesus’ opening for His Sermon on the Mount. “**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ...Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ...Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you**” **Matt. 10:42**.

These works are certainly not synergistic actions that earn our way into heaven by our good deeds. Rather they describe the character of a Christian who has heard and understood the words of Jesus. “**Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.; If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you: John 15:20.** Shortly before His crucifixion Jesus concluded His teachings about the actions of His followers. He speaks of His second coming and what He, as a judge, will do. “**And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the king will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me’.**” **Matt. 25:33-35**. In His last sermon, the night before His death, He referred to us

as branches, **“I am the vine, you are the branches, He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing”** John 15:5. So here we have the true character of a believer. As followers of the Way we will be buffeted, bruised and sometimes broken, which will produce the works that follow us into heaven. It is a fair and profitable exchange.

The Angels of Harvest

14. “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. 15. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.’ 16. So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. 17. Then another angel came out of the temple, which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18. And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, ‘Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.’ 19. So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.”

As this chapter proceeds chronologically, we are approaching the last days of our poor and abused planet, earth, named after its first inhabitant. It will be a great and long awaited experience for us, but a bitter and surprising one for the unbelievers. It starts with John seeing the sixth vision in this third series of sevens. The apostle sees Jesus as he did in **verse 1** and again used the imperative *idou* meaning *behold*. It is healthy for us to be as equally amazed and emotionally affected as John, the writer. In **verse 1** we saw the first advent of our Lord and the history of our faith. Here we are seeing His second coming, which is the future upon which our faith is based. **“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”** Heb. 11:1. By the grace of God, through the eyes of John, we can see both substance and evidence through our belief. As the apostle Paul said, **“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible”** Heb. 11:3.

Son of Man

John seems to understand that he is seeing a revised version of the same vision Daniel saw. **“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion. Which shall not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed”** Dan. 7:13-14. Daniel is seeing the future in literal form. John

is presented with a symbolic form, which he conveys to us, just as he saw it. John sees Jesus returning just as He foretold He would do. But John does not identify Him as Lord or the Christ, but “...**The Son of Man...**” as he did once before in **Rev. 1:13**. His purpose in both cases is to take us back to **Daniel 7**, which is the only place in the Old Testament which this title is used to present the Messiah. This is also the only designation Jesus used for Himself, and He did it often. Matthew recorded this designation thirty times in his Gospel. He records Jesus saying it twice in **24:30**, “**Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.**” But why did Jesus choose that cognomen? I’m guessing it was to remind us that He, the second Adam, had come to restore what the first Adam had lost in his Eden error. In Hebrew, the son of man would be written as *bar Adam*.

What we are seeing here is a view of the future event described by the Lord in each apocalyptic chapter of the Gospels, **Matt. 24:30, Mark 13:26, Luke 21:27**. This is fair warning. While all nations will be taken by surprise and mourn their fate, not so for God’s people. Paul said in **I Thess. 5:4**, “**But you, brothers, are not in darkness, so that This Day should overtake you as a thief.**” This is the second coming. Now Jesus is wearing “**a golden crown,**” not a crown of thorns. He now has the royal authority to rule and judge all mankind. We understand the concept of rule and Lordship, but cringe a little bit with judgment because there is a certain harshness and finality about it. But just as kings of both the Old Testament and New Testament were considered as rulers and judges, so must be our Lord. Paul appealed to the Roman emperor in **Acts 25:10-11**, “**Then Paul said, ‘I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know... I appeal to Caesar.’**” King Solomon was a judge when appealed to by two prostitutes in **I Kings 3:16-28**, “**Then two women who were harlots came to the king, and stood before him.**” In this poignant story of love and greed it is healthy for us to relate not to the wise king, but the two tarnished petitioners. As sinners, like them, we will stand unclean before Jesus, “**On the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel**” **Rom. 2:16**. Jesus Himself told us what God has appointed Him to do: “**And has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man**” **John 5:27**. We need to look closely at why the king blessed one of these soiled doves of the night and condemned the other. We will all stand before our judge one day. Will we be sheep who hear, “**...come you blessed of My Father,**” or goats and hear, “**...depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire...**” **Matt. 25:31-46**. If we don’t know the answer to that question, we are probably goats.

The Reaping of the Redeemed

We also may be a little uneasy when we hear that we will be harvested up by being sickled down. And the reaping will be done by the Lord Jesus, Himself. Our immediate response is the feeling that this is going to hurt, which is a natural feeling for unredeemed sinners who feel the guilt of their lifestyle; but not for the forgiven. So we need to look again and realize that Jesus loved to tell parables about this harvesting and expected us to understand them. There are three such accounts in **Matthew 13** alone.

Fortunately for us He had to explain them to His disciples. Just three verses will give us the intent: **“...The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels: Matt. 13:37-39.** So this paragraph ends as it began with Jesus sitting on a cloud. He now leans down, reaps up the believers who survived the Tribulation and brings them up to Him. We can call this the Rapture.

Scything the Sinful

As we near the end of this chapter, we again see the balance and order of God’s plan for history. It began with the redemptive appearance of Jesus and progressed chronologically through time, right up to the final act, the reaping of the damned. It is a repeat of the previous three verses. Another angel comes out of the temple and at the command begins to reap with a scythe. The only difference being it is them and not us, who are being cut down. Jesus did the harvesting in **verse 16** just as He longed to do for the Jews. He said in **Luke 13:34, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!”** What a crushing mistake for them but a blessing for us.

In this section two more angels appear. The first angel with a sickle comes away from the altar, and the next angel, **“Who had power over fire,”** gave orders to reap **“The vine of the earth.”** Although this no longer involves us, it is beneficial to examine the two new elements provided for our information. There has been no mention of fire in previous references to the altar or throne of God. It is generally a symbol of destruction, and it will be discussed more fully when it appears again in the next chapter. The destruction shown here is crushing people like grapes in a winepress. The first angel harvests, **“...The vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.”** To understand the term we must look at Jesus’ reference to the harvesting of grapes in **Matt. 21:33-44.** This was Jesus’ most thinly veiled parable because He truly desired the Jewish leaders to see the consequences of their intentions. We, too, must see that the time is ripe, which is the meaning of the term **fully ripe.** Mankind has developed to a point at which it must be accountable for its plundering of God’s kingdom. Jesus is the vine for the children of God. **“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes that it may bear more fruit.”** Satan is the **“vine of the earth”** and his followers will produce sour grapes that will cause the wrath of God to fall upon them. Jesus explained their outcome in **Matt. 13:41, “The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.”** The Prophet Joel predicts an identical event. **“Put in the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow for their wickedness is great” Joel 3:13.** Jesus has described His Father as a vinedresser. Isaiah expressed Him this way in **63:3-4, “I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger and trampled them in My fury; their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, and I have stained all My robes. For**

the day of vengeance is in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come.” John has just shown us this bloody carnage in a full and unadulterated depiction. Why do we need to see this? Because, if we care at all about our fellowman, we will at least speak out to warn them. Jesus, Himself has asked us all to be good Samaritans by instructing us **“to love our neighbor as ourselves: Matt. 19:19.** And if we, like the lawyer, ask who our neighbor is, we need to re-examine the parable in **Luke 10:29-37.**

Chapter Fifteen

Heavenly Praise

1.”Than I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. 2. And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. 3. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb saying: ‘Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways O King of the saints! 4. Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before you, for Your judgments have been manifested.”

This chapter, like, **Chapters Four, Five, Seven and Ten**, is a transition between groups of allegories the Lord is giving to us through John. In each case, the seventh supernatural appearance is there to produce the next series of sevens as in **8:1** and **11:15**. Here John is viewing his seventh vision, which prepares us for the final catastrophic septet, the seven bowls of wrath in **Chapter sixteen**. We are immediately told that bad news is coming and it will be final, **“For in them the wrath of God is complete.”** In case we missed it in **14:15**, **“...For the harvest of the earth is ripe.”** We get it here in a much more literal form, so we have no excuse for ignorance. Although John calls it **“great and marvelous,”** it is anything but for the vast majority of mankind. If we also may feel a little uncomfortable with what seems like God overreacting just a bit, this chapter is here to rectify our thinking process.

The picture John now sees is an altered depiction of what he saw in **Chapter Four**. **“Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne and around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back: 4:6,** which represented heaven’s perspective of the New Testament Age. Now we see heaven viewing humanity after the time that Jesus described in **Matt. 24:9-13**. **“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My names sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.** We now see those who endured and **“have victory over the beast...standing on the sea of glass...”** This would be the promise God made through Isaiah centuries ago, **“Thus says your Lord, the Lord your God, who pleads the cause of His people: See I have taken out of your hand the cup of trembling, the dregs of the cup of My fury; you shall no longer have to drink it. But I will put it into the hand of those who have afflicted you, who have said to you, ‘Lie down, that we may walk over you’”** Isa. 51:23.

There is another addition to the picture John saw in **Chapter Four**. Now the platform for God’s throne is **“mingled with fire.”** As mentioned in **Chapter Fourteen**,

fire, if not a symbol of the Holy Spirit, is a sign of damnation and destruction. The sixth angel who came out of the altar in **14:18** was represented as an angel of fire with the command to use it for destruction. I do not mean to be facetious about this, but in my imagination I see this as the residue or embers of this angel on the spot he stood before he went to do his work. Now his job is over and we are reminded of the severity this involves. Perhaps it is safer to use a picture that we know is scriptural, **“...His throne was a fiery flame. Its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him...” Dan. 7:9-10. Verse 2** summarizes the information given in **14:9-13** quite succinctly. The victory over the beast is pronounced and the redeemed are standing around God’s throne holding their harps, ready to break loose into song and to praise their God.

Song of Moses

As is so often the case, we have to ask why? Why the song of Moses? And which song is referred to? Because Moses produced two psalms, **Exodus 15:1-15, Deuteronomy 32:1-43**, and the two verses we are questioning here is found in neither song. We need to ponder on this before just plowing through a seemingly contradiction, or worse yet an error. Possibly Moses composed it, but for some reason he left it out of the Pentateuch. But this is a lazy and dangerous way to deal with a puzzle that God has provided for us to solve. The Lord has produced a pattern in this book we need to apply here. He loves to tell the whole story, to have a beginning and ending with clear parameters around them so that we can see and know the truth. We have such a parenthesis here. We must use both songs of Moses and consider the evidence.

Moses sang with joy after passing through the Red Sea. **“I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and rider He has thrown into the sea! The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation” Exodus 15:1-2.** After struggling through four decades of Israel’s rebellion and idolatry Moses has brought them to the promised land but he sees them as people who, **“...has corrupted themselves; they are not His children, because of their sins they are a perverse and crooked generation” Deut. 32:5.** So he sings them this song, which documents the faithfulness of God and the faithlessness of Israel. This is a grim psalm about a, **“...foolish and unwise people” verse 6.** Just before he sang his song, Moses said, **“I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will fall upon you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord...” Deut. 31:29.** What a shiver this should send right up from our spine to our mind. We are being instructed to learn from the grievous errors of Israel. If we can do this we can sing the new song and say: **“Great and marvelous are your works Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints,”** which is a metamorphosis of Moses’ songs into **“...the song of the Lamb.”** We learned about and loved the new song of the Lamb given in **Rev. 5:9-10 and 14:3.** We can justly rejoice in this drama portraying the trials and travails of the redeemed. We can relate to the first song of Moses in Exodus, but we must not ignore his last song. It may be more relevant than the first. Remember the words of Jesus about the entrance to heaven, **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate**

and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. For narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it: Matt. 7:13-14.

The Tabernacle of Testimony

5. “After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. 6. And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands. 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. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.”

After spending a few verses describing the scenery surrounding his vision, John proceeds with the sign the apostle started to tell us about in **verse 1, “After these things I looked and behold...”** The word translated *temple* is *skene* here and in **11:19** and **Acts 7:44** is really a *small cloth hut* or *tent*. It was used to protect the Ark, which contained God’s written law, as Israel trekked through the wilderness. After Solomon built the temple, it was the innermost part of the tabernacle, called the holy of holies. John calls it **“The temple of testimony.”** When he saw it in **11:19**, John reported that **“...the Ark of His covenant was seen in His temple”** indicating that something quite remarkable was about to happen. And, indeed it is. Suddenly the *skene* opens up and seven angels, garbed as temple priests, proceed out to be met by the fourth living creature introduced back in **4:7-8**. The angelic being hands them **“...seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God...”**

There is a certain solemnity and dignity surrounding all these procedures, which makes me think that perhaps it will be done in silence. Back in **Chapter Eight** there was a half hour of silence before the seven trumpets of vengeance began. Whether this happened here or not is irrelevant, but it helps me to feel the awe and the fear of God necessary to comprehend fully the depth of this last verse of **Chapter Fifteen**. The wrath of God must be felt and seen emotionally for us to be wise enough to just back off while God’s anger saturates His Holy of Holies so **“...that the wrath of God is complete”** **verse 1**. This reminds us of a statement God made to Moses in **Exodus 19:21**, **“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the Lord, and many of them perish’.”** We also need to be cautious lest we become overly casual about our approach to Jehovah or vice versa. As we finish this chapter, we need to be as impacted as Isaiah was when he saw the throne of God, **“And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. Then I said: ‘Woe is me for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips...’”** **Isa. 6:4-5**. So it is for our own safety that **“...No one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.”** With this understanding we are now ready to proceed into **Chapter Sixteen**.

Chapter Sixteen

The Bowls of Wrath, v. 1

1. “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, ‘Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.’ “

Chapter Sixteen is a continuation of the previous chapter. This is evident by John’s introduction. He writes of hearing loud words coming out of the holy of holies. This immediately takes us back to **15:5-8**, which was a scenario that prepares us for the seven plagues in sixteen. This, in turn, pulls us back to **verse 1** where we were introduced to **“...seven angels having the seven last plagues.”** My inclination is to jump right into the seven plagues of **Chapter Sixteen** because I think I know enough to write a concise commentary about future things, which do not apply to us anyhow. The vengeance of God is for unbelievers, not for believers. But by his introduction, **“Then I heard a loud voice...”** John seems to be suggesting that we look back and think again about what was said in **Chapter Fifteen**. He appears to be warning us not to presume things about future events before carefully examining the surrounding circumstances, which, of course, is what I have done. It is somewhat disconcerting to read too much between the lines, but in this case it seems justifiable. So I shall look back.

The first thing I note is an anomaly I missed the first time through. Twice John tells of seeing **“...seven angels having the seven last plagues,” 15:1 & 6** and I concentrated on the apostle’s use of the words *last* and *complete* and ignored the primary verb, *having* or *possessing*. For inexplicable reasons, I guessed that they were given the plagues to pour out and contaminate the earth. However John says they themselves were the plagues and were given gold containers filled with **“...the wrath of God.”** So in this case, angels who are normally messengers of the Gospel are quite the opposite here. They are bearers of bad news, very bad news, the **“wrath of God... There are sufficient cases of such angels of death in Scripture. The last plague God cast upon Egypt is a prime example of such a being. “For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you” Exodus 12:23.** More examples are found in **I Chronicles 21:15** and **II Sam. 24:16-17**. In the New Testament it was an angel of death, which caused the demise of Herod in **Acts 12:23, “Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died.”**

From **Genesis** through **Revelation**, plagues have been the visual consequences of mankind’s disobedience of God’s commands. There is no excuse. If we are indeed the children of God we must know and follow the rules our Father provides for us. If we prefer to be prodigals we must know and understand the consequences of our choices. As the tribes of Israel were preparing to cross the Jordan River to enter their promised land, Moses called them a special people of God. **“Also today the Lord has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He has promised you that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the Lord**

your God, just as He has spoken” Deut. 26:18-19. The only requirement was to obey. It is much like husbands and wives are asked to do in their wedding vows, to love, honor and obey. A commitment, which is quickly but often thoughtlessly made. To hear and obey are as simple and easy as they sound, but the resistance of natural man is equally powerful to cause rebellion.

The children of Israel had so much potential. God himself saw them as a special breed and as such they had marvelous blessings promised to them. This is recorded in **Deut. 28:1-14.** The only requirement was to obey. **“Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God to observe carefully all His commandments which I command to you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God” vs. 1-2.** In the following twelve verses God gives us a specific outline of His blessings. **“Blessed shall you be in the country... The Lord will open to you His good treasure... So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I commanded you this day, to the right hand or to the Left, to go after other gods to serve them” vs. 3-14.** The following fifty-four verses tell us the consequences of disobedience, and they are alarming to say the least. The curses are painful just to read about. They are visual examples of the wrath of God. Yet they must be read as diligently as we did the blessings in order to understand as Solomon did when he wrote: **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” Proverbs 10:9.**

We, like the children of Israel, are a special people and as such we must know both our privileges and our responsibilities. Peter reminds us of this in **I Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”** We like the Jews have enormous potential to be visual examples of the reality and power of our God. Jesus calls us the, **“...salt of the earth...and the light of the world...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” Matt. 5:13-16.** This is our responsibility; it is not a request, it is a command. It is true that we are now free of most if not all of the ceremonial laws given in **Deuteronomy.** They were foretokens of the coming Messiah and fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But they were never meant to be ignored, as they seem to be in the church today. God did say: **“But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that these curses will come upon you and overtake you” Deut. 28:15.** We need to consider all of His laws carefully, knowing that the moral laws are still in effect. God’s laws are much like our traffic laws, which tell us how fast we may drive and when to stop. They are easy to obey, but most of us are prodigal drivers. We do as we please if there are no speed traps around. **Chapter Sixteen** is a strong warning about the danger of ignoring the rules. If we do, we become easy prey for the unholy trinity.

So, after again exploring the method, purpose and use of God's plagues, I feel more comfortable with entering this dread-filled chapter. God has asked us to keep a lifestyle that reflects the spiritual genes of our Father. If we are indeed His children, it must be obvious by the way we live. Jesus summarized all the laws into just two, **"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these"** Mark 12:29-31. So often the message of the church suggests that we are contemptible sinful beings, which indeed we are, but they infer that we are needful of the clergy as our mediators with God. This was true for the Jews. They needed a high priest as an intercessor for the forgiveness of their sins. Jesus is our one and only mediator; nor should we have any other. If we do, it is idolatrous. The consequences of shifting our focus from Christ to the church again make us easy targets for the enemy. With this in mind, **Chapter Sixteen** presents to us a dramatic image of the danger there is for those whose focus has been diverted from the Word of God to church tradition.

As I sit at my desk thinking of the last few thoughts I have written, the music coming from my radio is Christmas carols. This wonderful church festival is only twelve days away, and as I listen to the words I realize that half of the music is secular, not Christian. This in itself is not bad; many are beautiful songs for the season. But far too many of them are purposely designed to shift the focus of Christmas from Christ to Mammon. I have offended more parents than I care to think about by being such an Ebenezer Scrooge about their Christmas activities. Their Christmas traditions have become so deeply imbedded into their consciousness that to be told it is being misdirected only results in self-righteous anger. Satan's most successful assault upon the kingdom of God was to switch the focus from Christ to Santa. I can almost hear him roaring with laughter every time we sing, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town." All he did was transpose the letters of his own name, and suddenly children love him and sing about him with joy. He has a lot of help, mostly from parents. They lie to their children and believe it is just a little white lie, which gives them pleasure. It is not! It is a huge red lie that puts them and their children in danger. Jesus pointed to this danger when He said, **"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea"** Mark 9:41. So I feel more concern than joy when I watch a children's program on Christmas Eve. They are singing and telling the story about the birth of the Son of God, but their body language and faces show their impatience to get away from Jesus Christ and get home to find what Santa Claus has left them.

I know I am being redundant, but I can't seem to stop myself. Perhaps it is just my own personal hang-up, but I feel overwhelmed by the full impact of this coming danger exuding from these angels of death and the impending series of plagues. Jesus has instructed us to view the inhabitants of this planet just as He did. **"When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The**

harvest truly is plentiful but the laborers are few” **Matt. 9:36-37**. I would like to think that Jesus was hearing the same mournful cry of a lost people Jeremiah heard. **“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!” Jer. 8:20**. It is so easy to be critical and condemnatory of our fellow earth dwellers. It seems to give us a better view of our own character. What a hazardous way of thinking. This kind of misconception will force Jesus to see us as goats and say: **“...Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” Matt. 25:41**. How can we avoid such a disaster? The easy answer is to recite **John 3:16**, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”** This indeed is true, but the next question is will they stay saved? Peter told us how this could be guaranteed. **“Therefore brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble: II Peter 1:10**. One way to achieve this is to do as Jesus instructed us. We need to care, and out of that care, to warn the lost sheep that the end is near and if they wait too long, it will be too late. We will see in **verses 9 and 11** that mankind does not repent. Even though they feel the wrath of God they blaspheme the only one who could heal them. Why? There is no answer to this question. Perhaps we have not cared enough to warn them.

The First Bowl, v. 2

2. “Then the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped them his image.”

The first thing we notice is that this chapter is devoted exclusively to what happens directly after the Time of Tribulation. Now is the time of Vengeance. To prepare for this we examined the plagues of God throughout Scripture, so this first bowl of wrath is somewhat surprising. Why does God begin His wrath with malignant skin disease? I believe He wants the elect to see the value of not giving in to the anti-Christ. Though this first plague is identical to the sixth plague in **Exodus 9:8-12**, the exact reason for this is not told there. It is Paul who gives us the whole story of the disaster in Egypt and the one yet to come. He says in **II Tim. 3:1-9**, **“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves. Lovers of money, boasters, blasphemers, ...always learning and never to come to the knowledge of truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth:”** These two magicians thwarted God’s effort to change Pharaoh’s heart by emulating the miracles of Moses with tricks. So Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, the result of which was the sixth plague. **“And the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils were on the magicians and on all the Egyptians” Exodus 9:11**. Now we can see why the sixth Egyptian plague becomes the first one during the Time of Vengeance. It is directed against the people who were deceived by sorcery and submitted to the mark of the beast. God has warned us to resist the evil one and be obedient to His word or: **“The Lord will strike you with the boils of Egypt, with tumors, with the scab, and with the itch from which you cannot be healed. The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of heart” Deut. 28:27-28**.

The Second and Third Bowls, vs. 3-4

3. “Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died. 4. Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood.”

This chapter continues to be a modification of **Chapter Eight**, where both salt and fresh water caused the death of **“Many men” 8:11**. What will happen in some future date has happened before. The first plague in Egypt occurred because of one man’s hardness of heart. **“So the Lord said to Moses: ‘Pharaoh’s heart is hard, he refuses to let the people go... By this you shall know that I am the Lord. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river...’ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron, take your rod and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt; over their streams, over their rivers, over their ponds, and over all their pools of water, that they may become blood. And there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt’” Exodus 7:14-19**. For some inexplicable reason some people think God just turned the Nile red. They must have learned that from the movies. We need also to be aware that this affected only Egypt. The first and second bowls in **Revelation 16:2-3** tells of death worldwide for many. As an after thought, I wonder if the water in Goshem also turned into blood. I think it did. I believe Moses and Aaron would of course tell their people to fill their bathtubs with water just in case. But that’s a guess. We know that God prevented the flies and hail with fire **Exodus 8:22** and **9:26** from touching Goshem, but the other eight plagues seemed to strike all of Egypt. Even the last plague passed over Goshem and only those who bloodied their doors were unaffected by death.

The Angel of the Waters, vs. 5-7

5. “And I heard the angel of the waters saying: ‘You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because you have judged these things. 6. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.’ 7. And I heard another from the altar saying, ‘Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.’”

Chapter Sixteen persists in providing surprises to the reader. After struggling through the bloodied waterways of Egypt, we expect the fourth angel to display the next disaster. Instead there is a brief time out. Perhaps it is to cause modern readers to reflect upon the effect blood has upon all humanity. While it flows through our veins we live, when it stops we die. The blood of Christ provides eternal life, but if we stop accepting this truth we will die. God told Adam, **“...The day that you eat of it you shall surely die” Gen. 2:17**. And Adam died spiritually the moment he took the fruit from the hand of Eve. Satan has never altered the method of his attack. He still quietly whispers to us all, **“You will not surely die” Gen. 3:4**. Since this lie is still effective with both intellectuals and simpletons alike we need to hear from a chorus of angels about the majesty of Our God. While their message is almost laconic in its brevity, we must be stunned by its scope. Just as the **“Song of Moses”** in **Chapter Fifteen**, this accolade provides further attributes to Our Father. In case we might feel these plagues are too vindictive, the angels remind us of the fact that God is both righteous and eternal. **Verse**

5 repeats a description of God given in 1:14, **“Grace and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come.”** It also reminds us that He is a God of vengeance to those who maim and kill His children. There is no help in identifying whose voice is coming out of the altar in **verse 7**, so we have to guess. I would like to think that it is the voice of martyrdom coming out from under the altar in **Rev. 6:10**.

The Fourth Bowl, vs. 8-9

8. “Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. 9. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him Glory.”

Regardless of the purpose for this brief time out, we can now see this chapter as an amalgamation of earlier chapters. With this in mind, we are now ready to get close and personal with a time yet to come, understanding that it is more imminent than futuristic. The fourth bowl is related to the fourth trumpet in **8:12 “...And a third of the sun was struck.”** However, the difference is significant. In **chapter 8** the sun was diminished; here it is magnified. There is no precedent for anything like this in all of history. What about the few Christians that are still alive: How would they be protected from such a solar blast? There are no answers for any of this. Scripture gives us ample warnings of such a disaster, but not a word about escaping it. The last chapter of the Old Testament says: **“For behold the day is coming, burning like an oven and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up” Malachi 4:1.** Isaiah records an even more devastating prophecy: **“The earth mourns and fades away, the world languishes and fades away; the haughty people of the earth languish. The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth. And those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left” ISA. 24:4-6.**

So we shall cling to our faith and with joy in our hearts we will wait and see. Which is what I believe was God’s purpose all along for not telling us ahead of time how He intends to care for His flock. How different this scenario is from the reactions of the unbelievers. As their world falls apart around them and with their friends and neighbors they are scorched and burned with heat. Their response is insane. This plague is beyond their understanding and experience. It is so supernatural that they can even recognize its source. As Christians we can see only one action, get on your knees in contrition and repentance. But they don’t; perhaps they can’t. Possibly, like Pharaoh, even after seeing the awesome power of God’s mighty works their hearts are so hardened that all they can do is to curse the God who sent the plagues. We can only be astonished at such ignorance, but not too much. For we see it in every level of the society in which we live. We must warn them even though it will bring us hatred and active persecution.

The Fifth Bowl, vs. 10-11

10. “Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. 11. And they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.”

The first four bowls were poured out upon our natural environment, the earth, water and sun. Bowl five takes us into the realm of the spiritual. This plague is an inundation of darkness upon the empire ruled by the beast of the land discussed in **13:11-18**. In Scripture, darkness is generally a manifestation of evil. Jesus explained His mission to Nicodemus in **John 3:19-20**, **“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.”** This section demonstrates the consequences of a society that denigrates itself into a life full of darkness. And they did it to themselves by not only ignoring Jesus, but also actually attacking Him both legally and morally. Spiritual darkness is a product of opening the door to evil. **James** says, **“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” James 4:7.** When an entire society reverses this dogma so they resist God and submit to Satan, it is darkness at its worst!

Stepping over to the dark side is always dangerous. Evil will do evil, even to those who are obedient to the devil. It can't help itself. A somewhat subtle example of this is found in the story of the Gadarene demoniac told in **Luke 8:26-39**, when the demonic spirits possessing the man pleaded with Jesus not to send them back into the Abyss. They begged instead to be allowed to go into a herd of swine. He gave them permission, but when they left Legion and entered into the pigs, the demons immediately drove the pigs into the lake and drowned them. I have been asked often why Jesus allowed the request of demons? I can't speak for Jesus, but I'm guessing that He fully understood that evil couldn't help but to do evil to anyone or thing that hosts it. We will see this more clearly in the next chapter.

A much clearer danger is seen in the sad story of Judas. He had a love for money that overwhelmed him. Luke relates the consequences of his greed. **“Then Satan entered Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the twelve. So he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains. How he might betray Him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money” Luke 22:3-5.** In Matthew's account, we find out that Jesus was sold for thirty denaria, the average cost of a slave. **“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘what are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?’ And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver” Matt. 26:28.** Evil had possessed Judas so completely that He was beyond recovery, even when he tried to undo his breach of faith. **“When Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ And they said, ‘what is that to us? You see to it.’ Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and**

departed, and went and hanged himself” Matt. 27:3-5. The last reference to Judas is when the disciples are replacing his position among the twelve: **“To take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” Acts 1:25.** Judas lost his fellowship, his money, his life and his soul. What a price to pay for submitting to evil. We also can expose ourselves to mortal peril if we don’t learn from Judas how corrupting it is to embrace sin. Darkness must be expelled not exploited. God’s words to Saul, after his conversion was: **“I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God...” Acts 26:17-18.**

The spiritual darkness caused by this fifth bowl is so excruciating that the people **“gnawed their tongues.”** On several occasions Jesus related the grinding of one’s teeth to the anguish of being condemned to hell: **“...all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness, will be cast into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth” Matt. 13:41-42.** The word used for gnashing in every case is *brugmos*, **Matt. 13:50, 24:51, Luke 13:28.** Here, however, another Greek word is used, which is found in no other place in the New Testament. It is *massaomai*, which means to chew. So a more exact translation for the pain caused by the fifth bowl would be: **“...and they chewed their tongues because of the pain.”** We can all relate to this; at one time or another we have all bitten our tongues accidentally while eating. Here the people do it on purpose. How awful is that? Now, awful can be used to describe full of awe, or it may mean dreadful. In the kingdom of the anti-Christ it means the latter. The people’s response to their pain again is to blame rather than to pray. **“So they blasphemed the God of heaven...and did not repent of their deeds.”** Believers may find this inexplicable behavior, but we must remember the source of their actions. They are reflecting the genes of their spiritual father. We saw the same demeanor in the beast from the sea in **13:5, “And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies...”**

The Sixth Bowl, vs. 12-16

12. “Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. 13. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. 15. ‘Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.’ 16. And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.”

There is an alarming parallel between the sixth bowl and the sixth trumpet in **9:13-21.** I expressed my discomfort then, in writing about something so distressing and enigmatic. It is always dangerous to explain the obscure wrapped up in an enigma. Yet it pops up here and in doing so, it seems that God expects His children to interpret this correctly. Since we appear to be nearing **“the great and dreadful day of the Lord”**

Mal. 4:5, we had better give it our best effort. We need to peer through the mist of prophecy and find a way to let Scripture explain Scripture. So, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, let us take a peek. Always remembering what Paul warned young Timothy about in **I Tim. 4:1**, “**Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.**” Let’s pray we get this conundrum solved with the use of both Spirit and mind. I put Spirit before mind because I have a tendency to get in the way of the Spirit. Whenever that occurs, little if anything good comes of it.

While commenting on **9:13-15**, I was uncertain about what I was looking at. Although the Euphrates River was referred through Scripture from **Genesis** through **Revelation**, none of these sources helped here. What is the significance of the Euphrates River and its tributaries and what have they to do with the time of tribulation? Was it to be taken literally or metaphorically? I had no answer for these questions, so I wrote very little about it in **Chapter Nine**. Yet, here it appears again with a bit more information, not much, but obviously the Lord thinks it is enough for those given gifts for it. Although the Spirit does not introduce this section with His favorite precedence, “**If anyone has an ear, let him hear**” **Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29** and **13:9**, it is lacking here. Since we are close to the breaking point of understand **Revelation** or not, I am guessing we are expected to figure it out without a precept. So back we go to rethink and find a logical reason for using the Euphrates as a method of mass destruction.

Right up to the twentieth century, the Euphrates River was considered a protective barrier between East and West. After the introduction of aviation, this was no longer a rampart of defense. So now we must think about it as another kind of barrier. In **9:14** four angels, imprisoned for their rebellion, were released to perform a massive killing on the population, “**a third of mankind.**” In **Chapter Sixteen** an angel of death dried up the Euphrates to open up a passage for the armies of the East. These are two different invasions from the same source, one metaphor in which each individual part needs to be extracted and studied separately. The difficulty lies in the river itself. I have to accept the name literally because it is used this way throughout Scripture. I must also use it as a metaphor in order to make any sense out of it for our generation. This is where opinion comes in because there is no proof from a biblical text. The only real barrier I can see between East and West other than cultural is money. The West has been the dominant form of government since the Roman Empire began before the birth of Christ. You can’t have military power without financial support. The balance of power moves as power of money moves. This is debatable, but I think the metaphor of the Euphrates is a drying up of money in the West as it grows more power in the East. In one word, oil, it has changed the world, as we knew it. So it befits us to get a clear-eyed vision of the future we have in store for us in the next four verses.

Although I thought I was ready to go on into the next component of this section, I found myself somewhat reluctant to leave behind the drying up of the Euphrates. Probably because I mentioned in the last paragraph that there was no biblical text to support supposition. Then it occurred to me that there is a remarkable parallelism between the drying of the Euphrates and the parting of the Red Sea in **Exodus 14:29**,

“But the children of Israel had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” There is about 600 miles, called the Fertile Crescent, between the Red Sea and the Euphrates River, but we need to be more interested in time than space. The crossing of the Red Sea was the beginning of a nation, the Israelites, the children of God who would produce the Messiah. The drying up of the Euphrates is the beginning of the end. And we can say the “end” because God said it in **15:1**, **“...seven angels having the seven last plagues.”** Plagues were common throughout Scripture, but these are the “last” ones. Having said that, we are now ready to look at how this end will occur.

False Prophets

To get a grasp on this metaphor it is necessary to realize that **v. 12** was a shortened version of the next four verses. This style of giving a summary for a preface to the whole story was typical for prophets from Daniel through John. Jesus gave us an edited version of **Revelation** in **Matt. 24:3-25:46**. Now we begin to see more detail in **v. 13**, **“And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs.”** Here again we find no help in Scripture about demonic frogs. God did use frogs as a plague in **Ex. 9:13-21**, but they were real frogs. In **v. 13** we see spiritual forms turning into the physical forms of frogs, and we have to ask why? They clearly are referring to false teachers. Men or women who seem to be as harmless as tadpoles, which have no voices, but will grow into adulthood and croak loudly the message of Satan. Perhaps the frog is given as a symbol of evil because of its ability to metamorphosis into another larger form. In the same way, sin without contrition and repentance, metastases into lethal levels. Right or wrong, at least we can now proceed into the evil heart of this whole matter.

The next segment of this allegory makes it clear that the source of all false teaching comes from the unholy trinity, which is done by lying spirits performing the will of their masters through susceptible human beings. This is an alarming concept that is by and large ignored within the church. We seem to expect that God will ignore willful ignorance among His people, but Scripture confutes this belief. There is a disturbing account of this in **I Kings 22**. In this chapter, two kings, Jehoshaphat of Judah and Ahab of Israel wish to join in war against Syria. Jehoshaphat wisely suggests that they ask for God’s approval, **“Please inquire for the word of the Lord today: v. 5.** Ahab agrees and gathers 400 prophets together and asks them what they thought. They all said: **“Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king” v. 8.** Jehoshaphat saw that one prophet, Micaiah, was missing and asked about him. Although it was not said here, Josephus said that Micaiah was in prison. Ahab sent him there because his preaching enraged him. All Ahab says is: **“I hate him because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil” v. 8.** To make this brief, they did call on Micaiah who prophesies truthfully and made both kings and other prophets angry. Of course he was sent back to prison.

I am relating the story of Micaiah for two reasons. First, in the thousands of sermons I have sat through, the name of this remarkable prophet has never once been mentioned; and, secondly it contains elements of lying spirits that we are examining in

Rev. 16:13-14. In this historical narration of Micaiah, told also in **II Chronicles 18**, there is a disturbing component. It is so disturbing that most commentaries skip over them while others say it must be a parable. I don't think so. After being pressured to tell all, Micaiah said: **"Therefore hear the word of the Lord: 'I saw the Lord sitting on His throne', ...and the Lord said 'who will persuade Ahab to go up, that he may fall...?' Then a spirit came forward...and said, 'I will persuade him...I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And He said, 'You shall persuade them, and also prevail. Go out and do so' vs. 20-22.** One of the false prophets, Zedekiah, was so angry that he slapped Micaiah and said: **"Which way did the spirit from the Lord go from me to speak to you?"** I can almost feel sorry for Zedekiah. He thought he was feeling a righteous wrath because he knew that he was speaking in the spirit. He just didn't realize that it was demonic, not divine. He didn't realize what a risky business he chose for a career. In the Old Testament, the only information God gives about false prophets was in **Deut. 18:20-22**, **"But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, ...that prophet shall die."** The Lord goes on to say that the only way to know a prophecy is false is when **"...the thing does not happen or come to pass."**

God's prophets today find it easier to discern false teaching than those in ancient times. First of all, God's word is in print for all to see, and secondly, Satan does not have access to the throne of God as he did in the Old Testament. But on earth he still spews out his lies through demonic spirits. Although the war was won on the cross, battles are still being waged daily. The frogs are winning these battles because they have adapted well to diverting the two edged sword of the Word by altering it for their own use. In other words, they work harder and know the Bible better than most Christians. We have become spiritually lazy. This is extremely dangerous. It is easier to accept the comforting words of 400 clergy than to examine in Scripture the message of one solitary voice like Micaiah. We don't because the truth often makes us too uncomfortable. So, even though the Word is fully available and easily understandable, it is avoided like the plague. That makes us susceptible to the words of false teachers, **"When they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through licentiousness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error"**

II Peter 2:18. Paul warns us not to be deceived about the last days. He said we must be awake, sober and ready for this dark period to come, for **"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with all power, signs and lying wonders"**

II Thess. 2:9.

We are viewing this climactic event with painful hearts. Not out of fear, we know this earth is not our home, but we have become attached to it. If I may quote from Lerner and Loewe, "I've grown accustomed to her face." We would love to avoid the concept of devilish frogs whispering lies into our ears. It seems too much like science fiction, but this is exactly what they are doing. Convincing us that science is reality and religion is fiction, the true goal of humanism. And if they can't convert us, they attack our children through the public school system where evolution is a religion. They have turned us into publicans. We need to look once again at Paul's view of our world. **"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to**

deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy” I Tim. 4:1-2. So, like it or not, these demonic spirits will become more effective in the last days. They will perform miracles so effectively that they will convince the hardened and skeptical political leaders of the world to join in the war against the God of all creation. What happened to Ahab in **I Kings 22**, is going to happen again, but then it will be pandemic, **“...The kings of the earth and of the whole world.”** Someone should warn them; but, like Micaiah, they will not only be ignored, they most likely will be thrown in jail for disturbing the peace.

Armageddon

The picture formed through the last three verses and the grim staging of Armageddon in **v. 16** may put fear into the reader’s mind, as well it should, if our faith is weak. But we must remember that Jesus taught us to fear nothing except God. So in the midst of this bedlam, He provides us with His third of seven beatitudes in **Revelation**. The Lord directs us to take a good look at His premonitions and stay awake because He is **“coming as a thief.”** If we have to ask why He needs to come as a burglar, we have missed His point. Every writer in the New Testament, except James and Jude have talked about and described this most momentous event in all of history. Just understanding what being alert and ready for His coming is easy enough? But if Jesus is saying that I need to be full dressed when He returns, that probably won’t happen, not if He comes in the middle of the night. I believe our Lord is not talking about physical nudity but being spiritually bare. Paul says, **“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ: Gal. 3:27.** Having been clothed by Christ in this born again experience we then had to grow up to maturity in the Word. The maturation is **“Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” Eph. 6:13.** This is the blessing Christ has bestowed upon us. Dress up in the Word or walk naked, exposing our sinful nature to all. If we hang up our spiritual garments in the closet of our minds and wear our carnal clothes for all the world to see, we are naked indeed.

The only place in the Bible that the word *Armageddon* is used is here in **v. 16**. There is a plain of Megiddo where a battle is referred to in **Zechariah 12:11**, but it is a stretch of the imagination to assume that this is where the last battle will take place. Nobody knows where it will be, so why guess? It seems that God has given us a name to hang our thoughts on without further information. Our Lord wants us to be ready and prepared, and we are after searching through this paragraph in **Revelation**. We can see in our mind’s eye, demonic spirits marshalling the armies of the world to a battleground called, **Armageddon**. Consequently we should already have our house set in order and be eager to learn more. If this indeed is God’s plan, it works beautifully, not only Christian but also pagans alike know and understand what the words means. It is found in every dictionary but never in an atlas because nobody knows where it will take place. That is fine with believers because we will be observers only, not participants. This will be proven in later chapters. If anyone is looking forward to learning more details about the battle, you will be disappointed. The war will be over in the wink of an eye.

The Seventh Bowl, vs. 17-21

17. “The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’ 18. And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. 19. Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of wine of the fierceness of His wrath. 20. Then every island fled away and the mountains were not found. 21. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, every hailstone about the weight of a talent. And men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.”

In the three previous series of sevens, the seals, trumpets and visions, the seventh was used to introduce the next series of sevens. Here, however, it is used as a finale. It is over; not **Revelation**, there is much more to come, but it is the end of the plagues. They were called “**The seven last plagues**” **15:1**, because they are the last sequences of sevens. The bowl is poured “**into the air.**” The first six bowls were poured upon something. What a difference a preposition can make. The earlier bowls, though unpleasant, were things that mankind could live through. This one, however, brings with it a finality that erases all reason for hope. Without air, life is impossible; but this verse is not about poisoning our atmosphere, as much as our souls. We are looking at a world, which has been so infected by spirits of demons that they are beyond redemption as described in **Hebrews 6:4-5**, “**For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, ...if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance...**” The air this bowl affects is the kingdom of Satan. Paul is warning us that we, “**...who were dead in trespasses and sin, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience**” **Eph. 2:1-2**. If we ignore the warning, we are looking at our future in this verse and “**It is done**” will not be a blessing but the crack of doom.

It Is Done

It is very helpful here to recognize the parallelism between these three words and the words spoken from the cross. John uses the verb *tetelestai* to report the words of Jesus in **John 19:30**. This word has several different usages in translation. It can mean to complete, execute or discharge a debt. It becomes a translator’s choice. My choice is the last one. I believe Jesus is expressing exactly what He has accomplished. He has paid the debt, not His own, but mankind’s debt, which began in the Garden of Eden and was compounded right up to the cross. Here in **v. 17** John uses the word *ginomai* and again in **21:6**, which is generally translated as *draw to an end* or *finish*. Next we need to ask, whose voice is coming out of “**The temple of heaven, from the throne.**” When Jesus spoke, “**It is done**” on the cross, He is saying that His job was done. Satan was expelled from heaven, **Rev. 12:9**, and was physically cast into the bottomless pit, **Rev. 20:1-2**. The war being fought in **vs. 12-16** was between the Holy Spirit and the beast from the sea and the beast from the land in **Chapter 13**. Now that His work is finished the Spirit can say: “**It is done.**” The phrase is used again for the last time in **21:6**, where God, the Father will bring a finality to everything.

In the last four verses of this chapter, there is little doubt as to what we are seeing. Just as **vs. 12-16** were a brief preview of **Chapter 17**, these verses will be explained more fully in **Chapter 18**. There is only so much we can say for certainty about what will certainly occur. It is the fulfillment of the wrath of God spent upon the Age of Tribulation, His vengeance on a pagan world that has raped and plundered both His children and His property. It is totally outside of anything we have ever seen, heard or read about. Every apocalyptic prophet in both the Old and New Testaments predicts it. These aerial bombardment of, **“noise, thunderings and lightnings”** together with seismic eruptions were predicted in **Isaiah 29:6-7**, **“You will be punished by the Lord of hosts with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with storm and tempest and the flame of devouring fire. The multitude of all the nations who fight against Ariel (Jerusalem) ...shall be as a dream of a night vision.”** Earlier we saw similar displays in **Rev. 4:5** and **Rev. 11:19**. There was one addition in **11:19** that may be helpful in this section, **“...lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and hail.”** The hail is mentioned in **16:21**. This chapter must be the time God was talking about when He told Haggai: **“...Once more I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations...” Haggai 2:6-7**. As dire as all these catastrophic events suggest, they are not the end, only the beginning of the end. Jesus described this in **Luke 21:10-11**, **“...Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.”** It becomes clear why we need the third beatitude at this juncture of **Revelation**. We must hear the voice of Jesus emerging out of all of these calamities and remember His words.

Uncertainties continue in **v. 19**. Is there one city mentioned twice or two different cities? Most think it is two, the great city they identify as Jerusalem and Babylon as Rome. This may be true. This passage talks about this great city being **“divided into three parts.”** It is possible that Zechariah is prophesying this: **“And it shall come to pass in all the land,” ‘says the Lord,’ “that two thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, I will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested...” Zech. 13:8-9**. The prophet continues this vision into **Zech. 14**, which predicts the death of the Messiah and the persecutions of His sheep. These are beautiful pictures of God’s promise, but we are entering the events surrounding our Lord’s second coming, not His first. And I can only find one place in the Old Testament where Jerusalem is called a great city, **“And many nations will pass by this city; and everyone will say to his neighbor, ‘why has the Lord done so to this great city?’” Jer. 22:8**. Ninevah is called a great city more often than Jerusalem. After viewing all this, it seems best to consider the great city and great Babylon to be one and the same.

The next thing to consider is what does this allegory represent. When Babylon occurred first in **14:8**, I perceived it as an accurate description of a society immersed almost totally in materialism. So I see no reason to change my opinion in midstream. Let us look at this as the fall of the western world. We will see Babylon called the great city five more times in **Chapters 17** and **18**. Since we are now viewing this as a metaphor for the western world, the phrase **“The cities of the nations fell”** should make

us cringe a little. We are glimpsing into our own future. There is no need to do more guessing now. Layer upon layer in the next four chapters will provide a much clearer picture. Also, we need to look back to **Chapter 14:6-13** and be sure what we decided here is compatible with earlier thoughts. The **“plague of hail” v. 21**, is comparable to two historical events, one in Scripture and one out of pagan literature. The seventh plague in Egypt was given in **Exodus 9:22-26**, **“...So there was hail, and fire mingled with hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation...”** The second is from the writing of Pliny the Younger, to a friend about the 79 A.D. eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. Pliny was an eyewitness to all that took place and wrote it down. One of the dangers for those far enough away from the noxious fumes and lava flows was falling pumice stones. He writes: “As protection against falling objects they put pillows on their heads tied down with cloths” Pliny, book six, letter 16 to Cornelius Tacitus. Although this is pumice instead of hail, I see a comparison, **“And great hail from heaven fell upon men, about the weight of a talent” v. 21**. The weight is either 55 pounds if Greek talents or 113 pounds if Jewish. Whichever it is, I’m guessing no one will go outside with only a pillow or an umbrella. However, the most compelling question about all of this is “Where will we be as these events are being fulfilled?” The only response we get from the Lord is, “Wait and see.”

Chapter Seventeen

The Vision, vs. 1-6

1.”Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, ‘Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, **2.** with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.’ **3.** So he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. **4.** The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. **5.** And on her forehead a name was written: **MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.** **6.** And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement.”

We have now reached the critical mass of apocalyptic information. Before even starting this crucial section of **Revelation** we must think again of Jesus’ promise to His disciples. **“When they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” Matt. 10:19-20.** I know that, but sometimes my short-term memory takes over and I start working on my own. After reviewing what I have written, there is a tendency to pat myself on the back and say, “What a good boy am I.” Fortunately this propensity is as short lived as my memory. When I forget who is doing all the work, inspiration fades away and reality strikes me like a sledgehammer. As I look over this chapter, I realize that for the first time since **1:2** we are getting divine explanations for an allegorical vision. God, knowing our inadequacy, gives us needed help in a pivotal point of **Revelation**. In case we miss the point here at the start, we will be reminded again in **v. 9**.

Again we see a woman at the center of a metaphor. In **Chapter Twelve** we were in awe of the lady; here she repels us, as well we should be. The first was Mother Church. The second is the Whore of Babylon. John does not indicate which of the seven angels is providing this new information. It is probably irrelevant to this chapter. But I would guess him to be either the sixth or seventh angel because he said, **“I will show you the judgment of the great harlot.”** What we are seeing in this vision is a more detailed description of events leading up to the second coming of our Lord. With this in mind, let’s think of **16:12-16** as a shortened version of **Chapter 17**. If we think of those former verses as the first layer and **17:1-18** to be the second layer, by overlapping the first with all the information in this chapter, the message should begin to merge into focus. If it doesn’t, we are in some serious apocalyptic difficulties.

Angel of Wrath

John is once again invited by an angel to move to another location. **“Come, I will show you the judgment...”** I can’t help but think that John was delighted to experience

these frequent excursions. Back in **Chapter 4:1** he was asked by a voice out of heaven saying to him **“Come up here.”** John was immediately drawn up to the throne of God. From this celestial view, he saw his Lord opening seven seals in **Rev. 6**. He was even moved about while Jesus was opening the first four seals. He tells us that each of the four living creatures from **4:6-8** came to John and addressed him, **“...with a voice like thunder, ‘Come and see’ 6:1, 3, 5 & 7.** He had the incredible blessing of seeing the future of mankind, right up to the present day. He saw the seven trumpets, the seven visions and the seven plagues all from the majestic perspective of heaven. In **11:1** John was even asked to become active himself. He was given a yardstick and ordered by an angel to, **“Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there.”** I envy the apostle, but I also bless him for teaching me something I haven’t thought of before. He was given a task very late in life. Jesus Himself told John to, **“Write the things you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this” Rev. 1:19.** An angel also told John in **Rev. 10:11**, **“...You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.”**

John did all the things he was instructed to do. As I look at his life and works, I begin to understand that all these wonderful experiences I envied him for were simply fringe benefits for doing what he was asked. John obeyed. What is he teaching me? I have to go all the way back to the beginning and examine again the first beatitude. **“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” Rev. 1:3.** God has promised blessings for each recipient of this extraordinary body of works, if they will just study and remember what He says. If we obey, the fringe benefits will flow. In the last book of the Old Testament, God pleaded with His people to clean up their temples, which were polluted by a corrupt priesthood. He promised them blessings for their obedience, **“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this” ‘says the Lord of hosts’ ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it” Malachi 3:10.** They neither listened nor obeyed, and we have seen the sad consequences of their failures in their history. Can we learn from this? Can we, living in the last book of the New Testament do what our Father asks of us, just read and remember. If we are obedient children, we instantly become paragons for every searching soul in this sin-darkened world. They will envy us for all of our fringe benefits and wish to know how they could find such luck. These benefits become our pulpits and our lifestyles are our sermons. This is what Jesus predicted when He said, **“Truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” John 14:12.**

The Great Prostitute

In the first two verses of this chapter the angel tells John what he is going to see, **“The judgment of the great harlot”** and why her conduct has brought down upon her the wrath of God. The waters she sat on will be described in **v. 15** as, **“...peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.”** God makes very sure that we will not make silly mistakes about the meaning of this vision. We have already determined that Babylon referred to the Western World, a conglomerate of many different ethnic groups and

nationalities. We even print it on our coins, *e Pluribus Unum*, from many one. The woman is a personification of an image the west presents to the world. Its creed is greed and its matrix is materialism. We are a nation of merchants. This was not the intent of our founding fathers. All they really wanted was to be a free people who could worship God in whatever matter that pleased them best. Which is why we print “In God we trust” on the other side of our coinage. And all these things were indeed accomplished and God has blessed us mightily, but like the weather, our society has changed. We, like spoiled children, began to believe that we deserved every blessing God provided. Suddenly our climate has turned from golden to corruption. We have been intoxicated by the prostitute and influenced a watching world to crawl into the same ghastly bed together with us.

The more gentle side of my nature is beginning to chide me for being so strident about in my criticism of our nation, but all the patriotic songs I’ve known from my youth no longer apply to my country. We can sing “God Bless America” all we wish, but He doesn’t bless this nation anymore. I can already hear the righteous wrath of my patriotic readers. I do not blame you, but for a moment look with me at, **Romans 1** and see if it applies to us or not. Paul saw in Rome the same spiritual deterioration as is apparent in America today. The beginning of decline is spiritual decay. Paul starts in **Romans 1:18-32**, “**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness...who suppress the truth...because what may be known of God is manifest in them for God has shown it to them...so they are without excuse, because, although they knew God they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, ...So God also gave them up...to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ...for this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also males, leaving the natural use of the female, burned in their lust for one another...And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting...**” So you see, there is no rebuttal for such a sorry tale of social decay. We have truly become a porcelain throne for, “**The great harlot who sits on...**” us. Not a pretty sight, but for our conscience sake, we should at least close the door.

In **v. 3** John is transported by the angel into a wilderness. He tells us he went “**in the Spirit.**” I wish he had said a little more about his experience, but that is just my own curiosity. Obviously whether in the body or out of body is quite irrelevant to the expansive landscape John is about to view. Possibly John couldn’t tell us because, like Paul, he, himself did not know. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul commented on a similar experience and said, “**...Whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows**” **II Cor. 12:2**. Where is far more important than how John traveled, he was transported, “**into the wilderness.**” This is the same place the first woman in **Chapter Twelve** was driven to by the dragon, but she not only survived, she flourished which enraged the dragon. The first lady was the church triumphant. Unfortunately the dragon’s hatred continued to grow while the church continued to decline. Now, with John, we are looking at a completely incompatible version of a church body. From Martin Luther on most commentators have identified the great harlot as the Roman Catholic Church. Today this is much too constrictive an opinion. We need bear some portion of the blame. We are looking at the full cycle of the

New Testament Age, from a woman, **“clothed with the sun”** to a woman soiled by, **“The filthiness of her fornication.”**

Is it possible that this tarnished lady of the night, elegantly clothed and richly decorated, supported by Satan himself could be considered a church? Indubitably it can. Among other things, we refer to a prostitute as a fallen woman. Here we are looking at a fallen church, once supported by and devoted to Jehovah, now totally sustained by Lucifer. God warned His people so often that, like children, they stopped hearing. There is a dreadful prophecy in **Jeremiah 4:22-30**, which we must look at and take seriously. **“My people are foolish, they have not known Me. They are silly children, they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge...Though you cloth yourself with crimson, though you adorn yourself with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain you make yourself fair; your lovers will despise you; they will seek your life.”** In interest of time, these are just the beginning and ending verses. Between them God gives a brief history lesson from **Genesis** to **Revelation**. **Jeremiah** predicts the fall of Babylon in **51:6-7**, **“Flee from the midst of Babylon, and everyone save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of the Lord’s vengeance; He shall pay her what she deserves. Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, that made all the earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore the nations have now gone mad.”** The prophet believed he was predicting the fall of the Babylon he knew in 600 B.C. And, indeed, he was. However, we now know of a new and more dangerous Babylon in this present age. We are both right. All the prophets, without knowing it were used by the Spirit to write double-headed prophecies for both Old Testament and New Testament children of God.

Daniel is one of those prophets. He wrote about a future enemy of God’s people in **11:31-35**, whom he referred to only as, **“the abomination of desolation.”** We know today that his name was Antiochus Epiphanus, a Greek conqueror who devastated Jerusalem and shamelessly polluted the temple in 168 B.C. **Daniel** writes the words of the angel Gabriel in **12:11**, **“From the time the daily sacrifice is taken away and the abomination of desolation is set up...”** Daniel probably thought he was being told about the same man; but we know differently because Jesus told us that there was another one yet to come. **“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place”** (‘whoever reads, let him understand.’) **Matt. 24:15**. The woman we are looking at in this chapter is not the anti-Christ, but she will be the generatrix of him. Could that mean that the **“abomination of desolation”** will come out of the church? It seems so. It may explain why **Peter** wrote, **“For the time has come for the judgment to begin at the house of God”** **I Peter 4:17**. The church at large has always understood that as a reference to persecution of the church. I would not even try to debate what seems to be exactly what the apostle meant. But allow me, if you will, to treat it as a double-headed prophecy. The word used for judgment is *krima*. Its first meaning of the word is *punishment for a crime*. And if the visible church is going to evolve into the **“great harlot,”** then the judgment befits the crime. It is quite normal to be stunned at this downward evolution of the church. Even John, **“Marveled with great amazement.”** We must always remember that we are the

church. It is too easy to blame poor preaching, boring services or doctrinal differences, but they are all integral parts of the body we have joined. James understands this well when he said, **“My brothers, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a greater judgment” James 3:1.** He clearly states that if our leadership is inadequate, it is our own fault. We hired them and we pay them. He also uses the same word, *krisma* for judgment and adds to it the adverb *meizon*, which means *to a greater degree*. James is warning us as parishioners and members, to think carefully about how we take care of our body.

How could this happen? How could that radiant woman of **12:1** be debased into whoredom, cohabitating with the beast of **13:1**? The answer is clearly stated by the angel, but explaining the answer is not so clear. Simply stated, we are intoxicated. John says, **“And I saw the woman drunk” v. 6.** And the messenger said, **“...the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk: v. 25.** The actions of the western world and its inhabitants are portrayed as being intoxicated by this great whore. We need to think upon this for a moment. Intoxication is indeed a form of possession. Are we so insipid that we have allowed ourselves to be possessed by the prostitute? Paul asked us, **“Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her... I Cor. 6:16.** If this mating between a man and a prostitute be true, how greater would it be for a society, guided by immorality to become personified as a harlot? Having said this, the question arises, “Can we be exorcized?” **Chapter Seventeen** says we cannot. We are so enamored by the party atmosphere and the affluence we see in **v. 4** that we fail to look beyond the externals. We have been seduced so completely that before our very eyes we see a transformation taking place. We began as a woman of beauty giving birth, creating life, **12:1-2.** We end up as a woman of ill repute, causing death, **17:5-6.** We can no more be reformed than a frog can turn back into a tadpole. But can’t God change our hearts? Yes, but not our wills. God has tried His utmost, even giving us His only Son, whom we promptly killed. His conclusion was, **“We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed” Jer. 51:9.**

I am a prophet of doom, I know. I don’t even like my own thoughts in writing. There is an abundance of beautiful words, thoughtful proverbs and profound teaching in the Bible, but **Chapter Seventeen** has only two of these, **vs. 8 & 14.** It is dismal, repellent and profoundly disturbing. Yet it is Scripture, it is here, it has to be understood, so I continue to write. Could I be wrong? Of course, and I hope I am, but a grim view of reality is, in the long view, a safer stance than rose-colored fantasy. Together with John we see a world totally corrupted and controlled by a promiscuous woman. She is superficially attractive, but at closer attention she is only depravity disguised cosmetically. She sits on a red dragon, both of these bear their names clearly upon their bodies, **“...names of blasphemy... mystery... the mother of... the abominations of the earth” v. 3-5.** The first meaning for mystery in Webster’s Dictionary is *a religious truth known by revelation alone*, which fits here exactly. Paul, in reteaching the Thessalonians about the last days, says, **“For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work...” II Thess. 2:7.** So the woman represents the mystery of iniquity. The second meaning of mystery is *beyond understanding*. In our society there are a multitude of crimes, but the most heinous of them all is the raping and killing of innocents. This is the

mystery of iniquity that has no explanation except Satanic. Yet our social consciences shies away from using his name. We prefer psychiatric answers to spiritual truths. We will find no reformation here any more than a prostitute can reclaim her virginity.

Explanation of the Vision, vs. 7-18

7. “But the angel said to me, ‘Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has seven heads and the ten horns. 8. The beast that you saw was and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. 9. Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. 10. There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. 11. And the beast that was and is not, is himself also the eighth and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. 12. And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. 13. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. 14. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.’ 15. And he said to me, ‘The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. 16. And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. 18. And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.’”

John was completely overwhelmed by what he has just seen. Though he had received some previous preparations through the teachings of Jesus, what he saw was beyond his understanding. So it is somewhat surprising that the angel asked, **“Why do you marvel?”** I feel that it was more a question for this generation than John’s. A study of our past history should have prepared us fully to see through the mist of this allegory. But in case we are still bedeviled by this graphic illustration, the angel responds to his own question. Not waiting for John to reply, he says, **“I will tell you...”** I would guess that John was delighted, as are we, to be told that this enigma will now be unfolded. But as we look ahead, it is not unfolded; it is just expanded. How can we forget that God is sending John visions of the future to confound the unbeliever but enlighten the faithful? Solomon states it clearly and simply in **“Proverbs 15:14, “The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.”** However, we must begin by understanding that we don’t possess what the angel said is a prerequisite, **“...The mind which has wisdom” v. 9.** Having come this far in **Revelation**, we of course know this, but it is healthy to be reminded of our shortcomings on a regular basis to block out pride. The Lord promised back in **1:3** that we would understand and remember, **“...what is written in it, because the time is near.”** If we believe the promise, all we must do is ask. The Spirit tells us through **James**, **“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of**

God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach and it will be given to him” 1:5. So after asking, let’s boldly plod on and dig for more hidden truths about the beast.

The Mystery of the Woman and of the Beast

We have probably learned more than we wish to know about this cannibalistic woman who lusts after the blood of saints. Another fascinating parallel, the blood of saints intoxicates her, the blood of Christ sanctifies the saints. But it is important for us to view her ironic demise in **v. 16** as well as her identification in **v. 18**. First however we need to recognize the source of her power. The true enemy of God’s people who reduces her to simply a visible image of his hatred, the beast in this chapter was identified earlier in **Chapter Twelve** as Satan. There he was given three names, **“The great dragon was hurled down, that ancient serpent called the Devil or Satan” 12:9**. Here he is described three times as, **“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit” vs. 8, 10 & 11**. The parallelism continues. God the Father is described as, **“Him who is and who was and who is to come” Rev. 1:4 & 4:8**. The startling difference is the present tense. God “is”, Satan “is not.” This has been commented on earlier, but a review is always good. Satan was doomed the moment Jesus said, **“It is finished” John 19:30**. At that moment the Devil was cast out of heaven into the abyss, which is why the angel can now say, he is **“The beast that was, and is not...”** He is not physically here, but his work is still being done expeditiously by the unholy spirit, the beast of **Chapter Thirteen**. And I can’t resist one further parallel in **v. 8**, **“The beast... will ascend out of the bottomless pit.”** This event, predicted in **9:1-2**, was the beginning of the end. The verb *ascent* takes our minds back to **Acts 1:9-11** where Jesus’ ascent into heaven was the beginning of the church .

The Book of Life

I feel some pressure to discuss this topic again. I have done this before in **3:5** and in **13:8**, which seemed more than enough, but obviously not. The Book of Life is referred to seven times in this book. Since seven is God’s number and used fifty-four times in **Revelation**, it must be considered in depth each time it occurs. Although the word seven is not used here, but by simply adding up the time it is used, **3:5, 13:8, 17:8, 20:12, 20:15, 21:27 & 22:19**, we have created another seven. So we better consider it some more. Earlier in **3:5** and **13:8**, I philosophized about the meaning of the book. Since **“The Book of Life”** is a metaphor, let’s look upon it metaphorically. If, out of the blue, someone asked me, “What is the Book of Life?” my immediate response would be, “The Bible.” If asked why, I would say, “Because it is Jesus,” and then quote **John 1:1**, **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”**

With this premise let’s look at the phrase as it appears in **v. 8**, **“...written in the Book of Life from the foundations of the world.”** If we agree that Jesus is indeed this book, then we are written in Him. Paul understands this as he told the **Ephesians**, **“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” Eph. 1:4**. The apostle went so far as to tell the church in Rome that we are baptized, crucified, died, buried and resurrected with Christ **Romans 6:3-11**. He even said we are married to Him in **Eph. 4:30-32** concluding this by

writing, **“This is a great mystery.”** Jesus is speaking of this to seventy of His disciples upon their joyful return from a mission trip. **“Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven” Luke 10:20.** And in His prayer the night before His death, Jesus asked His Father that all believers, **“...may be one, as You Father are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” John 17:21.** So fellow believers, we have been elected to this heavenly hall of fame from the very beginning of time. Our names are not listed in some catalogue, but in the **“Book of Life,”** which is a person, Jesus Christ, not an invoice. What a wonderful thing to rejoice about!

A little earlier I commented on a statement made by the angel, **“Here is the mind which has wisdom.”** How intimidating this can be for those of us who would never consider themselves to be in the PhD category; so we need to build up our self-esteem a bit before going on because we do understand that we have reached a pivotal point in **Revelation.** Wisdom is not all that we have been led to believe. Jesus used this word only four times, and on three of these occasions it had a negative connotation. In His last instructions to His disciples, He said, **“For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist” Luke 21:15.** The wisdom of God always refers to spiritual discernment. This is what Jesus was promising to His followers. He expects us to know, grow and understand. A good example of this gift is found in **Exodus.** God wished for a tabernacle to be built so He created craftsmen. Moses introduced them by saying, **“See the Lord has called by name Bazaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship” Ex. 35:30-31.** What God desires, He always provides. Paul explains this to the Corinthian church. **“For you see your calling brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called... But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God” I Cor. 1:26-31.** He then went on to tell them the secret of spiritual wisdom. He said: **“But we have the mind of Christ” 2:16.** Considering all these truths, how could we not be ready and waiting for more exciting revelations ahead.

As an after thought, we need to be warned. There is a near and present danger related to wisdom. The wisdom of Solomon was legendary. He requested God for it and his prayer was answered immediately. He used it to acquire massive wealth and royal authority for forty years, but he died an apostate. How could that happen? Jesus didn't talk much about wisdom, yet He often said after teaching: **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”** We don't have to be smart to be wise. All we need is to hear what the Spirit gives us, which John states is everything. **“For the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” I John 1:27.** Even among devout Christians this remarkable quote of John is generally ignored. People in general feel more comfortable letting others do their thinking for them. But how could believers ever

trust that faith did not require thought or that their clergy are always going to speak the truth? If they do, they might end up like Solomon.

The Seven Heads

We begin this paragraph with **v. 8** and it is wise to recognize that the opening words are a parallel passage to **13:18**. As I look back at my comments for the beast from the land, I am still comfortable with the thoughts I wrote down. There is no indication of the source for **13:18**: **“Here is wisdom.”** John gives us no help at all. He just makes a bold statement, which still remains the most enigmatic verse in Scripture. He has just described the wholesale destruction done by the anti-Christ in some future time. Neither he nor we have to understand the full meaning of this verse. It is for the faithful few who will still be around during the dangerous last days. Then it will be wise to recognize the **“Abomination that causes desolation” Dan. 12:11** and **Mark 13:14** before he begins his reign of terror. When Jesus quoted **Daniel’s** verse about the anti-Christ, He adds the phrase, **“Let the reader understand.”** This is the same as saying be wise about the apocalyptic things taking place shortly before **“They will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory” Mark 13:26**. I have mixed emotions about all this. On the one hand I long to understand what the Spirit is telling God’s people. On the other hand, I am more than willing to stand in Daniel’s shoes when he heard much the same information, **“Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, ‘My lord what shall be the end of these things?’ And he said, Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end” Dan. 12:8-9**.

The tendency is to relax and rest easy after such a proclamation coming out of Scripture. This would be a mistake. In **13:18** John seems to give wisdom a persona **“Here is wisdom.”** He is implying that survival in the time of tribulation will require wisdom beyond human capacity. It is quite different in **17:9**. Not John, but an angel said, **“Here is the mind which has wisdom.”** We are now being told to use the brain God gave us and think profoundly about what the Spirit is sharing with us at this critical juncture. If we now expect an easy answer to the meaning of Satan’s appearance, we haven’t been paying attention. That is not how it works in apocalyptic writing. Jesus showed us how to decipher metaphors in **Rev. 1:20**, **“The mystery of the seven stars... and of the seven golden lampstands is this; the seven stars are angels... and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”** This makes sense, yet the question still hangs out there unanswered. Why is it made so difficult? The inquiry is the same one the disciples asked Jesus about speaking in parables. His reply answers both them and us, **“Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given... Therefore I speak to them in parables because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” Matt. 13:11-13**. So let us assume that we are among that esteemed collection of the called and elected as mentioned in **II Peter 1:10**. With a prayer to the Spirit, let’s push forward.

I approach the last half of this chapter with the prayer of Daniel in mind. All the wise men of Babylon were being slaughtered because they could not answer Nebuchadnezzar’s questions. On the brink of his own death, Daniel requested just a bit

of time and he would have answers for the king. So he and his friends asked God for help. God responded and the rest is history. Daniel's gratitude for God's mercy was a prayer of Thanksgiving. The last verse is: **"I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers; You have given me wisdom and might, and have now made known to me what we asked of you..." Dan. 2:23.** This sounds too simple, but it is the simplicity of faith, as simple as Jesus promise to us, **"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you" Matt. 7:7.** My own experience in this has been not to expect some arcane burst of previously unknown truth. Rather let Scripture interpret Scripture. This is not an overnight excursion, but a daily diet of His Word. This somewhat lengthy introduction is more for my own benefit than for any future readers. It is my way of preparing to approach an intimidating puzzle that has boggled the minds of scholars far beyond my plain of thought, so let's seek truth from the giver of absolute truth.

I have laid the groundwork for the metaphorical picture before us back in **Chapter Thirteen.** There we saw a beast of seven heads and ten horns rising out of the sea. To identify him we had to find a parallel for this somewhere in Scripture, and we did in **Daniel 7.** It seems logical to return there to find some answers to questions, which I wish John had asked. What do the mountains represent? Who are the horns? Who or what is the great city? And why would the angel explain the one thing we could figure out for ourselves? These are conundrums, which commentators are rather hesitant to be pedantic about. Yet, it is very clear that the Lord expects us to find answers. Unfortunately when returning to **Daniel 7** we find no easy answers to our questions. There are interesting similarities, but that chapter deals mainly with the fourth beast from the sea. We know that beast is the unholy spirit. We know that the seven-headed dragon in **Rev. 17** is Satan. The two are one, but different. Starting with what we do know, let's find solutions for what we don't know. There is such significance in **Daniel 7** that it keeps pulling us back to look deeper, so let's try again.

Looking again at the four beasts from the sea, we remember how they were explained to Daniel as, **"These great beasts, which are four, are four kings which will arise out of the earth" Dan. 7:17.** Another angel explains to John in **Rev. 17** that the seven heads are: **"...seven mountains... also seven kings."** Daniel was looking at four empires that would affect his people after the fall of Babylon. He probably could identify the first beast as Persia, but we know them all because they are history for us. John was seeing a more complete history of dynasties, which had dealings with God's people. The apostle is told that, **"...five have fallen, one is and the other has not yet come."** John would have known Old Testament history, just as well as we. He would have identified the heads as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, who was in control through his lifetime. In all likelihood, he could guess that the seventh head would be the anti-Christ, which he had warned the church about in his first and second letters. The eighth head is self-evident to all. If this was so obvious to John in 100 A.D., why is it so obscure to modern readers? That was a rhetorical question! Everything revolves around the words of the angel. **"Here is the mind which has wisdom."** We desperately need this wisdom now. From **17:10** to the end of the chapter, we are looking at our own

future. We must be aware of the violent attack that satanic forces will use against us. To fully understand it becomes necessary to blend **Daniel 7** and **Rev. 17** as one unit.

He Was Now Is Not, and Shall Be

This blending has already been partly done back in **Chapter Thirteen**. If the reader is finding more and more information being repetitive, it is the very nature of the book. Half of the chapters in **Revelation** are the same story being retold with new information added to enlarge the whole picture. The problem of commentators in apocalyptic material is how much to repeat, enough to keep the vision fresh, but not so much as to insult their reader's intelligence. In this chapter, the three beasts of **Chapters Twelve and Thirteen** are presented again with new data. Satan is still a red dragon; the unholy spirit is transfigured into the great prostitute. The anti-Christ is only inferred to as the seventh head, which, **"...has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time."** The pivotal information about Satan is that he was, is not, and shall arise to be an eighth head. If I were John, I would have immediately asked where did that eighth head come from; it wasn't in the vision. But he didn't ask so we have to guess if we have a need to know. I suppose that the eighth head is not relevant because he has nothing to do with the faithful since we will be raptured out before he is allowed in. This is implied in **v. 14**. The angel states briefly that Jesus will return, **"...and those who are with Him are called, chosen and faithful."** The last part of this chapter is about the ten horns, and we now have to combine **Daniel 7 and 17** again to clarify as much as possible this remarkable vision of John.

The Ten Kings

In **v. 12** our angel reveals, **"The ten horns are which you saw are ten kings."** It is important to have a mental picture of the beasts in **Daniel** and **Revelation**. It is not imperative that the picture be perfect or even correct. Too many facts are left out of both Daniel's and John's vision to be positive that our picture is exactly what they saw. It doesn't matter. My picture of the fourth beast in **Daniel 7:7** has one head, but it could be more. For example, the third beast in **Dan. 7**, **"...had four heads."** Again, it doesn't matter if I'm right or wrong in my guess. If a number is omitted, it simply means that the number is not intrinsic to the message. I always asked my students where did they put the horns in their own mental picture; and, like students everywhere, they answered a question with a question. Why? Does it make a difference where we place them? My answer was no, but it did tell me how good they were at making mental pictures. Without the mental pictures we get easily lost in a maze of conflicting puzzle pieces. Here we need to examine the pieces given to us and ignore as much as possible the facts left out. In my own picture I put all ten horns on the seventh head because they are described as, **"...kings who have not yet received a kingdom."**

The western world has not as yet observed an evil axis of major powers as defined in Scripture. Since the facts concerning this political block are few, we need to garner each one of them carefully. The explanations of the angel, though few, were vividly clear. With the information gathered thus far, we can faintly see what the future holds. If the time is indeed imminent, we are looking at an emergence of ten political powers in the east. Because of ethnical or spiritual differences, their hatred against us will grow

into a passion to destroy. At this point we bring **Dan. 7:20-27** into our mental image. There we can see some details, which are crucial for identifying that brutal time of the anti-Christ. As Daniel was puzzling about the ten horns, he saw something John did not see, **“...There was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words” 7:8.** Following that, Daniel saw something that was extremely distressful: **“I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them” 7:21.** It is pointless to try and identify the ten kings or how the three are plucked. However, this much we do know, the anti-Christ will emanate out of the ten, cause some internal conflict with three and finally defeat the children of God. I like it no better than Daniel did. It seems inconceivable.

The War Against the Lamb

The part of John’s vision, explained in **vs. 11-18**, is a fuller description of the persecutions done by the anti-Christ, first given in **13:11-18**. The angelic explanation given here is quite clear and easily understood. So our question is not what is going to happen, but how could it happen? How could the forces of hell overcome the people of God? Even though it was expressed clearly in **13:7**, such wholesale destruction is unacceptable to a civilized society. We prefer to view it as a hologram rather than a holocaust. Yet hearing the warfare being expressed so literally and the reasons for the defeat so obvious, we can only accept and try to understand. There are two external elements that help our perceptions. The first was that the ten kings, **“...received authority for one hour as kings with the beast.”** This implies that these forces will be enabled by supernatural powers. This is not comforting news. It is like being told you will be attacked like Job, but it won’t last as long. The second piece of information as given in **13:7**, **“And it was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them.”** Again the question, who is doing the granting? Rather than just jotting down the obvious, allow me to share with you a more subtle opinion. I believe **Job**, the oldest book in the Bible, was written first primarily to provide answers and comfort for the last survivors of the tribulation. Satan complained to God that Job was a righteous man only because the Lord protected him from any discomfort. He argues that if he could get his hands on Job, God would see a very different king of man. **“So the Lord said to Satan, ‘Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life’” Job 2:6.** For the next forty chapters, Satan tried his hardest and failed. Modern readers in luxurious surroundings find no comfort in this, but survivors of the tribulation will find solace and understanding in Job’s life.

Perhaps, but doesn’t that sound like God and Satan playing a chess game using us as the pieces? Take care; we have a tendency to get too debonair about matters of colossal importance if we don’t understand all the rules. This is a global war, not a game. The reason for mankind’s defeat is explained in **v. 13**, **“These are of one mind...”** The single-minded obsession of the ten kings will be to eradicate the faithful witnesses of Christendom. They will succeed because they are totally united against Christians who are totally divided. There is a fascinating image of a metal giant with clay feet in **Daniel 2:31-43**, which Daniel had to explain for the king. It was composed of four different

metals representing empires like the four beasts of **Daniel 7**. However, they are as different as the statue is dissimilar to the beasts. The gold head represented Babylon, the silver chest was Persia, the bronze was Greece, and the iron legs were Rome, all of which are past except for the clay feet mixed with iron, which seems to be us. Daniel expressed it this way: **“Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of potter’s clay and partly of iron...so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will be a mixture of seeds of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay” 2:41-43.** This is a remarkable picture of America presented by God almost three millennia ago. It explains why we shall be overcome. The enemy is more united than the United States of America.

As depressing as this may be, there is some Gospel here. The next verse says, **“And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed” v. 44.** A casual reader may think Daniel is referring to the kings of the four empires displayed by the statue, but we know from **Revelation** that **“The days of these kings”** are the last days just prior to the second coming of Jesus. We also know the number, which Daniel left out. The toes on the clay feet foretell the ten kings who will produce the anti-Christ. It seems appropriate that the toes, the last appendages of the statue, represent the last days for mankind. In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a stone, **“...which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces” 2:34.** The meaning of which Daniel gave in v. 45, **“inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the clay and iron, the bronze, the silver and the gold – the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.”** Daniel had no doubts about the truth of his explanation, but I have serious doubts that he had any further insights into the full impact of this vision. We, however, because of his message, know the magnitude of it all by blending it into **Rev. 17:7-14.** The statue the king dreamt about was a metaphor. Its clay feet and ten toes are coming to life as we speak when they, **“...make war with the Lamb” 17:14.** I find it interesting that there is so much introductory information about this apocalyptic battle and the war itself is just a footnote. It’s sort of a Godly shrug, which says, “What else could you expect?” All John says about it is, **“And the Lamb will overcome them.”** I don’t know why this seems anticlimactic, but it does. I guess it is because of the two combatants. One is a seven-headed dragon and the other is a lamb. It seems no contest, and we would like to see how the underdog won the victory. The answer given should be enough. He won **“For He is Lord of lords and King of kings.”**

The War Against the Woman

This chapter was really finished with the closing words of v. 14, an imperial definition of our Lord Jesus followed by His **“called, chosen, and faithful.”** V. 15 is an unnecessary explanation for the many waters the prostitute was sitting on in v. 1. And yet, our just God deemed it fair to once again show the unfaithful their future if they continue to remain obstinate. The picture is as abhorrent and unfathomable as everything else connected to the beast the woman was sitting upon. It suddenly attacks her, its faithful and dependent devotee. The seventh head with its ten horns attack and destroy

her. Why? For what reason would the beast commit such a senseless act? There are two reasons. The first explanation is easy. I commented on it in **16:10-11** concerning the fifth bowl. Evil is incapable of doing anything but evil. It is by nature masochistic; it must do harm. If nothing else is available it turns upon itself. We see this happening here. Righteousness has been victorious. The war is over, all goodness has departed and all that is left is an allegorical depiction of hell.

The second reason is much more difficult to deal with because God is the real perpetrator. The angel confirms this by saying, **“For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose.”** Does this mean that Jehovah, who hates sin, would use evil to achieve His will? The answer is yes. Whenever man abuses his free will, he exorcises God right out of his life. God does whatever is needed to correct our error. The book of **Judges** is filled with examples. Here is one case in point. **“After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord. So the Lord sold them into the hands of Japin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor...and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years until they cried to the Lord for help”** **Judges 4:1-3**. This assault upon the prostitute by the ten kings we are told will last, **“until the words of God are fulfilled.”** We have been forewarned about this regularly in the study of **Revelation**. It began in **14:8**, **“Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries”** and again in **16:19**. The source for God’s wrath and the fulfillment of the words **“...until the words of God are fulfilled”** is found in **Ezekiel 16:35-43**, **“Now then, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord! ‘Because your lust was exposed and your nakedness uncovered in your harlotry with your lovers...and because of the blood of your children which you gave to them, therefore I am going to gather all your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them from all around against you and will strip you in front of them, that they may see all your nakedness...they will also bring a mob against you, ...I will make you cease playing the harlot, so I will try to rest My fury toward you...”** This was spoken to Jerusalem 600 years before the birth of Christ. How much more applicable it is to the society we live in today.

Though it sounded like the great harlot of **v. 1** has finally received her just punishments, we find the angel bringing her up again in the last verse of this chapter. Why would he conclude this already dismal chapter by presenting again this tawdry display of our society? Because her depiction is an allegory, there is room for debate about what or whom she represents. Many, perhaps most readers would readily disagree with what I have already written about what she portrays. Since we are looking at a critical point in the future of mankind, we need more hard evidence than a one-verse allegory. And this is exactly what we are approaching in **Chapter Eighteen**. This long and doleful chapter is a literal explanation for **17:16**. The woman is finally being explained as a **“Great city.”** In **Revelation** there are two great cities. One used fourteen times is New Jerusalem, **“...the city of My God, the New Jerusalem” 3:12**. The other city is the woman which is referred to eleven times, first in **14:8**, **“...Babylon is fallen, is fallen, the great city , because she has made the nations drink of the wine of the**

wrath of her fornication,” also in **16:19, 18:10, 16, 18 & 19**. So, ready or not, let's arm ourselves with the word and jump into the next chapter.

Chapter Eighteen

The Judgment of Babylon. Vs. 1-8

1. “After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. 2. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, ‘Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! 3. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.’ 4. And I heard another voice from heaven saying, ‘Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive her plagues. 5. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6. Render to her just as she rendered to you, and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix for her double. 7. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.’ 8. Therefore her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her.”

I have an inclination to write down the entire history of Babylon as given in Scripture. However this would lend nothing productive to what has already been stated, although it is interesting to look at its beginning. In **Genesis 10:9-10** we learn that Nimrod, who was not only a mighty hunter but also a great enemy of God, built Babel after the flood. Chapter 11 goes on to explain how his city got its name. The fall of Babylon in **Rev. 18** occurs because it has the same attitude towards God as did the architect of its namesake. There are more than enough warnings about Babylon’s collapse in Scripture. **Revelation** alone has seven of them, **6:12, Chapters Eight and Nine, 11:11-14, 14:6-13, 16:17-14 & 17:16**. Jesus warned the disciples of this in His last sermon in **Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21**. Then He gave some comfort by saying, **“Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” Luke 21:28**. In the Old Testament there is a number of powerful predictions about God’s judgment on Babylon. The most telling for me is **Jeremiah 51**. There the prophet assumes he is foretelling the destruction of the Chaldean city of his own day. And he is, except almost half of this chapter predict things that didn’t happen when Babylon fell in 538 BC. It is another double-headed prophecy. Perhaps this is why it is sixty-four verses long as opposed to the twenty-four verses of **Rev. 18**. Jeremiah is foreseeing the fall of two separate Babylons. We need to sort them out and apply those relating to a new Babylon and add them to our chapter here.

Let’s proceed on what I consider an epic journey through the preordained overthrow of the western world. Though it is our world and we love it with a patriotic zeal, we must clearly view its fatal shortcomings and nod our agreement. Understanding this chapter is so vital that God presented it in a literal form to keep us from clutching onto a false sense of security. So often in **Revelation** the Lord uses one brief allegory and expects us to see the full picture of literal truth just as Jesus did with parables. To make sure that we get the big picture here, He provides us with one allegorical verse in

the midst of twenty-three literal verses. If this were a classroom, I would ask you to find it yourself. So go ahead; it is very healthy not to let someone else do your thinking for you. This chapter is so unpleasant that we would like to skip through it thinking it can't be for us. We would be mistaken. There is a startling comparison between **Rev. 18** and **Deut. 28**. At the beginning of their epic journey, the children of Israel were given a long list of blessings and curses. The first fourteen verses were blessings; the last fifty-four were the curses. In **Rev. 18**, the children of God get a similar selection of verses in reverse. The curses are the first twenty-one and the blessings ignored are the last three verses, another intriguing parenthesis around the onset and closure of an act of God.

Another Mighty Angel

John starts with **"After these things."** I'm guessing that the apostle was both troubled and confused by what he saw in the last chapter, so I'm sure he was delighted in seeing another messenger **"having great authority."** He describes the angel in much the same way he did for the striking one he saw in **10:1**. The angel in **Chapter Ten** blessed John with an unusual meal and a daunting task. He is probably hoping that this angel will also provide him with information that will ease his troubled mind. And why not? The angel in **ten** was **"...Clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun."** This one illuminated the earth, **"...with his glory."** He is probably as gigantic as the angel in **ten**, but John only commented on his voice. He said it was mighty loud, reason being that the message was the focal point, not the appearance. If we become distracted or remain uninformed this event will come upon us like a thief in the night. **Isaiah** warns us saying: **"See the day of the Lord is coming, a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it"** **Isa. 13:9**. The angel then repeated the message given earlier in **14:8**, **"Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen"** to make sure we understand what is coming. He went on to describe a land so devastated that only demons, evil spirits and carrion birds could dwell in it. The angel used the word *fulakee* twice to describe their situation. The word basically means a *prison*, so they were not free they were incarcerated.

The Reasons

The angel now repeats information given earlier by angels in **14:8** and **17:2** and adds one more specific reason, **"merchants."** On the surface it seems so ordinary and inoffensive a word that our minds balk at it as a reason for destroying an entire civilization. Yet we are being told that the corruption of our society is the product of our storekeepers. If this information wasn't coming from the mouth of an angel, I would scoff at it and look for more serious evils to worry about, but we have been prepared for this in earlier sections. The fact that neither riches nor luxury are in themselves sins, yet they do beget it. Julius Caesar understood that the easiest way to defeat a society was to let its luxuries weaken it to the breaking point. He wrote it down as a military tactic in his book, *The Gallic Wars* Book 6 Chapter 2 Paragraph 15. So we don't have to find a lot of reasons. It begins and ends by rejecting God, once we do this we also lose the wisdom from God and Satan jumps in with his. **James** wrote, **"But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, ...this wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic: James 3:14-15**. Our country by rejecting God, has allowed materialism to become her religion and then seduced by it into spiritual

adultery. The consequences are devastating and clearly voiced by **Chapter Eighteen**. Can we really blame the merchants? If we think about it, are we not all merchants of one sort or another? Far too often we are so busy selling that we forget to give.

Heavenly Advice

As dismal as this all sounds, God's people always have options. In this case He only gives us one, run. Just as Jesus told His disciples to flee, **"When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies" Luke 21:20**, so also are we told to be ready for leaving at any moment. He warns us in **Luke 21:34**, **"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and anxieties of life, and that Day come upon you unexpectedly."** It is quite easy to see how the comfortable lifestyle we have attained has inured us to the cloud of dangers surrounding us. So, like Lot's wife, we can be so attached to what we would be leaving behind as to ignore or resent the words of God: **"Come out of her, My people."** This new voice John hears is repeating an old message. We heard it is **Jer. 51:45**, **"Come out of her midst, My people, and let everyone deliver himself from the fierce anger of the Lord..."** There is no question that we are dwelling in the midst of a dangerously seductive world. The siren song of materialism continually beckons us to become participants in her sin. God's song says leave her **"...lest you share in her sins."** Whom are we listening to most often? This is not a rhetorical question. It must be answered. God is quite serious about this. Children of God or not, if we hang around too long, we will also, **"receive of her plagues."** In case we are not taking this very seriously, God warns us twice in **Jeremiah**, first in **51:6**, **"Flee from the midst of Babylon, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance; He shall recompense her"** secondly in **51:45**.

I have reversed the two pieces of heavenly advice because **51:6** is a proper introduction to **18:5**. I find this verse a remarkable statement about God's somewhat tardy response to the growth of wickedness. Do the evils of a society have to pile up like garbage until heaven takes note of it? Malevolence abounds while righteousness hides in the closet. Where is God? Does He really have a memory problem? As irreverent and sanctimonious as this sounds, many casual Christians say or at least think these very thoughts. Peter was finding similar problems in the early church. His reply is priceless. **"The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not willing that anyone should perish but that all should come to repentance" II Peter 3:9**. With just one verse, he has shocked us out of our carnal mentality into a spiritual reality of cosmic importance. God does not need mnemonic assistance. He is the creator and sustainer of all things, how perverse it is to view His patience as forgetfulness. We however have difficulty viewing the invisible so we need to have our God anthropomorphically presented, even with a few human frailties.

God is seeing in our Babylon what He once saw in two totally corrupt cities named Sodom and Gomorrah. Through two angels, God tells Lot to leave Sodom at once, **"Because we will destroy this place, because the outcry against them has grown great before the face of the Lord, and the Lord has send us to destroy it" Gen. 19:13**. In the judgment of God, the punishment always fits the crime. In the Law

He gave to Moses, God said: **“But if any serious harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, stripe for stripe” Ex. 21:24-25.** God will punish Babylon because of the sorrow and pain she has bestowed upon His children by doubling their sorrow and grief. There is an inference to that in **Jer. 51:49, “As Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon the slain of all the earth shall fall.”** It is only fair to report that the Lord also doubles blessings. **“Instead of your shame you shall have double honor, and instead of confusion they shall rejoice in their portion. Therefore their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be theirs” Isa. 61:7.** **Rev. 18:6** begins with the word *apodidomi*, which has nine different meanings depending upon the surrounding circumstances. I like the King James’ choice of *reward*, my preference though would be *payback* for it seems more meaningful to the conditions.

The reason for such a severe double indemnity is provided in the last half of **v. 6**, **“...repay her double according to her works.”** Again the penalty fitting the crime stands out in stark similarity to her cruel persecution of the Church. There is no indication as to whom God is addressing when He says, **“...in the cup which she has mixed, mix for her double” v. 6.** Many believe He is speaking to those persecuted by her, however this is inconsistent with God’s mandate, **“Vengeance is mine, I will repay...” Deut. 32:35 and Rom. 12:19.** It seems obvious that God is manipulating the ten horns that were attacking her in **17:16.** He has instructed them to fill her own cup and punish her with it. There are only two cups in **Revelation**; one is God’s in **14:10**, **“...the cup of His indignation...”** The other is the prostitute’s in **17:4** and **18:6.** Here the Lord is directing her former allies to double stuff her own golden cup with her own products, **“...abominations and the filthiness of her fornication” 17:4.** The first word of **v. 7** is *hosos*, which has only one meaning – *by reduplication*. For inexplicable reasons it is never translated that way in the King James Bible. It uses “as long as, where so ever, the more etc,” and often they are just fillers, yet in this verse the original meaning is extremely appropriate. We are being told that the sins of Babylon will be reduplicated because of her arrogance and haughty pride.

Her sins in addition to those already mentioned are an inflated view of her own self-importance and her self-indulgent lifestyle, both of which armored her with a false sense of security. She thinks of herself as a **“...queen...and will see no sorrows.”** If it weren’t so calamitous a time in our impending future, this would sound like a fairy tale, the beautiful daughter of the king marrying her prince charming and living happily every after. Unfortunately the prince of this world is Satan, and he is seducing the church, the bride of Christ, to be his own. The outcome is inevitable. Instead of ever lasting joy there is endless, **“Torment and sorrow.”** **Isaiah** foretold this seven hundred years before the Christian era. In **Chapter 47** he wrote about the humiliation of Babylon. Like Jeremiah, he probably didn’t realize he was writing a double-headed prophecy. We, however, should know and look carefully at what God is predicting about our coming disasters. **“Therefore hear this now, you who are given to pleasures, who dwell securely, who say in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children but these two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day: The loss of children, and widowhood. They**

shall come upon you in their fullness because of the multitude of your sorceries, for the great abundance of your enchantments. For you have trusted in your wickedness; you have said, ‘No one sees me’ your wisdom and your knowledge have warped you; and you have said in your heart, ‘I am, and there is no one else besides me.’ Therefore evil shall come upon you; you shall not know from where it arises. And trouble shall fall upon you; you will not be able to put it off. And desolation shall come upon you suddenly, which you shall not know” Isa. 47:8-11.

As a rule, people attending a Bible Class will casually accept my opinion of the western world and America in specific as being the Babylon spoken of in **Revelation**, that is until we reach this point in **Chapter Eighteen**. It is somewhat similar to watching a house burn down with fascination until you discover that it is your own house. Suddenly there comes a sense of denial, and a few will walk out of the class while the more polite ones just start to look at their time pieces. Many argue that this is the apocalypse, which will affect the whole planet and believers will already be raptured up. All I can tell them is that they are one chapter too early, wait until **Chapter Nineteen**. After collating **Rev. 12, 13** and **Daniel 7**, these prophetic visions enlarge themselves into a gigantic picture of panoramic proportions. The only mistake one can make is to force some of the puzzle pieces into places they don't belong. Thus said, it is necessary to look into our future with heavy hearts and hearty faiths. We can thank our God for telling us ahead of time so we will not be taken by surprise and fall under the malediction of **Isa. 47**. The Lord also says that the destruction will be quick, one day, followed by, **“...death, mourning and famine.”** So it is obvious that we find a better place to be when all of this takes place. Not now! It is still too early. But think about it and consider what Jesus said in **Mark 13:28-29**, **“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near, at the very doors.”**

The Lament for Babylon, vs. 9-20

1. “And the kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, 10. standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’ 11. And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: 12. merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron and marble; 13. and cinnamon and incense fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. 14. And the fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. 15. The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, 16. and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! 17. For in one hour such great riches

came to nothing.’ And every shipmaster, all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, stood at a distance 18. and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’ 19. And they threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’ 20. Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!”

The Political Leaders

For all intents and purposes this chapter was finished with v. 8. Babylon will fall and God’s people will survive if they, “...**come out of her...**” End of story. This is the stark reality of our future, and unfortunately this affluent society we dwell in has heard this doomsday prediction far too often to take it seriously. But believe it or not, we have only two paths to follow. Jesus told us what to do in **Matt. 7:13**, “**Enter by the narrow gate, for wide is the path and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there be who travel on it.**” So our loving God, desiring to save the many, expands this chapter with more detailed reasons for the impending disasters. In a sense, the Lord is pleading with us to accept this literal description of the future as reality and respond accordingly. When a nation falls out of power history tells us to look at its leaders. If we had but known ahead of time, how many more lives could have been saved? In **Rev. 18** we are shown a description of future events and in so doing, gives us the opportunity to warn others and save ourselves.

We must, of course, begin with the power sources that forge our present and future circumstances, the political leaders. As a Bible believing Christian, I know that God is the power; yet we live in a world where the leaders have replaced or circumvented God to gain control for themselves. King David understood the seductive power that entices politicians to work by their own rules. He explained the very core of all international turbulence by answering his own question in **Psalm 2:2-3**, “**The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, ‘Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.’**” There in a nutshell, no pun intended, is the political subversion, which leads us to the point we have arrived at in **Rev. 18:9**. Our leaders sell their souls to the harlot for the sake of power and luxury. Even the patience of God has a breaking point, and we have now reached it. **Jeremiah** predicted this in **51:7-9**, “**Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, that made all the earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore the nations are deranged. Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed. Wail for her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed.**” I think this last phrase is our own question, very similar to Abraham’s attempt to save Sodom, and we receive much the same answer. God says, “**We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed. Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country. For her judgment reached to heaven and is lifted up to the skies.**” Men of sound mind shake their heads in bewilderment at the insanity of rulers who prefer war to peace. We shouldn’t be surprised. We do know that one must be deranged to choose, “**...The way that leads to destruction.**”

There should be little doubt that this chapter is chronicling the defeat of a great nation. There is, however, no indication of how this can happen, only why. There is no reference to war or armies, just plagues and fire. We are told that it will happen quickly, **“...in one day” v. 8**, or worse, **“...in on hour...” vs. 10 & 11**. An occurrence described here was unfeasible until the twentieth century. We have created the ultimate weapon. God created the world in six days; we can obliterate it in one hour. We understand atomic energy and the fatal consequences of radiation exposure, so we don't really need to be told, **“...stand at a distance for fear of her torment...”** It may indeed be the method of our demise as a nation. It could also be totally inaccurate. All we need to understand is that for the first time in the history of mankind, we can be destroyed in the blink of an eye, so let's start taking this possibility seriously. And of course the political leaders, **“...will weep and lament for her”** because their power base has now disappeared: the monetary system, which was the security they relied upon rather than God has been flushed away. Perhaps because they are powerbrokers, they seem to understand better than most exactly why such disasters occur for they say, **“...your judgment has come.”**

The Economic Leaders

In spite of all this, the kings only get two verses in this long chapter. It seems that the true villains behind this disaster are the merchants who take seven verses to be indicted. Their sorrow is sincere. They shed tears and grieve over Babylon's decline and fall because she was the only outlet for their merchandise. God is quite specific by listing their commodities in three lengthy verses. This is not a grocery list for putting food on our tables. Rather it is a catalogue of luxuries needed by none, but we seem to think that we do. Good marketing tools do this. **Verses 12-14** provide an invoice of products beginning with gold and ending with souls. Jesus taught us to pray, **“Give us this day our daily bread” Matt. 6:11**. Merchants convince us that we need much more, so it should be no great surprise that they are mourning over the reality that, **“In one hour such great riches came to nothing.”** This is a funeral, and we as Christians can attend and say, “We are sorry for your loss.” What for them is a calamity is for us an experience. We will finally understand what Jesus was teaching the rich young man in **Mark 10:17-31**. We can never really lose what we have never owned.

The Transportation Industry

The first sentence of **v. 17** is really a continuation of **v. 16** and represents the final lament of the merchants. There is a clear division in the Greek text. So we now begin with another industry that was both critical to and dependent upon the vitality of Babylon. Transportation is still the essential link between producers and consumers. If merchants cannot deliver their commodities to those who can buy them, all business comes to a standstill. Until the twentieth century the only forms of travel were by foot, beasts of burden or ships. Obviously ships, though not the safest, was the fastest form available. It was the lifeblood to any entrepreneur for success and wealth in the time of John so he focuses on, **“...all who travel by ship, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea.”** If he were writing today, he could add train, truck and air transport. This should be

a clear and present warning to us who are totally dependent upon these industries. Unlike societies of earlier centuries, we are not self-sufficient. When the framework of a society crumbles, life, as we know it also disappears. Their lamentations are real and understandable, for the basis of their wealth, **“...in one hour is made desolate.”**

Thus far in this chapter, there has been a great deal of weeping and mourning from all segments of this great city’s support groups. Though we may be dwelling in it, it is not our home. Christians can have genuine sympathy for all who weep and wail at their loss, yet we must see it for what it is, an act of God. Together with heaven and its inhabitants, we must, **“Rejoice over her.”** Babylon has a metastatic cancer that cannot be healed and is so polluting that even creation groans in pain. Paul saw Rome as Babylon of his day and described it by saying, **“For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pain right up to the present time” Rom. 8:22.** If I may continue using my funeral metaphor, the fall of this great city reminds us of our own ambivalent emotions at the death of a loved one. We feel both pain of loss, and joy of salvation. Only Christians can truly know this mixture of two ambivalent emotions. We can if we remember what Paul wrote five verses later, **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” Rom. 8:28.** It is perfectly proper for us to rejoice over the fall of Babylon as we would over a Greek Tragedy of Euripides. We can understand her punishment for hubris, greed and cruelty vented upon God’s people. Jesus Himself told us to, **“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers treated the prophets” Luke 6:23.**

The Loss of Babylon, vs. 21-24

21. “Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, ‘Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. 22. The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. And no craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore. And the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. 23. And the light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore. And the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. 24. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth.’”

As I inferred earlier, we now arrive at a one-verse allegory surrounded by an otherwise literal chapter. This is a dramatic technique long used by playwrights to recapture the audience’s attention. We can easily be dulled by the continual gloom and doom of this chapter. If we have a short attention span, our heavenly playwright recovers it with a brief but alarming photoplay of Babylon’s fall. The first half of **v. 21** contains three elements, which intensify the enormity of this spectacular event. First there is, **“...a mighty angel.”** There is no other description of him except the adjective, nor do we need one. We already had a majestic portrayal back in **Chapter Ten.** This mighty angel is not necessarily the same one presented earlier, probably not because he has a very different intent. He is an angel of destruction. Secondly his implement is, **“...a**

great millstone.” This would be the largest movable stone a first century person could see. And finally the angel, **“...threw it into the sea.”** The verb used here is *Ballo*, which always means throw with force. This same word is used in **Mark 5:40** when Jesus threw the professional mourners out of a dead girl’s bedroom. This is not a lob, rather like a fast pitch. The angel dashes the stone into a watery grave. If we think back, we should see how the architect behind all the corruption in this chapter rose out of the sea in **13:1-10**. So it is fitting that allegorically he is being thrown back where he came from. By combining these three components we should be ready to hear and understand his message. Because its malfeasance has piled up to heaven, Babylon will bring about its own violent death.

The second part of this verse augments the first with alarming finality. Great Babylon will indeed fall, but for the first time with a certainty we’ve not heard before: **“...and shall not be found anymore.”** This expression brings even greater meaning to v. 2. Our Babylon will be demolished, never again to be inhabited by mankind. The same forceful verb is used again in the future tense, **“...shall be thrown down.”** Jeremiah was seeing the same vision, **“...how Babylon has become desolate among the nations! The sea has come up over Babylon’ she is covered with the multitude of its waves. Her cities are desolation, a dry land and a wilderness, a land where no one dwells, through which no son of man passes” Jer. 51:41-43.** Interpreting his own prophecy, Jeremiah writes a letter to the Babylon of his day. There is a startling similarity between Jeremiah’s message and our angel’s in **18:21**. **“So Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that would come upon Babylon, all these words that are written against Babylon. And Jeremiah said to Seraiah, ‘When you arrive in Babylon and see it, and read all these words, then you shall say, ‘O Lord, you have spoken against this place to cut it off, so that none shall remain in it, neither man nor beast, but it shall be desolate forever.’” Now it shall be when you have finished reading this book, that you throw it into the Euphrates. Then you shall say, ‘This Babylon shall sink and not rise from the catastrophe that I will bring upon her. And they shall be weary.’ Thus far are the words of Jeremiah: 51:60-64.**

Reasons for the Loss

There is a finality to all of this that has a shuddering effect upon even the strong of heart. We want to deny, but in our heart of hearts we understand the propriety of God’s vengeance. Our society is compromising itself right out of God’s blessings. If this sounds too calloused and unforgiving, review again **Romans 1:18-32**. So then we can and should rejoice along with the heavenly beings over her fall. Though her materialism, greed and injustice has tainted us all, we must acknowledge the altruistic benefits her civilization has produced. Going from the golden age to the Stone Age in one fell swoop is heart wrenching. The sound of her music is gone. Bach, Beethoven and even Handel’s Messiah, **“...shall not be heard in you anymore.”** The beautiful creations of artists and craftsmen **“...shall not be found in you anymore.”** The factories and industries whose products better our lives, **“...shall not be heard in you anymore.”** The social amenities and customs, which bring joy to our lives, **“...shall not be heard in you anymore.”** Our only question is, why? God’s only answer is businessmen. But it is far too easy to place

the blame on our shopkeepers. We need to look at the Lord's answer more fully. **“For your merchants were the great men of the earth.”** We live in a culture whose icons are sport and entertainment figures. Even they will explain their bloated salaries as simply business expenditures. In a world where spiritual leaders should be the vanguard of society, they have been relegated to the tail end. Paul understood the consequences. He wrote: **“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” Gal. 6:7.** This is a sorry end to a disconcerting chapter.

Chapter Nineteen

The Alleluia Chorus, vs. 1-6

1. “After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God! 2. For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her.’ 3. Again they said, “Alleluia! And her smoke rises up forever and ever!” 4. And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, ‘Amen! Alleluia!’ 5. Then a voice came from the throne, saying, ‘Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!’ 6. And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, ‘Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns””

In sharp contrast to the lamentations of **Rev. 18**, John now hears the majestic roar of sound he first heard in **5:11-12**, **“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand time ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice.”** Here John just writes **“a great multitude,”** expecting us to remember as he the incredible volume of sound they must have been producing. The first word coming out of heaven is **“Alleluia.”** It means *praise the Lord*, a wonderful expression that is used nowhere else in the New Testament. Yet, here it is used four times in rapid succession, **vs. 1, 3, 4 & 6**. As majestic and appropriate as this is, that pesky word ‘why’ rushes to the forefront of my mind. Why now and why here? God’s design always has purpose and I seem unable to proceed until His design becomes clear to me. Guesswork is dangerously fallible, so the old tried and true method of letting Scripture interpret Scripture must again be used. The problem being that it is time consuming and difficult. I guess this is why so many would rather presume than to muse. Since the first word the chorus sings is found only here, what other element may we use for comparison?

Who was, Is and Shall Be?

It is always wise to begin with the subject and object of your sentence and proceed from there. In this case the object is **“a loud voice,”** so we begin to search for voices making pronouncements from heaven. We immediately notice that this is the last of seven announcements spoken by heavenly voices. So we go back to the first time where God the Father is being praised in **4:8-11**, **“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty Who was and is and is to come! ...You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.”** This is the beginning indeed! It takes us all the way back to **Gen. 1:1**. We begin to sense that these seven proclamations are going to cover the entire history of our planet, and God’s design begins to emerge.

The New Song

Secondly we examine the entire panoply of heavenly beings loudly rendering praise to the Son, extolling His redemptive work by creating a new song for Him. **“You are worthy to take the scroll, for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and You have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth” Rev. 5:9-10.** This paean of praise really began way back in **Gen. 3:15, “And I will put enmity between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel.”** In this briefest of forms we hear and see Jehovah’s entire plan for our salvation. So it is not surprising to find this to be the first word spoken after **“Alleluia” Rev. 19:1.** Salvation is the cornerstone of God’s grand design, and we can only stand in awe and say, “Thank you.”

Salvation

The next heavenly chorus is composed of the one hundred and forty-four thousands of **Rev. 7.** This seems a paltry number compared to the six billion now dwelling on our planet. However, this is proof of Jesus’ statement in **Matt. 7:14, “Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”** In addition to those saved are the voices of the angels around the throne of God, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures of **Rev. 4:4-8.** Together they shout out with spontaneous joy, **“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, to our God forever and ever. Amen” Rev: 7:10 & 12.** It should be no surprise that there are seven elements in this prayer of rejoicing over God’s solution for the sin of man.

The Seventh Trumpet

The fourth account of **“...loud voices in heaven”** are found in **Rev. 11:15,** shouting, **“The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!”** Then the twenty-four elders proclaim their joy and gratitude because their long awaited victory has now become reality. The elders represent the church triumphant, and the pronoun *we* adds us also to this wonderful song of thanksgiving. Again we hear a sense of finality to human history. Where is the joy in that? We need to see that there is no spitefulness in this vindication, only that our patient waiting is over. At long last an answer to the heavenly voices asking God, **“...how long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth” Rev. 6:10.** In **11:17-18** all the inhabitants of heaven sing together with God’s faithful remnants on earth, a psalm of judgment and reward. **“...Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and You should reward Your servants...” 11:18.**

The Song of the Lamb

The next victorious song flowing out of heaven is from the spiritual survivors who lived during the time of the anti-Christ. They are represented in **14:2-5** and **15:3**. In **Chapter Eleven**, the twenty-four elders fell on their faces and sang; in **Chapter Fourteen** they and the four beings are sung to by the redeemed. John was also a member of the audience, which heard us playing our harps and singing, “...as it were a new song...” It is intriguing that he does not report the song, only the character of the singers. My first thought is because we know the song from **4:9-10**, writing it down again would be redundant. Second thought however cancels this out. Our Lord does not seem to enjoy repetitive liturgical form because liturgists stop thinking when it is performed that way. We are simply told that it was similar to or like the song sung earlier, so we don’t really know exactly what our song will say. It appears that John has provided us with a regrettable omission, and yet it is in accordance with everything we have learned in Scripture. Jesus told His first four disciples, “**Come after Me and I will make you become fishers of men**” **Mark 1:17**. He later instructed them not to worry about what they will say, “**for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you**” **Matt. 10:20**. It is a matter of trust. If we are a part of this heavenly choir, the Spirit will provide the song. The consequences of this Spirit-filled faith is that we are, “...without fault before the throne of God” **14:5**. We can only thank John for not leaking out this vital piece of information.

The last cosmic statement heard was from an individual angel and an unidentified voice in **18:2 & 4**. The angel exclaimed, “...**Babylon the great is fallen...**” and then explained why in **vs. 2-3**. The voice would probably be God for it says, “...**Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues**” **v. 4**. The voice then expanded upon the reasons given by the angel for Babylon’s destruction, **vs. 5-8**. This brings us to the last of seven heavenly anthems and back again to that marvelous though questionable word *Alleluia*. The why now, why here, questions have been satisfactorily answered by our research. It is first used here, not once but four times, because it introduces another first event. And this one will be the most dramatic production in all of human history. How intriguing it is that this is not really the first, but the second coming of Jesus Christ. It is, however, the first time His, “**Salvation and glory and honor and power**” **19:1** is visible to all of mankind. This is an occasion of great joy for all believers and a time of fear and trembling for the unbelievers. The remainder of this chapter will describe in detail the why “**alleluia**” is finally and truly appropriate for the redeemed to shout it out.

In the first six verses of **Chapter Nineteen**, the **alleluia verses** all relate to God, the Father. What could be more appropriate than to praise the Lord now at this monumental moment in history? The design of the Father is now complete. The second advent of His Son has arrived. We praise God for, “...**Salvation and glory and honor and power...**” **v. 1**. We praise Him for the fall of Babylon “**And her smoke rises up forever and ever**” **v. 3**. We praise Him for the privilege to worship Him “...**who sat on the throne**” **v. 4**. We praise Him with a thunderous sound by saying, “**Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!**” **v. 6**. Our just God can now hand over the reins of

power to His Son, just as He promised in **Psalm 2:8-9**, “**Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; you shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.**” From this seminal promise is now born the termination of human history. The final act of what seems to be a comic opera, the story of man.

The Wedding Feast of the Lamb, vs. 7-10

7. “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. 8. And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 9. Then he said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God.’ 10. And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’”

As lamentable as the previous paragraph sounds, this new direction calls for a change of temperament. We are instructed by the heavenly choir to be joyful and happy. The reason for our joy is because we are invited to a wedding. Before jumping into this wonderful section about the “**...marriage of the Lamb...**” I must devote some time to the phrase “**Let us be glad and rejoice...**” For almost as long as I have been a Christian, a verse from **Psalm 118** has been my morning prayer. “**This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it**” **Ps. 118:24**. As I see the same phrase in **Rev. 19:7**, I am compelled to go back and study again this remarkable Psalm. It begins and ends with a verse of thanksgiving, “**Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! Because His mercy endures forever**” **vs. 1 and 29**. The twenty-seven verses between these two delineates in remarkable fashion how profound the mercies of God really are.

This psalm is a messianic song with overtones of a hard-fought battle between good and evil. Its battle hymn is “**The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation**” **v. 14**. Another extraordinary element found here is that it is written as a passion play. There is a narrator who presents the first and last verses and gives a fervent prayer in **vv. 5-21**. We can also hear a chorus singing verses from **Psalm 115:9-11** in **vs. 2-4**. They sing again in **vs. 22-28**, no longer a liturgy, but now present us with a grand prophecy of the Messiah, **v. 22**. Perhaps the most quintessential fact about **Psalm 118** is that, like Jesus, it is the exact center of the Bible. There are 1,188 chapters in Scripture. **Psalm 118** has 594 chapters preceding it and 594 chapters following it. The absolute midpoint in God’s Word is **v. 8**, “**It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.**” This sounds like an anecdotal proverb that sounds good but not to be taken seriously. And therein lies the fatal flaw of mankind. I always believed that sin was our problem, but God has cured this disease with the blood of Christ. Man’s real imperfection is its inability to accept such a simple and cost-efficient gift. Humanity’s motto is that there is no such thing as a free meal. The deadly sin is to then apply it to God. His simple solution is here in **Ps. 118:22-24**, “**The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be**

glad in it.” Unfortunately this seems too simple for world full of skeptics. If faith is so straightforward and uncomplicated, why can't even the churches agree on what is true and what is not? We must remember who our enemy is. Satan is both clever and industrious. He does not fear our churches as long as he can control how they run their business.

As beautiful as **Psalm 118** was and continues to be, it only foreshadows the sublime message we now hear through John's words, **“...the marriage of the Lamb has come.”** In Israel at the time of Jesus, a wedding was more like a dramatic play than a ceremony. It began with the couple's engagement party. The bride and bridegroom have a sip of wine to make the marriage official, at which point the husband would say, “I go to prepare a place for you.” He then immediately leaves to begin building a home for the two of them. This is exactly what Jesus said to His disciples the night before His death. **“Let not your hearts be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you: John 14:1-2.** His Jewish disciples would have immediately recognized this for what it was. Modern Christians miss the wonderful flavor of this wedding statement. The Jewish wedding did not begin with a honeymoon. In fact, the bride does not see her husband again until he has finished his construction work. When he has prepared a home for her, he does not let her know about it. He does, however, break into her father's house and abduct her in the middle of the night.

Paul also understood the similarities between a wedding and Jesus' second coming when he wrote, **“for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” I Thess. 5:2.** After the abduction, the bride's family would pursue the couple all the way to her new home where they begin the feasting and drinking outside while the bride and bridegroom consummate their marriage inside. One further element was necessary for the marriage to be legally binding. The bride must be a virgin. The best man would stand outside the door and listen for the groom's voice to announce that it was indeed legal. John the Baptist also understood all this before the rest of the world even knew that the Messiah had arrived. When John's own disciples thought of Jesus as some sort of pretender, he told them: **“He who has the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled” John 3:29.** It should be no surprise that the first miracle of Jesus was a wedding gift, **John 2:1-12.**

As earlier stated, a wedding in Israel was really a well-scripted play. Although the bride did not see her husband until his work was finished, she would be no different from any young girl today. She would be eager and excited for that day when she will be wife and mother in her own home. Of course she would not wish to be carried off to the bridal couch in a flannel nightgown. She would have friends and family keep track of her husband's progress so that she could be ready and waiting for her abduction, just as stated in v. 7, **“...His wife has made herself ready.”** This should have enormous significance for the church today. We pray, **“Thy kingdom come, thy will be done” Matt. 9:10** on a weekly basis. Do we really mean it? Are we indeed ready for what we are praying?

Jesus clearly understood how distracted His precious bride might become through Satan's prodigious effort to make her a prodigal rather than a prodigy. To thwart this from occurring our Lord has given us two wedding parables as warnings. To make sure we understand their importance He explains them as metaphors of heaven. The first parable of the wedding feast starts in **Matt. 22:2**, **"The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding, but they were not willing to come."** This parable ends in **v. 14**, **"For many are called but few are chosen."** The second metaphor is the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in **Matt. 25:1-13**, **"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."** And it ends with a warning about being distracted: **"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming."** Too often these warnings are thought of as fanciful stories relating to the unchurched. How dangerous is that? It is like wearing a sign around your neck saying, "I'm a stupid bridesmaid."

I know this is negativity at its worst, while the text is about being glad and joyful. Yet it is imperative to recognize the unscalable chasm between **"...the marriage supper of the Lamb" v. 9** and **"...the supper of the great God: v. 17**. The last line of **v. 7** says it all, **"...His wife has made herself ready."** The church has been the bride of Christ for two millennia. The marriage took place on the cross. Jesus predicted this at the onset of His ministry in **John 2:19**, **"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up again in three days."** Jesus' work was done when He said, **"It is finished!" John 19:30**. This is not generally thought of as a wedding scene, but it is. Just hours earlier, in His high priestly prayer, Jesus said, **"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are" John 17:9-11**. We, the church, are joined to Jesus Christ by an arranged marriage. The only question is have we made ourselves ready? Are we demonstrating our joy and exaltation for this divine union by giving Him glory for the marriage? As Jesus said, the only way He is glorified is through us.

The last line of **v. 7**, **"...His wife has made herself ready"** seems to be a contradiction to the start of **v. 8**, **"And to her was granted to be arrayed..."** So let's deal with this anomaly first before going on with the main concept of this text. Has the church, the bride of Christ, indeed made herself ready for her bridegroom? A bride on her wedding day is always beautiful, demure and deeply in love with her bridegroom. She has done all the grooming, perfuming and dressing herself with a little help from her bridesmaids. The church also had better clean herself up and be ready, for the day is drawing near. We must not forget that we are the church. Individuals yes, but indivisible in Jesus Christ. Born again, yes, but that is childhood. We need to mature to be a proper bride for our Lord. This can only be done through sanctification. We are saved by faith, but through sanctification our faith is kept safe. Simply stated, faith is cared for by the Spirit, who working through the word of God leads us to Spiritual adulthood. The next line, **"...to her it was granted to be arrayed"** is a reference to justification. Jesus did

all the work to make us justified and saved. Accepting this gift now makes us able to participate in “...**the righteous acts of the saints**” which is called sanctification.

The Marriage Supper

The last paragraph was too brief to fully define two major doctrines of the Christian church, justification and sanctification. Hopefully it was enough to grasp the truth behind the seemingly contradictory statements at the end of v. 7 and the beginning of v. 8. The real purpose here is to savor all the nuances of a Jewish wedding and their relationship to our part in the body of Christ. If the church is the bride, what part do we as members of the church play in this drama? Our question is answered in v. 9, the fourth beatitude we have heard in **Revelation, “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb” v. 9**. We are the invited guests to this divine banquet. Does that mean we have made the course and reached heaven? No, it doesn't. It only means we are invited. The weak link in this chain to heavenly glory is us. God's work is done and done perfectly. Our role in this performance is a small part indeed. Just thank God for the free tickets and make sure to attend. Jesus made this very clear in the same parable back in **Matt. 22:1-14, “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come.”** The parable goes on to relate the king's angry response to their regrets and a new invitation list for the wedding feast. This obviously refers to the Jewish rejection and the Gentile conversion.

The New Man

The clarity of this parable angered the Jews and delighted the Gentiles, but it also has made us a bit careless. I find that too often we tend to edit out the last four verses. The critical point in the whole allegory is **Matt. 22:12, “So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.”** Because we are forgiven and saved, does not imply that we have no responsibilities. Paul teaches: **“That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” Rom. 10:9**. Having been saved and sanctified, we are now able to begin reflecting the character and will of our Father. The apostle also told us how to do this. He defined the behavior of the redeemed in his letter to the **Ephesians, “This I saw, therefore and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, ...and that you put on the new man, which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness” Eph. 4:17-24**. We need to be clothed with, “...**the righteous acts of the saints**” in order to hear God say, **“Well done, good and faithful servant” Matt. 25:21**. But, if through laziness or ignorance, we go to the wedding inappropriately dressed, we shall hear, **“Bind him hand and foot, take him away and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen” Matt. 22:13-14**. Since we have been, as it were, created as a new being, it is only proper that we shout this to the world. If we don't, we

shall also be speechless when God says, **“Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment” Matt. 22:12.**

The Splendor of the Messiah and His Bride

There has probably been enough said about this allegory to close it up and go on to the next section. Yet I am reluctant to let it go. It portrays the determining factor in the entire history of mankind. It is so filled with solemn exaltation that John, who certainly knew better, began to worship the messenger. We also need to feel just a wee bit of the apostle’s awe. Perhaps John remembered what Jesus said to the disciples of John the Baptist, **“Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast” Matt. 9:15.** No wonder John is overwhelmed. He seems to understand that he is about to receive a truly unique blessing. He shall see the second coming of the Messiah. He saw his Lord crucified, dead, buried, resurrected and ascended. Now he is about to become the only human being ever to see both the beginning and the end. John heard Jesus say from the cross, **“It is finished” John 19:30.** Now he will hear Him say it again, **“It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” Rev. 21:6.**

Since we do not have John’s perspective we need another emotional stimulation for the joy and wonder this picture deserves. For me this feeling is found in **Psalm 45.** It is considered a marriage song, but commentators have differences of opinion about its subject. This is strange because the author of **Hebrews** identifies it as a Messianic psalm in **Heb. 1:8-9** where he quotes **Ps. 45:6-7.** If it were anything else, this psalm would just be a sentimental piece of flattery done by a court sycophant to please an eastern potentate as said in the first verse, **“My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the king; my tongue is the pen of a skillful writer.”** The writer goes on to describe the king as a victorious conqueror sitting upon the throne of God, **vs. 2-7,** which could only apply to the Messiah. The bride of the king is instructed to **“...forget your own people also, and your father’s house” v. 10.** Jesus might have been thinking of this verse when He said, **“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” Matt. 10:37.** The bride is portrayed in **vs. 13-14,** **“The royal daughter is all glorious within the palace; her clothing is woven with gold. She shall be brought to the king in robes of many colors...”**, which brings us back to the description given the church in **Rev. 19:7-8.** What an interesting thought is found in the last two verses of **Psalm 45,** which refers to us as the children of the bride.

This thought leads us into **Rev. 19:10.** Like John, we are in awe both of the message and the messenger, but we must be both awe-struck and inspired to be told that we are in the same enterprise as this mighty angel. I am guessing about who John is speaking of when he wrote, **“But he said to me” v. 10.** The last thing John heard was a voice coming out of the throne followed by all of heaven singing loudly in **vs. 5-6.** There is no reference to an individual angel. The last angel was the mighty one in **18:21** who destroyed Babylon allegorically. Whoever he was is irrelevant because he is just a tool to present God’s message. We also, whether elder, teacher, priest, witness or commentator,

are only tools to spread the Word. What a joy it is to be told by an angelic being that, **“...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”** We need to remember that Jesus said, **“For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you”** **Matt. 10:20.**

The Second Coming, 19:11-16

11. “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. 14. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed him on white horses. 15. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

John now experiences the new vision he anticipated when he fell at the feet of the angel. Once before the apostle saw a similar scene in **Chapter 4:1**, **“After these things I looked and behold a door standing open in heaven.”** At that point he was drawn up to heaven. Here heaven comes down to him in the form of Jesus riding a white horse. Together with John we saw our Lord riding a white horse earlier in **Chapter 6:2**. There also he was riding into war, **“...and He went out conquering and to conquer.”** I’m guessing that John would have to be thinking about the first time he saw Jesus riding. He wrote about it in his gospel. **“Then Jesus when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written! ‘Fear not, daughter of Zion; Behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt”** **John 12:14-15.** I doubt if John understood the insight he had at the time he wrote the prophecy from **Zech. 9:9**. Now however, as he sees the vision unfold, the apostle must understand as do we the enormity of what is about to happen: The closing scene of this present world.

Faithful and True

It is significant that the rider of the white horse is not identified by His given name, but by a cognomen, faithful and true. This is the way we must present Him to a skeptical world. Our Lord is indeed the most absolute truth teller the world has ever seen. In the opening chapter of his gospel, John set the stage for the basis of our saving faith. He wrote, **“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”** **John 1:17.** John stated the reason for writing his gospel in one verse: **“but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”** **John 20:31.** This is the simplicity of our message. If this truth is rejected or scoffed at, it is not our responsibility. Our part is to speak; the Spirit’s task is to save. Even so, there is a deep well of sorrow when people we care deeply about refuse to acknowledge the truth. This must be a reflection of Jesus’ own sorrow at the unbelief of His family and friends. One of the saddest lines in Scripture is the Lord’s statement to His fellow Jews, **“But because**

I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.” So, like Jesus, we must continue to spread the truth even though it might be a dangerous occupation.

For the epiphany we are seeing here to occur, it is imperative that we do our job. The church has allowed us to become lazy and consequently must share some of our blame. The apostle Paul is quite succinct when he said, **“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching” II Tim. 4:1-2.** Paul’s directive surrounds the phrase, **“...at His appearing and His kingdom.”** If I may be as succinct as Paul, Jesus will come again in glory after we have gone and witnessed. It is more than a little disturbing to see how casual many Christians are about spreading the Word. Can anyone think that Jesus was not serious when He said, **“Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My father who is in heaven” Matt. 10:32-33.** Therefore, we must also consider our Lord as our judge. **Verse 11** tells us five characteristics of the Messiah. We need to consider them all including the last one, **“...makes war.”** We must make sure which side of this war we will be on.

Prior to the last personal trait of Jesus in this verse, we hear the descriptive phrase, **“...and in righteousness He judges.”** In society today we fully understand what judging means, but righteousness is tenuous at best. Even when we want to do the right thing, too often we can’t be sure what it is. In a culture where everything goes and sin has been erased from our consciousness, we develop the cynicism of Pilate when he said to Jesus, **“What is truth?” John 18:28.** Webster defines righteous, as “acting in accordance with what is just and honorable.” Since ethics is not found in our children’s education, it is just and proper for them to ask the question: “What is right?” We live in a society where justice is selective and often unfair. Jesus prepared us for such an experience in the parable of the unjust judge in **Luke 18:1-8.** It seems quite relevant that He told this parable immediately after the Pharisees asked Him when the kingdom of God would come. Jesus then told His disciples what society would be like right before His second coming, **Luke 17:22-37.** Consequently we should be anxiously awaiting the arrival of Him who judges in righteousness.

Although my brain is now ready to proceed, my soul seems reluctant to go on. From past experiences I have learned that what authors call writer’s block doesn’t happen in Scripture. Rather it is generally a matter of the writer getting in the way of the Spirit. So one has to stop, look back and see what has been short-changed. In this case, it seems to be the children. In the last paragraph I sort of threw in the education of our youth as an example of a society that compromises righteousness. It seems that this subject must be expanded. When in doubt, look at what Jesus said. Our Lord had a special affection for children, I think, because of His affinity with them. He came to us as a little child. He goes so far as to say that our relationship with Him is related to how we deal with our children. **“Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me: Mark 9:37.** Four

verses later He gives a chilling declaration of what will happen if we don't care properly for our children. **“And whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea” Mark 9:42.**

With this grim warning, it behooves us to look more carefully at the indoctrination of our children. God tells us clearly how to raise our offspring. **“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” Proverbs 22:6.** Why is this not occurring in the vast majority of households in our nation? There are a number of reasons for this, and all of them are devastating. But, first and foremost is the fact that fathers themselves do not know **“...the way he should go...”** so how can they instruct their children? Most Christian parents delegate their responsibilities to the church, which in turn passes it down to Sunday school lay teachers. Now let's compare what our children are hearing. One day a week, if they are lucky, they hear the Word of God. Too often they will get a condensed version of how God created the heavens and earth in six days. Then we send them into a public school system that will teach them that the world is billions of years old and was not created at all. Children are inundated with evolutionism from K through 12 and beyond. Their exposure to creationism is minimal at best. Is it any wonder that they become skeptics? Let's pray that God will protect them, because we certainly don't.

I would love to bring a rosier spin to this image, but it won't allow me to do this. The rider on the white horse transfixes me because **“His eyes were like a flame of fire.”** We have heard this earlier in **Rev. 1:14** and **2:18**. Fire and flames in Scripture are often related to the wrath of God. This was certainly true in the case of the Thyatirian church where Jesus accused some members of having, **“...known the depths of Satan” Rev. 2:24.** One verse earlier He explained the purpose of His flaming eyesight. He said, **“...I am He who searches the minds and hearts, and I will give to each one of you according to your works.”** So this unnamed rider, who will be warrior, truth teller and judge, will also, with penetrating vision see into the very depths of our souls. Who can possibly feel comfortable with this closure? This naked reality, which bares all the things we have worked all of our lives to conceal are now revealed. It is spiritually healthy to see this event through the eyes of an unbeliever. What for us is a long awaited epiphany, for them is a far too sudden finale with catastrophic consequences. They have every right to look at us in anger and to say: If you knew this would happen, why didn't you warn us? The truth is that most Christians, like most fathers, don't teach because they also don't know.

If you are forming a mental picture of this verse as I am, there is a problem with the phrase **“...and on His head were many crowns.”** How many are there and how are they arranged? Obviously John did not think this to be pertinent for the subject matter because he left them out, so we must do the same. Crowns represent royal authority, and in the context of this triumphant entrance the many implies political power over many nations. The battle itself coming two verses later is anti-climatic. The victory had already been achieved on the cross. Satan had seven crowns on his heads in **12:3** and the anti-Spirit had ten crowns in **13:1**, so it is quite appropriate for Jesus to simply have

many. I would like to think that there were so many that John didn't have time to count them all, so he just said, "...many crowns." The unholy Trinity in **Chapters 12** and **13** seemed so indomitable at the time that the common consensus was, "**Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?**" **Rev. 13:4**. Yet here the outcome of the battle between good and evil is a foregone conclusion.

What's in a Name?

Regarding the rider's name, there is another conundrum. John says that, "**He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.**" The apostle must have seen this appellation yet he tells us nothing about where it was presented or what it looked like. John seems to feel a sanctity surrounding this name with the same awe his fellow Jews felt about the name of God. It appeared in the Old Testament only as the four consonant word "**YHWH.**" While reading scripture aloud the priests never attempt to pronounce it; instead they substitute it with the title "**Adonay,**" which means *Lord*. The rabbis claimed that only God Himself knew the true pronunciation and interpretation of this intriguing term. We Gentiles, however, need to at least guess at what it might be so we came up with the name Yahweh, which then developed into the more familiar word Jehovah. It comes to mind that this might be the reason for God's answer when Moses asked what name to call him. Foreseeing all of the uncertainties about this, He simply said, "**I am who I am**" **Exodus 3:14**.

I believe that we will not only know this name at some future date, but we will also wear it. Jesus gave remarkable promises to two of the seven churches in **Chapters 2** and **3** if they would endure and overcome. To the church in Pergamus He said, "**...to him who overcomes... I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it**" **Rev. 2:17**. And to the faithful church in Philadelphia He said, "**To him who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, ...and I will write on him My new name**" **Rev. 3:12**. All in all, we need to have patience about the name game and wait for any final answers. Most of us have names that we share with countless thousands of others. In heaven we shall have new names, which will give us individual value and significances. The scope of this surpasses all understanding. It is another joy of heaven to look forward to with unmitigated expectation. How can we be so sure? The answer is because God said so. In **Isaiah** God promises salvation for the Gentiles together with a new name. "**Even to them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off**" **Isa. 56:5**.

There is much more satisfaction in the visionary panacea our Lord has provided us with in **v. 13**. We saw Him riding a white horse. Now we hear, "**He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood.**" In past dealings with this verse I made assumptions that I now see were in error. I had pictured Jesus garbed in a white robe lightly sprinkled with blood drops, followed by a host of followers who all are dressed in white. But according to **Isaiah** His garment was not sprinkled but dyed with blood, not white but red. "**Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah,** (a city in Edam

renown for its dyed garments). **This One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength? ‘I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.’ Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the wine press?” Isa. 63:1-2.** In the past I have used **Isa. 63:3** as a melodious counterpoint for **Rev. 19:15**, which indeed it is. However in so doing, I overlooked the incredible significance of the first two verses in **Isa. 63:1-2**, painful proof that assuming dulls the mind. There is a glorious dialogue occurring in **v. 1** that serves as a counterbalance to the devastation in **v. 3**, **Isaiah** asked the proper question, **“Who is this who comes...”** And the Lord Jesus Himself provides the answer, **“I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”**

Self-criticism, though hard on the ego, is healthy for the soul. There is some comfort in knowing that I correctly understood the, **“...robe dipped in blood,”** represented our passport into heaven if we simply accept Jesus as **“The Word of God.”** This sounds simpler than both church and society have allowed. If Jesus is indeed **“...Faithful and true” v. 11** and **“The Word of God” v. 13**, then every word from **Gen. 1:1** to **Rev. 22:21** is accurate and without error. Isn’t that simple? Who should we believe, the sinless witness who was actively involved or sinful men who create only flawed theories? The answer should be obvious, but compromises abound and uncertainties continue to swarm around us. Satan still uses the same old lie he concocted in the Garden of Eden. **“Has God really said...” Gen. 3:1.** He still uses it because, unfortunately, it still works.

If the **“Word of God”** is the hallmark of all Scripture, it becomes important to expand on just what John means by using that term. John alone used this title for the Lord, and he was so emphatic about it that he founded his whole gospel upon it. **“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” John 1:1.** John again was the only writer to report the name that Jesus gave Himself after feeding the five thousand. He said, **“I am the bread of life” John 6:35.** The apostle carefully reports all three times Jesus used this title as He spoke to the Jews who followed Him for all the wrong reasons. Then Jesus exposed their superficiality by offending them with these words, **“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If a man eats of this bread he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” John 6:51.** This did offend some of His followers who showed their dissatisfaction by walking away, **“...and no longer followed him” John 6:66.** They did not understand what He meant, but John did and gratefully He shared the meaning with us. We must ingest **“the Word of God”** to make Him an integral part of our bodies. If we just look at the Word of God, we become his observers viewing a beautiful painting of a sumptuous banquet and then walk away hungry. On the other hand, Jesus says, **“If you are hungry, dig in!”** The Word of God must be savored, tasted, chewed and swallowed. If not we are only interested observers, too finicky to participate in such a finger-licking revelry.

Unsoiled and Unbloodied

As stated earlier, John saw great significance in the different titles Jesus used for Himself and recorded them for posterity. John begins in **8:35**, **“And Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life.’”** The apostle then follows with, **“I am the light of the world”**

8:12, “the gate” 10:7, “the good shepherd” 10:17, “the resurrection and the life” 11:25, “the way, the truth and the life” 14:6, “the true vine” 15:1. Notably all of these are related to getting us into heaven. Here in **Rev. 19:14** we now have an opportunity to get a peek at what we will look like when we get there. John calls us, not an army, but armies without explaining why. We can only guess. It could be one army of angels and another of the redeemed as in **Chapter Seven**. Or it could be one of Gentiles and another host of Israelis. John could have said something about it, but he chose not to. What he did choose to record was our type of clothing. It was, **“...fine linen, white and clean.”** Jesus was bloodied, but we are sparkling clean, which means that we are just spectators. An angel explains our appearance to John in **7:19, “...these are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”**

John also describes our mode of transportation. We are not just floating along behind Jesus like disembodied spirit, but as nobility riding out for a foxhunt. Like the Lord, we also are mounted on white horses. This brings to mind the account of Elijah’s remarkable horse drawn passage into heaven in **II Kings 2:11, “Then it happened as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.”** As Elijah ascended to heaven, we will descend with Jesus on horses. I find great significance between Elijah’s ascent and symbolic descent in **Malachi 4:5-6** and Jesus ascension in **Acts 1:9-10** and His return in **Rev. 19:11-14**. Habakkuk also saw the vision we are examining here. He did not understand its meaning so he asked God a question, **“O Lord, were You displeased with the rivers, was Your wrath against the rivers, was Your wrath against the sea, that You rode on Your horses, Your chariots of salvation?” Your bow was made quite ready; oaths were sworn over Your arrows...” Hab. 3:8-9.** The prophet was writing 600 years before the birth of Christ, so his discernment was understandably quite vague. We, on the other hand, are looking at this almost in hindsight. We understand the reasons for the wrath of God. What the prophets of old saw as a dim future, we see as an embarrassing history.

The Wrath of Almighty God

Mankind is tottering on the very edge of the last days predicted throughout the apocalyptic writings found in Scripture. Habakkuk saw it and wrote in **3:11-12, “The sun and moon stood still in their habitation; at the light of Your arrows they went at the shining of Your spear. You marched through the land in indignation; You trampled the nations in anger.”** We see the fulfillment of this prophesy in **v. 15**. Jesus appears with a sword in His mouth as we have seen earlier in **1:16** and **2:12**. In the two earlier visions it was a two-edged sword, here John just calls it a sharp sword. As mentioned in earlier chapters, the Bible contains both blessings and cursings. **Deuteronomy 28** is the most complete catalogue of both sides of this sharp sword. So it seems that at the time of Jesus’ second coming, the blessings side is complete. Now it is time for striking out and cutting down with the other side of the sword. I need to be careful about getting too caught up in this great battle scene. It is an allegory. The Lord will not cut down His enemy with any weapon other than His Word. This world is going

to be destroyed in the same way it was created, by the Word of God. John understands this and I believe that is why he provided us with some difficulties about these verses. The Bible is the Word of God; we must know what it says in order to know the Lord. Holy Scripture contains the basic instructions before leaving earth. The name of the motivational speaker who created this acronym escapes me, but I thank him for such a splendid idea.

Psalm Two

It is fitting and proper for John to again draw a passage from David's psalm to show the legitimacy of Jesus' authority over the world's leaders. The apostle obviously sees a significance of this psalm that compels us to search out and see what we might have missed earlier. The verse John is quoting is **Psalm 2:9, "You will break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."** The speaker in this verse is God the Father, giving authority over the nations to His Son. The first time this verse is used in **Revelation**, the speaker is Jesus passing on this authority to us. **"And he who overcomes and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations. 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces'" Rev. 2:26-27.** The last time we hear it is in **19:15, "...and He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron..."** The pronoun *he* in **2:27** refers to us, but the same pronoun in **19:15** is applied to Jesus, which all seems to explain how this whole scenario is going to play out. God the Father anoints the Son with His authority over the nations, **Psalm 2:7-9**. Jesus accomplishes His mission in **Rev. 19:15**, and then will pass this on to believers who endure to the end, which prayerfully will be us. All in all we are being assured of gainful employment with great benefits in the not too distant future.

The Grapes of Wrath

The scene we are looking at in the end of **v. 15, "...He Himself treads the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of almighty God,"** has been commented on earlier in **16:17-20**. There the vine of the earth was cut down with a sharp sickle, here with a sharp sword. This is the same event, the end of the story, but with greater detail. The prophet Joel wrote of an alarming vision God had given him about the end times. **"Let the nations be awakened and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down, for the winepress is full, the vats overflow for their wickedness is great" Joel 3:12-13.** Here we view the Lord Jesus bringing a bloody end to mankind's shameful history. I find it symbolic that Jesus began His ministry by changing water into wine as a wedding gift in **John 2:1-11** and in the end He will tramp grapes into blood, metaphorically speaking.

John stated in **19:12** that Jesus had His name written that no one knew. Here in **v. 16** we find that it was inscribed on His thigh. If we were a bit confused earlier, we are more so now. Why His thigh? Obviously this must be an opinion because John gives us no help. Jesus is appearing as a warrior in military garb. Normally a soldier wore his sword on his thigh, but Jesus' sword is in His mouth, and His name is on His thigh. This

may be a word-play on the picture of the great harlot in **17:5**, **“And on her forehead a name was written: Mystery, Babylon the Great the Mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth.”** The Messiah on the other hand has His name written on His thigh. Could it be because this is how He will defeat them? We are told in **17:14**, **“...and the Lamb will over come them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings.”** Now we see His name written on His thigh. I believe Paul also saw this vision during his three years of training in the desert. He told Timothy to, **“Fight the good fight of faith, ...until our Lord Jesus Christ appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords” I Tim. 6:12-15.** At any rate, all will eventually know the Lord’s name, which was known by none.

The Supper of the Great God, vs. 17-21

17. “Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, ‘Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, 18. that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.’ 19. And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. 20. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. 21. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.”

The Invitation

I am certain that this portentous scene unfolding should be taken as a literal event. Is it wise to jump from metaphor to literal almost at will? Almost certainly not. Yet we are in apocalyptic scripture and the Holy Spirit is holding the reins, not the commentator. So we must, as they say, go with the flow. The first thing that comes to mind is the location. We were told where in **16:16**, **“And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.”** The meaning of this word is most likely from the Canaanite city of Megiddo, which took its name from the twelve mile plain situated in Palestine. It was also called the plain of Jezreel or Esdraelon in the Old Testament. Many battles were fought there throughout history. This is another one of those remarkable parallels or Alpha and Omegas that occur so often in **Revelation**. The first great battle in history, which displayed clear military strategy and the careful disposition of troops, was fought in the plain of Megiddo. The first combatants were the Egyptians under Thutmose III against the Syrians in May of 1479 BC. The last great battle there will be Jesus Christ against the massed armies of earth’s military leaders.

The second thought, which comes to mind, is how frugal John was in his description of the messenger: **“I saw an angel standing in the sun.”** At this pivotal point in the history of man there seems to be a brief pause to publicize an invitation, **“...to all the birds that fly... Come and gather together for the supper of the great**

God.” There are two unexpected elements in one verse, which should at least be considered. The message is easier to deal with than the messenger, so let’s deal with the invitation first. There is no need for guesswork or opinions about what we are hearing here. The myriad of messages one might find in searching through **Revelation** could be pared down to just one critical inquiry. Whom do you follow? We may think that we must make many choices in our lifetime, and most adults could make a long list to prove it, but **Revelation** continually peels these decisions down to one. Whom do you follow? Jesus related this decision making to picking a path in **Matt. 7:13-14**. We can choose a rocky, difficult, lonely road to heaven, or a heavily traveled super highway to hell. Unfortunately Satan continues to bombard us with contradictory messages that muffle that basic simple question of life, “Whom do you follow?” **Revelation** continues to display how easy this choice really is. Here it presents two feasts, “...the marriage supper of the Lamb” v. 9 or “...the supper of the great God” v. 17. At the first we are the honored guests at the feast; at the second we are the feast. How difficult a choice is that?

Having dealt with the milk of v. 17, it is now time to ingest the meatier portion of it. John simply says he saw an angel. The very simplicity of this vision brings a sublime grandeur to the event. The only other information about this angel is that he is standing, “...in the sun.” This tells us that the messenger himself is irrelevant as opposed to his location. There is no other example like this in Scripture, so it is difficult to use the tried and true method of interpretation. Yet we are not reduced to using opinions for something so majestic. There are several comments about the sun, which may be related to this section that we must examine before using guesswork. First and foremost, the sun is a product of God’s creation. “**Then God made two great lights: The greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule with the night**” **Gen. 1:16**. This was the beginning of time. Almost as an afterthought Moses threw in, “**He made the stars also.**” There is an incredible significance to this little add on. Today’s astronomers tell us that earth and its solar system is just a small and unimportant part of the cosmic scheme. And evolutionary development of man is an interesting accident of nature, yet the Bible declares that the universe is just the icing on the cake we call our planet earth. So, by taking God at His word, this planet of ours is indeed the focal point of the entire universe. All other additions to the cosmos are just decorations for our admiration and wonder.

A solar system is like the human body. The sun pumps the life force into its orbiting planets like the heart pumps lifeblood into our extremities. Our bodies have an affinity with the sun just as our souls should have with the Son. It may be too much of a stretch for our imagination to compare our faith to an angel standing in the sun, but it inspires me. Too many believers know of and believe in Jesus, but they are not even close to standing in Him. However, suns are masses of blazing gas, which will eventually burn out or explode. The Son never will. David wrote, “**For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory?**” **Ps. 84:11**. As improbably as this may appear, we need God for survival more than we need the sun. Isaiah said, “**The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the Lord will be your everlasting light:**” **Isa. 60:19**. For those who hear the angel’s voice predicting cosmic destruction of our earth, the words of Isaiah should be a

load of comfort. Our safety has been provided. The last chapter of the Old Testament says, **“But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings and you will go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves” Malachi 4:2.** And John recorded something similar for us in **Rev. 7:16-17, “They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore, the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them...”** Jesus is our sun, what is there to fear? The angel standing in the sun tells us in no uncertain terms where we should be standing.

The Battle

Those carcasses that the birds are summoned to feast on in **v. 18** are the same seven classes of people John saw under the sixth seal in **Rev. 6:15**. Here, in **v. 19**, the apostle has the privilege to view the last gasp effort of mankind to determine their own destiny. For the first time in recorded history all nations, all ethnic groups and all social levels will unite against a common enemy. It is bitterly ironic that when man finally gets it all together, they are totally wrong. John sees the armies merging for battle and then completely unexpected, he skips over the battle. I’m guessing that he is asking the same perplexing question David asked in **Psalm 2, “Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing?” v. 1.** Both David and John knew there was only one outcome for such a blasphemous act, and found no joy in its outcome. John does not write a word about the battle. Perhaps because what he saw was only a brief scrimmage not worth writing about. However, the apostle carefully records both the reason and aftermath of this debacle.

The Outcome

Before jumping into **v. 20**, it is almost a necessity to at least consider how such an improbable result can have occurred. As we look at the two armies in our mind’s eye, from the human point of view, the beast can’t lose. On one side we have Jesus with an army of noncombatants who are clothed more for a picnic than a battle. On the opposing side we see the two beasts from **Chapter Thirteen** who have already defeated the church and shown supernatural powers. Following this dynamic duo is a massive army equipped with satanic power and human weaponry. We saw a similar one-sided battle in **Chapter Twelve** when a great dragon was poised over a woman in the process of giving birth. The red dragon’s intent was, **“To devour her child as soon as it was born” 12:4.** The reader can only feel sorrow for the baby who seems to have no chance for survival. Yet in the very next verse the child not only survived, but grew up to conquer the prince of this world. In that war there was an army of angels led by Michael protecting the child. Now Jesus closes the cycle by returning again, riding on a white horse to finish His part of the war against the unholy Trinity.

In both of these events the odds against the formidable power of demonic power seems overpowering. Yet on both occasions victory was not only achieved, but also so predetermined that it is not even recorded. I believe God is telling us something we need to hear, but probably won’t enjoy. Sometimes we have a tendency to apply our human frailties to our Omnipotent God. Like the disciples, we need to be more highly educated about the protective power of our Lord. While boating across the Sea of Galilee and

Jesus was taking a nap in the stern, a sudden storm arose. Peter tells us they become so frightened that they shook Jesus awake to ask Him an unthinkable question: **“Teacher, do you have no concern that we are perishing?” Mark 4:38.** We also have our storms of life that seem inescapable and as fear grows, faith diminishes. Then it is necessary for God to remind us again that, **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” Ps. 46:1.** With it also comes the troubling questions of Jesus, **“Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?” Mark 4:40.** It is dangerous to grow too casual in our daily relationship with the omnipresent power of Jehovah.

Probably this is about my own tendency to meander off in odd directions and is of little interest to others, so let’s get back to the text. The massive armies of the two beasts it seems are defeated by a single thrust of a sword, the Word of God. We must remember that this is a future event. We, the children of God, must deal with these same forces on a daily basis. Our first response would be, we can’t. If that is true, we have been deceived. We believed the lie of Satan who preaches, **“Who is like the beasts? Who is able to make war with him?” Rev. 13:4.** We must stop listening to lies and search the Word for truth. We have the same sword in our possession that will ultimately defeat the beasts. Paul tells us to, **“Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” Eph. 6:17.** We have no biblical reasons for defeatism and certainly no excuse for failure. Jesus conquers with ease, and John supports this by ignoring the battle itself. The only description to be found is in **Isa. 11:4, “...He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.”** We see the unholy Spirit and the anti-Christ being disposed of in **v. 20** together with a description of their crimes; and the last verse of this chapter relates to the mop up section of the battle. David appears to be describing this scene in **Ps.110:5-6, “...He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries.”** I think David even refers to us in **v. 3, “Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power.”** What a future we have in store for us.

Chapter Twenty

The Millennium, vs. 1-6

1. “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; 3. and he cast him into the bottomless pit and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. 4. And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”

At the beginning of each new chapter, it is my custom to review the work done up to that point. The farther along I get, the longer the reviews begin to take. As I look at **Chapter Nineteen**, there is something nibbling at the margin of my mind and I can't quite articulate it. After searching Scripture, I find no basis for this mental itch that I can't seem to scratch. Consequently I must resort to opinion though I still feel it is from the Spirit. After spending such a long time in Scripture looking almost microscopically into its depth, I now see this search as a long path of discovery. What began, as a study of the sixty-six books of the Bible then became a closer look at the 1188 chapters contained in these books. Next came a careful look into each verse, which I have not counted. I now find myself dissecting individual words and my itch seems to be where do I go from here? The answer, which I pray is from the Spirit, is now to regress back from where I came and see the whole picture.

I truly believe that every verse in Scripture contains the embryo of the entire word of God. To fully understand the meaning of one verse we must relate it to every other verse of canonical writings. My first human response is that it is not possible. To accomplish this would mean devoting every moment of life delving into Scripture. I am positive that God's reply is simply, yes! If indeed each verse is orbited by every other verse, chapter and book in Scripture like a galaxy, how can we ever understand it? Now the answer is rather simple. We need to exert the same sort of effort that N.A.S.A. is willing to spend to learn more about our own galaxy. Peter tells us why in his first letter, **“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” I Peter 3:15.**

King David, who was a poor father, a worse husband and a man who used his power to murder another to hide his own sin, was still blessed by God. Why? Because

he understood the Word and loved it is why. He explains basic truths for a blessed life in his first psalm. In the first verse David tells us what not to do if we wish to have a blessed life. He said we must not walk, stand nor sit with the ungodly. In the second verse he tells us what a true believer must do. **“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditated day and night...and whatever he does shall prosper” Psalm 1:2-3.** Our human response immediately revolts at such a simplistic view of life. We must feed, clothe and house our families. This takes all of our time and effort. Careful, this is just another way of saying, “I don’t believe it.” Perhaps it will help to consider again what Jesus said about the necessities of life. **“But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” Matt. 6:33.** In short, He is saying that if we believe in Him, our next life is taken care of; now spend our time properly to get this life straightened out. The long and the short of all this was pronounced by Moses to Israel in **Deut. 8:3** and by Jesus Himself in reply to Satan’s temptation, **Matt. 4:4, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”** How emphatic is that? Our very lives depend upon the Word of God.

How can we possibly think that God was not serious when He said we must ingest every word He has ever spoken? My malaise as I reviewed the last chapter is centered on a statement I made on page 182. In discussing our responsibilities I said the church has allowed us to become spiritually lazy and should share some of our blame. I was too kind. The church needs a whole lot of blame for our spiritual illiteracy. She has made us dependent upon her and promised to explain the truth of Scripture for us as if we are severely retarded children. The consequences of such a self-destructive policy is described in **Ezekiel 33:31-32, “My people come to you as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs and has a pleasant voice and plays an instrument well; for they hear your words, but do not put them into practice.”** History always repeats itself. What happened to Israel is happening to us today. We Americans are a nation of industrious people possessing a very pragmatic nature. If something needs to be done we are ready and willing to accomplish it. This sounds good, but it is not. We have great pride in our self-sufficiency while God insists on our being dependent upon Him. Such a violent culture class brings with it dire consequences. This was predicted by the prophet Amos, **“The days are coming says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord” Amos 8:11.** Jesus said that He was the bread of life. Our poor nation is starving for Him and doesn’t even know it.

Satan Bound

It seemed necessary for me to go through such a long introduction to **Chapter Twenty**. It is very easy to leap before we look at what God is informing us of. The normal assumption of most readers is that this chapter is a continuation of **Chapter Nineteen**; it even makes good sense. In the last section, Jesus returned victoriously and defeated all enemies, so for all intents and purposes, the conflict is over. That could be a correct interpretation, but I don’t think so. If such an assumption is correct then all of

Chapter Twenty is a picture of some future date where this corrupt planet of ours will continue to revolve for another thousand years. This is inconsistent with the rest of Scripture, and opens itself to questionable opinions. This chapter is most often interpreted as the fulfillment of **Isaiah 11:6-10** where carnivorous animals become herbivorous. The prophet is seeing the future correctly, but he is seeing the new earth, which occurs in the next chapter, not this one. If there is any doubt about this, look back at what Paul said about the corruption of our world in **Romans 8:20-22**, **“For the creation itself was subjected to futility...For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.”** How interesting that the world suffers the same punishment God issued to Eve. **“I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children” Gen. 3:16.**

At the very beginning of the revelation sections in **Chapter Six**, I made the supposition that each apocalyptic chapter was relating the same message from a slightly different point of view. To change this at such a late date would negate most everything written thus far. It is true that both **Chapters Eighteen** and **Nineteen** are continuations of **Chapter Seventeen** because John said, **“After these things I saw” 18:1** and **“After these things I heard” 19:1**. **Chapter Twenty**, however, begins with, **“Then I saw...”** John now is seeing a new scenario of events, which have been presented earlier, so our task is to recognize where in history this chapter begins. Our first question must be at what point was Satan bound? If this is an instant replay of something that was described earlier, where is it to be found? As previously stated, God always gives us clues to pursue discernment. Here there are two. In **v. 2** John gives us a description of Satan, which is identical to one he has given earlier. The synagogue of Satan is mentioned in **Rev. 2** and **3**, but Satan himself does not appear until **Chapter 12:9**, **“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”** As stated in my commentary on this, “The casting out of Satan happened the moment Jesus said from the cross, **“It is finished.”**”

The second clue is, **“and he cast him into the bottomless pit.”** The verb *ballo* is same as the word used in **12:9**. So what we are looking at is a broader picture of the aftermath from the battle waged by Michael and his angels in **12:7-12**. In **Chapter Twenty** we discover that Satan Himself was cast out, not only of heaven, but also imprisoned in the bottomless pit. I know this sounds like a contradiction, so an explanation is necessary. Satan was formidable foe. As we are warned in **12:12**, **“...Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath.”** For this reason the old dragon is physically locked away until the time for his final defeat in **20:7-10**. During the entire New Testament Age, his work is performed by the beast from the sea, the unholy spirit described in **13:1-10**. And still to appear is the beast from the land that John calls the anti-Christ. These two parts of the unholy trinity Jesus will defeat and, **“...Cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” 19:20**. God the Father will execute the final battle. The mistake made by readers is thinking that the time frame, a thousand years, is to be taken literally. If that is so, it is unique in **Revelation**. Up to this time, days, weeks, months and years have been figures of speech used to denote a larger frame of time. Why should we change

metaphors in midstream? The millennium represents an era not presented before in this book. It covers the entire New Testament Age, the Age of Tribulation, the Age of Vengeance right up through the second coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The crux of the matter at hand is not what happened, but when. This is indeed guesswork because it is not provable in Scripture. Yet, to bring together all the loose ends, it appears that Satan was cast out of heaven after the birth of Christ and into the bottomless pit after Christ's death. This assumption produces more questions. Why, then does **Chapter Twelve** indicate that the dragon persecuted the church throughout the whole New Testament Age? Our answer is given in **Chapter Thirteen**. Up to this point the concept of an unholy trinity has never been implied. So now an explanation is needed to show how the Devil, though locked away, was still able to cause damage. He did it through his spirit. Just as God protects, feeds and nurtures His family through the Holy Spirit, so also Lucifer assaults it through his unholy spirit. There is also an indication in **12:12** that Satan will not be released until after Jesus' second coming by explaining why he is so angry, **"...because he knows that he has a short time."** We know that for the Lord, **"...a thousand years is as one day" II Peter 3:8**, but for us humans a millennium is surely not a short time. To help us remember what was related in **12:12**, it is stated again in **20:3**, **"But after these things he must be released for a little while."**

The Fifth Beatitude

The next three verses give us a heavenly view of the believer's experiences during the New Testament Age. First we see, **"...The thrones and they who sat on them" v. 4**. The first two verses of this chapter forced us to look back at **Chapter Twelve**. We now can see a similarity in the style of writing between **Chapters Twelve and Twenty**. In **Twelve** we are given a vision of a one-sided battle between a dragon and a baby. In **12:5** we discover that the baby won, but not how. Fortunately for us, John went on to describe a fuller revelation of the New Testament Age. Here in **Chapter Twenty**, the apostle is providing another panorama of the age preceding the final defeat of Satan. Because we have been acquainted with this scene through previous chapters, John doesn't tell us how many thrones he saw, where they were or who was sitting on them. He expected us to remember. We must recall that John was writing each scene as he saw them occur. He expects his readers to support his brevity of words by doing what he instructed in his first beatitude in **1:3**, **"...and remember these things which are written in it."** These thrones are referred to earlier in **Rev. 4:4**, **"Around the throne were twenty-four thrones and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting,"** The number and individuals were explained in that section. Our discretionary power to act as judges is stated by Paul, **"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world" I Cor. 6:2**. And Jesus verified and ordained it in **John 20:20b-23**, **"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."**

The second thing we note in **v. 4** is a grisly scene of beheaded souls. As we think back to a similar picture in **6:9**, there is again a striking comparison. The earlier chapter shows us, **"...souls of those who had been slain for the word of God..."** and here, **"...souls of those who have been beheaded for their witness..." 12:4**. Both of these

are abbreviated examples of Jesus' longer answer to His disciples' question about the future in **Matt. 24:1-51**. Making this connection, we are now able to view this as a presentation of the general persecution of Christians throughout the New Testament Age. Here, indeed, lies the double-edged sword of Christianity. Jesus said, **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"** **Matt. 5:10**. And the apostle Paul said, **"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse"** **Rom. 12:14**. Such a contradiction of terms can be confusing at best. Nevertheless we must stand steadfast upon our convictions, not just grimly accepting the inevitable, but grasping unto it with joy knowing we are the children of God. We must also know that we are at war with a powerful enemy who hates us with a deadly passion. Jesus warned us in **John 15:20**, **"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."**

The third element of **v. 4** proceeds chronologically beyond the present time into what Jesus called a, **"...great tribulation such as has not been seen since the beginning of the world"** **Matt. 24:21**. All believers must view this as a Christian persecution, which is now poised on the horizon waiting to devour us. Just as the second vision of **12:4**, **"...And the dragon stood before the woman...to devour her child as soon as it was born"** was the beginning of the New Testament Age, this one represents the end of the Age, under the assault of the anti-Christ. Christians are going to die, a lot of them. Our only comfort is Jesus' prediction, **"And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elects sake those days will be shortened"** **Matt. 24:22**. Too many Christians are patiently expecting God to rapture them up before the tribulation. Don't they realize what they are saying? They have believed a satanic lie that actually says Jesus is in error. We need to be as ready to die for our faith as were the first-century Christians. There is a more formidable Nero waiting in the wings. We need to adopt the motto of the U.S. Coast Guard, "Semper Paratus" (always prepared). So in one verse we see the entire review of the New Testament Age from its birth to its demise. It ends with the phrase, **"...And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."** We must understand that we are victors, not victims. David foresaw this in **Psalms 2:6**, **"Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion."** Though the dragon may devour our flesh, believers who endure will always be a victorious, **"...chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a wholly nation"** **I Peter 2:9**.

The First Resurrection

The last two verses of this paragraph expand on the Christian era presented in **v. 4**. More is always better in Scripture, but it often brings with it more difficulties. Our first problem is the phrase, **"But the rest of the dead did not live again until..."** **v. 5**. Who are these people? First of all they, by contrast, are total opposites of the beheaded souls in the last verse, who though dying still live and reign with Jesus. These poor souls, however, die and stay dead until the end of the New Testament Age. Then they get a brief resuscitation just for the Judgment Day. The key seems to be in the phrase, **"This is the first resurrection."** By using the adjective 'first' implies that there is at least a second. Proceeding with this premise, let's consider our options. In his gospel, John wrote of Jesus' pronouncing, **"Most assuredly I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death"** **John 8:51**.

And in the Lazarus account, he records Jesus' promise to Martha, **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live"** **John 11:25**. Keeping these in mind, let's examine Paul's explanation in **Romans 6:4**, **"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."** So Scripture teaches us that we have two resurrections. The first is by being baptized, or born again; the second is the translation from this life to the next, which makes a Christian's death really a celebration. Fully understanding this, Paul said, **"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain"** **Phil. 1:21**. Unfortunately for them, unbelievers have only one resurrection, and what was gain for Paul will be pain for them. In brief, Christians never die and unbelievers die twice.

Proof of this is provided in **v. 6**. Though the term "a second resurrection" is not used, it is replaced with **"the second death"**, which applies to unbelievers. Related to God the Father through the blood of His Son, we are called, **"Blessed and holy."** Has a more joyous description ever been put into print that that? Whatever the motives we have for leading decent lives, every intelligent human being recognizes that man's nature is flawed. At the core of our being is a character we are not proud of. We are corrupted by it. Mankind is selfish, greedy and murderous. We can't help it. The term for this deadly disease is "original sin." Like it or not, we need a Savior to rescue us from our own nature, and Jesus did that for us – cost free. The only task needed is to acknowledge that man is not improving his character. He is actually degrading it. Our only hope for redemption is to step off the path of humanism and convert to the road of Spiritualism, or, using Jesus' words, off the broad path to death, onto the **"...narrow road that leads to life: Matt. 7:14**. As blessed as our born again experience was, the amplifications of it flow into our lives many times over through sanctified living. We now can indeed be called, **"Blessed and holy"** and by our kinship to God be both kingly by nature and priestly in service, **Rev. 1:6** and **5:10**. We must see that this ministry is a lifelong service to be experienced in this life, not some future millennium. The only inevitable thing in human life is death. But in **v. 5 & 6** we see the startling contradistinction between believers and unbelievers. Christians live both in this life and the next, while idolaters die in both.

The Last Battle, vs. 7-10

7. "Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison 8. and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. 9. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. 10. And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

To get a better perspective of these disturbing and difficult verses it is necessary to get an overview of **Chapters 19:1-20:15**. In the previous chapter we saw a marvelous metaphor of two different feasts, the **"...marriage supper of the Lamb"** **v. 8** and

“...The supper of the great God” v. 17. These parabolic pictures add color and data about Jesus’ second coming and the fall of Babylon. **Chapter Twenty** gives us basically the same storyline in vs. 1-6, and then adds new information and the final touches done by God the Father. In getting the big picture of what is unfolding before us, it becomes manifest that the New Testament Age is now over. Jesus’ task is finished and His Father will finally eradicate Satan himself, the originator of mankind’s sin and death. For this to transpire, Satan must be, **“...released from his prison”** for a short time after the New Testament Age is completed. With this in mind, we can now look for a new perspective in these perplexing verses.

As we explore them we see a period of time that has not yet been touched upon in **Revelation**, so we must look farther afield for information which could help us discern. As always, God gives us clues to investigate. Here they emerge at once in **v. 8, “...Gog and Magog.”** Magog is named as a grandson of Noah in **Gen. 10:2** and **I Chron. 1:5**, but they seem irrelevant to the one mentioned here. Both Gog and Magog are described in almost finite detail in **Ezekiel 38** and **39**. The language John uses in his imagery is almost identical to that of Ezekiel. It becomes obvious that this is where he is sending us to read and absorb this cataclysmic conflagration. Upon searching through these two chapters we emerge more confused than when we started. First and foremost the Lord Jehovah is not speaking to us. He is talking to, **“...Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh...” Ezk. 38:2**, an individual and a nation we know absolutely nothing about. God tells Gog what He is going to do to him and why in two fact-filled chapters. They seem to relate superficially to the Babylonian captivity, but the body of facts disputes that possibility. Commentators who try relating these chapters to history have produced a plethora of opinions. Forming new and interesting ideas at this point is unthinkable. So, how should we proceed?

Gog and Magog

It seems wise to continue doing what has been successful thus far. Take every word coming from the mouth of God as truth, and proceed with that as our basis. The fundamental verse for me is **Ezk. 38:8, “After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword...”** Comparing this to **Rev. 20:7-10** I see why John sends his readers back to Ezekiel. Gog is being told that after a short period of time he will have a visitor. Using what we have learned in **Revelation** that would probably be the archangel Michael. The time frame, according to John would just be a brief period of time after Jesus defeats the beast and the anti-Christ. Gog or Satan is then released from his chains to find the world, called Magog by Ezekiel, has totally been altered during his imprisonment. The Devil had worked diligently to corrupt mankind with his seed. Jesus explained this in the parable of the weeds, **“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.”** As the weeds grew up with the wheat, the farm workers asked if they should pull out the weeds and the farmer said, **“...No, let both grow together until the harvest...” Matt. 13:24-30.** Now the harvest is over and Jesus has gathered and separated His believers. This is the condition Satan finds after his release. His first response is to gather his own offspring for what will be his final battle.

It is always dangerous to elaborate too much on the basic materials given in apocalyptic views. **Vs. 7-10** provide us with a brief glimpse of a future, which doesn't relate to us all. Its primary concerns are Satan and God's dealings with him together with the remains of his evil empire. Typical of all the confrontations with the enemy in **Revelation**, the evil **"...whose number is as the sand of the sea"** vastly outnumbers the good. In **vs. 9-10** they put a siege around the encampment of God's people and are soundly defeated at which time Satan is delivered into the eternally burning body of water. These are the simple facts of the matter. Though they are not a part of our future if we are part of the saints, they do raise a few questions. Why are we camping out and where on earth are we? And, how is the fire from heaven related to the, **"...lake of fire"** in **V. 10**? Be warned, everything I write about the rest of this section will be opinion.

The Siege but No Seize

We are portrayed earlier as a secure army, **"clothed in fine linen, white and clean" 19:14** following our bloodied Savior. In this section we are referred to as **"...the camp of the saints" 20:9**. This makes us sound like the Israelites bivouacking in the wilderness because they didn't follow God's commands. The problem lies in the word translated as *camp* for the Greek *parembole*. Its most common usage was as an army, or a military encampment, and sometimes it represented a fortress or castle. That changes my mental picture of what John is presenting. We are a beloved city fully protected by our loving God. We are like the cities of refuge that God ordained in **Numbers 35:13**. Where we shall be located is irrelevant. It is going to occur in the end of time as we know it, and God will do all the work. Any guesswork on our part would be downright foolish at best. The facts themselves are fascinating enough. Jesus has already defeated the armies of the ten kings in **17:12-14**. Satan has now conscripted all remaining humans for one last tidal wave of destruction against the people of God. Though it sounds serious, it is child's play for the Lord Jehovah. There is not even a battle, just a brief firestorm that **"...came down from God out of heaven and devoured them."**

The fire coming down from heaven was earlier displayed with majestic power in **I Kings 18:20-40**. During the reign of King Ahab and Jezebel, the national religion of Israel became the worship Baal and Astarte. Jezebel began killing the prophets of Jehovah on a grand scale. This is a striking prototype of the persecution to come under the brutal reign of the anti-Christ. When it appeared that only he was left, Elijah confronted the king and presented a challenge between him and the prophets of Baal. In a classic example of the battle between good and evil, there was 450 pagan prophets and only Elijah to speak for God. For an entire day the prophets of Baal beseeched their God to send down fire upon their sacrificial altar. All the while Elijah was giving them sarcastic suggestions as to why they were getting no response. Late in the day they gave up, and Elijah took over. He rebuilt an altar for Jehovah and offered up a prayer, which expresses the purpose for this almost farcical display. **"Here me, O Lord, hear me that this people may know that You are the Lord God, and that You have turned their hearts back to you again" I Kings 18:37**. Immediately fire came down and consumed the offering and the people of Israel fell down and worshiped God. But Elijah did not let them off that easily. He asked them to make a physical commitment to their change of hearts. He told them to seize the 450 prophets of Baal and execute them. Now by

returning to **Rev. 20:10-11** we come full cycle. **“Fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire...”**

The Last Judgment, vs. 11-15

11. “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. 13. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

John’s series of remarkable visions are now reaching their apex. With him we are seeing things, which are beyond human experience and consequently outside of anything we can fully understand. We must assume that John remembered what Jesus told him as he viewed, **“...a great white throne and Him who sat on it.”** On Tuesday of Passion Week Jesus gives His disciples a brief version of **Revelation** in chapters **24 & 25** of **Matthew**. John must be remembering what Jesus predicted then is now taking place. The Lord said, **”When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats” Matt. 25:31-32.** As He looked at the great white throne in front of him, John had to think also of the first time he saw the throne of God. At the beginning of this odyssey through **Revelation**, which God has provided for him, John had a very different view of heaven. The scene presented earlier has been dramatically changed. In **Rev. 4** the apostle saw a multi-colored throne encircled by a rainbow perched on a sea of glass surrounded by elders and spiritual beings. All of these elements used for the promoting of Christianity are now gone. They were the genesis, so to speak, of God’s plan for salvation. That process is finished; all that remains is judgment.

The second and for me, even more startling part of **v. 11** was what the presence of God now causes, **“The earth and the heaven fled away.”** My mind’s eye is drawn inexorably back to the first words written in Scripture, **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” Gen. 1:1.** Now they are gone. There is a finality about this, which has a lingering sadness because of what might have been. We are taught in science that elements cannot be destroyed, just changed in form. This of course does not apply to God. Though it is stated in a poetically gentle way, **“And there was found no place for them,”** they are gone. As they were created out of nothing, they now have returned to what they were, nothing. The Psalmist said it best, **“In the beginning You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain, they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing You will change them and they will be discarded” Ps. 102:25-26.** Peter says

much the same thing, but in a more descriptive and apocalyptic way. **“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will disappear with a roar, and the elements will be destroyed by fire; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” II Peter 3:10.** Many may say, “ why would a merciful God do such a thing?” The answer is simple – for the same reason He caused the flood. **“Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” Gen. 6:5.** Just as an ark saved the just, so in our future the just will be saved by the body of Christ, **“...the camp of the saints” v. 9.**

The Dead are Judged

We are now watching with John, the visual reality of Jesus’ parable about the sheep and the goats. If so, does that mean we are there among the dead standing before the throne of God. Briefly, the answer is no! There is an enigma surrounding this grim picture for which the apostle Paul provides an answer. He said, **“Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed” I Cor. 15:51.** We are indeed there, if not, then Jesus’ parable would be in error. But as Paul says, we are not dead. As Christians, we have many titles. In this chapter alone we are called souls, witnesses, royalty, blessed, saints, the beloved city and here in **v. 12** we are acknowledged as **“The Book of Life,”** but never are we called dead. Paul explained to the Corinthian Christians what must occur. **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” II Cor. 5:10.** In view of this reality, the apostle urges young Timothy to be a diligent minister of the word, **“...before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom” II Tim. 4:1.**

The Books of the Dead

John portrays God much like an account executive, balancing His books. On the plus side He has assets, **“The Book of Life,”** and on the negative side are the deficits, which he opens first. The last four verses in this chapter deal only with the deficiencies. The losses are described simply as, **“...the dead, small and great.”** Death is the great leveler. Every different level of our social structure has now disappeared and they stand before God as equals awaiting judgment. If it is saddening for me a man to see the volume of differences between the blessed and the condemned, how must God feel? A God who, **“...so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” John 3:16.** Yet despite His enormous sacrificial effort, the vast majority of mankind will perish. Though John simply says **“books,”** in my mind’s eye I see a library full of books containing the names of the dead. By comparison, our names are listed in a single volume, probably a very little book. Jesus said, **“For many are called, but few are chosen” Matt. 22:14.** That is His only explanation for His parable of the wedding feast. God must now judge the dead based upon what they have done in life in accordance with what is detailed in the books.

Death and Hades

Upon arriving at **v. 13** we discover what seems unnecessary additional information, **“The sea gave up the dead who were in it.”** We have already finished up the judgment in the previous verse, so why the superfluous data? They were all dead, so what difference does it make, where they came from? Up until now John has never provided more facts than were needed. In fact, he has done quite the opposite, so we need to look more carefully at this anomaly. The disciple has often sent us back to **Genesis** to see the fuller picture so let’s look for a comparison. The first phrase gives us a mental picture of sailors and victims of shipwrecks rising up out of the water and wafting up to judgment. But is that the picture John is sending us? It is unlikely, the Greek noun means a large body of water, which would make us first think of an ocean, but the greatest body of water the world has ever known was Noah’s flood. Is it possible this is the water John is seeing and the dead are the Antediluvians who died prior to or in the flood? Since they had no written laws to break they may need a different form of trial. Noah’s father and grandfather lived during Adam’s lifetime and must have shared the Genesis story with those who didn’t know him. So the pre-flood population could have known the truth from the horse’s mouth, but rejected the truth and accepted a lie. They are not guilty of breaking a law, but for having no faith. Ours is not to question why, nor do we have to be correct. It is however a strong warning about the future of mankind, and we need to at least consider its meaning.

Death and Hades are personified here, as they were when John first saw them in **6:8**, **“And I looked, and behold a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed him...”** He was informed that they would bring disastrous inflictions upon humanity. I am sure that John immediately remembers, as must we, what Jesus said in **Rev. 1:18**, **“I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forever more. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”** This is a ringing endorsement for the Christian experience. Death is inevitable, yet our Lord has promised us an escape route found nowhere else in human philosophy. He is our key to open the gate from death to the everlasting life God intended us to have from the very beginning. Now that the end has come, it is time for the demise of these abnormal life forces by casting them, **“...into the lake of fire.”** As dreadful as these verses are, we must see that they are bracketed by, **“The Book of Life”** in **vs. 12 & 15**. Can we be sure our names are printed in this book? Peter said we could. **“Therefore brethren be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** II Peter 1:10-11.

Chapter Twenty-One

New Heaven and a New Earth, vs. 1-5

1. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2. Then I, John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.’ 5. Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’ And He said to me, ‘Write, for these words are true and faithful.’”

We are now viewing the final revelation presented in this book. It is a climax of such monumental proportions that to be dogmatic about its meaning is arrogant at best. The most common opinion about the universe passing away is not destruction by God, but just a little housecleaning to spruce it up. However, this is inconsistent with what we have been taught in Scripture. The putrefying effect of sin is so pervasive it cannot be simply sponged off; it must be eradicated. Peter tells us how this will be done, **“...the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works in it will be burned up” II Peter 3:10.** One of the great lessons taught in the raising of Lazarus is the ever-present existence of sin. Even though brought back to life by Jesus, Himself, sin also came back and Lazarus was going to have to die again. I’m sure Lazarus would have much rather stay where he was, but he was still needed by the Lord. Lazarus responded to the words, **“Lazarus come forth!” John 11:43.** So God’s first creation has to be destroyed because of sin. Though the verb *aperchomai* does mean to pass away, it seems to be used the same way we use it, as a euphemism for death. God told His prophet **Isaiah, “For behold I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create” Isa. 65:17-18a.**

John is given a view of the omega, the finale, of what began in **Gen. 1:1.** He saw God terminating His creation in the same manner He created them, by His word. Jesus said it would occur in **Matt. 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”** John does not tell us how the new heaven was formed, probably because he expects his readers to remember how the old ones were made, **“God said, ‘Let there be... and there was...’ Gen. 1:3.** However the apostle then says, **“Also there was no more sea.”** My first thought is why didn’t John supply us with more information or leave it out altogether? What sea is he talking about? Opinions abound, which generally means they are not to be relied upon. I am forced to stick with my one opinion about the sea in **20:13.** The flood permanently altered the surface of our planet. The deluge formed our oceans, mountains, and canyons. The pre-flood world provided mankind with long lives and a temperate climate all of which disappeared after the flood. There were bodies of water, **Gen 1:6-10,** but they were not dangerous because, **“God**

saw that it was good” **Gen. 1:10**. So it seems that the new earth will be a duplicate of the old earth before the flood, but without the sin that destroyed it.

New Jerusalem Descending

John’s last revelation continues in **v. 2** as he sees the holy city descending down from heaven. I think the apostle was uncertain about what he was seeing, but two things John did understand he wrote down for us. First he relates the vision to the prophesy of **Isaiah, “Awake, Awake! Put on your strength, O Zion; put on your beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city! For the uncircumcised and the unclean shall no longer come to you” Isa. 52:1**. The second was his reference to her attire, **“...prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”** He must be thinking back to what he was told concerning the wedding feast of the Lamb in **19:7-9**. John must also have understood that he was looking at an allegory when he named it, **“...the holy city...”** Cities were never holy, not even the city of David, which God loved. They are not a product of God, but of man. There is no indication that Adam ever built a city. It was Cain who did that. **“Then Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch, and he built a city and called the name of his son – Enoch” Gen. 4:17**. After the flood it was Nimrod the grandson of Ham who built the first city and called it Babel, **Gen. 10:10**. Cities, like human beings, are intrinsically flawed. They are crowded by huddled masses seeking protection by walls or police rather than by God, and they are more concerned about food and the disposal of human waste than seeking the kingdom of God. So what we are seeing together with John is not a city of stone and metal but the body of Christ, which is we, His followers. Thus we are looking at ourselves. We are viewing our future and such an allegory needs divine inspiration or we may not understand its full meaning. For this reason the rest of this chapter is information given by, **“...a loud voice from heaven.”**

The Peace of God

We are informed by this celestial voice in **vs. 3 & 4** about the dramatic change in our environment. We are no longer at enmity against God. The Psalmist said, **“The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand and seek God. They have all turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is none who does good, no, not one” Ps. 14:2-3**. That was our birthright from Adam. Christ, the second Adam, rescued us from that birthright so that we are no longer carnally minded descendants of Adam but the children of God. Paul summarizes this when he wrote, **“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God...” Rom. 8:5-6**. So our lives in this world are a constant struggle between our own fleshly desires and our spiritual desire. Too often the flesh wins because it is fed daily, while the spiritual side is too often being starved to death. James roundly censures those guilty of this by saying, **“Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” James 4:4**. Why so much negativity in such a grand and glorious announcement from heaven? Because as human beings we find it almost impossible to think that we are really rotten to the core. The sooner we can accept this

truth, the sooner we can embrace the peace of God and enter into a new covenant with Him.

Peace of the Lamb

In this new covenant God will now dwell with His offspring just as He walked with Adam in Eden, **Gen. 3:8-9**. The Son of God recovered this relationship for us. **“And the word became flesh and dwelt among us...” John 1:14**. John now relates the byproducts of this renewed relationship with God in **v. 4**, **“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes...”** These words were designed to make us look more fully into how God has done this. This phrase was used twice before in Scripture, first in **Isaiah 25:8**, **“He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces...”** Isaiah tells us what God will do, and John tells us how He will do it in **Rev. 7:17**, **“For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”** Humanity fears death with such a passion that they sublimate it to avoid thinking about such finality, but death is all around us and fear is always hovering over us. And yet here we have just two verses of Scripture that both soothe us and save us. These are our tools for mission work. These open up the **“Book of Life.”** Those who hear and reject automatically enroll themselves into the wrong book club. Those who accept these promises receive the promises of no more, **“death, nor sorrow, nor crying; ...no more pain.”** Since death or paradise are the only options we have, how insane it is to choose pain in preference to gain.

The Power of God

John now returns to the vision he saw in **vs. 1& 2**, just before he heard the loud voice from heaven. He also changes my mental picture of the work in progress. There is suddenly a new speaker confirming what was said at the beginning of this chapter, but the apostle does not give him a name. He somewhat casually writes, **“Then He who sat on the throne said.”** Three questions immediately arise. Who is the He, where did the throne come from and why the redundancy? The first answer is obvious; He is God. Inquiring Christians would at least wonder which part of the Godhead they are listening to. We believe implicitly in a triune God. Throughout the New Testament we have divided the Trinity to understand their roles in achieving our salvation. Now the New Testament Age is over and the three have now fused back into one as they were in the beginning. The Holy Trinity appears in the first three verses of **Genesis, v. 1**, **“In the beginning God created...”** **v. 2**, **“and the Spirit of God was hovering...”** **v. 3**, **“Then God said ‘Let there be Light’** (Jesus). Yet **v. 4** begins with God in the singular form. And on the sixth day, **“God said ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’”** **v. 26**. Perhaps this is where John wanted us to go so we could see both the beginning and the ending. The other two questions are my own and are probably irrelevant. I do believe that **v. 5** represents the instrumentality part of the Trinity. The bodily form sitting on the throne would be Jesus. The voice represents the Father and the Spirit would move the pen as John wrote, **“...these words are true and faithful!”** John heard these same words earlier in **19:9**. He was also asked to write twice before by an angel in **Revelation, 1:19** and **14:13**. In the latter, the Spirit is mentioned, **“Then I**

heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ Yes says the Spirit.”

The Promise of God, vs. 6-8

1. And He said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. 7. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. 8. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.’”

The speaker now defines Himself and describes the parameters for humans who either accepted or rejected Him. The being that sits on the throne makes His identity crystal clear by the words, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega.”** Since we have just reviewed the first and last portions of Scripture, we should be as awestruck as John was in **19:10** and **22:8**. There he was being told by an angel, a mighty angel indeed, but only a messenger. We, however, are hearing this monumental message from the mouth of our Savior Himself. For believers it is a blessed inheritance; for unbelievers it is a tombstone. This definition of the Lord has been used four times in **Revelation**, once here and thrice in **1:8**, **1:11** and **1:17**. After musing over this, the preceding phrase, **“It is done!”** takes on an entirely new meaning. Jesus said the same words on the cross; though He used a different verb, the meanings are the same. His work was finished on Golgotha, and now God’s work is finished on Judgment Day.

The Water of Life

For an unbeliever, Jesus’ first promise may seem rather ephemeral and not very appealing. But for a reader of Scripture, life-giving water is always a metaphor for salvation. Jesus explained the difference between drinking water and saving water to the Samaritan woman. Jesus said, **“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” John 4:13-14.** And in the Old Testament we are told, **“And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water; a fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Acacias” Joel 3:18.** Jesus assures us that this is freely given with only one prerequisite - one must be thirsty. The Lord expressed this several times, first in the Beatitudes, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled” Matt. 5:6.** He had to explain this more clearly to some confused followers, **“If anyone thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water: John 7:37-38.** It seems possible that at least one of His listeners asked Him where the verse was in Scripture because John tried to explain what He really meant in **v. 39.** Jesus is not quoting a specific verse of Scripture, but compiling a synoptic view of Messianic prophecies. The point being, if one is spiritually parched, all that needs to be done is to come to Jesus who provides all things freely. Isaiah said, **“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you**

who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” Isa. 55:1.

Patrimony

The promise in **v. 8** is to become the legitimate offspring of the owner who created everything. We shall be the heirs of this wealth if we abide by one prerequisite, be one **“who overcomes.”** This is a significant word to John. Luke used it only once, Peter twice, and Paul three times, but John used it eleven times. Being the last surviving Apostle he has developed a full understanding of what this word means to a Christian. Perhaps through him we also can get a better grasp of how overcoming life’s exigencies brings blessings for believers. Staying a Christian is a lifelong struggle. We become a child of God at baptism; staying one means surviving. To each of the seven churches in **Rev. 2** and **3**, Jesus promised wonderful rewards, but only if they overcame the difficulties that each church was experiencing. In short, persecution is necessary for developing spiritual muscle. With this kind of exercise we stay in the family of God. John tells us, **“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” I John 4:4.** If we need more assurance, Paul says, **“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” Rom. 8:16-17.**

Promise of Judgment

Up to this point in **Chapter Twenty-One** everything has been scrumptious. It is like honey in our mouths. So **v. 8** is a shocker. For what reason is it there? There is a tendency to skip over it because it does not apply to us. Making assumptions in **Revelation** is like swimming at your own risk. I believe it does apply to us, and we need to look into it with an open mind and an honest heart. As we examine these eight categories of damnable activities, we should discover at our dismay that this does apply to us. Who hasn’t been afraid? Who hasn’t been angry without cause? Jesus called that murder in His Sermon on the Mount, **Matt. 5:21-22.** And if we still don’t think this relates to us, look carefully at the last on the list, **“And all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”** We have all earned this fate as soon as we learned to talk, so what point is the Spirit trying to drive home? We must remember that Jesus said many churchgoers are going to be surprised on Judgment Day. The parable of the sheep and the goats is a stern warning about casual acceptance of compromise, **Matt. 25:31-46.** It is a joy to hear Jesus say, **‘I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts’ 21:6.** But we must stay thirsty because He also said, **“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water” Jer. 2:13.** Thank you, Lord for showing us how important it is for clinging to the only one who can make us clean.

New Jerusalem Explained, vs. 9-11

9. “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the bride,

the Lamb's wife.' 10. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11. having the glory of God. And her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

John does not tell us which one of the seven angels appeared to continue this last vision of **Revelation**, probably because it was the message not the messenger that was important. But to satisfy my own curiosity, I am going to guess. It seems logical that this angelic being would be the seventh angel that poured out his bowl of wrath into the earth's atmosphere, **"...and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, 'It is done!'" 16:17.** We were forewarned about the coming wrath of God upon our planet in **Chapters Sixteen to Eighteen.** In **Chapter 21** this has already occurred and, **"...the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" v. 1.** There are too many parallelisms here for them to be just coincidences. For example, in **17:1** another, probably the same, angel came to John and invited him to **"Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters."** There is such a vast difference between the two that it takes one's breath away. There is such a disparity between Babylon and New Jerusalem, between the harlot and the bride, between good and evil, that there should be no debate about what side we want to be part of.

Mountain Top Experience

What John saw as a vision in **v. 1** he is going to see in person in **v. 10.** Though he was carried away in spirit, it was still in person. He is transported, **"...to a great and high mountain."** The parallelisms again abound. Earlier John was carried away in the spirit to a desert to see the whore of Babylon in **17:3-6.** Here the disciple is taken to a mountain to see, **"...the bride, the Lamb's wife."** How vastly different these two environments are. Jesus was also taken to a mountain top, not by an angel, but by Satan in **Luke 4:5-8,** **"Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time."** Lucifer is offering to Jesus his entire kingdom if only He would acknowledge him as God of all creation. Jesus is seeing much the same scene John saw in **Chapter Seventeen,** Babylon the Great, and says, **"Get behind Me Satan!"** I find His answer interesting. The Lord didn't just say no, rather He ordered Satan into his proper place. We know where he wanted to be from **Isa. 14:12-15,** **"How far you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! ...for you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; ...I will be like the Most High.'" He didn't get his heart's desire, but he is still using the same empty promises to steal humanity away from God. Jesus showed us how to respond to such temptation: "Get behind Me Satan."**

The Glory of the Bride

So there would be no misunderstanding the angel identified the holy city we are viewing as, **"...the bride, the Lamb's wife."** We are looking at ourselves personified as a glorious city. For centuries Paris has been called the city of light. Whether this is appropriate or not is in the eye of the beholder, but here we are seeing the true city of radiance – ourselves. Jesus told us, **"You are the light of the world" Matt. 5:14.** Paul had almost the identical thought when he calls us, **"...children of God without fault in**

the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” Phil. 2:15. The only two places this word for light, *phosphorus*, is used is in **Phil. 2:15** and **Rev. 21:11**. Its true meaning is a *light* or *lightgiver*. I find it fascinating that only in **Isaiah** was the name *Lucifer*, which means *light bearer*. No wonder Satan is so angry with us. It is a jealous anger because we replaced him in both his position and his job. He was, **“Lucifer, son of the morning”**, who now has been, **“...brought down to Shoel, to the lowest depths of the pit” Isa. 14:12 & 15**. We on the other hand have been rescued from the grave and hell by the blood of Christ and raised up to the throne of God. For this reason John says we are, **“...like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone.”** In his description of God, John said in **4:3**, **“And He who sat there was like a jasper, and a sardius stone in appearance,”** so we have the same iridescent glow as our heavenly Father, not because of our own shining character, but by the debt paid by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Metropolis or Metaphor? Vs. 12-21

12. “Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13. Three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. 14. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. 15. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. 16. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. 17. Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. 18. And the construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. 19. And the foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper; the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20. the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

John has been provided with a bird’s eye view of the holy city called New Jerusalem. He now writes down ten verses of a rather detailed description of what it looked like to him. My first thought is why? He must have understood the allegorical intent of this vision, so why did he transcribe it so literally? A too common folklore of heaven as a city with golden streets and pearly gates is derived from these verses. In the past, I have generally skimmed over these details since countless commentators before have written extensively and well about them. However, it is necessary to consider what John’s intent was. It seems that the apostle is using the same parabolic technique he learned from Jesus. He wants us to look between the lines and see the spiritual meanings behind them. So we must take a step back and view the whole picture, as did John. In all probability his mind went back to the book of **Ezekiel** where the prophet described a similar city. In his last chapter he gives an account of a city whose name was, **“The**

Lord is there” Ezek. 48:35. His second thought should be the angel’s own description of the city as, **“...the bride, the Lamb’s wife” 19:9.** With this in mind, it begins to grow clear that we are not looking at a city, but a picture of our glorified selves.

Precious Gems

We are being given a gorgeous metaphor of a future existence we can find no prototype for in this life. Paul writes, **“Eye has not seen, no ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” I Cor. 2:9.** Yet, here in **Revelation** we are getting a taste of what awaits those who endure. The writer of **Hebrews** extols the virtue of our faith by defining it as, **“...the substance of things hoped for, the evidence things not seen” Heb. 11:1.** So John gives us an allegory to at least ponder over and anticipate what awaits us as the habitants on a new earth. It seems somewhat unproductive to concentrate on the minutia and miss the purpose of the author. But, just for a moment, try to imagine what we will be like when God completes His purpose.

There are a few comments about these verses that might be helpful. The Jews are mentioned in **v. 12** and the gospel for the Gentiles in **v. 14.** It is intriguing that the angel measures this heavenly city. Back in **Chapter Eleven**, it was John who was told to do some measuring. **“Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, ‘rise and measure the temple of God...’”** John was asked to gauge the invisible church of his day, which though saved was still sinful. The angel in **Rev. 21:15-17** is measuring the exalted and sinless body of the heavenly church. One final thought on this section is how exhilarating it is to be described as precious gems. We adorn the city as twelve jewels, which are two more than Satan had as an anointed cherub in **Ezek. 28:12-13**, **“You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: ruby, topaz, diamond, beryl, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and emerald with gold.”** Whenever anyone wonders what we will be like in heaven, they need only to look at this symbolic city to realize that we will be more glorious than Lucifer ever was, even at his best.

The Glory of God’s People, vs. 22-27

22. “But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light. 24. And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. 25. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). 26. And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. 27. But there shall be by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.”

John’s parable continues and he informs us that there will be no temples in **v. 22** and no sun or moon in **v. 23.** We must remember that this is not a reality show about heaven; at best it is a reflection of reality, which we will not fully understand until we get there. Just as the moon has no light of its own and is only a reflection of the sun, so this

metaphor gives just a reflection of the Son. There will be no church structures because we are the living stones, **I Peter 2:4**, which make up God's spiritual temple. Jesus Himself promised, **"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God..." Rev. 3:12**. God will live with us and provide for us in ways we can have only a sample of in this life. We are told about this by an angel in **7:15**, **"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them."** The imagery of no natural light seems to be a brief summary of **Isaiah's** thoughts in **60:19-20**, **"The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; but the Lord will be to you an everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no longer go down, nor shall your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning will be ended."** Jesus will provide His light, which first appeared in **Gen. 1:3**; consequently both night and death are now banished.

The Light of the Lamb

John continues by commenting on the Gentiles walking in Jesus' light, which is a direct reference to **Isa. 60:1-3**, **"Arise shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you... The Gentiles shall come to your light and the kings to the brightness of your rising."** This wonderful city will be open to all who come into the glorious light of the Lamb as was predicted in **Isa. 60:11**, **"Therefore your gates shall be opened continually; they shall not be shut by day or night, that men may bring to you the wealth of the Gentiles and their kings in procession."** John begins **v. 27** with a Greek double negative that creates an emphatic denial. Though the city gates are always open, no form of sin is ever allowed to enter. The perpetrators of such actions are sent away into the lake of fire as indicated in **21:8**. As I was pondering that verse, the phrase 'there but for the grace of God go I,' passed through my mind. Only by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ am I allowed into the city of God. My faith is based on this truism, and this belief has enrolled me into Jesus' **"Book of Life."** I don't believe the Good Shepherd needs a written account book to remember who belongs in His flock. But for those of us whose memories is short term and often incorrect, there is great joy in thinking that our names are etched into our Lord's eternal logbook. It is not a coincidence that this phrase, **"The Book of Life,"** is used seven times in the New Testament. Paul used it in **Phil. 4:3**, **"And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life."** And John uses it six times in **Rev. 3:5, 15:3, 20:12 & 15, 21:27 and 22:19**. They provide a comfort zone to Christians who live in this world but are not a part of this world.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Paradise Regained, vs. 1-5

1. “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. 4. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. 5. And there shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.”

The Water of Life

There is definitely a logical though ephemeral bridge between the opening and closing chapters of the Bible. Between **Genesis** and **Revelation** there is an obvious union, which forms an unbroken circle between the beginning and the ending. What seems to be a straight line while reading Scripture, suddenly at the end turns itself into a wheel, endlessly revolving around the Lamb of God. There is a similarity between New Jerusalem and the Garden of Eden. It carries us back to **Genesis 2** so we may discover for ourselves that though similar, they are startlingly different. In **Gen. 2:10**, “**Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden...**” Here, not ground water, but crystal clear water flows, “**...from the throne of God and of the Lamb.**” It appears that **Ezekiel** was blessed with the same scene, which he relates in **47:1-12**. He ends this picture with, “**Along the bank of the river, on this side and that will grow all trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruits will be for food and their leaves for medicine**” **47:12**.

I also find a fascinating similarity between **Gen. 1 & 2** and **Revelation 21 & 22**. In **Rev. 21** there is a general description of New Jerusalem but no details of the environment surrounding it. But in **22:1-5** suddenly details are given which become clear enough for us to think of mankind’s first paradise. **Genesis 1 & 2** resembles **Rev. 21 & 22** in a remarkably analogous style. Thus we hear the sweet unending melody of God’s love from beginning to end, with no more curses and no more darkness in Paradise regained.

The Epilogue of Revelation, vs. 6-20

6. “Then he said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true.’ And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things, which must shortly take place. 7. ‘Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.’ 8. Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. 9. Then he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.’ 10. And he said to me, ‘Do not seal the words of the

prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. 11. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.’ 12. ‘And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. 13. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.’ 14. Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. 15. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. 16. ‘I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.’ 17. And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. And whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. 18. For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; 19. and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. 20. He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! 21. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

We have just finished God’s revelation, which concluded with a dazzling picture of our future existence. But flawed by our human condition and living in a fallen world, we are skeptics by nature. What we have just seen and heard seems too good to be true. Consequently we need to be told again, “**These words are faithful and true...**” Jesus Himself had to constantly assure both friends and enemies that He told them the truth, so our skepticism seems normal because it is part of our world. Knowing this, Jesus prayed for us in His High Priestly prayer in **John 17:17**, “**Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.**” So trusting in the power of the Spirit to accomplish this, we listen and believe. The angel gave us similar words in **19:9**, “**These are the true sayings of God.**” And **21:5**, “**...These words are true and faithful.**” The angel has begun the epilogue with much the same message given in the prologue. There we are told, “**The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants--which things must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John**” **1:1**. In **Chapter One, Revelation** was told to one servant, John. In the last chapter, the apocalypse is displayed for all of God’s servants to see and understand. There is also a sense of urgency. The angel warns us that these prophetic events will shortly take place. To emphasize this, Jesus Himself says three times, “**Behold, I am coming soon! Vs. 7, 12 and 20.**”

The Sixth Beatitude

Jesus is indeed returning soon. Every year on firstfruits Sunday, the Christian church shouts, “He is risen, He is risen, indeed.” I truly believe we are shouting the wrong message. His resurrection is an historical fact, which is why we believe and practice our faith. What we need to proclaim loudly and regularly is, “He is coming soon!” I think the church has become lackadaisical about this future certainty. It has been over twenty millennia since John heard and wrote this manifesto. By our calendar,

coming soon has long since passed into oblivion. In Peter's day, there were scoffers who said, **"Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation" II Peter 3:4.** Modern scoffers have even gone beyond mocking God's word by simply categorizing it as myth and ignoring it. Even the church seems to regard it as more apocryphal than apocalyptic. With that in mind I thought it wise to review all the Beatitudes both in **Matthew** and **Revelation** before commenting on this section. It is important to see that the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the ending of His ministry are similar, yet different. The beatitudes in **Matthew 5** are a skeletal outline of a Christian's spiritual growth from knowledge of guilt through persecution to salvation. The seven beatitudes in **Revelation** are expanded to cover believers throughout the entire New Testament Age. They begin with a promised reward for reading and remembering the facts of **Revelation in 1:3.** In **14:13** we are blessed for enduring persecution, **16:15** for being ready, **19:4** for accepting, **20:7** by resurrection and **22:12 & 14** by our reward. These blessings are not bestowed because of a group project but for individuals who keep a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

Stewardship

So overcome by what he had been shown, John inadvertently fell down reverently before the angel. Some may think that John's memory was going because of his advanced age. He had just made that same mistake earlier in **19:10** and was admonished for it. But I think this must be insulting both to the apostle and the Spirit who is providing us with this joyous vision. In all probability it is stated again because of our own short attention spans. As we review the beatitudes, we cannot help but see that the only prerequisite for the Gospel is to spread the word. The angel is again reminding us that we are in the same business as he, messengers of God's good news. It should be exciting to be told that we are colleagues with prophets and angels, but many seem intimidated by the enormity of the task. They have forgotten what Jesus said, **"It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" Matt. 10:20.** I also believe that **v. 10** is a continuation of our stewardship instructions. Though primarily it was an order for John to publish his work, we have to feel a similar pressure to get the word out for all to see and measure. If anyone childishly asks why, we need only repeat the message, **"...for the time is at hand."**

Decisions

In **vs. 9-10** the angel warns John and us, his readers, of two activities we should be concerned about. We must be careful about whom we worship and what message we send out. The first seems easy, but it is healthy to examine how we would define our worship. Is it a loving relationship with one whom we cherish, or has it evaporated into dry tradition? If the latter, we can easily be seduced into an adulterous relationship with whatever tickles our fancy. God's view of this sad affair can be seen in **Jeremiah 3:8, "I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of adulteries."** This may seem a bit excessive for the subject matter at hand. However, for me at least it is necessary in order to approach **v. 10** with the kind of urgency it demands. We are told, **"Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book."** And yet that is exactly what has been done by a large part of the Christian church. We seal it up by not

personally ingesting what it says. We let others preach and tell us what it means. If this is the basis of our faith, our sharing of God's Word will be ineffective and embarrassing or both. So Christians at large much prefer to sit and listen rather than go and tell. This is as deplorable as hoarding up all the food to keep it out of the mouths of starving children. God has waited patiently for us to do our job, but there is a limit even to God's patience and it seems this time is very near.

Consequences

As harsh as this seems, it provides a logical step into the next verse. The theme of both the prologue and the epilogue of this book is about the quick return of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega. Quite clearly the reference to quickly does not mean shortly after John writes **Revelation**. It does mean, however, that when the prophesied events of the last days begin to unscroll, there is a very brief span of time to get oneself saved. The second coming is a defining moment in time when one's character is permanently etched in stone. The just are sealed with, "...**His name on their foreheads, 22:4** and the unjust is sealed with, "...**the number of the beast, for it is a number of a man: His number is 666**" **13:18**. Jesus told the church in Laodicea, "**I know your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth**" **Rev. 3:15-16**. The church today is a church of compromise. Doesn't that make us lukewarm? If that is true, shouldn't we consider what seal we are wearing? For the time is coming soon when it will be a seal of permanence, which is exactly what **v. 11** is warning about.

We discovered in **Chapter Nine** that a time is coming when mankind will no longer seek forgiveness: "**And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts**" **9:21**. The verse we are looking at now is describing the extremities of that era. Because of the phraseology of **v. 11**, a literal translation is somewhat difficult. The word *eti* means *still* (of time or degree). I believe here it is better interpreted, "...**let him be unjust even more.**" The power of God's word is so potent that it always produces growth for it makes the unjust more wicked and the righteous more holy. It is always moving us in one direction or the other. It is never static. So as sanctification grows, so must persecution. Paul told Timothy, "**Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived**" **II Tim. 3:12-13**. Such warnings must be viewed with alarm. If some demonic activity was prevalent in Paul's day, what kind of progeny are we being plagued with today? Has the growth been so prodigious that we now see it as normal? If true, we must rejoice, that the "**time is at hand**" when our parentage will be visible and obvious to all.

Second Advent

With such a venue now taking place in our society we can take our Lord's statement to heart: "**I am coming quickly!**" **vs. 7, 12 and 20**. If said only once this might seem ambiguous to some, but three times demands our attention. There is an interesting interplay of dialogue in this chapter. An angel is delivering the message he was sent to give, but it is Jesus Christ who says, "**I am coming quickly!**" There is such

a surgical precision in all of the declarations made in this chapter that we are forced to simply gaze in awe and accept.

In v. 12 Jesus confirms the promise He made to His disciples in **Matt. 16:27**, **“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”** Jesus is clearly stating that He will bring recompense for our works, good or bad. Throughout Scripture we are told that our actions count. If we are the children of God, it must show His genes in our deeds. Jeremiah is told, **“I, the Lord, search the heart. I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” Jer. 17:10.** There is nothing synergistic about this. The blood of Christ saved us, and good deeds are the natural product of sanctification. Paul said, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, whether good or bad: II Cor. 5:9.** Our reward is on its way; whether a crown or a curse depends on those sign of ownership we may be wearing.

Alpha and Omega

Here is the third time Jesus has identified Himself with this cognomen. The first two times were in **1:8** and **11**. It is no coincidence that they are given only in the first and last chapters of **Revelation**. Jesus is the beginning and ending of everything. He created the world, and He will bring it to a close. All things orbit around the Messiah; any other concept is both vain and empty. If this is our commitment, then the seventh and last beatitude in **Revelation** is ours to own. For inexplicable reasons, both the King James and the New King James translate this wondrous beatitude as, **“Blessed are those who do His commandments.”** Yet the Greek text, *“plunontes tas stolas”* can only be translated as *“...wash their robes,”* which is a direct reference to **7:14**, **“...these are the ones who come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** The product of this cleansing is the privilege to enter into heaven or New Jerusalem and have access to **“...the tree of life,”** or to experience the Edenic experience God intended for us in the first place. Solomon seems to be thinking this when he wrote, **“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise” Prov. 11:30.** James expands upon this by saying, **“Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his ways will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” James 5:20.** In effect, both translations apply to the context: washing in the blood of Christ saves us and sharing Him with the world sanctifies us. Our journeys end will be either the blessed city or the lake of fire. We will be unsoiled saints or dirty dogs. **V. 15** must be connected with **21:8** to see the extent of all who are excluded from heaven.

Offspring of David

In v. 16, Jesus continues to provide us with vital pieces of information needed by every Christian. First He verifies the veracity of **Revelation**. He embraces the entire book by sending us back to **1:1**, **“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—which thing must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John.”** Just as this verse was personal for John, so is this verse personal for us. Jesus says that He, the Lord of angels, is sending, **“...My**

angel to testify to you these thing in the churches.” This can be interpreted to mean the seven churches in **Chapters Two and Three**, or the church at large throughout the Christian era. However, I take this as personal as John must have when he first hear it. Jesus said, **“You,”** which is a personal pronoun. Yes, it could be either singular or plural, but Jesus demands to be a personal Savior for everyone who would follow Him, so He is speaking to each individual in the church, not the church itself. Here again He is giving us a call, and He underwrites it with three new titles to go along with His name. He first identifies Himself as the Progenitor and Offspring of David. If the virgin birth is biologically impossible, this one is absolutely mind-boggling. **Isaiah** was told that, **“There shall come forth a rod from the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots” Isa. 11:1.** How memorably graphic is this biological metaphor? Yet it is important not to lose sight of the marching orders. Jesus’ instruction was to witness. He ended His ministry with the command to: **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” Matt. 28:19.**

The Morning Star

It is probably unwise to get overly dogmatic about this title; yet Jesus assigned it to Himself for a purpose, so it would be wise to examine it. With such a dilemma at hand, we must again let scripture interpret itself for us. The first reference to the Messiah as a star is found in **Numbers 24:17, “I see Him, but not now, I behold Him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob...”** This remarkable vision was seen fifteen hundred years before the birth of Christ by a Gentile prophet, so gifted that he knew God personally. **“Then God came to Balaam and said, ‘Who are these men with you’” Num. 22:9.** He also serves as a strong warning about what not to do with the gifts that God provides for us (see page 22). The star involved in His conception and birth are given in **Matt. 2:2,** and **Luke 1:78.** Zacharias, a priest and father of John the Baptist utters it in **Luke 1:78, through the tender mercies of our God, with which the Dayspring (rising sun) from on high has visited us.”** And the wise men from the east said, **“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him” Matt. 2:2.** Peter also uses this name when he wrote, **“We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” II Peter 1:19.** So again we have come full circle from **Rev. 22:16** to **Numbers** to **Peter** to **Rev. 2:28,** for Peter has opened up a whole new meaning for the star. The gift that Jesus promised to those who endure in the church seemed rather obscure in **Rev. 2:28, “And I will give him the morning star.”** Now it is clear that we also are to be lights in this sin-darkened world. Michael the archangel explains to Daniel the events of the last days, **“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” Dan. 12:2-3.** Jesus told us: **“You are the light of the world” Matt. 5:14.** Are our beacons shining brightly? If not we had better cancel the blackout before it is too late.

Come

I am fascinated with how fundamental the two little action verbs, come and go, are for our faith. They are in fact the alpha and omega of our spiritual life. Jesus starts it by saying: **“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” Matt. 11:28.** He concludes it in **Matt. 27:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** Here in v. 11, come is used three times by four different personages: The Spirit who guides us into all truth; the church who proclaims and protects this truth; each individual who hears and believes this truth; and for every novice who is told, **“Let him who thirsts come.”** Jesus Himself uses the word to conclude His book, **“Surely I am coming quickly.”** And for the seventh and last time we also lift our voices and say: **“Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”**

Postscript

I skipped over **vs. 18-19** because I take them personally as every reader should. Just as the last beatitude in **v. 14** is a joy for those who respond to the Word, so the last curse in **vs. 18-19** provides a bleak future for anyone who tries to alter the Word. Every preacher, teacher or commentator must ask, “Lord, is it I?” Nobody knows better than Satan how significant this book is to God’s people. Anyone who decides to decipher the apocalypse must be prepared for a Satanic onslaught and trust nothing but the Holy Spirit for truth. One does not need a great I.Q. to solve this book, only humility and trust. The Devil is delighted when we get pompous and bombastic with God’s Word. So we need to take this warning to heart. God says, “Don’t tamper with My Word.”

At the beginning of His book of laws, God said: **“You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” Deut. 4:2.** How proper to end His book with the same warning about tampering and the consequences if you do. **Solomon** said: **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” Prov. 9:10.** **James** also understood the danger one risks when he walks where angels fear to tread. **“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment: James 3:1.** My only boast is that I never wanted to be a teacher. God thrust it upon me and I went kicking and screaming all the way. So, with some trepidation I wonder what to do with this work. In my uncertainties my thoughts are drawn to John Bunyan’s remarkable apology for writing his masterpiece, “The Pilgrim’s Progress.”

“When at first I took my pen in hand, thus for to write; I, did not understand that I at all should make a little book in such a mode: Nay, I

had undertook to make another; which when almost done, before I was aware, I thus begun...Thereby to please my neighbor; no not I, I did it mine ownself to gratifie. Neither did I but vacant seasons spend in this my scribble; nor did I intend but to divert myself in doing this from worser thoughts, which make me do amiss.”

This author is not fool enough to compare his scribbles to Bunyans, but to his thoughts about why he wrote what he did is identical to my own.

An Anonymous Layman

