

WORTHY IS THE LAMB TO EXECUTE GOD'S END TIMES AGENDA

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF REVELATION

**IN THE END TIMES KING JESUS WILL RETURN IN VICTORY TO
RESCUE BELIEVERS, JUDGE THE WICKED AND ESTABLISH HIS
KINGDOM ON EARTH SO REMAIN FAITHFUL AND WORSHIP HIM**

Paul Apple (March 2024)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

Revelation 11:15 – *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”*

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BACKGROUND NOTES

GENERAL

Philip Carrington (early Church historian and Archbishop of Quebec): In the case of Revelation, we are dealing with an artist greater than Stevenson or Coleridge or Bach. St John has a better sense of the right word than Stevenson; he has a greater command of unearthly supernatural loveliness than Coleridge; he has a richer sense of melody and rhythm and composition than Bach ... It is the only masterpiece of pure art in the New Testament ... Its fulness and richness and harmonic variety place it far above Greek tragedy.

R. H. Boll: Of all the books of the Bible none other is so solemnly introduced to us; none so specially urged upon our attention; and, we must add, none so generally disregarded, so shunned, and so neglected. Yet no other book opens with a gracious promise of blessing on him that readeth, on those who hear and keep the things written therein. And to no other book is attached such a warning lest anyone should take from or add to its message. It is a message therefore of the very highest importance, though by men often lightly esteemed and treated as though it were superfluous, and could be dispensed with without material loss. In God's estimate, at least, this book is of supreme value. In it we behold the end and consummation of all God's work and plan, the climax and outcome of all His dispensations and dealings with men; and in it every prophecy and promise, every purpose and covenant finds its ultimate goal and fulfilment. In Genesis we have the beginning of all, in Revelation we have the end and goal of all.

Charles Swindoll: No other book of the Bible has provoked greater fascination or led to more controversy than Revelation. Its profound mysteries, elusive symbolism, powerful predictions, and colorful language are unparalleled in the rest of Scripture. Attempts to interpret its details have spanned the extremes from the sublime to the ridiculous. Throughout my life of ministry, I've seen the book of Revelation drive fanatics to set dates for the return of Christ, frighten believers who find themselves overwhelmed by its judgment and wrath, and turn off skeptics who already think the Bible's filled with indecipherable nonsense.

How wrong! God promises great blessing to those who study the book of Revelation and heed its message (**Rev. 1:3; 22:7**). In fact, in the midst of the sometimes perplexing details of the visions, God's final message to humanity remains clear: In the end, good will triumph over evil, wickedness will be judged, and the righteous will receive their rewards.

Nancy Guthrie: Revelation invites us to celebrate—rather than be embarrassed by—the wrath of God. Our modern world is all for a God of love. But it doesn't really know what to do with a God of wrath. Many would like to purge God's reputation and reality of wrath. But Revelation won't let us do that. Instead, it invites us to sing along with the saints in heaven a song that celebrates wrath of God as a demonstration of his perfect

justice and righteousness. Revelation shows us that it is the wrath of God that will fall on the earth that will cleanse and purify it. Revelation provides us with a response to the question, “Why doesn’t God do something about all of the evil and suffering in the world?” Its answer is: be patient. Evil’s day of doom is surely coming.

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-the-book-of-revelation/>

William Barclay: We cannot shut our eyes to the difficulty of Revelation. It is the most difficult book in the Bible; but its study brings infinite rewards, for it contains the blazing faith of the Christian Church in the days when life was an agony and people expected the end of the heavens and the earth as they knew them but still believed that beyond the terror was the glory and above human raging was the power of God.

Thomas Hamberger: The Book of Revelation teaches us a foundational truth we must remember throughout our lives: **Jesus wins!** Of course, this needs no spoiler alert, as this ending has been made known for quite a while (I would argue since the “protoevangelium” of **Genesis 3:15**, where we are told that the serpent will be crushed underfoot). Jesus is victorious.

The final act of Revelation shows us Jesus’ final victory in the spiritual battle going on around us. The unholy trinity that we see formed in **Revelation 13** finds itself defeated in **Revelation 20** as the fire rains down from God’s heavenly domain and devours them. As the final battle ends, Jesus’ judgment of the world begins. In the meantime, Satan, though he knows he will not win, continually tries to mock and replace God at every opportunity. It is a great thing to know that we serve an eternal winner.

David Jeremiah: Revelation’s Message: God Wins

Revelation’s message is too important for us to miss. The Gospels present Christ’s humiliation – His earthly life, ministry, death, and resurrection. And the epistles give glimpses of Christ’s coming glory in passages such as Philippians 2, where Paul states that every knee will bow to Him one day. However, Revelation reverses Christ’s humiliation and reveals Him as the King of kings and Lord of lords in all His glory. It anticipates the day He takes His rightful place as Ruler over all the earth. By presenting Jesus Christ in glory, Revelation places a capstone on history.

In Greek, the word for “*throne*” appears 46 times in Revelation, “*king*” appears 25 times, and “*power*” and “*authority*” occur 33 times. When John beheld a vision of Christ’s majesty, he “*fell at His feet as dead*” (**Revelation 1:17**). This response to God’s glory is not uncommon, for the same thing happened to Daniel in the Old Testament (**Daniel 10:7-9**). One day we, too, will encounter the living God, and we will find ourselves overcome by His splendor and holiness.

<https://davidjeremiah.blog/what-is-the-book-of-revelation-about/>

Ken Baugh: Jesus came to earth over 2,000 years ago as the Lamb of God, but He is coming back again as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Jesus Christ is coming back! He is the rider on the white horse, the One who is faithful and true. When He comes, the armies

of heaven will be following Him, and He will destroy all those who oppose Him. In the end, Jesus will not only defeat the nations of the world whom the Devil has deceived, but will finally cast him into the lake of fire where he will remain for eternity. Here is the big idea of the book of Revelation: Jesus Christ is the Victor, Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and we as His followers will reign with Him forever in the New Heaven and the New Earth. I say, Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus, come—and come soon! Come and take your bride, the church, to be with you forever!

J. Vernon McGee: This book is like a great union station where the great trunk lines of prophecy come in from other portions of scripture. Revelation does not originate, but consummates. It is imperative to a right understanding of the book to be able to trace each great subject of prophecy from the first reference to the terminal (*Reveling Through Revelation*, p. 4).

Craig Koester: The power of a book can be seen in what it does to people, and few books have affected people more dramatically than Revelation. In positive terms, Revelation has inspired countless sermons and theological treatises, artistic works, and musical compositions ranging from the triumphant “Hallelujah Chorus” to the gentle strains of “Jerusalem My Happy Home.” On the negative side, it has fed social upheaval and sectarian religious movements that have often foundered on misguided attempts to discern the date of Christ’s return. Some are attracted to sensationalistic interpretations that find Revelation’s prophecies reaching fulfillment in the rise of the modern state of Israel, the threat of nuclear war, volcanic eruptions, terrorism, and oil spills. Others, repelled by these speculations, suggest that Revelation might best be kept on the shelf, sealed and unread. Yet attempts to ignore or dismiss Revelation are generally not successful; its secrets are too alluring.

Grant Osborne: The primary problems in studying the Apocalypse are four:

1. the symbolism;
2. the structure of the book;
3. the debated among historicist, preterist, idealist, and futurist interpretations;
4. and the use of the OT in the book.

FOUR PERSPECTIVES IN INTERPRETING REVELATION

Bruce Hurt: https://www.preceptaustin.org/revelation_commentaries#schematic

1) Preterist

Preterist (from Latin *praeter* meaning “past”) holds that through the use of symbols and allegory, the Revelation deals with events that were fulfilled in John’s time (they are “past”) and that it was written primarily to provide hope and comfort to the first century church persecuted by Rome. In short, preterism holds that all prophecy in the Bible is really **history**. Preterims (full or consistent preterism) teaches that end time prophecies were fulfilled in 70AD with the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus preterists interpret the beasts of (**Rev 13:1, 2, 11**) as imperial Rome and the imperial priesthood, but notice that

they are clearly interpreting the passage allegorically, not literally, for nowhere in the context is this interpretation even suggested! The preterist view is held by many modern scholars, especially liberals and others who deny that the Revelation is predictive of specific future events. "Preterism teaches that the Law was fulfilled in AD 70 and God's covenant with Israel was ended. The "*new heavens and new earth*" spoken of in **Revelation 21:1** is, to the preterist, a description of the world under the New Covenant. Just as a Christian is made a "*new creation*" (**2Cor 5:17**), so the world under the New Covenant is a "*new earth*." This aspect of preterism can easily lead to a belief in **replacement theology**." Indeed, preterist interpretation is essentially the antithesis of futuristic interpretation!

2) Historicist

The historicist approach views the Revelation as a symbolic or allegorical prophetic **survey of church history** from the first century up to the Second Coming of Christ. This was the view espoused by most of the "reformers" and thus dominated Protestant eschatological teaching for centuries. This view however has been discounted by many as it does not adequately address the prophecies in the Revelation. The discerning reader needs to be aware that the historicist view is reflected in most of the "older" commentaries (many of which are public domain works easily accessible on the internet) including the works of John Knox, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, C. H. Spurgeon (although Spurgeon did believe in the Millennium), Matthew Henry, Adam Clarke and Albert Barnes. Unless you understand their historicist approach to prophecy, you may become very confused when reading these older "classic" commentaries. Note that with the exception of Spurgeon, these works are not included in the list of resources. It is also important to realize that many of these "classic" commentaries tend to treat many of the OT promises to Israel as primarily applying to the NT Church, a view that is strongly disavowed by this website (see discussion of The Israel of God). An example of a historicist interpretation is the belief that the strong angel of **Revelation 10** symbolizes the Reformation and that the harlot in **Revelation 17** represents the Roman Catholic church, both interpretations which a plain reading of the text simply does not allow!

3) Idealist

This approach argues that the symbols in the Revelation do not relate to historical events but rather to **timeless spiritual truths**. Idealists feel that Revelation relates primarily to the church between the first and second coming of Christ. They feel Revelation relates to the battle between God and evil and between the church and the world at all times in church history. The seals, trumpets, and bowls are thought to depict God's judgments on sinners at all times, and the beast refers to all the anti-Christian empires and rulers in history. Thus the Revelation is viewed as describing the victory of Christ and His people down through history. The Millennium in this approach is not a future event but the final cycle of the book describing the church age. The weaknesses of this view include the failure to see the futuristic aspects of many of the prophecies or to connect them in any way with history. (Adapted from **Grant Osborne: Revelation**. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament - available free in pdf)

This view is variously referred to as the **spiritual approach**, the **idealist approach** or the **symbolic approach** and makes no attempt to find individual fulfillments of John's visions, instead viewing Revelation as a great drama depicting transcendent spiritual realities, such as the spiritual conflict between Christ and Satan, between the saints and the antichristian world powers. Fulfillment is seen either as entirely spiritual or as recurrent, finding representative expression in historical events throughout the age, rather than in one-time, specific fulfillments. (From **Steve Gregg**. *Revelation, Four views: A Parallel Commentary*)

4) Futurist [Ed: This is my view.]

A Literal reading of prophecy will generally lead to a "futurist" interpretation. Thus futurists interpret **Revelation 4-22** as predictive of future end time historical events preceding, during and after the return of Jesus Christ, the establishment of His 1000 year (thus futurist are usually "premillennial". Amillennialists spiritualize the 1000 years and postmillennialists spiritualize the resurrection which precedes it), millennial kingdom on earth, followed by the creation of a new heaven and new earth. Variations of this view were held by many of the so-called early church fathers, including men like Justin Martyr (164AD), Irenaeus (195AD), et al. This futuristic approach has enjoyed a revival since the 19th century and is widely held by many if not most modern evangelicals.

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Robert Thomas: The **futurist approach** to the book is the only one that grants sufficient recognition to the prophetic style of the book and a normal hermeneutical pattern of interpretation based on that style. It views the book as focusing on the last period(s) of world history and outlining the various events and their relationships to one another. This is the view that best accords with the principle of literal interpretation. The literal interpretation of Revelation is the one generally associated with the premillennial return of Christ and a view of inspiration that understands God to be the real author of every book of the Bible. Though He used human authors whose individual backgrounds and writing styles are reflected, the divine element in inspiration prevails to the point that the unity of Scripture can be assumed.

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Other online sources give their summary of these four different approaches:

Evidence and Answers: <https://evidenceandanswers.org/article/four-views-revelation/>

R.C. Sproul: <https://www.ligonier.org/posts/four-ways-read-book-revelation>

Greg Herrick: <https://bible.org/article/interpretive-models-book-revelation-whole>

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TIMING OF THE RAPTURE

After settling on the Futurist view of the book, the next key question involves the **timing of the rapture** from a premillennial standpoint. The traditional dispensational position has been that the rapture occurs before the final seventy week of Daniel begins so that the church does not go through any of the tribulation described during that period. This would be a period when God's program focuses distinctively on the physical nation of Israel. That had always been my perspective. However, the arguments of my friend Van Parunak have persuaded me to switch to a **"Pre Wrath"** position:

1) A study of "*tribulation*" in the NT makes it clear that believers experience persecution and difficulties inflicted by other human actors throughout this present evil age. So the "Great Tribulation" suffering just "differs in intensity, not in kind," from what we have been called to expect.

2) A study of the **Olivet Discourse** passages from the gospel accounts [Matthew (chapters 24-25), Mark (13), and Luke (21)] "explicitly describes the temporal relationship between the time of great tribulation, the return of Christ, and a gathering of believers together unto him."

Table 1: Periods Prophesied in the Olivet Discourse

Period #	Mt 24,25:	Mk 13:	Lk 21:	Characterization	Description
1	3-13	3-13	7-19	The Beginning of Sorrows (Mt 24:8)	The NT period, before the fall of Jerusalem (which is the next period). Note close correspondence with the first four seals of Rev 6. Contrary to popular thought, these four seals belong, not to Daniel's seventieth week, but to the present age.
2	(Lacking)		20-24a	The Days of Vengeance (Lk 21:22)	Desolation of Jerusalem under Titus, AD 70. In the discourse, this <i>precedes</i> the time of the Gentiles, and thus is not to be confused with Matt 24:15-28, which <i>follows</i> it.
3	14	(Lacking)	24b	The Times of the Gentiles (Lk 21:24)	During this period, Jerusalem is subdued by the Gentiles (Luke) and the gospel goes forth throughout all the world (Matthew).
4	15-28	14-23	(Lacking)	Great Tribulation (Mt 24:21)	Explicitly linked to "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet" (15, Dan 9:27). This period begins with the entry of the abomination of desolation into the holy place, at the middle of Daniel's seventieth week. Thus "the great tribulation" is only part of that week.
5	29-31	24-27	25-28	Appearing of Son of Man (Mt 24:30)	Cosmic signs, return of Christ in glory, gathering of his saints
	24:32-25:30	28-37	29-36		(Parables about, and exhortations to, watchfulness)
6	25:31-46	(Lacking)		Separation	Final Judgment

“The traditional dispensational approach to **Matt 24:29-31** acknowledges that it describes a gathering of tribulation saints when the Lord Jesus returns to set up his kingdom, but insists that **1 Thes 4** describes a different rapture that is not described in **Matt 24**. In support of this assumption, it is sometimes urged that the saints in **1 Thes 4** go up to meet the Lord in the air to be with him in heaven during Daniel’s seventieth week, while those in **Matt 24** are gathered to him as he comes to earth. Actually, the language Paul chooses in **1 Thes 4** suggests that he has the same picture in mind as **Matt 24**. His word for “*meet*” in v.17 is commonly used to describe the actions of a delegation that goes out to meet a visiting dignitary and accompany him into their city. Later in the Olivet Discourse (**Matt 25:6**), our Lord uses this very word to describe the action of the virgins who go out to meet the bridegroom and accompany him back into the feast. Again, in **Acts 28:15**, as Paul approaches Rome, Luke chooses the same word to describe how the believers come out of the city to meet Paul at a village along the way and accompany him back to the capital. Thus Paul’s language in **1 Thes 4** does not require or even suggest that the saints meet the Lord to return with him to heaven. To the contrary, it is completely consistent with the view that they rise to form his royal escort as he makes his glorious return to the earth.”

The main objection which **Van Parunak** then addresses is that the Pre Wrath position does not hold to the same sense of the imminent return of Christ (He could come at any moment without any necessary intervening events) as the Pre Trib position. This is a major change in outlook.

“The NT *does* contain **explicit prophecies that must be fulfilled before the rapture**. . . To readers who recognize the New Testament authority of **Matthew 24**, it is an explicit denial of strong imminency. **2 Thes 2**, a passage often cited with respect to the rapture, is another. In spite of ingenious efforts to find the rapture in the apostasy of **2:3** or the removal of the restrainer in **2:7**, any candid reader must admit that these references would never suggest the rapture to someone who was not looking for it. The overall thrust of the passage is that the Thessalonians fear that they are in “*the day of Christ*” (**2:2**), also called “*the day of the Lord Jesus Christ*” and “*the day of the Lord*.” This period is to be distinguished from the great tribulation. The two flow in opposite directions. The biblical descriptions of the day of the Lord Jesus Christ all concern the pouring out of God’s judgment on sinful men, while the description of the great tribulation in the Olivet Discourse and the first five seals of the Revelation concern the persecution of godly people by unbelievers. Because both involve great human suffering, it can be easy to confuse the two. Traditional pretribulationism, for instance, usually includes the great tribulation in the day of the Lord. The Thessalonians also appear to have made this confusion. Suffering severe tribulation (**2 Thes 1:4-6**), they worry that perhaps they are in the day of the Lord. Paul assures them that they are not. How does he do so? He tells them to **look for the appearance of the Antichrist**, taking God’s place in the temple and demanding worship from all (**2:3-4**). According to **Dan. 9:27**, this event takes place at the middle of Daniel’s seventieth week. By pretribulation theory, the Thessalonians should be long gone by this time, and this sign would be useless to them. Yet Paul (in conformity with **Matt 24:15-22**) cites it as the touchstone that will distinguish the great

tribulation from all previous tribulations, a touchstone that is in principle accessible to them. According to Paul, the assumption of divine prerogatives by the Antichrist will precede the rapture of the church.

At any point in history since the first century, believers could look forward to the possibility that the Lord might very shortly return. The great tribulation is at most three and one-half years long, extending from the middle of Daniel's seventieth week to the beginning of the day of the Lord sometime in the second half of that week."

Practical Application:

"The pressures of the world around us every day urge us to deny our Lord. Under Antichrist these pressures will reach their climax. The scriptures warn us of these persecutions, so that we will not be taken by surprise. Paul explains to the Thessalonians that the reason he told them beforehand of coming tribulation is so '*that no man should be moved by these afflictions* [lit. tribulations]' (1 Thes 3:3,4). Believers who harbor the false hope that the rapture precedes the tribulation will be caught off-guard when great tribulation begins. They will conclude that God lied to them about the rapture and may very well fall away, denying the Lord and bringing dishonor to him. Those who accept the Lord's explicit teaching that the rapture comes '*after the tribulation of those days*' will know in that day that God has not forgotten us. The accuracy of his prophecy about the tribulation will encourage us to wait patiently for the promise of his coming. We will be prepared to stand in the strength of God's Spirit and glorify him in the day of trouble, so that we will not be ashamed before him when he ends that time with his own appearance and pours out his just wrath on those who had troubled us."

'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.' 1Pet 4:12-13.

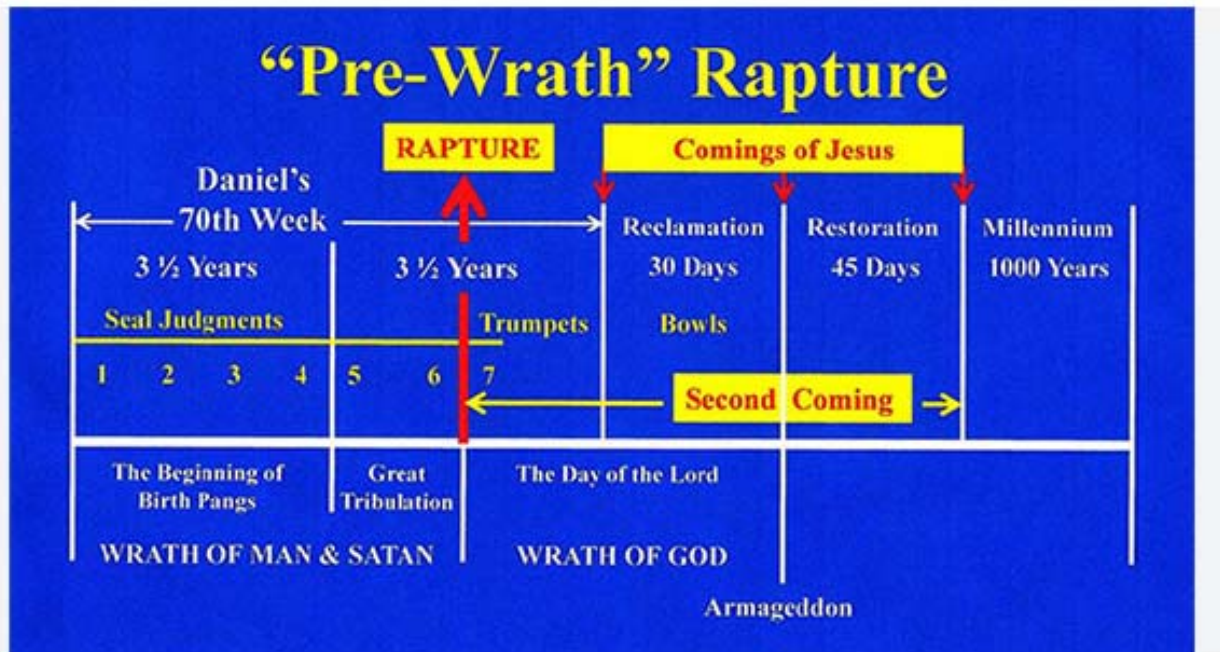
<https://www.cyber-chapel.org/rapture.pdf>

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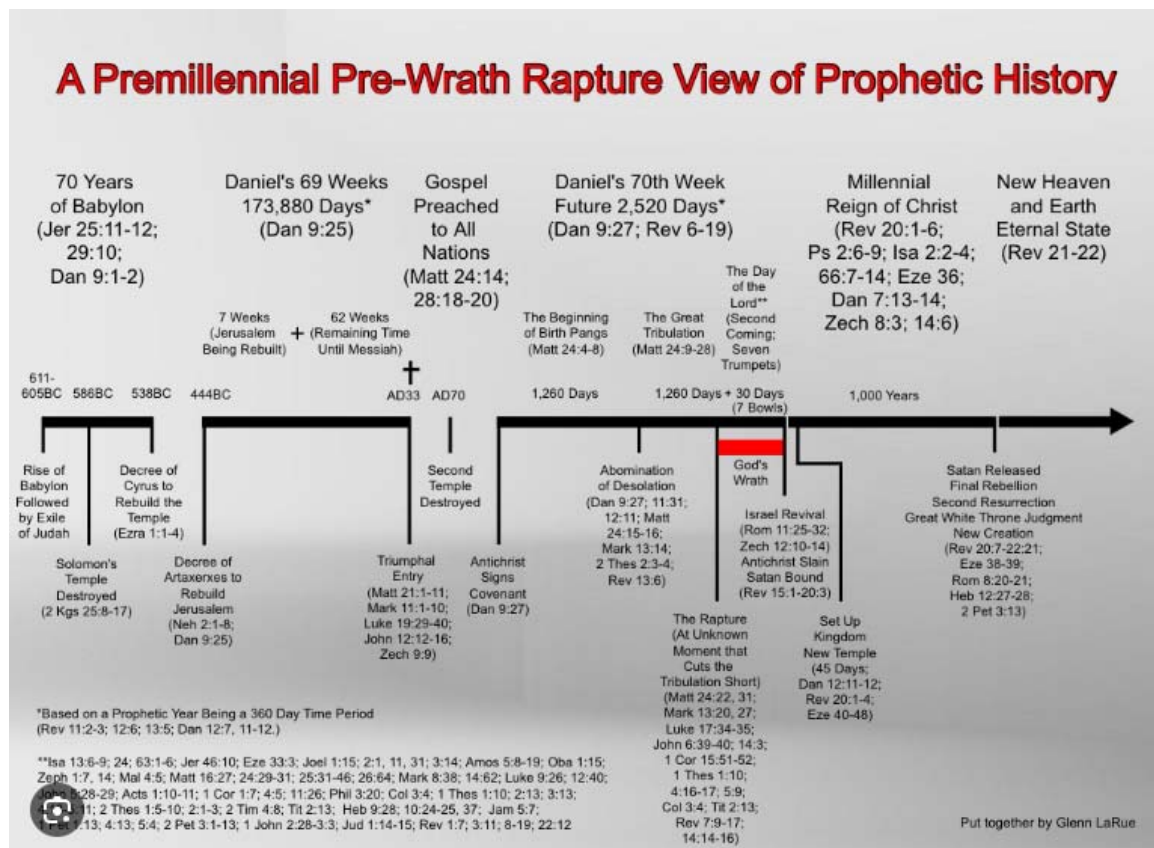
Therefore, there is only one supernatural return of the Lord Jesus at the end of the age when He gathers believers to Himself and then unleashes His final wrath on the unbelieving world in preparation for the establishment of His 1000 year Millennial Kingdom on earth. This is followed by the new heavens and the new earth and New Jerusalem ushering in the eternal state.

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Lamb and Lion Ministries: Graphical Timeline from Pre-Wrath perspective



Glenn LaRue – Graphical Timeline from Pre-Wrath perspective



AUTHORSHIP, BACKGROUND, SETTING, DATE

Robert Thomas: The first-century churches in the Roman province of Asia were distinctive in several ways. They were the only ones outside Jerusalem and the birthplace of Christianity to benefit from the extended personal ministries of two major apostles. Paul spent three years in Ephesus, the major city of the province (**Acts 20:31**, probably A.D. 52-55). This was the longest span of ministry devoted to any city during his extensive missionary tours. According to reliable tradition, John the apostle arrived in this city at about the time of Paul's martyrdom in Rome and spent the remainder of his life, approximately thirty years, overseeing churches in the same general area. These churches were also the first recipients of a considerable number of NT books. Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Timothy to this general region. He also wrote 1 Corinthians while ministering in Ephesus, so the church there presumably had opportunity to know its contents before it was dispatched. John wrote the gospel of John, three epistles, and the Apocalypse primarily for the benefit of churches in this territory. It is not surprising, therefore, that several prominent church leaders of the second century such as Papias, Polycarp, Ignatius, and Irenaeus had ties to this region. It was an important sector of the cradle of Christianity.

Robert Mounce: Early tradition is unanimous in its opinion that the Apocalypse was written by **John the apostle**. **Justin Martyr**, who lived for some time at Ephesus during the first part of the second century, was familiar with the Revelation and held that the apostle John was its author. This is corroborated by a remark in **Eusebius** (who himself did not accept the apostolic authorship of Revelation), who says that **Justin** mentioned the Revelation of John, "plainly calling it the work of the apostle." In his work against heresies **Irenaeus** frequently cites from the Apocalypse and holds it to be the work of "John the disciple of the Lord," by which title few would deny that he means the apostle. This witness is of special interest because as a boy Irenaeus had known Polycarp, who in turn sustained a close relationship with John. **Clement of Alexandria** cited the Apocalypse in several places and accepted it as the work of John the apostle. Writing from Carthage **Tertullian** quotes from all but four chapters of Revelation (mostly in his Montanist works), holding it to be the work of the apostle John.

Van Parunak: The author is John the Apostle. He only identifies himself as John since he is so well known. He spent his last days at Ephesus. Early church fathers ascribed authorship to John the Apostle. The one big contrary argument would be the different style of language used from the Gospel of John.

Location of writing would be the island of Patmos. John is exiled here and condemned to a state of loneliness; but he is not alone since he has the Lord with him.

The timing of the writing was between 90-95 AD during the persecution under Domitian (which was much more systematized and widespread than the earlier localized persecution under Nero).

Grant Osborne: Justin Martyr in the mid-second century wrote that the apostle John was the author (Dialogue with Trypho 81.4), and this became the accepted view (so also Irenaeus, Against Heresies 4.20.11; Tertullian, Against Marcion 3.14.3; Clement of Alexandria, Paedagogus 2.108; Origen, De principiis 1.2.10). . .

In short, persecution is a major aspect of the book; while the emphasis on persecution can fit either Nero or Domitian, and while there are problems with both views, the Domitianic date provides a slightly better fit for the data. . .

It is clear that the seven churches were in a hostile environment from two directions—the Jewish world and the Roman world. The “*synagogue of Satan*” (2:9; 3:9) had turned against them. Relations between church and synagogue, never good from the start, deteriorated in the last couple of decades of the first century, and Revelation reflects that situation. Judaism had a special privilege that the Romans allowed only them, freedom from worshiping the Roman gods and participating in the Greco-Roman cults. Christianity was considered part of Judaism at least through the Jewish War (A.D. 66–70) and also benefited from this privilege. However, Judaism tried more and more to separate itself from Christianity and get the Roman Empire to recognize that Christianity was not exempt. This probably caused some of the pressure reflected in the book. **Bredin** (1998: 161–64) points to the Judean tax that the Romans imposed on Jews for the rebuilding of the Capitoline temple. It was this tax that allowed the Jews freedom from participation in the imperial cult. Christians refused to pay this tax; thus the Jews denounced Christians as not being true Judeans and as being troublemakers.

While there was no official Roman persecution, Christians felt a great deal of economic and social pressure to participate in Roman life, including the trade guilds with their idolatrous feasts and cultic practices as well as the imperial cult. **Beale** (1999: 30) describes the pressure to compromise with the guilds, especially the annual feast honoring each guild’s patron deities as well as the emperor (the Nicolaitan cult gave in to these pressures). When Christians refused to do so, a great deal of antipathy was naturally directed against them. This situation is reflected in the seven letters, in the “*affliction*” they were experiencing (2:9), and in the imminent intensification of that affliction to the point of imprisonment and death (2:10; cf. 13:10). While there is no developed persecution in the book, there was a great deal of daily opposition as well as signs of intensification on the near horizon.

G.K. Beale: Date of Writing

John wrote to churches that had experienced an occasional localized persecution (2:3, 13; 3:8-9), which does not fit with the severe persecution under Nero in A.D. 64-65. The church at Ephesus, founded around 52, had been around long enough to have lost its first love (2:4). The Laodicean church is called rich (3:17), but Laodicea was devastated by an earthquake in 60-61 and would have taken many years to recover. Early Christian writers, including Irenaeus, held that John received his vision during the reign of Domitian (81-96), and it was during that reign that a cult of emperor worship was established at Ephesus and some form of persecution broke out against the church. Our study will show that the Christians to whom John was writing were being forced to participate in this

imperial cult (see on **2:9, 13-14; 13:15**). From about 100, the usual basis for charges against Christians was their refusal to worship the emperor. Judaism enjoyed certain freedoms under Roman law, including the right to worship in synagogues and some degree of exemption from the imperial cult. However, as Christians became identified as a separate group from Jews, such privileges would not have been extended to them. It seems from Revelation that some Jewish Christians were tempted to flee persecution by returning to the synagogue and that Gentile Christians were tempted to avoid persecution by giving in to the demands of emperor worship. In Asia Minor, where the churches addressed in Revelation were located, the demands of emperor worship were particularly strong from about 90 onward. People were even required to participate in sacrifices as ritual processions passed their homes. The impetus for this cult seems to have come more from local and provincial officials seeking to ingratiate themselves with Rome than from the emperor himself. Their attempts to make themselves look good depended on their ability to force the local population to support the cult enthusiastically, and detractors had to be punished. In Revelation Rome, along with other kingdoms, is identified with Babylon, yet Jews never referred to Rome as Babylon until after the destruction of the temple in 70, comparing that destruction with the similar destruction carried out by the Babylonians many centuries before. The evidence, therefore, seems to indicate that Revelation was **written sometime shortly after 90**, when John the apostle would have been an old man.

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There are a number of online sources that do a good job of documenting these background and authorship details:

Cooper P. Abrams, III: <https://bible-truth.org/RevIntroduction.pdf>

John MacArthur: https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/macarthur_john/bible-introductions/revelation-intro.cfm

David Malick: <https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-revelation>

Daniel Wallace: <https://bible.org/seriespage/revelation-introduction-argument-and-outline>

Chuck Swindoll: <https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-apocalypse/revelation>

Third Millennium Ministries: <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/133>

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PURPOSE OF WRITING

Van Parunak: John is being persecuted; revelation regarding conflict between church and Satan; John wants to encourage the brethren to stand fast in the Lord.

John 16:33 highlights the theme being developed here in the book of Revelation –
In the world you shall have tribulation; we can have peace in Christ who has overcome the world.

Our peace does not come because we are living in time of prosperity and comfort.

Paul was in a Roman jail when he wrote Philippians – permeated with theme of Joy.

Grant Osborne: There is also an **apocalyptic mind-set**. The fundamental perspective of the book is the **exhortation to endure persecution** on the basis of the transcendent reality of God's kingdom in the present as grounded in God's control of the future. Therefore the temporal world of temptation and pressure to conform to secular demands can be endured when one realizes that God is "*the one who is and who was and who is to come*" (**1:4b**), that is, the same God who controlled the past and will control the future is still in control the present, even though it does not seem like it. The **judgment of the wicked** and the **vindication of the saints** are important elements in apocalyptic and dominate Revelation as well. In light of this, the ethical mandate to persevere or overcome is essential, for apocalyptic is ethical at heart and demands faithfulness on the part of the people of God. The recurring theme of the letters is **repentance**, for only this makes it possible to be an **overcomer**. The basis of it all is the determinism of the book. God is triumphant; he is "*Lord God Almighty*" (**1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22**), the one who is omnipotent and in control of all things. The so-called dualism of the book is only partial, for while the battle between good and evil dominates, it is not an equal battle. Satan has already been defeated at the cross, and even the death of the saints (**13:7**) becomes their triumph over him (**12:11**).

Kenneth Easley: The purpose of the letter was to encourage and challenge Christians.

Central theme: Jesus, the Lord of history, will return without fail to earth to bring history to its proper conclusion (**Rev. 1:7**).

Charles Swindoll: Knowing what the Bible teaches about the future:

- Communicates the full character of God, balancing our theology.
- Gives us Hope for today and alleviates unnecessary fears about the future.
- Compels us to live godly lives in view of future rewards.
- Moves us to worship God, who will ultimately triumph over evil.

G.K. Beale: The goal of Revelation is to bring encouragement to believers of all ages that God is working out His purposes even in the midst of tragedy, suffering, and apparent Satanic domination. It is the Bible's battle cry of victory, for in it, more than anywhere else in the NT, is revealed the final victory of God over all the forces of evil. As such, it

is an encouragement to God's people to persevere in the assurance that their final reward is certain and to worship and glorify God despite trials and despite temptations to march to the world's drumbeat.

Chip Brogden: The Seven-Fold Purpose of the Book of Revelation

- (1) To Reveal Christ as Preeminent Over All Things
- (2) To Show Things That Would Shortly Take Place
- (3) To Encourage the Faithful
- (4) To Warn the Unfaithful
- (5) To Show the Ultimate Judgment and Defeat of Evil
- (6) To Show the Ultimate Reward and Triumph of Good
- (7) To Show the Kingdom, Mystery, and Purpose of God Being Fulfilled in Christ "*on earth as it is in heaven.*"

<https://theschoolofchrist.org/seven-fold-purpose-book-of-revelation>

MAJOR THEMES AND THEOLOGY

John Walvoord: Undoubtedly, the principal contribution of Revelation is in the realm of **eschatology**. Here is presented not only the eschatology of the church . . . but the majestic completion of the prophetic program of the Gentiles and Daniel's program for Israel, both culminating in the second coming of Christ. Nowhere else in Scripture is there more detailed description of the period just before the second coming with special reference to the great tribulation. The events immediately preceding and following the second coming are also spelled out in detail.

Here alone the millennial kingdom is declared to be one thousand years in length, and a clear distinction is made between the millennium and the eternal state. Emphasis in the book is on the triumphant second coming of Christ. Prominent also are the doctrine of divine judgment of sin, the doctrine of resurrection, and the doctrine of reward. No book of Scripture more specifically sets out the believer's eternal hope in Christ in the new heaven and earth and gives greater assurance of God's triumph over evil, rebellion, and unbelief.

Revelation is the eschatological center of the New Testament. Every major theme of prophecy is treated to some extent in this book, with special attention to completion or fulfillment of God's prophetic program. For this reason Revelation cannot be understood apart from the sixty-five books that precede it, although it is in itself a Bible in miniature.

Van Parunak: Focus on 3 words in the book of Revelation

1) "*world*" --- distinguished from earth in Bible; earth is the physical planet on which we live; cosmos refers to a political and cultural system that is under the control of Satan of which we are all a part; used 3 times in Rev:

Rev. 11:15 – the kingdoms of this world – part of this world system; struggle for dominion and power; contrasting Satan's dominion with the Lord's

Rev. 13:8 – *the lamb slain from the foundation of the world* – God’s commitment to provide a Redeemer from the very beginning

Rev. 17:8 – *written in the book of life from the foundation of the world*

2) “*overcome*” – Used in Rev. and 1 John primarily; we are called to be overcomers; to have victory in our struggle with the world; **Rev. 3:21**;
Those who hate the Lord Jesus, hate His people;

3) “*tribulation*” – *thlipsis* – 45 times in NT; only 3 times refer to a divine judgment against unbelievers; refers to ongoing process of unbelievers doing bad things to believers; only 6 instances refer to end time events; emphasis on tribulation during this present church age

Kenneth Easley:

Doctrinal themes

- the second coming of Christ
- the sovereignty of God in history
- the wrath of God against evil
- the holiness and justice of God
- the limited, but vicious power of evil
- the person of Christ: slaughtered Lamb and conquering King

Practical themes

- importance of worship for believers
- reality of persecution for God's people
- God's protection of his people
- need for lukewarm Christians to repent
- reality of final judgment for all humanity

John MacArthur: Those who ignore Revelation deprive themselves of a rich treasure of divine truth. Revelation takes a high view of God’s inspired Word. It claims divine inspiration for itself (**1:2**), and it has been estimated that 278 of its 404 verses allude to the inspired Old Testament Scriptures. Revelation reveals God the Father in all His glory and majesty, describing Him as holy (**4:8**), true (**6:10**), omnipotent (**4:11**), wise (**7:12**), sovereign (**4:11**), and eternal (**4:10**). Revelation details the depths of man’s depravity. Despite experiencing the final outpouring of God’s devastating wrath and judgment on sinful mankind, people will nevertheless harden their hearts (like Pharaoh before them; **1 Sam. 6:6**) and refuse to repent (**9:20–21; 16:9, 11**). Scripture contains no clearer summation of the doctrine of redemption than that of **Revelation 1:5**, which declares that “*Jesus Christ ... loves us and released us from our sins by His blood.*” The ministry of angels also figures prominently in Revelation, which contains one out of every four references to angels in Scripture. Revelation warns the church of the dangers of sin and compromise with the world (**chaps. 2–3**), and teaches it how to properly worship God (**chaps. 4–5**).

G.K. Beale: Willingness to Suffer for Christ Is the Path to Ultimate Victory.

Even as the cross turned out to seal Christ's victory over Satan, so the present suffering of Christians seals their victory over the powers of darkness. Even while, like Christ, Christians suffering tribulation and hardship (1:9) also share in Christ's kingly reign (1:6). In this present age, believers may suffer physical hardship, but their spirits will be kept safe (11:1-12). The church's persecutors, on the other hand, will find themselves in the same position as Satan. Even as Satan's apparent victory triggered his ultimate defeat, so the present evil actions of unbelievers (11:10) are only laying the basis for their final judgment (11:13, 18). One of the main goals of the book, therefore, is to exhort believers to remain faithful to Christ in spite of present sufferings and in spite of the temptation to engage in idolatry represented by compromise with the world-system, because this faithfulness will eventually be rewarded in the heavenly kingdom. Notice that after the portrayal of the heavenly kingdom in 21:1-22:5, the final words of the book revert to the command to **remain faithful**. The heavenly visions serve as motivators for Christians now suffering in adversity to hold to the glorious promises of God and not to fall away. And so in the same way, Christians today should still read Revelation and allow its portrayal of the divine majesty to motivate us to continued faithfulness. Christians are to live according to the values of this new world, not those of the world in which they live. Churches should be reminded that the scenes of heavenly worship are to be the model for our earthly worship every Lord's Day — for remember, it was as John readied himself for worship on the Lord's Day that he was given this vision.

Also: The Sovereignty of God in Human History

Craig Keener: What then is Revelation's message?

- That God is awesomely majestic, as well as sovereign in our troubles
- That Jesus' sacrifice as the Lamb ultimately brings complete deliverance for those who trust him
- That God's judgments on the world are often to serve notice on the world that God will avenge his people
- That regardless of how things appear in the short run, "sin does not go unpunished," and God will judge
- That God can accomplish his purposes through a small and persecuted remnant; he is not dependent on what the world values as power
- That worship leads us from grief over our sufferings to God's eternal purposes seen from a heavenly perspective
- That proclaiming Christ invites persecution, the normal state of committed believers in this age
- That Christ is worth dying for
- That a radical contrast exists between God's kingdom (exemplified in the bride, the new Jerusalem) and the world's values (exemplified in the prostitute, Babylon)
- That the hope God has prepared for us far exceeds our present sufferings
- That God's plan and church ultimately include representatives of all peoples

Harold Willmington (Liberty University): H. H. Snell has aptly summarized the position held by the Lamb in Revelation: “In the Revelation, THE LAMB is the centre around which all else is clustered, the foundation on which everything lasting is built, the nail on which all hangs, the object to which all points, and the spring from which all blessing proceeds. THE LAMB is the light, the glory, the life, the Lord of Heaven and earth, from whose face all defilement must flee away, and in whose presence fullness of joy is known. Hence, we cannot go far in the study of the Revelation, without seeing THE LAMB, like direction-posts along the road, to remind us that He who did by Himself purge our sins is now highly exalted, and that to Him every knee must bow, and every tongue confess.”

Revelation is about a Lamb! John the apostle presents Him in a ten-fold light:

- A Sin Cleansing Lamb “*And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (**Rev. 7:14**).
- A Slain Lamb “*And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth*” (**Rev. 5:6**).
- A Redeeming Lamb “*And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*” (**Rev. 5:9**).
- A Worthy Lamb “*Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing*” (**Rev. 5:12**).
- An Overcoming Lamb “*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death*” (**Rev. 12:11**). “*These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful*” (**Rev. 17:14**).
- A Life-Giving and Protecting Lamb “*And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (**Rev. 13:8**).
- A Comforting Lamb “*For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes*” (**Rev. 7:17**).

- An Eternal Lamb “*And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*” (Rev. 5:13).
- An Angry Lamb “*And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb*” (Rev. 6:16).
- A Shining Lamb “*And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*” (Rev. 21:23).

PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING REVELATION

Kenneth Easley:

Figurative language. Figures of speech are normal in all written language, and should be recognized and interpreted according to first-century understanding.

Simplicity of meaning. The simplest explanation of complex information is generally preferred in science as well as interpretation of Scripture, unless there is some compelling reason to do otherwise.

Telescoping of time. A biblical prophecy may refer to both a near and a remote event (Isa. 61:1–3, referring both to first and second comings of Christ).

Time lines. Chronology cannot be established with absolute certainty, but the need to make Jesus one's first love can. Thus, unlike commentaries which focus much of their effort on chronology and time lines, this commentary will present each of these; but will focus on its primary goal of stressing the lifestyle implications of prophecy—the need to love Jesus and follow him in obedience. After all, Revelation both opens and closes with promises of blessings to those who heed its teachings (1:3; 22:7), not to those who intellectually decipher its prophetic landscapes.

STRUCTURE

Buist Fanning: A further issue about the structure of Revelation is the question of recapitulation versus chronological progression in the book. One larger dimension of this issue was touched on already in the section “Hermeneutical Approaches”: whether John’s visions refer to events throughout the age or exclusively in the past or distant future (**predominantly future** seems to be the best approach). But the structural dimension of this question is whether the events described in the major units and subunits of the book progress chronologically or go back and describe the same events again as the chapters move along. The main focus of this debate falls on **chapters 6–16** (how do the seal,

trumpet, and bowl judgments and their various interludes relate to one another?) and **chapters 19–21** (does **20:1–6** recapitulate events described earlier in the book, and do the eschatological battle accounts in **19:11–21** and **20:7–10** refer to the same events?). See discussion in the commentary on **chapters 19–21** for the second issue. The following discussion centers on the question in **chapters 6–16**.

The essence of the recapitulation view of the three series of judgments is that they give three descriptions of the same judgments but with differing viewpoints or levels of detail. The main support for this approach includes the following:

- (1) general thematic parallels appear frequently among the seals, trumpets, and bowls such as effects on the earth's waters, effects on heavenly bodies, warfare and invasion, scorching heat, widespread human deaths, and lack of repentance by the ungodly.
- (2) Some inconsistencies arise if we take the three series sequentially: the heavenly bodies that were dramatically affected in the sixth seal (**6:12–17**) are still in place and are darkened under the fourth trumpet (**8:12**); the first trumpet (**8:7**) burns all the green grass, but the locusts of the fifth trumpet are not to harm it (**9:4**).
- (3) **The seven trumpets and seven bowls seem to end at the same place:** the consummation of God's judgment just prior to the start of his rule on the earth (**10:5–7**; **11:15–18**; **16:17**; cf. **15:1**; the seventh seal is unclear, **8:1**).
- (4) A storm theophany (lightning, thunder, earthquake, hail) comes at the end of each of the series (**8:5**; **11:19**; **16:18–21**). These are taken as evidence that the three series are coextensive and parallel and describe the same events but with different specifics or points of view each time.
- (5) The sixth seal (**6:12–17**) describes such changes in the heavenly bodies that it must refer to realities immediately prior to Christ's return.

The final three points make clear that the three series are not purely sequential (i.e., all seven seals followed by all seven trumpets and then all seven bowls). But arguing (as in points 3 and 4) that the series all end at the same time does not speak to whether they begin at the same time. And general parallels (point 1) do not establish identity of events since the three series all draw from Old Testament typologies of judgment (e.g., the day of the Lord, Egyptian plagues, Sodom and Gomorrah) that may recur at separate occasions. The sixth seal does speak of cataclysmic effects, but it is best to see its description as hyperbolic for unmistakable heavenly portents of God's coming judgment, not the end of the cosmic order as a woodenly literal reading would take it (see commentary on **6:12–17**).

The evidence for chronological sequence includes the following points, and this approach seems more satisfactory:

- (1) explicit ordering of the features within each series ("*first*," "*second*," etc.) supports a predisposition toward taking the realities they refer to as well as the three series themselves as chronologically sequential. Why portray these features as explicitly sequenced if they represent things that occur at various times in no particular order?

(2) The strong typological association with the Egyptian plagues (at least for the trumpets and bowls) suggests that the judgments in all three series are sequential and get progressively worse just as those did and they likewise do not lead to repentance even as they get worse.

(3) The intensification within each series and between the series is easier to explain by chronological sequencing than by recapitulation of the same events. For example, the first four seals and first four trumpets are less severe than the later ones in each series, and the scope of destruction increases with each series (one fourth in **6:8**, thirds in **8:7–12** and **9:15, 18**, including a third of the sea creatures dead; all of the sea creatures die in **16:3**, and the other bowls seem to affect the whole world with their woes rather than being partial).

(4) The bowl judgments are explicitly called “*the last plagues*,” that “*complete*” God’s judgmental wrath visited on the earth (**15:1; 21:9**).

(5) The contents of the seventh seal and seventh trumpet are left unspecified and are narrated or described so closely with the subsequent series (trumpets and bowls respectively) as to indicate that the trumpets constitute the last seal judgment and the bowls constitute the last trumpet judgment (**8:1–6; 10:5–7; 11:15–19; 15:1**). This arrangement is sometimes called **telescoping** or telescopic rather than purely sequential. Thus each series brings the reader up to the end point of the future climactic period of judgment, just prior to the establishment of God’s rule at the return of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords (**19:11–21**).

Within the larger framework of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, **chapters 6–16** also contain various **interludes** or digressions that can be disorienting but complement the mainline narration in important ways. They pause the chronological progression for shorter or longer segments with **flashbacks** to background events, **heavenly previews** of the consummation about to come, or glimpses of **relevant contemporaneous circumstances** before the judgment sequence is picked up again. These interludes serve several discernible purposes in the literary design. They relax the tension of a seemingly breathless but predictable pace and implicitly show that the imminent end will come on an unexpected timetable controlled by God. They give glimpses of the heavenly viewpoint on the earthly events portrayed in the images of judgment in the chronological progression. They also provide needed answers to questions raised by the judgments (e.g., **6:17**, “*Who can stand?*”; **10:5–7**, Why the delay before the end?). These answers sometimes give encouragement (**7:1–8**, God will protect Israel) or hope for redemption in the midst of judgment (**7:9–17**, a vast multitude from every nation worshiping God and the Lamb). They provide examples of God’s witnesses for the readers to emulate in their own experiences of hostility and rejection by the surrounding culture (**chs. 10–11**). They explain the cosmic and historical background to the present and coming conflict (**chs. 12–13**). They preview God’s coming triumph as well as the severe judgment about to be consummated (**ch. 14**). **In summary, a basic chronological progression with embedded flashbacks, previews, or contemporary glimpses is the most satisfactory way to read the central section of Revelation (chs. 6–16, most of the second major vision).**

With the third major vision (17:1–19:10), John focuses on the destruction of Babylon, which is roughly contemporaneous with **chapters 6–16** in time but also portrays her past and present evil influence on the world and then the events of God’s judgment on her. This judgment will culminate in divine rule being established on earth when her power is swept away at the time of Christ’s second coming (as foreshadowed in 11:15–18; 14:1, and stated explicitly in 14:8; 16:10, 19). The fourth major vision (21:9–22:9) provides a contrasting focus on the new Jerusalem, which exists in an eternal future. The vision describes the blessedness of living in direct communion with and service for God. The major section that intervenes between the third and fourth major visions (19:11–21:8) is laid out chronologically and recounts seven shorter visions portraying future events that take place between the collapse of Babylon and the coming of the new Jerusalem with its new heaven and earth. So the larger arrangement of most of the book follows a temporal progression through various events that will culminate this age and lead finally to the new heaven and new earth, events that “*must happen soon*” (1:1; 22:6).

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One question that must be addressed is whether **Revelation 20:1-6** reflects chronological progression (the premill view) or recapitulation (the amill view). Charles Powell gives a good analysis of this issue:

<https://bible.org/article/progression-versus-recapitulation-revelation-201-6-some-overlooked-arguments>

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[Various approaches to the structure of the book]

J. Sidlow Baxter: No book of Scripture is built upon a clearer plan. It runs in three movements, each issuing in a transcendent climax.

I. FIRST MOVEMENT (chap. 1-5)

The enthronement of Christ in heaven.

II. SECOND MOVEMENT (chap. 6-20)

The Great Tribulation.

The Wrath of God.

The enthronement of Christ on earth.

III. THIRD MOVEMENT (chap. 21-22)

The enthronement of Christ in the new creation.

Next, let it be realised that the main body of the book (**chapters 6-19**) runs in two parallel series of chapters; i.e. **chapters 6-11** and **chapters 12-19**, run parallel with each other, both chapter-groups depicting the same series of happenings but from two different aspects. Both run through two awful epochs:

(1) “The Great Tribulation” and

(2) “The Wrath of God.”

Note that the seven seals in the first member of the parallel (6-11) are matched by the seven personages in the second member (12-19) also that in both there is the sealing of an

Israel remnant on earth and the blessedness of the saints in heaven; that the seven trumpets of the one part exactly parallel with the seven vials of the other part. In the first member (6-11) we have the earthly view of these things; in the second member (12-19) we have the heavenly view of them.

We can easily exhibit the parallel as follows:

<u>Chapters 6-11</u>	<u>Chapters 12-19</u>
Ch. 6 The seven seals.	The seven persons (12, 13)
7 Parenthetical:	Parenthetical (14):
(1) Israel remnant sealed	(1) Israel remnant sealed.
(2) Blessedness of saints in heaven.	(2) Blessedness of the saints.
8, 9 <u>SEVEN TRUMPETS</u>	<u>SEVEN VIALS (15, 16)</u>
1. On the earth.	1. On the earth.
2. On the sea.	2. On the sea.
3. On the rivers.	3. On the rivers.
4. Sun, moon, stars.	4. Sun.
5. Darkness, scourge.	5. Darkness, scourge.
6. Euphrates: army.	6. Euphrates: kings.
7. "Nations angry";	7. "Nations fell";
"Wrath";	"Wrath";
"Great voices";	"Voices"; "Thunderings";
"Time no more."	"It is done."
10, 11 Parenthetical	Parenthetical (17-18)
Jerusalem in the "Great Tribulation"	Babylon in "Wrath of God."
11:15 End of seventh trumpet.	After seventh vial (19)
1. "Kingdom of the Lord."	1. "Lord God reigneth."
2. The 24 elders worship.	2. The 24 elders worship.
3. "Wrath" is come.	3. "Armageddon."

In this parallel there is one feature which is peculiarly arresting when once it is perceived, namely, the solemn pause between the seven seals and the seven trumpets in column one, and the correspondingly solemn break between the seven personages and the seven vials in column two. Why, then, this break between seals and trumpets, and before the vials? It is to mark a distinction between the two stages of the age-end crisis, i.e. between the oft-called "**Great Tribulation**" and the "**Wrath of God**."

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John MacArthur: He bases his outline of the book on **Rev. 1:19** –

<i>"Therefore write the things which you have seen,</i>	(1:1-20)
<i>and the things which are,</i>	(2:1 – 3:22)
<i>and the things which will take place after these things."</i>	(4:1 – 22:21)

This is a popular outline scheme for the pretrib position which holds that the rapture occurs between chapters 3 and 4.

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Some scholars have discovered a complicated **chiastic structure** which they think is the key to outlining the book – Examples:

Nils Wilhelm Lund -- <https://creationconcept.wordpress.com/2011/01/20/on-the-chiastic-structure-of-revelation/>

Kenneth Strand:

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1420&context=auss>

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Charles Swindoll: The book of Revelation can also be described by focusing on its star Actor and on major sections, or “episodes.” None other than Jesus Christ occupies center stage throughout the inspired drama. All of the episodes ultimately point to Him and His second coming as Judge and King. In a sense, Jesus Christ Himself is the One who is revealed through the series of visions, for “*the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*” (19:10). To this end, the drama of Revelation **portrays Jesus performing a variety of roles**. I find it helpful to describe the flow of the book with six distinct but interconnected episodes centered on Christ.

- 1: Messages of the Majestic Savior (1:1–3:22).
- 2: Worship of the Worthy Lamb (4:1–7:17).
- 3: Judgments of the Righteous Redeemer (8:1–10:11).
- 4: Rivals of the Sovereign Lord (11:1–13:18).
- 5: Vengeance of the Glorious Deliverer (14:1–19:10).
- 6: Reign of the Coming King (19:11–22:21).

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I have adopted an outline focused around the **four main visions** in the book – each section beginning with a reference to the writer John being “*in the Spirit*.”

My view would be very similar to the approach adopted by Buist Fanning:

Buist Fanning: The more common recent approach is to structure the major sections between the prologue and the epilogue according to the literary transitions given by the repetition of “*in the Spirit*” (ἐν πνεύματι) in four places, accompanied by “*I came to be*” (ἔγενόμην) in 1:9–10 and 4:1–2 and by “*he carried me away*” (ἀπήνεγκέν με) in 17:1–3 and 21:9–10. The verb “*I will show*” (δείξω) occurs in the immediate context of the latter three transitions, while in the first it is a bit further away (the infinitive “*to show*” in 1:1). These higher-level transitions **structure the book into four major visions** spread out between the **prologue** and **epilogue**, but it leaves two major loose ends to resolve: the

large unit of **4:1–16:21** (the second vision) that needs to be subdivided based on further literary features; and the important section that intervenes between the third and fourth visions (**19:11–21:8**) that needs to be incorporated in some appropriate way. Both can be handled following one or more of the other structural features listed above. The section between the third and fourth major visions is made up of seven shorter visions that portray the events that will intervene between Babylon's destruction and the coming of the new Jerusalem (signaled by prominent uses of "*and I saw*," καὶ εἶδον). The second major vision is much more complex, but it is clearly structured according to the three series of seven judgments (seals, trumpets, bowls) with their introduction (the throne-room vision of **chs. 4–5**) and **significant interludes** to slow down the impending destruction and fill in important details about God's coming rule on earth.

OUTLINE OF REVELATION

WORTHY IS THE LAMB TO EXECUTE GOD'S END TIMES AGENDA

BIG IDEA:

IN THE END TIMES KING JESUS WILL RETURN IN VICTORY TO RESCUE BELIEVERS, JUDGE THE WICKED AND ESTABLISH HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH SO REMAIN FAITHFUL AND WORSHIP HIM

(1:1-8) PROLOGUE – INTRODUCING THE RETURN OF THE SOVEREIGN AND MAJESTIC GOD

A. (:1-3) The Revelation of Jesus Christ – The Divine Unveiling of End Time Events Calls us to Readiness and Promises a Blessing

1. (:1a) God's Purposeful Unveiling of End Time Events – The Origination and Objective of the Revelation
2. (:1b-2) God's Prophetic Blueprint – The Chain of Communication of the Revelation
3. (:3) God's Promised Blessing – The Value of the Revelation

B. (:4-7) Salutation and Introduction – The Preeminent Jesus Christ – Who Loves Us and Redeemed Us and Elevated Us – Is Coming Back in Dramatic Fashion to Exercise Sovereign Dominion

1. (:4a) Preface – The Greeting
2. (:4b-5a) The Source of the Greeting – Divine Triune Godhead – Emphasizing the Preeminence of Jesus Christ
3. (:5b-6) Doxology of Praise and Majestic Sovereign Dominion

C. (:8) Climax – 3 Self-Titles of the Lord God – You Can Count on the Promise of Christ's Return Because the Eternal God Is the Self-Existent, All-Powerful Sovereign Controlling the Universe

1. Omniscience – The Eternal God Knows All
2. Self-Existent – The Ever-Present God Transcends All
3. Omnipotent – The All-Powerful God Controls All

I. (1:9 – 3:22) – VISION #1 – KING JESUS SOVEREIGN OVER HIS CHURCH

A. (1:9-20) Commission to Record the Vision of the Glorified Christ – The Vision of the Glorified Reigning Christ and Recorded Insight Into End Time Events Fuel the Perseverance of Suffering Saints

1. (:9-11) The Circumstances Surrounding John's Commission to Record the Vision
(1:10) "in the Spirit"
2. (:12-16) The Characterization of the Vision
3. (:17-20) The Confirmation of the Commission

B. (2:1 – 3:22) Letters to the Seven Churches

1. (2:1-7) Ephesus – Loveless Orthodoxy
2. (2:8-11) Smyrna – Intense Persecution

3. (2:12-17) Pergamum – Worldly Compromise
4. (2:18-29) Thyatira – Toleration of Jezebel
5. (3:1-6) Sardis – Zombie Church
6. (3:7-13) Philadelphia – Faithful Church
7. (3:14-22) Laodicea – Lukewarm Church

II. (4:1 – 16:21) – VISION #2 – HEAVENLY THRONE ROOM AND 3 JUDGMENT CYCLES – SEAL, TRUMPET AND BOWL JUDGMENTS

A. (4:1 – 5:14) Vision of the Heavenly Temple

1. (4:1-11) Worship Scene in Heaven Around God's Throne
(4:2) *"in the Spirit"*
2. (5:1-14) Worthy is the Lamb to Break the Seals
 - a. (:1-5) Who Is Worthy?
 - b. (:6-10) The Slain Lamb Is Worthy
 - c. (:11-14) Expanding Cacaphony of Praise

B. (6:1 – 8:1) The Seven Seal Judgments and Interlude of the Two Multitudes

1. (6:1-17) First Six Seals
 - a. (:1-2) The First Seal – White Horse – Counterfeit Conquest (Antichrist)
 - b. (:3-4) The Second Seal – Red Horse – War / Strife
 - c. (:5-6) The Third Seal – Black Horse -- Famine
 - d. (:7-8) The Fourth Seal – Pale Green Horse – Death / Pestilence
 - e. (:9-11) The Fifth Seal -- Martyrdom
 - f. (:12-17) The Sixth Seal – Cosmic Disturbances
2. (7:1-17) Interlude – Sealing of the 144,000 Jews and Saints Worshiping in Heaven
 - a. (:1-8) Sealing of the 144,000 Jews on Earth
 - b. (:9-17) Pre-Wrath Rapture of Saints -- Worshiping in Heaven
3. (8:1) Breaking of the Seventh Seal and Solemn Silence in Heaven
(contains the 7 trumpets and 7 bowl judgments = Day of the Lord)

C. (8:2 – 11:19) The Seven Trumpet Judgments

1. (8:2 – 9:21) First Six Trumpets
 - a. (8:2-6) Preparation for the Seven Trumpet Judgments
 - b. (8:7) The First Trumpet – Earth's Vegetation Burned Up
 - c. (8:8-9) The Second Trumpet – Seas Struck
 - d. (8:10-11) The Third Trumpet – Rivers and Streams Struck
 - e. (8:12-13) The Fourth Trumpet – Heavenly Bodies Darkened
 - f. (9:1-12) The Fifth Trumpet – Demonic Plague of Locusts
 - g. (9:13-21) The Sixth Trumpet – Demonic Forces Attacking Mankind
2. (10:1 -11:14) Interlude – The Little Book and the Two Witnesses
 - a. (10:1-11) The Mighty Angel with the Little Scroll
 - b. (11:1-14) Temple Measurements and the Two Witnesses
3. (11:15-19) The Seventh Trumpet – Triumph of Christ's Kingdom
(contains the 7 bowl judgments)

D. (12:1 – 14:20) Interlude – Anticipating Babylon's Fall

1. (12:1 – 13:18) The Dragon's War against the Woman
 - a. (12:1-17) The Woman and Her Seed

- 1) (:1-6) 2 Dramatic Signs in Heavy
- 2) (:7-12) Defeat of the Dragon, Expulsion from Heaven and Diverse Reactions
- 3) (:13-17) The Enraged Dragon Fails to Destroy Israel
- b. (13:1-18) The Dragon's Two Beasts
 - 1) (:1-10) The Beast from the Sea = the Antichrist
 - 2) (:11-18) The Beast from the Earth = the False Prophet
2. (14:1-20) Preview of Coming Judgment and God's Triumph
 - a. (14:1-5) The Victorious 144,000 Sing a New Song of Praise
 - b. (14:6-20) Announcement of the Grim Reaper Arriving for All the Earth

E. (15:1 – 16:21) The Seven Bowl Judgments – Pouring Out of God's Wrath

- (15:1-8) Preparation for the Seven Bowl Judgments
 - a. (15:1) The Seven Plagues Will Finish God's Wrath
 - b. (15:2-4) Song of Moses and the Lamb Sung by Victorious Martyrs
 - c. (15:5-8) Seven Plagues Distributed to the Seven Angels
- (16:1) Prologue
1. (16:2) The First Bowl – Ulcerous Sores in the Earth
2. (16:3) The Second Bowl – Sea Turns to Foul Blood
3. (16:4-7) The Third Bowl – Fresh Water Sources Turn to Blood
4. (16:8-9) The Fourth Bowl – Sun Scorching Men
5. (16:10-11) The Fifth Bowl – Darkness over the Kingdom of the Beast
6. (16:12-16) The Sixth Bowl – Water of Euphrates Dried Up in Preparation for Armageddon
7. (16:17-21) The Seventh Bowl – Targets the Atmosphere

III. (17:1 – 21:8) -- VISION #3 – COLLAPSE OF SATAN'S EMPIRE AND MILLENNIAL REIGN OF KING JESUS

A. (17:1 – 19:5) Destruction of Babylon the Great

1. (17:1-18) Judgment of Religious Babylon
 - (:1-2) Introduction
 - (:3a) Transition -- *"in the Spirit"*
 - a. (:3b-6a) Vision of Religious Babylon Seated on Scarlet Beast
 - (:6b) Transition – Response of Wonderment
 - b. (:7-18) Interpretation of the Vision
2. (18:1-24) Babylon the Great Fallen
 - a. (:1-8) Judicial Recompense and Call for Separation
 - b. (:9-20) The Lament by Kings, Merchants and Mariners
 - c. (:21-24) Gone Forever
3. (19:1-5) Praise for God's Judgment of the Great Harlot

B. (19:6-21) Final Victory: The End of the Evil Empire at the Parousia

1. (:6-10) Marriage Supper of the Lamb for His Righteous Bride
2. (:11-16) Second Coming of Christ as Conqueror, Judge and King
3. (:17-21) Feast on the Slaughtered Wicked

C. (20:1-10) Thousand-Year Reign of Christ and Judgment of Satan

1. (:1-3) Binding of Satan for 1,000 Years

2. (:4-6) Blessings of the Millennial Kingdom of the Messiah
3. (:7-10) Burning in Hell Forever Is Satan's Final Destiny

D. (20:11 – 21:8) Final Judgment and Recreation

1. (20:11-15) Great White Throne Judgment
2. (21:1-8) View of the Eternal State after Jesus Makes All Things New

IV. (21:9 – 22:5) -- VISION #4 – KING JESUS WITH HIS BRIDE IN THE NEW JERUSALEM

A. (21:9-21) Description of New Jerusalem

(21:10) "in the Spirit"

B. (21:22-27) The Shekinah Glory of New Jerusalem

C. (22:1-5) Restoration of Enhanced Edenic Paradise

1. (:1-3a) Enhanced Edenic Conditions in New Jerusalem
2. (:3b-5) Exalted Privileges in New Jerusalem

(22:6-21) EPILOGUE – JESUS IS COMING SOON – 12 FINAL EXPRESSIONS = PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF OUR LONGING FOR JESUS TO RETURN SOON

A. (:6-7) Invitation to Respond in Obedience to God's Revelation

B. (:8-9) Correction Regarding Proper Object of Worship

**C. (:10-11) Exhortation to Broadcast God's Truth
as a Savor of Life unto Life and Death unto Death**

D. (:12) Assurance of Reward for the Faithful

E. (:13) Proclamation of Authority and Sovereignty

F. (:14-15) Pronouncement of Blessing and Cursing – Insiders vs Outsiders

**G. (:16) Assurance of the Reliability of This Revelation Based on the Authenticity
of Messianic Credentials**

H. (:17a) Invitation for Jesus to Return

I. (:17b) Invitation to Drink Freely from the Water of Life

J. (:18-19) Warning against Altering God's Prophetic Message

K. (:20a) Thesis Statement: Jesus Is Coming Soon

L. (:20b) Final Affirmation

(:21) Benediction

TEXT: Revelation 1:1-3

TITLE: PROLOGUE – THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

BIG IDEA:

THE DIVINE UNVEILING OF END TIME EVENTS CALLS US TO READINESS AND PROMISES A BLESSING

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: This book is a prophetic revelation from God Almighty through John intended to bless the churches by showing how God's redemption will be consummated through the imminent coming of Jesus Christ to rule over the whole earth. . . John's enigmatic book begins clearly enough with a title that succinctly describes its character, source, and intended audience.

Daniel Akin: Revelation is a unique book because it comprises three different literary genres. It is an apocalypse (v. 1), a prophecy (v. 3), and a letter (v. 4).

John MacArthur: Many people are confused by the book of Revelation, viewing it as a mysterious, bizarre, indecipherable mystery. But nothing could be further from the truth. Far from hiding the truth, the book of Revelation reveals it. This is the last chapter in God's story of redemption. It tells how it all ends. As the account of the Creation in the beginning was not vague or obscure, but clear, so God has given a detailed and lucid record of the ending. It is unthinkable to believe that God would speak with precision and clarity from Genesis to Jude, and then when it comes to the end abandon all precision and clarity. Yet, many theologians today think Revelation is not the precise record of the end in spite of what it says. They also are convinced that its mysteries are so vague that the end is left in confusion. As we shall see in this commentary, this is a serious error that strips the saga of redemption of its climax as given by God.

Craig Keener: These opening verses declare the ultimate authors of the revelation (God the Father and Jesus), its subject matter ("*what must soon take place*"), its intended audience ("*his servant[s]*") and its messengers (the angel of Christ and John).

Grant Osborne: John is clearly communicating that this is not merely his set of visions, but the visions come directly from God and Christ, mediated by angels. In the crisis being faced by the churches in Asia Minor, God does not remain silent but assures his people that he is still in control. Thus **1:1–3** are at the same time a title, an eschatological summary of the contents of the book, and a prophetic exhortation as to what God's people are to do with it.

David Aune: **Rev 1:1–3** consists of two clearly defined literary forms, with **vv 1–2** constituting the title of the book, clearly marked off from **v 3**, which is a beatitude introduced with the conventional term μακάριος, "*blessed, fortunate*."

Rev 1:1–3 consists of [these] elements:

- (1) a summary designation of the character of the work itself, "*This is a revelation*,"
- (2) with a subjective genitive indicating its source, "*from Jesus Christ*,"
- (3) and an indication of its ultimate origin, "*granted him by God*,"

- (4) a reference to the addressees, “*to show [i.e., ‘to reveal’] to his servants,*” and
 - (5) a summary of the content of the revelation, “*what must quickly come to pass.*” This is followed by
 - (6) a statement of how the revelation was transmitted, “*He made it known by sending his angel,*”
 - (7) a statement of the recipient of this revelation, “*to his servant John,*”
 - (8) confirmation of the accomplishment of this task through the composition of the present book, “*who now bears witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*” (i.e., by writing this book), and
 - (9) the brief mention of how the revelation was received, “*even to all that he saw.*”
- Finally,
- (10) a beatitude (in the form of an enthymeme) is pronounced on those who read, hear, and keep this revelatory message: “*Blessed is the one who reads aloud and those who hear these prophetic words and keep what is written herein, for the time is near.*”

I. (:1a) GOD’S PURPOSEFUL UNVEILING OF END TIME EVENTS -- THE ORIGINATION AND OBJECTIVE OF THE REVELATION

A. Mediator of the Revelation

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ,”

I prefer the subjective genitive here rather than the objective genitive because the emphasis is on the act of revealing that is taking place rather than the content of the revelation.

Craig Keener: book titles often listed the purported author, as in “*the book of the words of Tobit*” (lit. trans. of **Tobit 1:1**); or “the word of the LORD that came to Hosea” (**Hos. 1:1**).

Grant Osborne: here it means generally “*Jesus’ revelation of the imminent future,*” that is, “*what must soon take place.*” The visions of this book are presented as an “*uncovering of hidden truths,*” namely the hidden reality of God’s sovereign control of the future, of how he is going to bring an end to the seeming success of the forces of evil in the present age.

Robert Mounce: It is an apocalypse or unveiling. Had God not taken the initiative, the human mind could never have understood the real forces at work in the world. Nor could anyone have known how it would all turn out.

Craig Koester: When Paul insisted that the gospel he proclaimed came through “*a revelation of Jesus Christ*” (**Gal. 1:12**), he referred to an encounter with the risen and glorified Christ. Similarly, when the writer of Revelation calls his book “*the revelation of Jesus Christ,*” he refers to a message that he understood to come from the glorified Christ, who received it from God and communicated it through an angel (**Rev. 1:1–2**).

Buist Fanning: The key word of the title, “*revelation*” (ἀποκάλυψις), denotes an unveiling or disclosure of something hidden, referring to either the action of revealing (**Rom 8:19; 1 Cor 1:7; 1 Pet 1:7**) or the content that is revealed, as here. This noun and its related verb are used frequently in the New Testament (noun 18x; verb 26x), always of divine disclosure of what is otherwise hidden from humans. They often refer to the “unveiling” that will come in the future consummation of all things, and that is the sense in this verse, as we will see. The English transliteration of the word, “*apocalypse*,” has come to be used as an alternate title for this book,

and also as the name of a genre of ancient literature, apocalypse or apocalyptic literature (see introduction). While the word does not carry the technical sense of a genre of literature here, it aptly describes the book in two ways:

- (1) as God's disclosure of the events that will fulfill his sovereign plan for the destiny of the world (the content of apocalyptic), and
- (2) as an unveiling communicated in dramatic, highly symbolic, and often enigmatic ways (the character of apocalyptic). . .

The phrase could carry the sense of an objective genitive, "*about Jesus Christ*," since the initial vision (1:9–20) reveals Jesus Christ in all his glory as the one who holds the keys to human destiny. The rest of the book would then simply fill this out in detail: he who is now unseen will soon appear in glory and power to establish God's rule over all things. Additionally, "*the unveiling of Jesus Christ*" carries this objective and eschatological sense in other places (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Pet 1:7, 13). But the immediate context of 1:1–2 strongly suggests the sense of a subjective or source genitive instead, "*revelation given by Jesus Christ*" or "*revelation from Jesus Christ*" (NIV, NLT). The clarifying clauses of vv. 1b–2 set up a full chain of agents of communication from God to Jesus to God's angel to John and then to God's servants. The rest of the book centers on the two final agents in this chain: what Jesus Christ reveals to John about the events that are coming. Ultimately this comes from God the Father, and sometimes we see angels taking a role in mediating what John sees, while the wider recipients are God's people. But Jesus Christ is the **primary revealer**, as the vision of 1:9–20 shows (especially vv. 17–19). This of course underscores the paramount **authority** of the message contained in this book and thus its value for all who give attention to its message (cf. 1:3).

Robert Thomas: The evidence favoring **Christ as the revealer** (i.e., subjective genitive) is more impressive. The strongest single consideration on either side of the issue is the plain fact that Christ functions in the role of revealer throughout the book: He addresses the seven churches in **chapters 2–3**; He opens the scroll of destiny (5:5, 7) and discloses its contents (6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1). His activity in this respect supports viewing Christ as the revealer in Revelation.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: This implies that Jesus Christ himself has torn back the curtain which hides from human eyes the invisible world and the future of this world, and that what is open to view is a vision of reality granted by him.

B. Source of the Revelation

"which God gave Him"

Charles Swindoll: Prophecies about the future are only as reliable as the wisdom, knowledge, and insight of their sources. When the source of information is our limited human perspectives on the past and present, the most intelligent "expert" can only offer an educated guess. On the other hand, if the source is the all-knowing sovereign God, we can be certain that what He speaks will surely come to pass.

Before God gives us a glimpse of future events, He reveals the reliable source of this information. The visions of the future do not come to us from the pen of a crazed quack or wild-eyed fanatic. The prophecies of the book of Revelation come from our omniscient, sovereign God, through Jesus Christ Himself. They are therefore a reliable and relevant source concerning the future of the world.

C. Target Audience of the Revelation

“to show to His bond-servants,”

D. Urgency of the Revelation

“the things which must shortly take place;”

The Pre-Wrath Rapture view does away with the imminency of the specific rapture event itself but maintains the imminency of the overall package of end-time events where the 70th week of Daniel could begin at any moment in time. The emphasis here and in **vs. 3** is that the *“time is near.”*

Buist Fanning: The content of this disclosure is expressed by the very significant phrase *“what must happen soon,”* which provides vital insights into the background and central elements of John’s theology in Revelation. The first part of the phrase, *“what must happen”* (ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι), is an allusion to **Daniel 2** where Daniel is given the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s troubling dream. This exact phrase in **Revelation 1:1** appears twice in the LXX version of **Daniel 2:28–29** (and variations of it occur also in **2:29, 45**). Three important theological themes appear in **Daniel 2** that are mirrored in John’s prologue and throughout Revelation.

- First, God is the only one who can reveal the mysteries of the future (**Dan 2:18–19, 28–29, 47**). This is the point of **Revelation 1:1a** as we have seen: God is the origin of this revelation from Jesus Christ.
- Second, God has predetermined all the events of earthly history, and he is the one who *“changes times and seasons and deposes some kings and establishes others”* (**Dan 2:21**). This is the significance of the verb translated *“must”* in this phrase (δεῖ, *“it is necessary”*). Certain events *“must happen”* because they are set out by God in his sovereign plan for this world and its inhabitants. The phrase *“must happen”* occurs at key places in the literary structure of Revelation to frame the events that are coming in God’s purposes (**1:1; 4:1; 22:6**). It also appears in Jesus’s eschatological discourse with a similar allusion to **Daniel 2** (**Matt 24:6; Mark 13:7; Luke 21:9**).
- Third, the seemingly invincible kingdoms of this world will be swept away by God’s kingdom that will be established forever (**Dan 2:44, 47**). John alludes to these points in the prologue (**Rev 1:5–8**), and it is a recurring theme throughout (**11:15, 17; 12:10; 19:6, 16; 20:4, 6; 22:5**). . .

“soon, without delay,” is supported by the expression in **1:3**, *“the time is near,”* as well as by other expressions throughout Revelation (see the use of the adverb *“quickly,”* ταχύ, in **2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20**; the use of *“be about to,”* μέλλω, in **1:19; 3:10**; as well as the repetition of *“the time is near,”* in **22:10**). Other New Testament passages speak in similar terms (**Luke 21:28; Rom 13:12; 16:20; Phil 4:5; Jas 5:8–9; 1 Pet 4:7**). None of these seems to mean *“rapid occurrence once started”* (view 1). It is better to understand that these expressions reflect a *“soon”* occurrence not in the sense of an exact chronology but in a prophetic time frame, **describing what is certain to occur and could occur at any time without any delay**. The timing, however, is subject to God’s calendar, whose timetable is different from human calculation (cf. **Ps 90:4; 2 Pet 3:8–9**).

Robert Mounce: The express purpose of God in giving the revelation is to *“show his servants what must soon take place.”* History is not a haphazard sequence of unrelated events but a

divinely decreed ordering of that which must take place. It is a logical and moral necessity arising from the nature of God and the revelation of his purpose in creation and redemption.

Robert Thomas: the view that sees *en tachei* meaning “soon” and thereby focuses on the **imminence** of the predicted events is impressive. A major thrust of Revelation is its emphasis upon the shortness of time before the fulfillment. In the midst of persecution God’s people do not have long to wait for relief to come. To say that the relief will come “suddenly” offers no encouragement, but to say that it will come “soon” does. That fulfillment of the divine purpose will come soon is the consistent expectation of prophecy and apocalyptic (cf. **22:6; Deut. 9:3; Ezek. 29:5[LXX]; Luke 18:8; Rom. 16:20**). Throughout apocalyptic literature and the NT the Messianic kingdom with its immediate precursors is viewed as near (**Charles; Beckwith**).

The meaning of nearness assigned to *en tachei* also derives support from $\gamma \alpha \varsigma \gamma \gamma \varsigma$ (*ho gar kairos engys*) in **1:3**, “for the time is near,” and from the parallel statement of **22:6**, “behold, I come soon.” The response of this view to the seeming difficulty raised by the delay of more than nineteen hundred years is not that John was mistaken but that time in the Apocalypse is computed either relatively to the divine apprehension as here and in **22:10** (cf. also **1:3; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20**) or absolutely in itself as long or short (cf. **8:1; 20:2**). When measuring time, Scripture has a different standard from ours (cf. **1 John 2:18**) (**Lee**). The purpose of *en tachei* is to teach the imminence of the events foretold, not to set a time limit within which they must occur (**Johnson**). It must be kept in mind that God is not limited by considerations of time in the same way man is (cf. **2 Pet. 3:8**).

The presence of *en tachei* in **1:1** shows that for the first time the events predicted by Daniel and foreseen by Christ **stood in readiness to be fulfilled**. Therefore, John could speak of them as imminent, but earlier prophets could not.

II. (:1b-2) GOD’S PROPHETIC BLUEPRINT – THE CHAIN OF COMMUNICATION OF THE REVELATION

Kendell Easley: The line of communication may be simply illustrated:
God → Jesus → angel → John → servants

This verse shows the **authority** and **inspiration** of Revelation in the strongest terms. John uses the language of a **legal witness** called to appear in a courtroom. His role is simply one who reliably testifies to everything he saw. This is John’s way of affirming that the book is “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” Here also he gives two subtitles to his book: the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Christians call the entire Bible the Word of God; the Book of Revelation self-consciously claims this for itself. The noun testimony is closely related to the verb testifies.

A. Role of Special Angel

“and He sent and communicated it by His angel”

John Walvoord: The name of the angel is not given, though **Gabriel** has been suggested (cf. **Dan. 8:16; 9:2, 21–22; Luke 1:26–31**).

Craig Feener: That he does not need to qualify which John he is may suggest that he is the most obvious John among the early Christians, namely, John the apostle, son of Zebedee, who had personally known Jesus in the flesh (cf. John 21:22). Until the mid-third-century writer Dionysius, the external evidence for Revelation among orthodox Christians is unanimous, and even detractors admit that this evidence is some of the best available for any New Testament work.

John MacArthur: The book of Revelation is unique in New Testament literature because it is the only book sent and communicated to its human author by angels. In **22:16** Jesus reaffirmed the truth taught here, declaring, “*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches.*” Angels were involved in the giving of the book of Revelation to John just as they were in the giving of the Law to Moses (**Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2**). Not only were angels involved in transmitting the book of Revelation to John, but they also play a prominent role in the scenes it depicts. Angels appear in every chapter of Revelation except 4 and 13. The words angel or angels are used seventy-one times in the book of Revelation—more than in any other book in the Bible. In fact, one out of every four uses in Scripture of those words is in the book of Revelation. This book, then, is an important source of information on the ministry of angels.

B. Role of Servant John

1. Identification of John

“to His bond-servant John,”

Note how John identifies with Christians in general by using this same descriptive term of *bond-servant*.

Marvin Rosenthal: Technically, John was the scribe, not the author. The last book of the Bible is not, as in some versions, “*The Revelation of St. John the Divine,*” but rather, “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*” (**Rev. 1:1**). He alone is the author; the beloved apostle John served as the amanuensis, or scribe, of the Revelation. This fact sets the book of Revelation apart from other New Testament books. Paul wrote letters; Peter wrote letters; John wrote letters. They are part of the Bible – inspired by God. Only the book of Revelation (Greek, *apokalypse* meaning *unveiling*) is a direct communication from the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Testimony of John

a. Based on What He Heard

1) Word of God

“who bore witness to the word of God”

Cf. the prologue to John’s gospel where he identifies the incarnate Jesus as the Word who was with God from the beginning

2) Testimony of Jesus Christ

“and to the testimony of Jesus Christ,”

G.R. Beasley-Murray: it conveys a message from God and witness borne by Jesus Christ.

Grant Osborne: Both John and Jesus “witness” to the reality of the imminent events. In Revelation “witness” refers to fearless public proclamation and authentication, usually in the face of tremendous opposition, of divine realities in word and life. After receiving the revelation

from God and Jesus via the angel (1:1), John now “testifies” or gives evidence to the church and the world that these visions constitute “*the word of God*” and “*the testimony of Jesus*.”

- b. Based on What He Saw
“*even to all that he saw.*”

III. (:3) GOD’S PROMISED BLESSING – THE VALUE OF THE REVELATION

Buist Fanning: This blessedness is rooted in the book’s **authority** because it comes from God and Jesus Christ (vv. 1–2) as well as its urgency because the events it describes are near at hand (v. 3d).

A. Value Based on Its Authority

1. Blessing Derived from Hearing

“*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy,*”

G.R. Beasley-Murray: A “*revelation*” of the end of history is given not for the satisfaction of curiosity, but to inspire living in accordance with the reality unveiled.

Gordon Fee: What makes John a truly Christian prophet is that from his position at the end of the first Christian century he clearly recognizes that the church and state are on a deadly collision course, wherein the church will suffer in the near future, but will know Christ’s triumph at the end (the “real” future). Thus at the outset John uses apocalyptic language that is intended to merge what is seen with what is spoken. That is, for him this was a “seen” word; but to communicate it to the church it had to become a written word, “the testimony” that Jesus Christ gave by way of one vision following another.

2. Blessing Derived from Obeying

“*and heed the things which are written in it,*”

Craig Feener: In biblical idiom, “*hearing*” also often meant “*heeding*,” i.e., obedience (e.g., the Hebrew of **Gen. 26:5; 27:8**), but John allows no ambiguity, adding “*take to heart*” (lit., “*keep*”); one used this language for observing commandments. Though Revelation is not a collection of laws, its message provides us demands no less serious (**Rev. 12:17; 14:12; 22:7**).

William Barclay: The one who keeps these words is blessed. To hear God’s word is a privilege; to obey it is a duty. There is no real Christianity in anyone who hears and forgets or deliberately disregards.

John MacArthur: The three participles translated *reads*, *hear*, and *heed* are in the present tense. Reading, hearing, and obeying the truths taught in the book of Revelation (and in the rest of Scripture) are to be a way of life for believers. The change from the singular *he who reads* to the plural *those who hear* the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it depicts a first-century church service. It was common practice when the church gathered for one person to read the Scriptures aloud for all to hear (cf. **1 Tim. 4:13**). **Dr. Robert L. Thomas** explains that “because writing materials were expensive and scarce, so were copies of the books that were parts of the biblical canon. As a rule, one copy per Christian assembly was the best that could be hoped for. Public reading was the only means that rank-and-file Christians had for

becoming familiar with the contents of these books”(Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1992], 60). Since only Scripture was to be publicly read, John’s “obvious intention that the Apocalypse was to be read publicly argued strongly from the start that it be included among those books that eventually would be recognized as part of the NT canon”(Thomas, Revelation 1–7, 62–63).

B. Value Based on Its Urgency

“for the time is near.”

Buist Fanning: The final clause (v. 3d), introduced by “for,” underscores the **urgency** of heeding the message of Revelation: the culminating events prophesied in this book are close at hand. John refers to the future period of consummation (“the time” [ὁ . . . καιρός]) as a metonymy for the all-important events that will occur in that period. Just as he did in v. 1 (“what must happen soon”), John asserts that these climactic events are “near” at hand (ἐγγύς; same phrasing in **22:10**; cf. also **Matt 26:18**; **Luke 21:31**; **Rom 13:11**; **Phil 4:5**). This is a statement of **imminence**: these things can happen at any time, without delay. To know this and live accordingly brings blessing from God.

Craig Feener: Whatever else “the time is near” (1:3) might mean, it probably means that the events of the end will be **unexpected** and that we should **be ready for them at any time** (**Mark 13:32–37**; **1 Thess. 5:2**), so that believers should live “every moment as though it were our last.” A summons to **readiness** is surely a major part of the phrase’s rhetorical function, which we can apply readily today. As in John’s day, Jesus’ coming remains imminent, intruding on our preoccupied world, standing as a promise to the broken but a threat to Laodicean Christianity too satisfied with the present state of affairs. Jesus’ return will bring the final scene of human rebellion to close—an announcement that is a happy ending to God’s people, but a tragic one for all who chose to reject his way. Because the specific time is unknown and near, no one dare postpone repentance. There is never a good time for Christians to be attached to worldly possessions or allegiances, because there is never a time when testings or the Lord’s literal return may not call us to account for all our choices.

Grant Osborne: The “nearness” of the Lord’s return is used frequently in the NT to call believers to live responsibly toward God (**Rom. 13:12**; **Heb. 10:25**; **James 5:8**; **1 Pet. 4:7**, with the cognate ἐγγίζω, engizō, draw near; **Mark 13:28–29** par.; **Rom. 13:11**; **Phil. 4:5**, with ἐγγύς). Throughout, the focus is not just on eschatology but on **ethics**. In other words, in light of the fact that “the time is near,” we are called to live decisively and completely for God.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is this book the last book in the NT canon?
- 2) Why is this book avoided by so many Christians and preachers when it carries with it such a specific promised blessing?
- 3) How does the genre of apocalyptic literature utilize **symbolism**?

4) What should be the practical impact of the doctrine of **imminence** as it relates to end time events?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

R. H. Boll: Of all the books of the Bible none other is so solemnly introduced to us; none so specially urged upon our attention; and, we must add, none so generally disregarded, so shunned, and so neglected. Yet no other book opens with a gracious promise of blessing on him that readeth, on those who hear and keep the things written therein. And to no other book is attached such a warning lest anyone should take from or add to its message. It is a message therefore of the very highest importance, though by men often lightly esteemed and treated as though it were superfluous, and could be dispensed with without material loss. In God's estimate, at least, this book is of supreme value. In it we behold the end and consummation of all God's work and plan, the climax and outcome of all His dispensations and dealings with men; and in it every prophecy and promise, every purpose and covenant finds its ultimate goal and fulfilment. In Genesis we have the beginning of all, in Revelation we have the end and goal of all.

Craig Feener: The churches in Asia Minor were at a crossroads, impacted by persecution and wooed toward lives of compromise that might soften the persecution (**2:10, 14**). Although Christians in today's world often face different specific temptations, the basic temptation to succumb to the world's pressure remains the same. When we face such temptation, Christ's revelation to us can put everything back into perspective. No matter how difficult our situation, Revelation announces that God is still in control and that he will conclude this stage of history the way he has promised. He often provides happy endings to our individual trials; but even when he does not, we have the assurance that a time is coming when everything will be as it should be. Precisely because he rules history, he can assure us of its outcome.

Warren Wiersbe: The Author

Holy Spirit used the apostle John to give us three kinds of inspired literature: the gospel of John, the three epistles, and the book of Revelation. His purposes may be outlined as follows:

Gospel of John

Believe, **20:31**

Life received

Salvation

The Prophet

Epistles

Be sure, **1 John 5:13**

Life revealed

Sanctification

The Priest

Revelation

Be ready, **22:20**

Life rewarded

Sovereignty

The King

John wrote Revelation about AD 95, during the reign of the Roman emperor Titus Flavius Domitian. The emperor had demanded that he be worshipped as "Lord and God," and the refusal of the Christians to obey his edict led to severe persecution. Tradition says that it was Domitian who sent John to the Isle of Patmos, a Roman penal colony off the coast of Asia Minor. This being the location of John's exile, perhaps it is not surprising that the word sea is found twenty-six times in his book.

During Christ's earthly ministry, John and his brother James asked Jesus for special places of honor by His throne. The Lord told them that they would have to merit their thrones by sharing

in His suffering. James was the first apostle martyred (**Acts 12:1–2**); John was the last of the apostles to die, but he suffered on Patmos before his death.

Charles Swindoll: We often think of Revelation as containing nothing but death, destruction, and suffering. In reality, Revelation actually contains seven “beatitudes” designed to provide hope and encouragement to believers in the midst of trials.

THE SEVEN “BEATITUDES” OF REVELATION

- Blessed are those who read, hear, and heed the prophecy (**1:3**)
- die in the Lord (**14:13**)
- stay alert and keep their clothes (**16:15**)
- are invited to the wedding feast of Christ (**19:9**)
- have a part in the first resurrection (**20:6**)
- heed the words of the prophecy of this book (**22:7**)
- wash their robes (**22:14**)

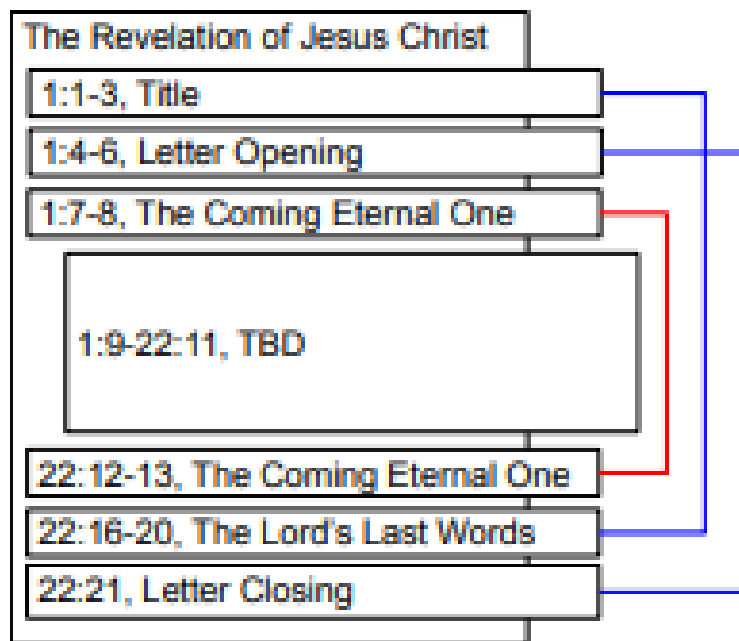
Charles Erdman: This is a book of judgments and of doom. The darker side of the picture is never for a moment concealed. God is just. Sin must be punished. Impenitence and rebellion issue in misery and defeat. Here is no sentimental confusion of right and wrong. Here is no weak tolerance of evil. There is mention of “*the Lamb that hath been slain*,” but also of “*the wrath of the Lamb*.” There is a “*river of water of life*,” but also a “*lake of fire*.” Here is revealed a God of love who is to dwell among men, to wipe away all tears, and to abolish death and sorrow and pain; but first his enemies must be subdued. Indeed, The Revelation is in large measure a picture of the last great conflict between the forces of evil and the power of God. The colors are lurid and are borrowed from the convulsions of nature and from the scenes of human history, with their battles and their carnage. The struggle is titanic. Countless hordes of demonic warriors rise in opposition to him who is “*King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*.” Upon them “*woes*” are pronounced, “*bowls*” of wrath are poured out, and overwhelming destruction is visited. A brighter day is to come, but there is thunder before the dawn. (*The Revelation of John* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966], 12)

David Thompson: In this book of Revelation, Jesus Christ is identified with the most sublime majestic names and titles:

1. Jesus - He is Savior.
2. Christ - He is Jewish Messiah and King.
3. The Faithful Witness. **1:5**
4. The Firstborn of the Dead. **1:5**
5. The Ruler of the Kings of the Earth. **1:5**
6. The Alpha and Omega. **1:8; 22:13**
7. The Lord God who was and who is and who is to come. **1:8**
8. The Almighty. **1:8**
9. The Son of Man. **1:13** - God/man who will one day rule over everything (**Dan. 7:13-14**)
10. The First and the Last. **1:17; 22:13** - First and last of everything.
11. The Living One. **1:18**
12. The One who was dead but is forever alive. **1:18**
13. The One with the keys of death and hell. **1:18**
14. The One who hold church angels in His right hand. **2:1/1:20**

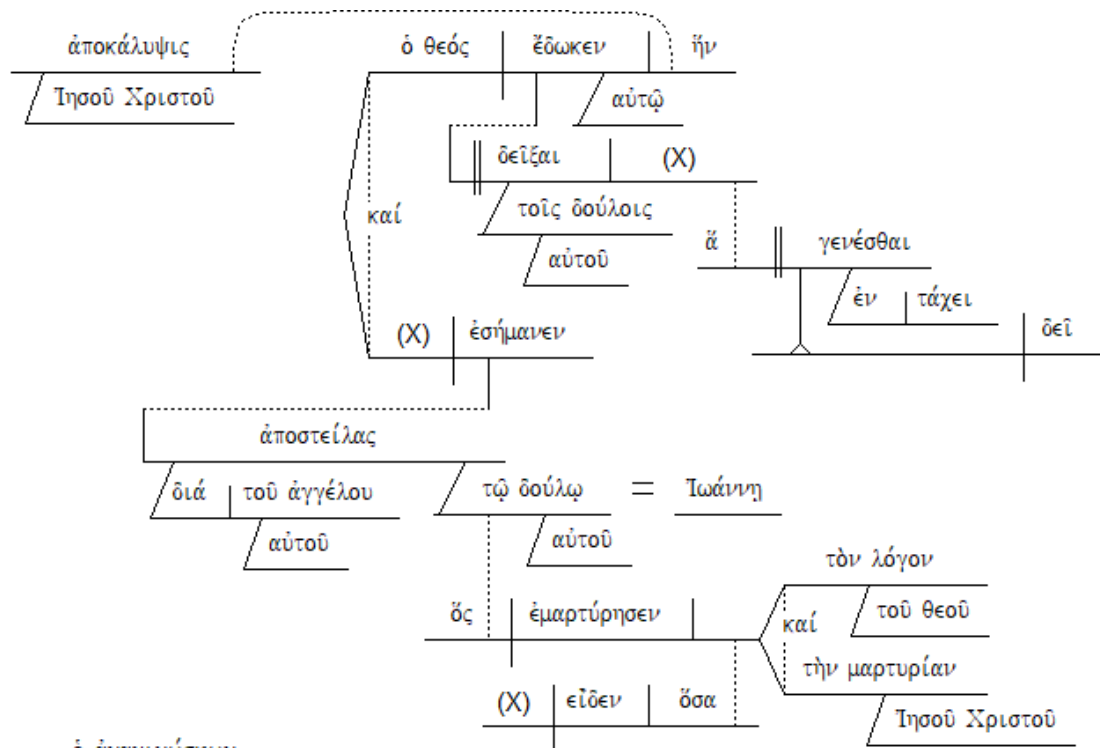
15. The One who walks in the midst of the churches. **2:1/1:20**
16. The One who has a sharp two-edge sword. **2:12**
17. The Son of the God. **2:18**
18. The One with eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze. **2:18**
19. The One who has control of seven spirits of God and seven stars/angels. **3:1**
20. The One who is holy. **3:7**
21. The One who is true. **3:7**
22. The One who has the key of David. **3:7**
23. The One who can open doors no one can shut. **3:7**
24. The One who can shut doors no one can open. **3:7**
25. The Amen. **3:14**
26. The Faithful and True Witness. **3:14**
27. The Beginning of the Creation of the God. **3:14**
28. The Lion of the tribe of Judah. **5:5**
29. The Root of David. **5:5; 22:16**
30. The Lamb. **5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 7, 9; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 8:1; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14, 14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3**
31. The Lord, Holy and True. **6:10**
32. The Lord God The Almighty. **15:3**
33. The King of the Nations. **15:3**
34. The Word of The God. **19:13**
35. King of Kings and Lord of Lords. **19:16**
36. The Bright and Morning Star. **22:16**
37. Lord Jesus. **22:20-21**

Van Parunak: The Envelope of the Revelation – three internal sections that are echoed at the end of the book:

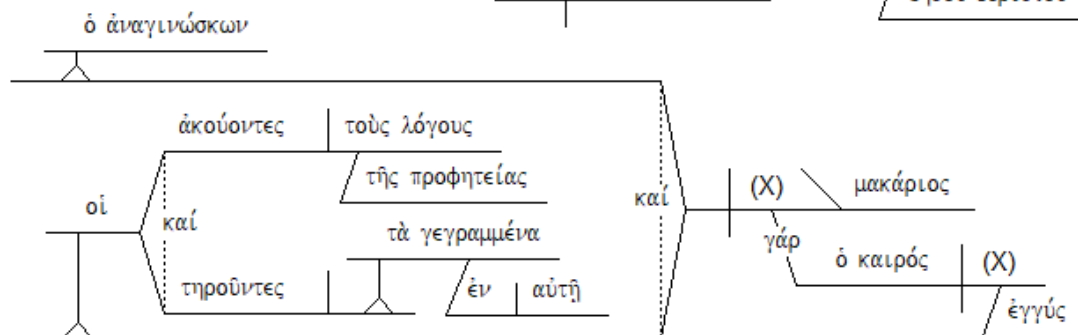


Leedy Greek Diagram

Rev 1:1-2



Rev 1:3



TEXT: Revelation 1:4-7

TITLE: PROLOGUE – SALUTATION AND INTRODUCTION

BIG IDEA:

THE PREEMINENT JESUS CHRIST -- WHO LOVES US AND REDEEMED US AND ELEVATED US -- IS COMING BACK IN DRAMATIC FASHION TO EXERCISE SOVEREIGN DOMINION

INTRODUCTION:

Richard Phillips: The book of Revelation, which takes the form of a **historical letter**, can also be better appreciated if we keep in mind the people who were involved. In the salutation found in **Revelation 1:4–5**, we meet the main participants. Included in this greeting are John the apostle, the seven churches of the Roman province of Asia, and the triune God of grace and peace. In the background, but very much present, was the diabolical Roman emperor **Domitian**, whose looming persecution supplied the setting in which the book of Revelation was given.

Grant Osborne: The prescript, or greeting, is found throughout NT epistles. Following ancient convention, it contains three elements: the sender (John), the recipients (the seven churches in Asia), and the greeting (grace and peace). However, it differs from convention in two ways: an extensive prophetic introduction (**1:1–3**) precedes the normal beginning, and the greeting itself goes beyond the norm: in **1:4–5a** there is a trinitarian formula, and in the doxology of **1:5b–6** John goes beyond custom to build a case for the soteriological (**v. 5b**) and ecclesiological (**v. 6**) core of the book.

Craig Keener: If **1:1–3** PROVIDES an appropriate title for and introduction to an apocalyptic revelation, **1:4–8** provides an **epistolary introduction**, specifying the audience (from “*servants*” in **1:1** to the “*seven churches ... of Asia*” in **1:4**). Most important, it expounds the identity of the God who sends the revelation and in so doing encourages suffering Christians that God is greater than their tests. . .

The preface, or exordium, of a work sets the tone for a work (Quintilian, Inst. Or. 6.1.5); expansions on any part of the traditional letter introduction, including the blessings, often provide clues to themes in the rest of a letter. That John expounds so fully on **Jesus’ roles** in **1:5–6** suggests the central place that Christology will play in this book. That God “*is, and ... was, and ... is to come*” frames the source of the blessing (**1:4, 8**), hence is a point that John certainly wishes to underline. Some pagans understood the concept of a supreme deity’s self-existence, but the language here appears to have been a more common ancient Jewish interpretation of God’s claim in **Exodus 3:14**: “*I AM WHO I AM.*”

G. K. Beale: greets the churches on behalf of the Father, Spirit, and Son, whose redemptive work results in the Christians’ new status, all to the glory of God (**1:4-6**). . .

The Son’s kingship and the Father’s sovereignty over history are the basis of the church’s grace and peace and the Father’s glory (**1:7-8**).

Rick Griffith: John addresses seven churches in Asia and worships the triune God, especially Christ as the soon-to-come sovereign Ruler, to exhort his readers to watch for His return.

(;4a) PREFACE – THE GREETING

A. Channel of Revelation

“John”

Richard Phillips: compelling evidence that the “*John*” who wrote Revelation was the apostle John. John is a major figure of the New Testament, having been one of Jesus’ three closest disciples, “*the disciple whom he loved*” (**John 19:26**), as well as the author of the Gospel of John and three epistles that bear his name. **Revelation 1:1** identifies him as the “*servant*” of Jesus Christ. **John MacArthur** describes him further as “the elder statesman of the church near the end of the first century, . . . universally beloved and respected for his devotion to Christ and his great love for the saints worldwide.”

In these late days of his life, John is revealed as a faithful servant of Jesus. If Revelation was written around the year A.D. 95, John would have been over eighty years old. He is considered the youngest of the original twelve disciples, perhaps just a teenager when he watched Jesus die on the cross and then raced with Peter to gaze inside the empty tomb. Few people today pursue any calling single-mindedly over the entire length of their adult lives. But from the time when Jesus came to John and his brother James and pledged to make them “*fishers of men*” (**Mark 1:17–20**) until the dying moments of his elderly years, a span of over sixty years, John had served as a witness of the gospel, an apostle of Jesus, and a pastor to the church. John’s **faithful service** was extraordinarily valuable in the first century.

Early church tradition holds that in these late years of his life, John had been leading the church in the strategically important city of Ephesus. This fits the book of Revelation, since John writes this letter to churches in the province of which Ephesus was the leading city. This indicates that John was also a **humble servant** of Christ. The church in Ephesus was founded by the apostle Paul (see **Acts 19**). The elders of that church had been converted by Paul and had a profound loyalty to that fiery apostle (see **Acts 20:37–38**). Moreover, Paul had placed his protégé, Timothy, in charge of the Ephesian church (**1 Tim. 1:3**). So John would have accepted this charge in order to complete someone else’s work and as the successor to a lesser figure in the church. Many strong leaders today would refuse such a calling, putting a priority on their own career aspirations, but John humbled himself to serve where he was most needed.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The Hebrew idioms in the book, the authority of the author in relation to the churches, the use of distinctively Johannine terms like *logos* and “Lamb of God,” and the corroboration of Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian and Clement all affirm that the Apostle John was the author of this book. Every New Testament book was written by an apostle or by one who was closely associated with an apostle, i.e., like Luke who was a companion of the Apostle Paul. This was one of the marks of inspiration and necessary for recognition of a book into the canon of Scripture.

B. Churches Targeted

“to the seven churches that are in Asia.”

William Barclay: The seven churches are named in **verse 11** – Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. These were by no means the only churches in Asia. There were churches at Colosse (**Colossians 1:2**), Hierapolis (**Colossians 4:13**), Troas (**2 Corinthians 2:12; Acts 20:5**), Miletus (**Acts 20:17**), Magnesia and Tralles, as the letters of Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, show. Why did John single out only these seven? There can be more than one reason for his selection.

(1) These churches might be regarded as the centres of seven postal districts, being all on a kind of ring road, or gyratory system, which circled the interior of the province. Troas was off the beaten track. But Hierapolis and Colosse were within walking distance of Laodicea; and Tralles, Magnesia and Miletus were close to Ephesus. Letters delivered to these seven cities would easily circulate in the surrounding areas; and, since every letter had to be handwritten, each letter would need to be sent where it would reach most easily the greatest number of people.

(2) Any reading of Revelation will show John's preference for the number seven. It occurs fifty-four times. There are seven candlesticks (**1:12**), seven stars (**1:16**), seven lamps (**4:5**), seven seals (**5:1**), seven horns and seven eyes (**5:6**), seven thunders (**10:3**), seven angels, plagues and bowls (**15:6–8**). The ancient peoples regarded seven as the perfect number, and it runs all through Revelation.

From this, certain of the early commentators drew an interesting conclusion. Seven is the perfect number because it stands for **completeness**. It is, therefore, suggested that, when John wrote to seven churches, he was, in fact, writing to the whole Church. The first list of New Testament books, called the *Muratorian Canon*, says of Revelation: 'For John also, though he wrote in the Revelation to seven churches, nevertheless speaks to them all.' This is all the more likely when we remember how often John says: '*Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches*' (**2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22**).

(3) Although the reasons we have offered for the choice of these seven churches may be valid, it may be still more valid that John chose them because in them he had a special authority. They were in a special sense his churches – and by speaking to them he sent a message first to those who knew and loved him best, and then through them to every church in every generation.

C. Customary Greeting

“Grace to you and peace,”

John Walvoord: John's greeting of “*grace ... peace*” is also common to Paul's letters. These two words capture the richness of the Christian faith. **Grace** is God's attitude toward believers, coupled with His loving gifts—which will never change. **Peace** refers to our relationship with God—which includes both the peace made with God at salvation and our ongoing relationship with Him, which we can enjoy, or fail to enjoy, as we walk or fail to walk in obedience to God.

Van Parunak: We must cling tightly to this greeting. A pervasive theme of the book is the persecution that unbelievers bring upon believers, which had become institutionalized at the national level during the time that John writes. Yet he greets his readers with the promise of “peace.” We are not assured of peaceful lives in our daily experience, but we have peace with God, and secure in his love, we can deal with the difficulties of life in the world.

I. (:4b-5a) THE SOURCE OF THE GREETING -- DIVINE TRIUNE GODHEAD -- EMPHASIZING THE PREEMINENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

A. God the Father – The Eternal, Self-Existent One

“from Him who is and who was and who is to come;”

Kendell Easley: Although the Greek grammar is awkward here, this is a development of God's Old Testament name, “*I AM WHO I AM*” (**Exod. 3:14**). In changing, perilous times, Christians take heart that the God they serve transcends time.

Charles Swindoll: As an allusion to the divine name “I AM” in **Exodus 3:14**, it indicates God’s complete transcendence over all history —past, present, and future. God is just as much in control of our unknown future and unnerving present as He is of our unpleasant past!

Buist Fanning: God’s proclamation of himself as the self-existent one in **Exodus 3:14** naturally implies his ongoing existence as the eternal one, and this is the sense John has captured in his three-part title. In this as in other ways he portrays God as the awesome, almighty Lord who controls history from beginning to end.

B. God the Spirit – In a Supporting Role

“and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne;”

John Walvoord: Joining the Father in salutation are “*the seven spirits who are before his throne.*” Some consider the term an allusion to the Holy Spirit (cf. **Isa. 11:2–3**). Others believe these were seven angels in places of high privilege before the throne of God (cf. **Rev. 3:1; 4:5; 5:6**). The word spirit is commonly used of evil spirits, that is, demons or fallen angels; of the human spirit (cf. **Mark 8:12**); and occasionally of holy angels (cf. **Heb. 1:7, 14**). Those who favor the seven spirits as referring to the Holy Spirit find justification in **Isaiah 11**. The message originates in God the Father and the Spirit.

John MacArthur: Obviously, there is only one Holy Spirit; the number seven depicts Him in His fullness (cf. **5:6; Isa. 11:2; Zech. 4:1–10**).

Robert Thomas: The most satisfactory explanation for the title “*the seven spirits*” traces its origin to **Zech. 4:1-10**. **Zechariah 4:2, 10** speaks of the seven lamps (cf. **Rev. 4:5**) that are “*the eyes of the Lord, which range throughout the whole earth.*” This has a close similarity to John’s “*sent out into all the earth*” in **Rev. 5:6** (**Mounce**). Because Revelation 4 and 5 carry the same symbolism as Zechariah 4 and the title used in the opening of this book must relate to themes occurring later on, the tracing of the title to this OT passage is an obvious solution (**Beckwith**). The prominence of the Holy Spirit’s activity in the world in **Zech. 4:2-10** is established by the words “*not by might or power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts*” (**Zech. 4:6**). John’s use of Zechariah 4 furnishes an example of his kaleidoscopic variations on OT imagery (**Caird**). In deriving the title, John identifies the seven eyes of Zechariah with the seven spirits that belong to the Lord (**Zech. 4:10**; cf. **Rev. 5:6**). The seven lamps of Zechariah (**Zech. 4:2**) are also synonymous with the seven spirits (**Rev. 4:5**).

Daniel Akin: The Holy Spirit of God, John tells us, is in front of God’s throne. The Spirit who energizes and equips the churches for service is the Spirit who proceeds from the very throne of God. We are indeed made sufficient for every assignment, every challenge, for the God who lives in us (**1 Cor 6:19**) is the God who is before the throne!

Buist Fanning: Referring to the Spirit as “*the seven spirits*” is a **metaphor of fullness** drawn from **Isaiah 11:2**, which sees the Lord’s Spirit, described by seven attributes, as resting on the ideal king from David’s line to guide and empower his future rule. John seems to have drawn insight also from **Zechariah 4:1–6**, where a vision of seven lamps is explained as representing not might nor power but God’s Spirit at work in the world (also apparently associated with seven “*eyes of the LORD that range through all the earth*,” **Zech 4:10**). The Spirit positioned “*before his [God’s] throne*” pictures God’s heavenly presence as a throne room from which he rules the world (this image will be filled out in detail in the vision of **chs. 4–5**) as well as the Spirit’s readiness to carry out God’s royal decrees in all the earth.

Van Parunak: Clues that point to the Holy Spirit as the intended interpretation:

- The threefold greeting leads us to expect a reference to the Holy Spirit.
- The reference in **Rev 5:6** emphasizes the Spirit’s omnipresence and omniscience in the world.
- “*Seven*” emphasizes the completeness and thoroughness of the Spirit’s work.

C. God the Son – His Preeminence and Sovereign Dominion

“and from Jesus Christ,”

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus Christ is seen in His threefold office as **Prophet** (faithful Witness), **Priest** (First-begotten from the dead), and **King** (Prince of the kings of the earth). *First-begotten* does not mean “the first one raised from the dead,” but “the highest of those raised from the dead.” Firstborn is a title of honor (see **Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18**).

1. Preeminent in Revelation

“the faithful witness,”

William Barclay: He is the witness on whom we can rely. It is a favourite idea of the Fourth Gospel that Jesus is a witness of the truth of God. Jesus said to Nicodemus: “*Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen*” (**John 3:11**). Jesus said to Pilate: “*For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth*” (**John 18:37**). A witness is essentially a person who speaks from first-hand knowledge. That is why Jesus is God’s witness. He is uniquely the person with first-hand knowledge about God.

Daniel Akin: Jesus is “*the faithful witness*,” the trustworthy revealer of the Father (**John 14:9**). By His perfect, sinless life and by His words and works, He showed us the character of God. By His present ministry among the churches (**Rev 2–3**) He reveals the continuing interest and concern of the Father. **Gordon Fee** makes the interesting observation that in **Psalms 89:37** “‘the moon’ is called ‘a faithful witness in the sky,’” and “that language is now transferred to Christ.”

Robert Mounce: This designation applies in the first place to his role in mediating the revelation he received from God (**Rev 1:1**; the “*testimony for the churches*” referred to in **22:16**). But it also refers to the larger purpose of his life as the one who bore witness to the truth from God (**John 3:32–33; 18:37**) with special emphasis on his death that followed as a result. The Greek word for witness (*martyr*) has come over into English as “*martyr*,” one who suffers death for allegiance to a cause. Throughout Revelation the word is associated with the penalty of death that results from a firm and constant witness (cf. **2:13; 11:3; 17:6**). To the Asian Christians

about to enter into a time of persecution, Jesus is presented as the *faithful witness*. He is the model of how to stand firm and never compromise the truth of God (cf. **1 Tim 6:13**).

Tony Garland: Among the unique titles of Jesus, He is “*called Faithful and True*” (**Rev. 19:11+**). Here, we see His character as God, Who cannot lie (**Num. 23:19; Rom. 3:4; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18**). Where God is involved, other witnesses are unnecessary, for God bears truthful and reliable witness of Himself (**John 8:14**). The witness of Christ was faithful in that He finished the work which the Father had given Him (**John 17:4**), manifesting the Father’s name to His disciples (**John 17:6**) and resisting the temptation to circumvent the cross (**Luke 22:42-44**). In His incarnation, Jesus provided a witness of God to man (**Isa. 9:1-2; John 1:14, 18; 12:45; 14:8-9; Col. 1:15; 2:9; Heb. 1:2; 1Jn. 1:2**).

2. Preeminent in Resurrection

“the first-born of the dead,”

John MacArthur: The second description of Jesus, *the firstborn of the dead*, does not mean He was chronologically the first one to be raised from the dead. There were resurrections before His in the Old Testament (**1 Kings 17:17–23; 2 Kings 4:32–36; 13:20–21**), and He Himself raised others during His earthly ministry (**Matt. 9:23–25; Luke 7:11–15; John 11:30–44**). *Prōtotokos* does not mean firstborn in time sequence, but rather first in **preeminence**. Of all who have ever been or ever will be resurrected, He is the premier one. God declares of the Messiah in **Psalm 89:27**, “*I also shall make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.*” The book of Revelation records the unfolding of that promise.

Robert Mounce: This title is also found in **Col 1:18**, where Christ is declared sovereign over the church by virtue of his resurrection from the dead. **Lightfoot** points out that the two main ideas in the designation are **priority** and **sovereignty** and that in messianic contexts the latter predominates. The messianic interpretation stems from **Ps 89:27**, which says of David (and extends to his descendants culminating in Jesus the Messiah), “*I will also appoint him my firstborn.*” If faithful witnessing should result in a martyr’s death, the believer is to remember that Jesus, the ideal martyr, is the firstborn from the dead. As the risen Christ now exercises sovereign control, so also will the faithful share in his reign (**Rev 20:4–6**).

Buist Fanning: The second title, “*the firstborn from the dead*” (ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν; **v. 5c**; see **Col 1:18**, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν) is a classic oxymoron referring to Jesus’s resurrection and what it means for Christians. His victory over death is prototypical because it guarantees resurrected life for those who are his followers (similar to “*the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*,” **1 Cor 15:20**; cf. **v. 23**; see also **Rom 8:29**). Such a guarantee has deep significance for John’s addressees, some of whom faced the possibility of physical death because of following Christ. The title “*firstborn*” itself is rooted also in **Psalm 89**. In **Psalm 89:27** (LXX 88:28) God declares that he will make the king in David’s line the “*firstborn [πρωτότοκος], highest of the kings of the earth,*” continuing the father-son imagery of **89:26** (found also in **2 Sam 7:14** and **Ps 2:7**). The human king in Jerusalem is pictured in close relation to God, as one who represents God’s rule in the way that a son would represent a father. In these terms the “*firstborn*” is the one who has the greatest claim to the privilege and authority that derives from the family relationship (similar to **Col 1:15; Heb 1:6**). Jesus’s resurrection and exaltation demonstrates his ascension to kingly rule as well as his victory over death.

3. Preeminent in Reigning

“and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

Robert Thomas: The three titles taken together have been variously construed. One defines them as speaking of divine testimony, revelation of the risen Lord, and the forecast of the issues of history. Another sees the past, present, and future works of Christ in the three (**Tenney**). The most precise explanation sees all three as referring to Jesus Christ’s future dominion over the earth (**Bullinger**). Some secondary reference may be acknowledged to the faithful witness He has borne in the past, to His present ministry as the resurrected Lord, and to His future role as King of kings, but the origination of all three expressions from **Psalm 89** reflects a major authorial intent to direct attention to the fulfillment of the promises made to David regarding an eternal kingdom in **2 Samuel 7**.

Richard Phillips: What a blessing it is to know that the true Sovereign reigning over history is Jesus, the Lord of grace and peace. **Alexander Maclaren** writes: “His dominion rests upon love and sacrifice. And so His Kingdom is a kingdom of blessing and of gentleness; and He is crowned with the crowns of the universe, because He was first crowned with the crown of thorns. His first regal title was written upon His Cross, and from the Cross His Royalty ever flows.”

II. (:5b-6) DOXOLOGY OF PRAISE AND MAJESTIC SOVEREIGN DOMINION

A. Doxology of Praise

1. Praise for Christ’s Love for Us

“To Him who loves us,”

Richard Phillips: When John praises Christ for his present work, he sums up the whole by speaking of Christ’s love for his people: “*To him who loves us*” (**Rev. 1:5**). This is the great fact that the Bible declares to Christians: not just that Christ loved us in the past but that he loves us now. **James Boice** describes the love of Christ as “so great, so giving, so winsome, so victorious, so infinite, that we can only marvel at it. It is a love that reaches from the heights of divine holiness to the pit of human depravity to save and keep us from sin.” Perhaps this explains the popularity of one of our most enduring children’s songs: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

David Thompson: This is the only place in the N.T. where the love of Christ is presented in the **present tense**. Every other time it is presented in the past tense (**John 3:16; Gal. 2:20**). Jesus Christ wants His people in His church to know that He continually loves them. This is only for a believer. . . The word “*love*” is *agape*, which means Jesus Christ continually loves believers at the highest level and always does the best for them. Jesus makes it clear that He loves His own “*to the end*” (**John 13:1**). If you are a believer, you can always know you are continually loved by Him.

2. Praise for Christ’s Redemption of Us

“and released us from our sins by His blood,”

Richard Phillips: John’s statement that Jesus freed us “*from our sins by his blood*” (**Rev. 1:5**) makes plain the primary meaning of Jesus’ atoning death on the cross. Jesus freed us by paying the penalty for our sins, substituting himself to die in our place. This is the significance of “*by his*

blood,” which means “*by his sacrificial death.*” Putting these ideas together brings us the doctrine of **penal substitutionary atonement**. Jesus atoned for our sins by paying the penalty of our guilt as a Substitute who made a sacrifice in our place with his own blood. **Barnhouse** writes: “Ours were the sins; His was the blood. Let no man wonder hereafter if salvation is sufficient.”

3. Praise for Christ’s Elevation of Us

a. Elevated to Dominion

“and He has made us to be a kingdom,”

David Thompson: Jesus Christ is the One who elevates our status from sinner to priestly saint. We are a kingdom group of priests to God by virtue of the fact that we have believed in Jesus Christ. In the O.T. the priests were in charge of all things that pertained to God including the Temple and the sacrifices and the offerings. Jesus Christ has elevated us to this position (**I Pet. 2:2-9**).

Robert Thomas: *Basileia* is the word used most often in the LXX, and the NT to speak of the messianic rule and kingdom, an emphasis that most vividly carries over into John’s Revelation. It reaches a climax in **chapter 20** where the future share of the saints in Christ’s earthly rule is expressly stated (**20:4**; cf. **5:10**; **11:15**).

Kendell Easley: An important Old Testament designation for the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt, kingdom and priests (**Exod. 19:6**), is now transferred to “us.” If Jesus is King over earthly kings (**v. 5**), he is especially King over the kingdom of God. If he is the Priest now in heaven on behalf of his people, he has a multitude of priests on earth to serve his God and Father. These priests are not a specialized clergy class, but include all of “us.”

Richard Phillips: Not only are Christians Christ’s kingdom, but all through Revelation Jesus declares that believers enter into his kingship. He states that Christians who persevere in faith will receive “*authority over the nations*” (**Rev. 2:26**) and will “*sit with me on my throne*” (**3:21**). In **Revelation 5:10**, the worshipers in heaven praise Christ for making his people “*a kingdom and priests to our God*,” and John adds that “*they shall reign on the earth*.” Kings reign by conquering, and believers conquer in Christ’s name through the gospel. Kings establish their laws, and Christians enter into Jesus’ reign by teaching and obeying the commands of Scripture. The key earthly institutions of Christ’s kingdom are the church and the Christian family. In these realms, Christ’s name is to be worshiped, his Word is to be preached and obeyed, and his gospel is to be advanced. We pray, as Jesus taught us, “*Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*” (**Matt. 6:10**).

b. Elevated to the Priesthood

“priests to His God and Father;”

John MacArthur: Christ’s love also caused Him to make us to be a kingdom (not the millennial kingdom, but the sphere of God’s rule which believers enter at salvation; cf. **Col. 1:13**) in which we enjoy His loving, gracious rule and almighty, sovereign protection. Finally, He made us priests to His God and Father, granting us the privilege of direct access to the Father (cf. **1 Pet. 2:9-10**).

William Barclay: Jesus made us a kingdom, priests to God. That is a quotation of **Exodus 19:6**: “*You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.*” Jesus has done two things for us.

(a) He has given us royalty. Through him we may become the true children of God; and, if we are children of the King of Kings, we are part of the most royal ancestry of all.

(b) He made us priests. The point is this. Under the old way, only the priest had the right of access to God. When the Jews entered the Temple, they could pass through the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women and the Court of the Israelites – but there they must stop; into the Court of the Priests they could not go; they could come no nearer the Holy of Holies. In the vision of the great days to come, Isaiah said: “*You shall be called priests of the Lord*” (**Isaiah 61:6**). In that day, every one of the people would be a priest and have access to God. That is what John means; because of what Jesus Christ did, access to the presence of God is now open to everyone. There is a priesthood of all believers. We can come boldly to the throne of grace (**Hebrews 4:16**), because for us there is a new and living way into the presence of God (**Hebrews 10:19–22**).

B. Doxology of Majestic Sovereign Dominion

“to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

Robert Thomas: The doxology closes with the word ἀμήν (*amēn*), a common practice with doxologies in the NT (**Rom. 1:25; 15:33; Gal. 1:5; 1 Tim. 1:17**). Among Jews and Christians this was the customary solemn response to show approval of the words of others, probably including a commitment to what is expressed in those words also. The Greek term comes from the Hebrew word (’āmēn, “*be firm*”). That it was a regular part of Christian worship is the indication of **1 Cor. 14:16** where “*amen*” is the response to a prophetic utterance. In the synagogue it was the response to the prayers of the leader of the meeting. In this verse it marks the assent and commitment of the writer to the truthfulness of all the affirmations about Jesus Christ, His identity and accomplishments, but especially His worthiness to receive glory and strength, as expressed in the doxology of **vv. 5b-6**. *Amēn* is used this way six other times in this book (cf. **1:7; 5:14; 7:12** [twice]; **19:4; 22:20**).

Buist Fanning: The doxology form is a way of acknowledging not only that Christ (in this case) possesses these attributes but that he is truly deserving of them and will exercise them “*forever and ever*.”

John Schultz: Both spiritually and grammatically the emphasis is upon the last part of the hymn: “*to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen*.” These words are akin to the doxology of **Psalms One Hundred Fifty**, the ultimate hymn of praise. We do well to pay attention to these rules of grammar. For us, however, the emotional emphasis is upon the first part of this verse, upon the love, redemption, and restoration. Thus heaven and earth are united in this verse. The adoration belongs to heaven; the redemption and rehabilitation belong to earth. Love forms the bridge between the two. Love is the source and the reason for what happens. Redemption is the way that shows how it happens. The kingdom and the priesthood are the result. This is the victory that was intended. But the ultimate goal, the “*raison d’être*,” that which gives meaning and purpose to all is the eternal glory and power of God. God’s glory and power would have existed immutably, even if the universe were wrapped in darkness. The fact that adoration wells up from our souls does not add or detract any from the absolute character of God, but it makes us more human. No one will ever be able to look at this mystery without being changed and renewed by it.

III. (:7) DRAMATIC RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

G.R. Beasley-Murray: This verse may be regarded as providing the motto of the book (**Bousset**). Its theme is that of the whole prophecy. The statement is formed by the conjunction of two Old Testament passages, which had already been fused in Christian tradition (**Dan. 7:13; Zech. 12:10**).

A. Reality and Certainty of the Majestic Second Coming

“Behold, He is coming with the clouds,”

Robert Gundry: “Behold” calls special attention to the second coming, a **climactic event**. As the reference to piercing dictates, “he” who “*is coming*” is Jesus Christ, the dominant figure in **1:5–6**. But “*who is coming*” described God the Father in **1:4**. So because of their oneness, what is true of him is true also of Jesus. The present tense of “*is coming*” makes this future event as certain as a current event. Clouds accompany manifestations of deity (see the comments on **Mark 13:26**, for example), so that Jesus’ coming “*with the clouds*” signals his deity in union with God the Father.

Daniel Akin: He who is coming is literally, historically, and visibly “*coming with the clouds*,” which is also an a theological symbol for the presence of God (**Exod 13:21; 16:10**). He who is coming is Jesus Christ (**Rev 1:5-6**), “*and every eye will see Him*.” This is not the coming of God incognito, which was the case, to some degree, when He came the first time. No, His authority, deity, and sovereignty will be put on full display for all to see. The whole earth will see this!

Richard Phillips: John claims that Christ’s return will be visible to all people on the earth. This claim is contrary to the doctrine of Christ’s secret coming, which many Christians today believe, together with the rapture of believers from the world and Christ’s visible return on a second occasion. Notice that John makes no mention of two comings of Christ—one secret and one visible. In fact, the Bible consistently speaks of Christ’s coming to save his people and judge his enemies as a single event. Paul writes that Christ comes both “*to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted . . . , when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven*” (**2 Thess. 1:6–8**). **First Thessalonians 4:16–17**, the key text that teaches the rapture, or the taking up of believers from the earth, presents Christ’s return as anything but a secret event. Jesus comes “*with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God*.” Not only will Christ be seen by all when he comes for his people, but he will be heard by everyone as well.

When John writes that Christ is “*coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him*” (**Rev. 1:7**), this agrees with the picture throughout Scripture of a cataclysmic, glorious event that decisively ends history as we have known it. Jesus said that “*they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory*” (**Matt. 24:30**). “*For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west*,” Jesus added, “*so will be the coming of the Son of Man*” (**24:27**). These statements make clear that Jesus will be made visible to all the earth not by means of electronic technology, but in a decisive and sky-splitting display of divine glory.

B. Response of the Jews and Gentiles

1. Response of Jewish Nation

“and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him;

Kendell Easley: The first coming of Christ was marked by lowliness. The Second Coming will be with the clouds—representing the majesty of the presence of God (**Ps. 104:3**). Not only that, every eye will see him. His ultimate victory will be open for all to observe. In contrast, hardly anyone noticed his birth except a few shepherds and magi. Only a few hundred witnessed his resurrection appearances.

Those who have rejected Christ in every age, beginning with those who pierced him, have thought they were superior to him. At last they will realize their terrible error. He will become their Judge. As the doom of all the peoples (unbelievers) sinks in, they will mourn because of him. Although such mourning is taken by some as grief and repentance, Revelation contains no indication that this will happen. Rather, they will realize that all is lost and that he is about to inflict judgment on them.

Robert Gundry: Up in the sky with the clouds as he comes, he'll be visible to “*every eye*” (compare **Matthew 24:23–30**). “*Even those . . . who pierced him*” pluralizes the single soldier who pierced Jesus’ side in **John 19:34**. But since that soldier was acting on behalf of the Jewish authorities to whom Pilate gave Jesus over for crucifixion (**John 19:12–16**), “*those . . . who pierced him*” refers to these Jews. “*Even*” and “*as such*” underscore Jesus’ victory over the ones most directly responsible for his death.

Richard Phillips: It is most likely, however, that in **Revelation 1:7** John writes of Jesus’ second coming as an event that catches most people unprepared and unforgiven because of their unbelief. Every eye will see his return and will look upon the One whom they pierced in mockery and rejection, “*and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.*” The scene is Christ’s judgment on unbelieving humanity, which experiences sorrow without repentance and mourning over the realization that there is no longer an opportunity to believe and be saved. Such mourners will no doubt lament the lives they led, and their seeing the grace of Christ for believers will make the anguish of judgment all the more keen. **James Ramsey** said: “Christ rejected, an offered salvation neglected, a day of grace wasted, this is the thing that will give the lost sinner his keenest anguish, and wring from him at the last a bitterer wail than devils ever uttered.”

2. Response of Gentile Nations

“and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him.”

James Hamilton: Many Jews no doubt rejected Jesus precisely because they believed that the crucifixion proved he was not the Messiah, but John quotes these two texts [**Dan. 7:13; Zech 12:10**] in order to prove that what happened with Jesus is exactly what was predicted in the Old Testament. John proclaims that those who rejected him “*will wail on account of him,*” but John announces this in the hope that some will repent in response to this announcement of Jesus’ coming. You can be sure that he will come. And you can be sure that if you are his enemy, you will wail. Repent and believe on the Lord Christ!

Robert Gundry: “*All the tribes of the earth*” corresponds to “*every eye*” and includes many more than those who pierced Jesus. The tribes “*will beat themselves [on the chest]*” to lament his having been pierced (compare **18:9** for a similar lament over the fall of Babylon). John isn’t concerned to say whether the tribes lament in repentance (probably not, since only certain Jews had him pierced) or in despair over their coming judgment. The focus rests on **lament** as such to

emphasize the **injustice** done to Jesus. This injustice parallels the injustices perpetrated on his followers, but his coming with the clouds forecasts a vindication for them like his vindication. “Yes!” is Greek. “Amen!” is Hebrew. Together they provide a twofold affirmation of the truth that Jesus is indeed coming with the clouds.

Robert Mounce: The mourning of **Zech 12:10–12** was that of repentance, but the mourning of Revelation is the remorse accompanying the disclosure of divine judgment at the coming of Christ (cf. **16:9, 11, 21**).

C. Our Response

“Even so. Amen.”

John Walvoord: This is a powerful statement of the **certainty** of Christ’s coming and the events surrounding it. The NET Bible seeks to capture this force with the rendering, “*This will certainly come to pass! Amen.*” Jesus is called “*the Amen*” in **Revelation 3:14**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage provide encouragement for believers facing persecution and possibly martyrdom?
- 2) Are you living like you belong to the kingdom of Jesus Christ, that He is your Lord and ruler? Are you living like a priest, leading others in worship and praise of God?
- 3) Have you been transformed by Christ’s love and atonement so that you are experiencing forgiveness and deliverance from your sins?
- 4) Are you looking forward to the dramatic return of Jesus Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thomas Constable: **Thomas** argued that the genre of Revelation is prophecy written in epistolary style. [Note: **Thomas**, *Revelation 1-7*, pp. 28 and 59.] **Swete** saw it as a prophetic vision and a letter (from **Revelation 1:4** on). [Note: **Swete**, pp. 3, 4.] **Beale** viewed it as an epistle that contains apocalyptic and prophetic material. [Note: **Beale**, p. 1156.] **Beasley-Murray**, and **Carson and Moo**, also advocated a combination of apocalyptic, prophecy, and epistle. [Note: **Beasley-Murray**, pp. 12-29; **Carson and Moo**, p. 716.] Most scholars have classed it as apocalyptic. [Note: See **Mounce**, pp. 18-25, for a helpful discussion of apocalyptic.] I prefer to think of it as an epistle containing prophecy, much of which is apocalyptic.

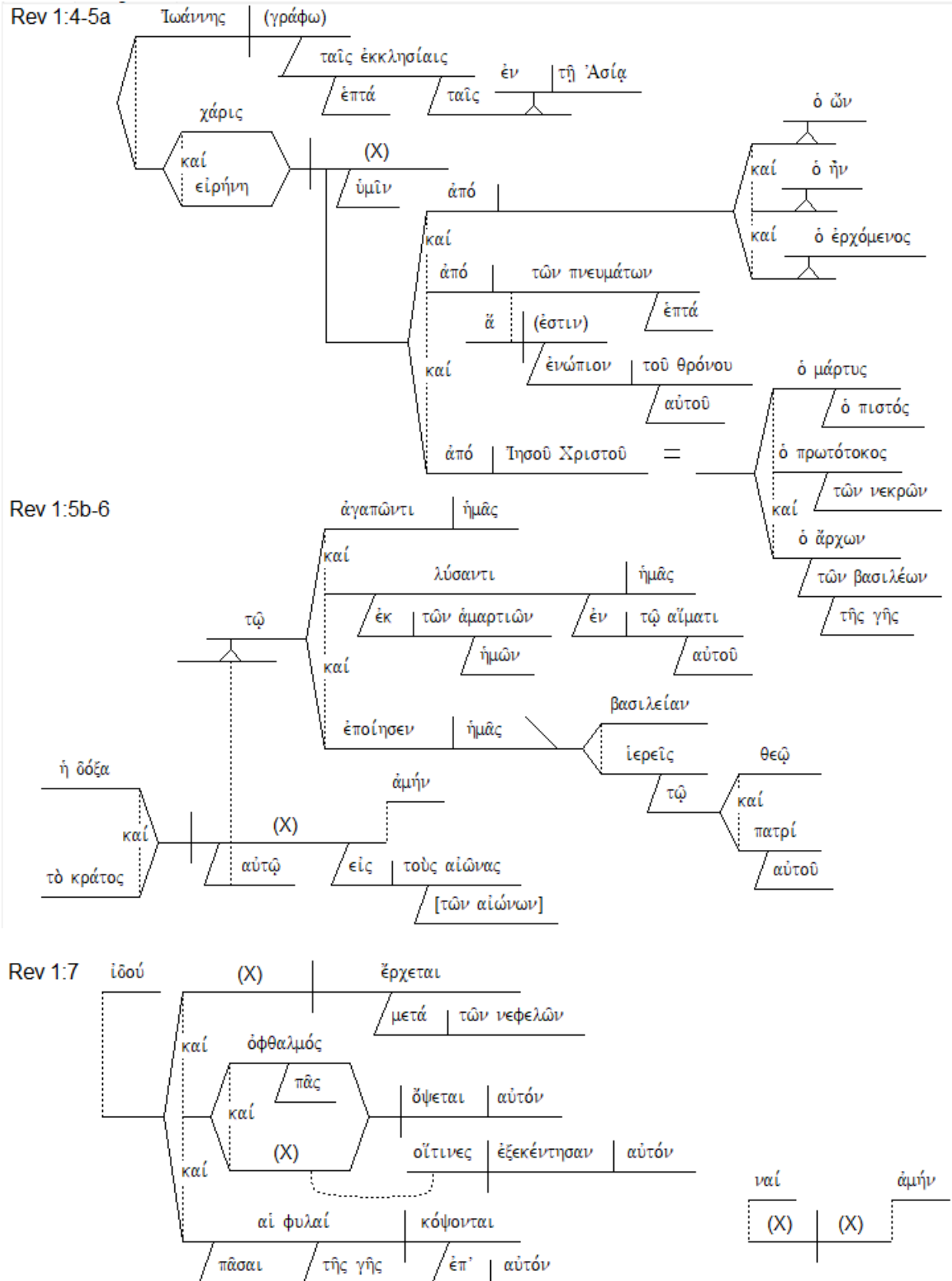
Richard Phillips: A future focus on Christ’s coming will produce a different lifestyle from one that is focused on earthly things. Paul saw the purpose of his life in terms of spiritual growth: “*Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (**Phil. 3:13–14**). Unbelievers glory

in worldly pleasures, “*with minds set on earthly things*” (3:19). “But our citizenship is in heaven,” Paul writes, “*and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself*” (3:20–21). In saying that Christians “*await a Savior*” from heaven, Paul means that they live lives of godly service, biblical devotion, prayer, and witness to the gospel—actions that all point us forward to the hope that we have, no longer in the world, but in the coming of Christ. Can these things be said of us? Does our manner of life suggest that we are awaiting a Savior from heaven? Or is our life fixed on earthly things?

John Walvoord: Jesus Christ is the central figure of the opening eight verses of Revelation. As the Source of revelation He is presented in **verse 1**. As the Channel of the word and testimony of God He is cited in **verse 2**. His blessings through His revealed word are promised in **verse 3**. In **verse 5** He is the faithful Witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. He is revealed to be the source of all grace who loves us and cleanses us from our sins through His shed blood. He is the source of our royal priesthood who has the right to gather in Himself all glory and dominion forever. He is promised to come with clouds, attended with great display of power and glory, and every eye shall see the One who died for men. He is the Almighty One of eternity past and eternity future. If no more had been written than that contained in this introductory portion of **chapter 1**, it would have constituted a tremendous restatement of the person and work of Christ such as found in no comparable section of Scripture.

J. A. Seiss: “*Even so, Amen.*” Some take this as the seal and ratification of the solemn truths which have just been uttered. If this be the true meaning, what particular stress is to be laid upon these things – how sure to come to pass – how unmistakably certain! Brethren, it does seem to me, when I look at the Scriptures on this subject, that even the best of us are not half awake. May God arouse us by his Spirit and not permit us to sleep till the thunders and terrors of the great day are upon us. But I find another and more natural sense of these words. I find in them John’s acquiescence in all that the great day is to bring, and his prayer, as repeated at the end of the book, that that the Lord would hasten its coming. Terrible as it will be to the wicked, and the unprepared, and those who refuse the warnings which we give them, it is a precious day to the saints, a day to be coveted, and be prayed for with all earnestness of desire. The poor faint-hearted Christianity of our times can hardly contemplate it without trembling and annoyance. Many who profess and call themselves Christians would rather not hear about it, and would prefer, if they had their choice, that Christ might never come. It was not so in the days of Christianity’s pristine vigour. Then the anxious inquiry of disciples was, “*Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*” “*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?*” Then Christians wrote to each other in joyous congratulation, that their citizenship was in heaven, whence they looked for the coming of the Saviour; and comforted one another in the assurance that the Lord himself is to descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and with the trump of God; and, as directed by their Lord, lifted up their heads, and looked up with joyful hope at every turn in human affairs which they could be any means construe into a probable herald of his nearing epiphany. Then the prayer, “*Thy Kingdom come,*” had a depth of meaning and lively anticipation which now has well-nigh been lost. Then “*the appearing of Jesus Christ*” had a power over the soul which made it “*rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;*” and the most earnest and constant call of apostles and their followers was, “*Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly. Even so. Amen.*” Nor can the Church ever be her true self, or enter into the true spirit of her faith, or rise to the true sublimity of her hope, where this is not the highest object of her deepest desire.

Leedy Greek Diagram



TEXT: Revelation 1:8

TITLE: PROLOGUE – CLIMAX – 3 SELF-TITLES OF THE LORD GOD

BIG IDEA:

YOU CAN COUNT ON THE PROMISE OF CHRIST'S RETURN BECAUSE THE ETERNAL GOD IS THE SELF-EXISTENT, ALL-POWERFUL SOVEREIGN CONTROLLING THE UNIVERSE

INTRODUCTION:

G. K. Beale: The greetings section is concluded by the Lord's description of Himself using the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, *the Alpha and the Omega*. This is a figure of speech that involves the stating of polar opposites to highlight everything between the opposites. Hence the statement that God is the beginning and end of history stresses His presence throughout and His rule over all events in between. **God's sovereign rule** is highlighted by referring to Him as the One *who is and who was and who is to come*, which means that God is *the Almighty*. With this threefold formula not only is the totality of polarity expressed (*who was and who is to come*) but a middle element is added (*who is*) to show that God is, indeed, ruling over events between the beginning and end of history. This middle element is actually put first, out of order, to highlight for the readers that God is present with them, ruling over all the circumstances in which they find themselves. This emphasis serves as a basis for v. 7, since it is only with the presupposition of an omnipotent God that such a confident assertion about the consummation of history can be made.

Gordon Fee: the description of the divine speaker as "*the Lord God*" and "*the Almighty*" is language once again derived directly from the prophetic tradition. In this case John is reflecting **Amos 4:13** (in the LXX), where the oracle concludes, "*the Lord God Almighty is his name.*" In the present instance, and almost certainly for effect, John divides up this divine name by inserting the phrase "*the One who is, and who was, and who is to come*" between "*the Lord God*" and "*the Almighty*." Thus the concluding self-identification puts most of the emphasis on God's being the **Eternal One**, but whose identity here concludes with God's being the **All-Powerful One**.

Kendell Easley: Before describing his first vision, John records the sovereign words of the Lord God who is able to bring it all to pass. Since one theme in Revelation is the **conflict between the powers of good and evil**, readers are reminded of who really has the power. First, he is *the Alpha and Omega*, the A and Z, the one in control from before the beginning of time until after the end. His eternity is further noted in the phrase, *who is, and who was, and who is to come* (v. 4). Finally, his power is seen in the title *the Almighty* (Gr. *pantokrator*), the one whom none can resist.

Richard Phillips: In **Revelation 1:8**, we come to the final verse in John's introduction to this remarkable book. The prologue gives useful information about Revelation, and the most important bit is the **purpose** for which John is writing. There are many secondary purposes for Revelation, such as giving information about the future and exhorting the churches to which it was written. But the great purpose of Revelation is to provide Christians with a view of history from God's perspective in heaven. As **James Boice** elaborated, "the primary purpose of

Revelation is to enable Christians from every age and in every possible circumstance to **view what is happening in history from God's point of view**, rather than from man's, and to be comforted and strengthened by it to live for Christ and his glory at all times." . . .

Since Revelation presents God's view of history, it makes sense for God to present himself as the Sovereign who is able to hold all things together and accomplish all his purposes in Christ to save his people.

Robert Thomas: As though not satisfied that he has made the prophecy's certain fulfillment plain, in **v. 8** the prophet adds the emphatic declaration of God the Father as further verification of this fact. The implied thought is that the prophecy of **v. 7** is just as sure to be fulfilled as is the credibility of the speaker who identifies Himself in **v. 8** by these very significant titles.

James Hamilton: The Father's Solemn Pronouncement

The words of the Father in **verse 8** function as a solemn verification of what John has written to this point in the letter. The revelation of Jesus (*1:1*), the testimony of John (*1:2*), the blessing on those who read, hear, and keep this prophecy (*1:3*), John's wish of grace and peace for the churches (*1:4*), the doxology to Jesus (*1:5, 6*), and the warning of the coming of Jesus (*1:7*) are all attested to by the one who has always been and will always be.

John MacArthur: In this verse the Lord God puts His signature on the prophecy of the Second Coming recorded in the previous verse. **Three of His divine attributes guarantee the certainty of the pledge of Christ's return.**

I. OMNISCIENCE -- THE ETERNAL GOD KNOWS ALL

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God,"

Robert Thomas: The specific **identity of the speaker** of these words is not immediately clear. Is the spokesman God the Father or God the Son? Persuasive evidence has been advanced in favor of the latter identification. (*Egō eimi*, "I am"), the words with which the verse begins, is a frequent self-designation appropriated by Jesus in the NT, especially in the gospel of John (e.g., **John 8:58**) (**Caird**). (*to Alpha kai to Ō*, "the Alpha and the Omega") is a self-description by Jesus in **Rev. 22:13**. It more probably carries the same force in this verse. Jesus Christ has been the central figure in **vv. 1-7**. A switch to God the Father in **v. 8** is improbable because it is so abrupt (**Walvoord**). The case is further strengthened by a comparison of this verse with **Rev. 1:17-18**, where similar titles are without question applied to Christ (**Smith**). Lastly, because *erchetai* in **v. 7** clearly refers to Christ's coming, the same must be the case with (*ho erchomenos*, "the coming one") in **v. 8**. The evidence in favor of seeing Christ as the speaker is impressive.

Yet so is the evidence favoring the Father. (*kyrios ho theos*, "the Lord God") is a title of God the Father throughout the OT, beginning in **Genesis 2** (**Bullinger; Alford**). Furthermore, (*ho ōn kai ho ēn kai ho erchomenos*, "the one who is and who was and who is coming") is a title for the Father in **1:4**, as shown there. It is only plausible that it should have that connotation here also (**Smith**). In the LXX (*ho pantokratōr*, "the Almighty") renders the Hebrew expression for "Lord of hosts," except in **Amos 4:13** where it renders "God of hosts," and in the book of Job where it is used for the Hebrew "Shaddai" (**Bullinger; Alford**). Remembering that similar words are spoken by the Father in **21:6** (**Mounce**), one cannot help being impressed by the strength of the

case for seeing God the Father as the speaker in v. 8.

Whichever conclusion is correct, it is clear that a close affinity exists between the Father and the Son in this book. Undoubtedly this results from Christ's being all the fullness of the Godhead (cf. **Col. 2:9**) and sharing in all the attributes, deity, and totality of the Father (cf. **Heb. 1:3**) (**Hailey**). Still, the above issue of identity must be resolved. A weighing of evidence, especially in light of the OT "flavor" of the expressions and a recollection that the Father in the OT refers to Himself as "*I am*" (i.e., the Tetragrammaton, **Ex. 3:14**; cf. **Isa. 48:12**), tips the balance ever so slightly to the side of concluding that God the Father speaks in v. 8. This is His affirmation to confirm the truthfulness of the prophetic oracle of v. 7.

David Thompson: [Alternative View – Christ's own identifying statements He makes about Himself]

J. Hampton Keathley, III: since this follows the salutation which comes from the trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, perhaps it could be **from the Godhead itself**.

Sola Scriptura: Trying to decide which member of the Godhead is identified in **verse 8** is impossible. It is as if both members are speaking at the same time. This may be closer to the truth John intends. This prophecy stands as the unanimous consent of God the Father and God the Son.

Buist Fanning: The point is that the Lord God is sovereign over all of time and history. He is the origin and goal of everything that exists or happens (cf. **1 Cor 8:6**, "*from whom and for whom are all things*"). This makes it appropriate that the speaker is identified as "*the Lord God*" (κύριος ὁ θεός) since this expression, so reminiscent of the Old Testament title of God (cf. **Exod 3:15–16; 20:2; Deut 6:4**) is frequently used in Revelation in contexts emphasizing his authority to judge and rule (cf. **Rev 11:17; 18:8; 19:6; 22:5**).

John MacArthur: And he [God the Father] says, "Look, I am A to Z. I contain all knowledge. There is no information, there is no knowledge, there is no truth, there is no understanding, there is no wisdom outside of what I know. When I say Christ is coming, I'm telling you there won't be any surprises because there's nothing outside My knowledge. *I am Alpha to Omega*. I know everything. And since I have all knowledge, there is nothing I don't know about. There is nothing that exists or could happen to ever foil this plan because there's nothing I don't know about. There are no unknown factors that could sabotage the second coming."

J. Hampton Keathley, III: These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It is equivalent to our A and Z. This does not relate so much to time but to truth. It expressed the extent of God's knowledge and wisdom (**Col. 2:3**). It stresses Christ's or the Godhead's omniscience or infinite knowledge and wisdom. This stands then as a strong authentication of the book of Revelation because it comes from the Alpha (a) and Omega (w).

II. SELF-EXISTENT -- THE EVER PRESENT GOD TRANSCENDS ALL

A. Present Existence

"who is"

B. Past Existence

“and who was”

C. Future Coming

“and who is to come,”

Rick Griffith: John quotes God the Father who is Lord of time to demonstrate His ability to bring all the promises of the prophecy to pass.

III. OMNIPOTENT -- THE ALL POWERFUL GOD CONTROLS ALL

“the Almighty.”

Craig Keener: God not only is Lord over time, but he rules the entire universe: he is pantokrator, “Almighty,” a common title for God in this book (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22; elsewhere in the New Testament only at 2 Cor. 6:18). . .

For Christians suffering under Caesar, the *autokrator* or emperor, knowing that they served the “Almighty” must have provided strength. Caesar might rule citizens of an empire in limited ways, but God rules the cosmos; and God, who is the beginning and the end, will guide the course of history long after Caesar’s death and the cremation of his body in Rome.

Grant Osborne: The final title, ὁ παντοκράτωρ (*ho pantokratōr, the Almighty*), provides a fitting conclusion for the preface. In the LXX it frequently translates the OT title “*LORD of Hosts*” (cf. 2 Sam. 5:10; Jer. 5:14; Amos 3:13; et al.), stressing throughout the prophets the omnipotence and authority of God over all earthly forces. It occurs nine times in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22; elsewhere only in 2 Cor. 6:18 in an OT quotation), always with the connotation of God’s absolute power and control. In a sense all of Rev. 1:8 looks to God as ruler over all of history, in control of this world and the next, with full authority over earthly and cosmic forces. It provides a fitting climax to the prologue of 1:1–8.

Daniel Akin: The title again emphasizes God’s **sovereignty** and **omnipotence**. This God has absolute authority, control, and power. He is “in control of this world and the next” (**Osborne, Revelation**, 72). This is no finite deity. This is no God in process on the way to completion and perfection. These titles leave no room for “open theism” and a God who is not absolutely omniscient in the fullest sense that word can bear. It is hard to imagine how God Himself could make this clearer!

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does the context better support these verses testifying to the identity of God the Father or God the Son?
- 2) What events or circumstances in your life fall outside of the control of the sovereign God?

- 3) How is the future coming of Christ supported by His present and past existence?
- 4) What comfort do you derive from the assurance that God is the Almighty?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Craig Koester: In **1:8** the voice of God speaks directly: “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*” **God’s voice** is given in direct terms only twice in Revelation, here and in **21:5–8**. In both places the message is the same, namely, that God is the *Alpha and Omega*. The intrusion of the voice of God at the beginning and end of Revelation gives these words particular emphasis. If God is the beginning and God is the end, then **God is the focus of the book**.

Richard Phillips: “*The Alpha and the Omega*” is a figure of speech called a **merism**. **G. K. Beale** writes that “a merism states polar opposites in order to highlight everything between the opposites.” As the Alpha and the Omega, God is in control of everything in between. This statement echoes **Isaiah 41:4**, where God says: “*Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he.*”

When we speak of God’s being eternal, we mean that his being exists outside time and history, which God created. **A. W. Tozer** writes: “Because God lives in an everlasting now, He has no past and no future. When time-words occur in the Scriptures they refer to our time, not to His. . . Since God is uncreated, He is not Himself affected by that succession of consecutive changes we call time. God dwells in eternity but time dwells in God.” Peter therefore states that “*with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*” (**2 Peter 3:8**). Being eternal, God is the One “*who is and who was and who is to come*” (**Rev. 1:8**). **William Barclay** comments: “He has been the God of all who have trusted in him; he is the God in whom at this present moment we can put our trust; and there can be no event and no time in the future which can separate us from him.”

An analogy of a river may help us to understand God as eternal. We experience time the way that a boat travels down a stream: we are on the river, are at only one place at any one time, and can see only a short distance behind and ahead. But God has an aerial view that enables him to see the entire river at once. He knows every turn, sees every narrows, and foresees every difficulty and danger. As the Alpha who started it, God knows where the river began, and as the Omega, he has ordained its destination. Likewise, everything that is, was, or will be is present to God at the same time and is subject to his rule. This is true of our individual lives, the whole of which God sees at once from beginning to end. The same is true for all history. **Beale** writes: “The God who transcends time guides the entire course of history because he stands as sovereign over its beginning and its end.” What better news could suffering Christians have than that God is “*the Alpha and the Omega*”?

When we study the attributes of God, we find that they are all interrelated. Therefore, related to God’s eternity is another attribute of God highlighted in **Revelation 1:8**. Repeating a phrase from **verse 4**, God describes himself as the Alpha and the Omega, “*who is and who was and who is to come.*” These words reflect God’s eternity, but the first of them especially declares God’s

self-existence. He is the God “*who is*.” Not only does the eternal God have no beginning, but the self-existent God has no source of life other than himself.

God’s self-existence is highlighted in the Greek text, which begins **Revelation 1:8** with the words *ego eimi*, “*I am*.” These words bring us to the burning bush, where God spoke to Moses. Moses asked for his name, and God answered, “*I AM WHO I AM*” (**Ex. 3:14**). In Hebrew, this is summarized by the tetragrammaton, the four Hebrew letters that make the name Yahweh, based on the verb to be. “*Say this to the people of Israel*,” God told Moses, “*I AM has sent me to you*” (3:14).

God’s self-existence is declared in the Bible’s very first verse, “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth*” (**Gen. 1:1**). God’s being is like the fire in the burning bush that Moses saw on the mountain, which “*was burning, yet it was not consumed*” (**Ex. 3:2**). The fire did not depend on the bush but burned by its own all-sufficient life. Like the fire, God does not derive his life from any source; the fire burned in the bush, but the bush was not the source of the fire. The theological term for God’s self-existence is aseity. This word combines the Latin *a*, meaning “from,” and *se*, meaning “himself.” God is “from himself.” The Puritan Matthew Henry observed: “The greatest and best man in the world must say, By the grace of God I am what I am; but God says absolutely—and it is more than any creature, man or angel, can say—**I am that I am**.”

A number of implications may be drawn from the self-existence of God, starting with his self-sufficiency. **Philip Ryken** says: “He does not have any unmet needs or unsatisfied desires. He does not need any help. He is not codependent. He is not living on borrowed time. He does not live or move or have his being in anyone except himself.”

A second implication of God’s self-existence involves another attribute of God: his immutability. This means that God does not and cannot change. Because God is eternal, his being is not subject to any chain of events. Because he is self-sufficient, nothing outside God is able to cause him to change. Paul wrote, “*For from him and through him and to him are all things*” (**Rom. 11:36**). Therefore, having his life entirely from himself, the God “*who is and who was and who is to come*” always is, was, and will be exactly who he is.

The immutability of God provides more good news to suffering Christians like the believers to whom John was writing in Revelation. It means, first, that **God’s character does not change**. God is now exactly the same as he always has been and will be for all eternity. Westminster Shorter Catechism answer 4 teaches: “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth” (emphasis added). This means that we can count on God to always be the same as he is revealed in the Bible. People often change and let us down. Their attitude toward us alters without a good reason. But God is always the same in his being, attitude, and purpose. Some people counter by arguing that the Bible does show God as changing his attitude toward people. The answer is that while God responds to sin, faith, and obedience, he always responds to these in the same way. **A. W. Tozer** writes: “What peace it brings to the Christian’s heart to realize that our heavenly Father never differs from himself. In coming to him at any time we need not wonder whether we shall find him in a receptive mood. He is always receptive to misery and need, as well as to love and faith. . . . Today, this moment, he feels toward his creatures, toward babies, toward the sick, the fallen, the sinful, exactly as he did when he sent his only begotten son into the world to die for mankind.”

Daniel Akin: Several years ago a colleague told me about an interesting experience he had on the mission field when ministering to an underground and persecuted church in a totalitarian country. Out of curiosity he asked, “What are your favorite books in the Bible?” To his surprise the answer was **Daniel** and **Revelation**. When he asked why, they said, “**Because they teach us in the end our God wins!**” Those faithful brothers and sisters in Christ are right. Revelation, in particular, teaches us that Jesus is “*the ruler of the kings of the earth*” and that “*the glory and dominion*” are our God’s forever. He is “*the One who is, who was, and who is coming, the Almighty*.” This is a God who is victorious. This is a God you can trust. This is a God who will do what He promises. This is what we learn when God speaks from heaven.

John MacArthur: The Certainty of the Second Coming (:7-8)

So it is central to the Christian gospel and the Christian faith to believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ. The credibility of the Trinity is at stake, the integrity of the program of God for the church, for Israel, and for the nations is at stake. And the dethroning of Satan is at stake, as well as the fulfillment of the anticipation and hope of the believers. . .

You know why [vs. 8 is] here? Because God is saying if you think this may not happen, I just want to affirm who is in charge of this event and who He is. So, “*the Lord God says*.” **The speaker is Jehovah.** This, by the way, is **His signature on the certainty of the second coming.** This is absolutely magnificent. God puts His signature on this prophecy by emphasizing three of His attributes, three very familiar ones.

- His omniscience
- His omnipresence
- His omnipotence

He is the supreme power. Yes, He has all knowledge. Yes, He is ever and everywhere present. And yes, He is in absolute, sovereign, complete, control of every single thing. When John says He’s coming, He’s coming. And **God is going to guarantee it.** And He’s going to come in a glory cloud and the whole world is going to see Him. The Jews are going to mourn and be saved. The Gentiles are going to mourn and be destroyed. And our response ought to be, “Yes, yes, let it happen.” And God says, “Believe Me, it will.” **Verse 7** is true because **God guarantees it by His person in verse 8.**

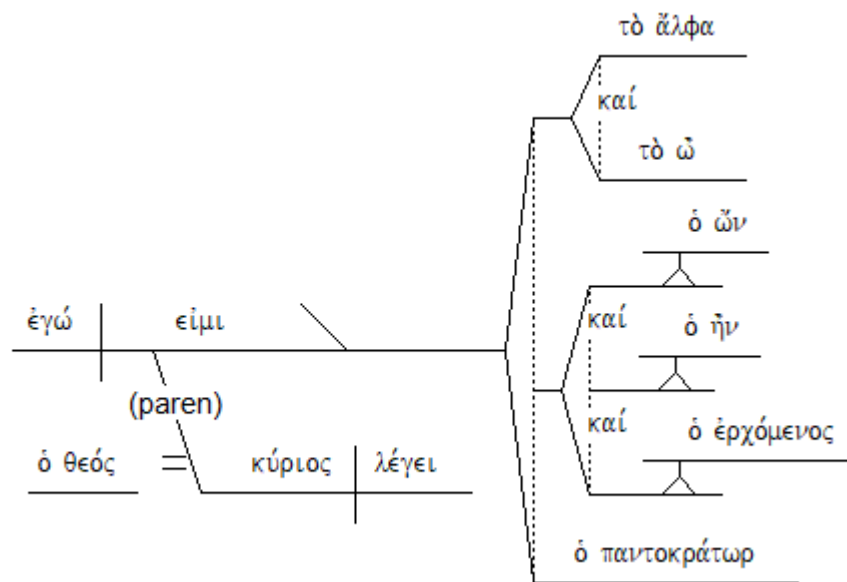
Thomas Constable: This whole introduction points to the main event of the following revelation, the return of Jesus Christ at His second coming (**Revelation 19:11-16**). It also presents the triune God as Lord of time (past, present, and future), faithful to His promises, and powerful enough to bring these events to pass. In Genesis, Moses also emphasized God’s power and faithfulness more than any other of His attributes. The last Bible book stresses these qualities of God as does the first Bible book.

Alan Dunn: The God of Revelation

- The God of Covenant Faithfulness – “*Lord God*”
- The True and Living God – “*I AM*”
- The Transcendent History-Encompassing God – “*Alpha and Omega*”
- The Transcendent Time-Encompassing God – “*who is and was and is to come*”
- The God of Supreme Omnipotence – “*the Almighty*”

Leedy Greek Diagram

Rev 1:8



TEXT: Revelation 1:9-20

TITLE: COMMISSION TO RECORD THE VISION OF THE GLORIFIED CHRIST

BIG IDEA:

THE VISION OF THE GLORIFIED REIGNING CHRIST AND RECORDED INSIGHT INTO END TIME EVENTS FUEL THE PERSEVERANCE OF SUFFERING SAINTS

INTRODUCTION:

John MacArthur: Having described the circumstances in which he received it, John then related the vision itself. This revealing and richly instructive look at the present work of the glorified Son of God discloses seven aspects of the Lord Jesus Christ's constant ministry to His church: He empowers, intercedes for, purifies, speaks authoritatively to, controls, protects, and reflects His glory through His church.

James Hamilton: In **1:9–20** the risen Christ appears to John to commission him to write this prophecy of Revelation. John sees Jesus in the full splendor of his majesty. John has been exiled to the island of Patmos because of his testimony to Jesus, and he writes to churches facing tribulation and persecution. The message that Jesus communicates through John is that they are to endure faithfully, and that message is made compelling by the glory of the risen Christ.

Robert Thomas: After including God's emphatic declaration (**1:8**) that confirms the prophetic theme of the book (**1:7**), John turns his attention to a description of his first revelatory encounter with Christ on the island of his exile. Initially he tells the circumstances of his first commission to write (**1:9–11**). Then he furnishes a detailed description of the source of the commission (**1:12–16**). He closes with words about interaction with the one who gave him the commission and a restatement of the commission which expands the initial command with a more detailed statement of what he was to write (**1:17–20**).

Richard Phillips: While showing Christ as Lord, this vision makes five key points about the relationship between Christ and his church: the church is under Christ's rule, receives Christ's care, is subject to Christ's judgment, relies on Christ's power, and has unity in Christ's presence.

Perhaps the most important thing for us to note about the church as a lampstand is that the light it shines comes not from itself but from Jesus Christ. The Greek word *luxnia* describes the church not as a light for the world but rather as a stand on which a lamp is set. **William Barclay** writes: "It is not the churches themselves which produce the light; the giver of light is Jesus Christ; and the churches are only the vessels within which the light shines. The light which Christians possess is always a borrowed light."

Gordon Fee: If one thinks of the Revelation in terms of a **majestic drama**, then the function of the first chapter is to introduce the reader to the three primary dramatis personae. Thus **verses 1–8**, which function very much as the preamble to the whole, at the same time introduce the major "player," Christ himself. The function of the present paragraph is to situate the second "player," the author John, in his own context, while at the same time introducing his primary readership, who are the third major "player," and who will then be elaborated in some detail in **chapters 2 and 3 . . .**

Everything about this vision is intended to describe a **theophany**, a divine self-revelation. First, there is the careful collage of images that combine the heavenly and earthly Son of Man, and do so with images used only for God. Second, there is the prostrate John, who is reassured with the “*right hand*” and the “*do not be afraid*” that he is safe in the Divine Presence. But especially, third, there is the self-disclosure language of **verses 17–18**, language that deliberately echoes God’s own language in **verse 8**.

Kendell Easley: The exalted Lord Jesus, who walks spiritually among his churches, gave John a revelation of himself that focuses on his certain glorious return.

Daniel Akin: Even in the midst of suffering and hardship, the church of Christ can look to the risen Savior and receive encouragement to both persevere and worship.

Buist Fanning: Through a vision of Jesus Christ in all his resurrected glory, John is commissioned to write down for Christ’s churches what the Spirit shows him about God’s future for the world.

I. (:9-11) THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING JOHN’S COMMISSION TO RECORD THE VISION

A. (:9) Suffering of John the Apostle

1. The Principle of John’s Suffering =

The Pathway to Kingdom Blessing Is Perseverance Thru Present Tribulation

“I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus,”

Craig Koester: When the curtain rises on Act I, the audience hears the narrator introduce himself as “*I, John, your brother*” (**1:9**). John does not introduce himself in terms of his authority—as a prophet or other figure—but in terms of his relationship with the readers: he is their brother.

John MacArthur: John was astounded that, despite his utter unworthiness, he had the inestimable privilege of receiving this monumental vision. . . Suffering persecution for the cause of Christ, belonging to His kingdom, and patiently enduring trials are distinctly Christian experiences.

James Hamilton: Unlike the Roman Empire, which promised peace but delivered brutality and fear, the kingdom of God promises tribulation and delivers peace and confidence and eternal salvation to those who patiently endure. Jesus will bring hope and change.

Make no mistake about it: **your best life is not now**. Your best life will begin when the skies are split by the shout of the archangel. When you patiently endure whatever afflictions you face in your life, you follow in the footsteps of the Old Testament prophets, the Lord Jesus, and his disciples.

Warren Wiersbe: John puts three words together – tribulation, kingdom and steadfast endurance. Tribulation is *thlipsis*. Originally, *thlipsis* meant simply pressure and could, for instance, describe the pressure of a great stone on someone’s body. At first it was used quite literally, but in the New Testament it has come to describe the pressure of events which constitutes persecution. Steadfast endurance is *hupomonē*. *Hupomonē* does not describe the patience which simply

passively submits to the tide of events; it describes the spirit of courage and conquest which leads to gallantry and transforms even suffering into glory. The situation of the Christians was this. They were in *thlipsis* and, as John saw it, in the midst of the terrible events which preceded the end of the world. They were looking towards *basileia*, the kingdom, into which they desired to enter and on which they had set their hearts. There was only one way from *thlipsis* to *basileia*, from affliction to glory, and that was through *hupomonē*, conquering endurance. Jesus said: ‘*Anyone who endures to the end will be saved*’ (**Matthew 24:13**). Paul told his people: ‘*It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God*’ (**Acts 14:22**). In 2 Timothy, we read: ‘*If we endure, we will also reign with him*’ (**2 Timothy 2:12**).

Robert Thomas: *Thlipsei* in Rev. 1:9 is linked closely with two other words, *basilei* and *hypomon*, which combine with it in constituting the sphere of fellowship. The grammatical signal pointing to this is the governance of all three nouns by a single article *τ*. Yet the nature of the relationship of these three is not easy to define. Many explain that the three are viewed separately with the unusual sequence of their listing accounted for by the following rationale: the present experience of tribulation is that which is bringing in the kingdom (**Acts 14:22**), but endurance is mentioned to remind the readers that the kingdom in its fullness is not yet here; there is still a struggle before it will be attained. The appropriateness of this reasoning is obvious. It fits well against a backdrop of a persecuted church awaiting a future kingdom-deliverance. The unusual nonchronological sequence can be accounted for by noting that, added as an afterthought, *hypomon* is a quality that must be manifest in tribulation as a condition of inheriting the kingdom. This aligns with Paul’s exhortation that “*through many afflictions we must enter the kingdom of God*” (**Acts 14:22**). A severe drawback to this understanding of the three concepts, however, is a grammatical one. It simply does not account adequately for the unity of the three indicated by the single article governing them.

An alternative understanding is to see that John has used a figure of speech called hendiatriis, i.e., the use of three words with **only one thought** intended. The one idea is “**affliction**” and the other two words characterize that affliction as being not what the world experiences but what is particularly connected with the “*kingdom*” (**Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 20:6**) and one that requires “*endurance*” or patient waiting (**Rev. 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12**). This view’s elevation of *θλίψει* (*thlipsei*, “*affliction*”) to the prominent role gives due recognition to the grammatical construction (**Bullinger**) and coincides well with the end of **1:9** where John’s exile comes into view. Such a focus on persecution sets a more appropriate stage for the vision and commission that came to John in **1:10 ff**. What Jesus had to reveal to and through him must be seen in the light of his own sufferings and those of other Christians. This second view regarding the relationship of the three nouns is superior to the first and should be accepted.

Charles Swindoll: Today, it’s hard for most Christians to imagine fellowship in the church without three so-called essentials —food, folks, and fun. Yet John demonstrated that fellowship in the early church centered on an altogether different threesome —perseverance through tribulation in light of the coming kingdom.

The Greek word *thlipsis* [2347], “*tribulation*,” can refer to the coming Great Tribulation of the end times, leading up to Christ’s physical return (**Matt. 24:21, 29**). More commonly, though, it refers to **general trials and persecutions** experienced by Christians of every era (**Matt. 13:21; 24:9; John 16:33; Rom. 5:3**).

Richard Phillips: Before John's participation in the kingdom, however, was his partnership "*in the tribulation*" (**Rev. 1:9**). John mentions the suffering of believers first because tribulation marks the path that leads us to the kingdom, just as for Jesus the cross preceded the crown. With this in mind, we may find it remarkable that many Christians read the book of Revelation as teaching that the church will be removed from the world's great tribulation. Nothing could be more contrary to the emphasis of this book, as of the entire New Testament. The great tribulation of the end times will merely intensify the tribulation that is always Christians' lot. Paul taught that "*through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*" (**Acts 14:22**). **John Calvin** wrote: "The church of Christ has been so divinely constituted from the beginning that the Cross has been the way to victory, death the way to life." As Jesus himself foretold, "*In the world you will have tribulation*" (**John 16:33**). If Christians all come from the same place and are bound to the same destination, it follows that we must all take the same road. Jesus defined it: "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*" (**Luke 9:23**). Just as there is a kingdom "*in Jesus*," together with its blessings and glory, so also there is "*tribulation . . . in Jesus*" (**Rev. 1:9**).

Daniel Akin: A study on the book of Revelation may possibly be titled, "The Normal Christian Life: Prosperity Gospelers Need Not Apply." The apostle John had been faithful both to preach the Word of God and to proclaim the testimony of Jesus Christ (see **1:2**). **David Platt** points out this idea appears three other times in Revelation (**6:9; 12:17; 20:4**), and every time it refers to Christians who are suffering because they are speaking and witnessing about Jesus ("Danger"). Christians will be attacked, exiled, slaughtered, beheaded. Serving Christ will not be easy. It is costly! John's reward for being such a faithful witness was imprisonment and being sent away to die alone. There was no health and wealth for this follower of Jesus.

- there is partnership in suffering for Jesus
- there is pain in suffering for Jesus
- there is privilege in suffering for Jesus
- there is purpose in suffering for Jesus

Grant Osborne: The repetition of ἐν ("*in . . . in*") stresses the NT teaching that all Christian suffering was interpreted in the early church as a participation "*in Christ*" (cf. **Rom. 8:17; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:10; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24; 1 Pet. 4:13**). In a very real sense, affliction in the name of Christ was perceived as sharing in his life and glory (**1 Pet. 1:11**, in which "*the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow*" become a model for Christian endurance in the rest of the epistle).

2. The Place of John's Suffering = Isolation in Exile on Patmos "*was on the island called Patmos,*"

John MacArthur: When he received this vision, John was in exile on the island called Patmos. Patmos is a barren, volcanic island in the Aegean Sea, at its extremities about ten miles long and five to six miles wide, located some forty miles offshore from Miletus (a city in Asia Minor about thirty miles south of Ephesus; cf. **Acts 20:15–17**). According to the Roman historian **Tacitus**, exile to such islands was a common form of punishment in the first century. At about the same time that John was banished to Patmos, Emperor Domitian exiled his own niece, Flavia Domitilla, to another island (**F. F. Bruce**, *New Testament History* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972], 413). Unlike Flavia Domitilla, whose banishment was politically motivated, John was probably sent to Patmos as a criminal (as a Christian, he was a member of an illegal

religious sect). If so, the conditions under which he lived would have been harsh. Exhausting labor under the watchful eye (and ready whip) of a Roman overseer, insufficient food and clothing, and having to sleep on the bare ground would have taken their toll on a ninety-year-old man. It was on that bleak, barren island, under those brutal conditions, that John received the most extensive revelation of the future ever given.

Warren Wiersbe: Patmos, a barren, rocky little island belonging to a group of islands called the Sporades, is ten miles long by five miles wide. It is crescent-shaped, with the horns of the crescent pointing to the east. Its shape makes it a good natural harbour. It lies forty miles off the coast of Asia Minor, and it was important because it was the last haven on the voyage from Rome to Ephesus and the first in the reverse direction.

Craig Koester: Given the reference to “*affliction*,” readers sometimes imagine that Patmos was a **penal colony**, where John and his fellow prisoners were subjected to hard labor. Yet that was not the case. Patmos was an ordinary island with families living in a small Greek town beside its harbor and herders tending goats on the rocky slopes. There was a fort on the hill above the town, though it was probably not used much in Roman times. A social highlight of the year was the local festival to the goddess Artemis, when sacrifices were made in her honor. Ships would stop at the harbor at Patmos as they made their way from island to island while sailing from Asia Minor to Greece. If John had indeed been banished, he would have lived among the residents of the island. The stipulation was that he could not leave until the authorities said so.

Richard Phillips: There are differing opinions about the nature of John’s imprisonment. On the easy side, exiled prisoners may have received mild treatment and been permitted relative freedom on the island, although they had lost their property and civil rights. More negatively, Sir William Ramsay paints a stark picture, arguing that John’s exile was “preceded by scourging, marked by perpetual fetters, scanty clothing, insufficient food, sleep on the bare ground, a dark prison, work under the lash of the military overseer.” Whatever his actual circumstances, there can be little doubt that most painful to John the pastor was separation from his beloved church across the sea in Ephesus and his inability to proclaim the gospel of his Savior, Jesus.

3. The Persecution of John’s Suffering – Due to Proclaiming the Gospel *“because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”*

Van Parunak: —These two terms, first mentioned in **1:2**, summarize the Bible: God’s OT revelation and the teaching of the Lord Jesus, amplified in the NT. Later verses show that these are the cause of persecution (**Rev. 6:9; 12:17**).

Robert Thomas: The most probable meaning of the words is that John was exiled here **because of** the preaching of the gospel that he had done in other places (**Alford**). The closely related use of *dia* in **6:9** and **20:4** supports the idea of banishment as the cause, because both passages speak of death by persecution. Also, throughout the remainder of the book the expression refers uniformly to the gospel (cf. **6:9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4**) (**Beckwith**). This is the sense of “*the Word of God*” elsewhere also (cf. **1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:9; 1 John 2:7**) (**Swete**). This too is in agreement with an early and practically unanimous tradition regarding the reason for John’s presence on Patmos. A final confirmation comes from noting the emphasis on affliction and persecution earlier in the verse. Only this viewpoint follows through with that line of thinking (**Alford**). One objection is worth mentioning. The claim is that because John had leisure to receive visitors and to write, he could not have been under the penalty of some kind of

banishment (**Bullinger**). This is countered, however, by noting Paul's situation of house arrest during his earliest imprisonment in Rome. He enjoyed freedom of ministry while a prisoner. There is no reason John could not have been extended the same.

B. (:10a) Spiritual Orientation of John the Apostle

1. Controlled by the Holy Spirit

"I was in the Spirit"

John MacArthur: John received his vision while he was in the Spirit; his experience transcended the bounds of normal human apprehension. Under the Holy Spirit's control, John was transported to a plane of experience and perception beyond that of the human senses. In that state, God supernaturally revealed things to him. Ezekiel (**Ezek. 2:2; 3:12, 14**), Peter (**Acts 10:9ff.**), and Paul (**Acts 22:17–21; 2 Cor. 12:1ff.**) had similar experiences.

James Hamilton: There are four places in Revelation where John records that he was "*in the Spirit*"—here in **1:10**, in **4:2**, in **17:3**, and in **21:10**. Each marks the beginning of a significant movement in John's visionary experience. Here in **1:10** John is about to see the risen Christ. In **4:2** John sees the heavenly court. In **17:3** John is carried away in the Spirit at the beginning of his vision of the fall of the harlot Babylon, and in **21:10** John is carried away in the Spirit to see the descent of the bride of the Lamb, the new Jerusalem.

Van Parunak: The Spirit brought him into an altered state of consciousness; compare **Acts 22:17**, "*come to be in a trance*," and **Acts 12:11**, "*come to oneself*." The first circumstance is that God's Spirit took control of his mind.

2. Concentrating on Worship

"on the Lord's day,"

Van Parunak: Some people seek to identify this with "*the day of the Lord*," the day when the Lord returns, and suggest that John is saying that the HS has given him a vision of this great coming day. While he will ultimately have a vision of this event, the language here is not the expression that both the NT and OT use for that coming day, ἡμέρα G2250 κυρίου G2962. Rather, it designates the day with an adjective that marks it as belonging to the Lord. The only other instance of this adjective in the NT is **1 Cor 11:20**, "*the Lord's supper*."

John is keeping track of **what day of the week** it is. It appears that in spite of his exile, he has tried to set apart the first day for a time of meditation and prayer, and it is on such an occasion that the Lord appears to John.

Buist Fanning: John adds a further detail about the circumstances when this vision of Christ came to him by the Spirit: it was "*on the Lord's day*" (ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ). This almost certainly refers to Sunday, the first day of the week, when Christians gathered for worship, instruction, and fellowship (**Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2**). Sundays had become the Lord's day (the "dominical" day, the day belonging to the Lord), because it was the day of the Lord's resurrection (**Matt 28:1; John 20:1, 19**; cf. Did. 14:1). The relevance of this detail for introducing the vision is that it reinforces the sense of Christ's glory as the one raised from the dead (cf. **Rev 1:18**). It may also suggest that the vision arose from John's experience of worship and reflection, either alone or with a group of Christians gathered there on Patmos with him on that Sunday.

John Walvoord: [Alternate View] Some Bible commentators say the expression “*on the Lord’s day*” refers to the first day of the week, the day of Christ’s resurrection and Christians’ day of worship, while others believe it is a reference to “*the day of the Lord*” as used in the Old Testament—an extended period of time in which **God deals in judgment** and rules over the earth. Although it is common today to refer to Sunday as “the Lord’s day,” it is not used this way in the Bible. The New Testament consistently refers to Christ’s resurrection as occurring on “*the first day of the week*,” never as “*the Lord’s day*” (**Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2**). **Ryrie** notes, “[The word] ‘Lord’s’ is an adjective ... used only here and in **1 Corinthians 11:20** in the New Testament. Unless this is a reference to Sunday, there is no place in the New Testament where this expression is used for that day, since the usual designation is ‘*the first day of the week*.’” So John was projected forward to the **future day of the Lord** as he received the revelation of the unfolding of the end times.

Robert Thomas: A weakness of this explanation includes the observation that the genitive of the noun, ὁ ἰου (kyriou), and not the adjective kyriak is always used elsewhere to name the eschatological day of the Lord (**Bullinger; Mounce**). Another weakness observes that though the eschatological day of the Lord is prominent in the book elsewhere, it is out of place in this immediate context that portrays Christ in His current role as present with the church on earth (**Swete; Beckwith**).

C. (:10b-11) Startling Commission of John the Apostle

1. The Majesty Delivering the Commission

“and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying,”

William Barclay: In this state of existential openness to the Spirit of God, John hears a loud voice behind him. There is no possibility of misunderstanding the command because the voice is as clear and unmistakable as the sound of a trumpet. Since Christ’s voice is later said to be “*like the sound of rushing waters*” (**1:15**), some have held that the voice in **v. 10** must have been that of an angel. In the verses that follow (**vv. 17–19**), however, it is Christ who commands John to write, and it is therefore natural to assume that it is also he who speaks in **vv. 10 and 11**.

Sola Scriptura: “*a loud voice*” – This noun phrase is used twenty-two times in Revelation and is compared to the blast of a trumpet, the sound of thunder, and sound of roaring water. In each case, a divine being or angelic being is delivering a significant message. Compare **1 Thessalonians 4:16**.

2. The Manuscript Demanded by the Commission

“Write in a book what you see,”

Kendell Easley: The voice commanded John to write on a scroll, the form in which books existed in those days. Sheets of paper handmade from the papyrus plant (a kind of reed) were glued into strips about a foot wide but as long as thirty feet and then rolled up. The scrolls were handwritten with ink in even columns a few inches wide. Since Revelation was written in Greek, the columns went from left to right. The seven cities—Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (see **Col. 4:16**)—had been evangelized directly or indirectly through Paul’s ministry.

3. The Mandate to Fulfil the Commission

“and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

Why the targeting of these 7 churches?

- These were actual churches that existed in John’s day.
- John had a ministry connection already to these churches so that his message would be received as authoritative.
- These churches are listed along a geographical circuit.
- These churches exhibit problems and temptations that apply to all churches down through church history.
- These churches are in some sense typical of the churches that will exist in the end times as tribulation intensifies.
- By addressing 7 churches, the number of completeness, John is addressing the church in its totality.

Rejection of alternative views:

- That these churches represent a progressive view of church history with each church describing the characteristics of that specific period.
- That these churches are not historical churches but some idealized catalog of churches designed to represent a wide range of spiritual problems.

Gordon Fee: These churches when connected by road make a long, thin horseshoe-shaped semi-circle from Ephesus through Smyrna to Pergamum in the north—still on or close to the Aegean Sea—and then inland in a south-southeasterly direction down to Laodicea, which is about eighty miles east and slightly south of Ephesus.

II. (:12-16) THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE VISION

Warren Wiersbe: It is easy to miss seeing how carefully constructed Revelation is. It is not a book which was flung together in a hurry; it is a closely integrated and artistic literary whole. In this passage, we have a whole series of descriptions of the risen Christ; and the interesting thing is that each of the letters to the seven churches which follow in the next two chapters, with the exception of the letter to Laodicea, opens with a description of the risen Christ taken from this chapter. It is as if this chapter introduced a series of themes which were later to become the texts for the letters to the churches. . .

The second thing to note is that, in this passage, John takes titles which in the Old Testament are descriptions of God and applies them to the risen Christ.

A. (:12-13a) The Big Picture

“And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me.”

1. (:12b) Seven Golden Lampstands

“And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;”

Grant Osborne: There have been many interpretations of the **lampstand**. While it could refer to Yahweh's presence among his people, most take it as a reference to Israel shining upon the nations with the Holy Spirit (1:6) and the truth of God. There are two differences between Zechariah and **Rev. 1:12**: in the latter there are seven separate lampstands, and on the basis of **1:20** they refer to the seven churches in **chapters 2–3**. Nevertheless, the basic thrust is the same: the churches are depicted as **shining lights for God** in the midst of a hostile world. This **witness theme** fits the imagery already suggested for **1:6–7** above and will be extended further in the two witnesses of **chapter 11**, called "*the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth*" in **11:4**, a further allusion to **Zech. 4:2–3**.

Warren Wiersbe: The picture of the seven golden lampstands has three sources.

(1) It comes from the picture of the candlestick of pure gold in the tabernacle. It was to have six branches, three on one side and three on the other, and seven lamps to give light (**Exodus 25:31–7**).

(2) It comes from the picture of Solomon's Temple. In it, there were to be five candlesticks of pure gold on the right hand and five on the left (**1 Kings 7:49**).

(3) It comes from the vision of Zechariah. Zechariah saw '*a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it; there are seven lamps on it*' (**Zechariah 4:2**).

2. (:13a) Son of Man

"and in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man,"

Van Parunak: So the fundamental picture is of the Lord, as high priest, tending his churches, as the high priest tends the lampstand. The imagery reminds us:

- of our responsibility to shine as a church, bringing glory to the Lord;
- of our autonomy, in contrast to the integrated lampstand of the Jewish tabernacle;
- of our Lord's care for us, guiding us to ever greater brightness for him

Richard Phillips: The vision of **Daniel 7** concluded with God as the "*Ancient of Days*," to whom "*there came one like a son of man*," riding on the clouds (**Dan. 7:13**). "*Son of man*" does not, therefore, denote the mere humanity of Jesus, but rather the fact that this One in the form of man is really God. According to Daniel, the Son of Man is the One worthy to receive "*dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him*" (**7:14**). According to **Douglas Kelly**, the Son of Man is "the sovereign Master of an indestructible kingdom that is going to crush all others." Far from signifying Jesus' humble humanity, "*Son of man*" makes exactly the opposite point, declaring Jesus in his **transcendent majesty and sovereign rule**.

Leon Morris: Explanation of use of title "son of man":

1. Jesus used the term because of its lack of political complications.
2. Jesus used the term because of its divinity overtones.
3. Jesus used the term because of its connections with a future kingdom.
4. Jesus used the term because of its human undertones.

Grant Osborne: **Metzger** (1993: 26) captures it better: "When John says he saw Christ in the midst of the lampstands, he wants to let us know that Christ is not an absentee landlord. On the

contrary, he is in the midst of his churches supporting them during trials and persecutions.” This begins a progression of images, with Jesus “*in the midst of*” the lampstands (1:13), then “*holding*” the seven stars “*in his right hand*” (1:16; 2:1; 3:1), and finally “*walking among the seven golden lampstands*” (2:1). All three images depict Christ involved in the lives of his people and sovereignly protecting them. But as Giesen (1997: 87) states, there can also be a **warning** involved here. Since Christ is lord over the church, he can remove them if they do not turn themselves around (e.g., 2:5).

B. (:13b-16) The Specific Details

1. (:13b) Priestly Robe

“clothed in a robe reaching to the feet,”

John MacArthur: the word translated *robe* was used most frequently (in six of its seven occurrences) in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) to describe the robe worn by the **high priest**. While Christ is biblically presented as prophet and king, and His majesty and dignity emphasized, the robe here pictures Christ in His role as the Great High Priest of His people. That He was girded across His chest with a golden sash reinforces that interpretation, since the high priest in the Old Testament wore such a sash (cf. **Ex. 28:4; Lev. 16:4**).

Daniel Akin: This is the clothing of the priest in the Old Testament (**Exod 28:4**). It signifies Jesus as our great high priest and points to His work of atonement and intercession on our behalf (see **Heb 7:25**).

William Barclay: Some writers hold that in the introductory verses of Revelation Jesus is presented in the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king. As recipient of God’s revelation in **v. 1** he is a prophet. As “*ruler of the kings of the earth*” in **v. 5** he is king. And the high-priestly garments of **v. 13** present him as priest (cf. **Exod 28:4; 29:5**).

2. (:13c) Royal Girdle

“and girded across His breast with a golden girdle.”

Grant Osborne: The “*golden sash around his chest*” could be the sacred ephod of the high priest embroidered with gold thread (**Exod. 28:4; 29:5**; cf. **39:29**), but it is more likely from **Dan. 10:5**, where Daniel had a vision of a man “*dressed in linen, with a belt of finest gold.*”

3. (:14a) Wisdom of Eternity

“And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow;”

John MacArthur: John’s description of Christ’s head and ... hair as white like white wool, like snow is an obvious reference to **Daniel 7:9**, where similar language describes the **Ancient of Days** (God the Father). The parallel descriptions affirm Christ’s deity; He possesses the same attribute of holy knowledge and wisdom as the Father. *White* translates *leukos*, which has the connotation of “bright,” “blazing” or “brilliant.” It symbolizes Christ’s eternal, glorious, holy truthfulness.

Kendell Easley: In the ancient world, white hair symbolized the respect due to the aged for the wisdom of their advanced years (**Prov. 16:31**). This part of the picture points to Jesus' wisdom.

In traditional theological language, the “omniscience” of the exalted Jesus may be suggested. He knows what is best for his people, even when they are suffering.

John Piper: This is remarkable, because in that same chapter in Daniel (7) where John gets this picture of “*one like a son of man*” (vv. 13-14), God the Father is described like this in **verse 9**: “*The Ancient of Days took his seat; his vesture was like white snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool.*” In other words John is describing the Son of Man in terms used for God himself. John wants us to see something here about the age of Christ and the wisdom and dignity that come with age—everlasting age!

In American culture today, we respect the process of aging less and less. A person is admired if he can keep looking young, not if he has the dignity of age. The Bible saw it another way.

Proverbs 16:31 says, “*A white head is a crown of glory,*” so much so that in the law God commanded, “*You will rise up before the white head, and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God; I am the Lord*” (**Leviticus 19:32**).

One of the reasons we don’t want to grow old is that we associate age with the fading of powers that make life worth living—the capacity to see and hear and think clearly and move about and not have pain. But all of those things do not belong to aging as aging. They belong to aging in a futile and fallen world of sin. Once God does away with sin and the curse, and establishes the new heavens and the new earth, aging will not have any of these negative connotations. It will only be associated with growing wisdom and insight and maturity. All the strength will still be there. All the mental powers. All the sight and hearing and agility. Nothing that is great about youth will be left behind. There will only be added all the powers and beauties and depth of age.

This is what John saw in Jesus. He was like the Ancient of Days with all the wisdom of eternity and all the maturity and steadiness of age, but he was not weak or weary or faltering in his step. (“Look at Jesus”)

4. (:14b) Penetrating Omniscience

“*and His eyes were like a flame of fire,*”

John MacArthur: His searching, revealing, infallible gaze penetrates to the very depths of His church, revealing to Him with piercing clarity the reality of everything there is to know. Jesus declared, “*There is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known*” (**Matt. 10:26**). In the words of the author of Hebrews, “*There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do*” (**Heb. 4:13**). The omniscient Lord of the church will not fail to recognize and deal with sin in His church.

James Hamilton: When John describes Jesus in **1:14** as one whose “*eyes were like a flame of fire*” (cf. **19:12**; **Daniel 10:6**), he is declaring the reality that nothing escapes the all-searching, pure gaze of Jesus. This has at least three implications:

- 1) no sin that we commit will escape his notice,
- 2) he will see every faithful thing his people do, and
- 3) he will note every injustice done to his people by their enemies.

5. (:15a) Triumphant Omnipotence

*“and His feet were like burnished bronze,
when it has been caused to glow in a furnace,”*

Warren Wiersbe: It may be that we are to see two things in the picture. The brass stands for strength, for the steadfastness of God; and the shining rays stand for speed, for the swiftness of the feet of God to help his own or to punish sin.

Kendell Easley: These powerful feet of Jesus point to his ultimate triumph over all the forces of evil, natural and supernatural alike. If his hair symbolizes “omniscience” and his eyes “omnipresence,” then the feet may represent “omnipotence.”

Grant Osborne: philologically, the term must be understood as a metal alloy of copper, bronze, or brass. From this **Hemer** (1986: 112–17) after an extensive discussion concludes that this was a brass alloy of copper and zinc, **used for military purposes** (Thyatira was a Roman garrison town or military headquarters) and in coinage. . . This image of “polished bronze” emphasizes the glory and strength of Christ.

6. (:15b) Majestic Voice

“and His voice was like the sound of many waters.”

7. (:16a) Church Sovereignty

“And in His right hand He held seven stars;”

Grant Osborne: To “have . . . in his hand” occurs often in this book (**1:16; 2:1; 3:1** with ἔχω only; **6:5; 10:2; 17:4**), and in each case the idea of **power over the thing held** is present. Therefore the glorified Christ is in **complete control**. The “seven stars” are identified in **verse 20** as the angels of the seven churches addressed in **chapters 2 and 3**.

8. (:16b) Decisive Judgment

“and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword;”

James Hamilton: This is a colorful way to say that Jesus will speak decisive words of judgment (cf. **Isaiah 11:4; 49:2; Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 2:12; 19:15, 21**).

Kendell Easley: The sword stands for Jesus' power to judge and conquer his enemies, thus protecting his people.

9. (:16c) Shekinah Glory

“and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.”

Daniel Akin: This speaks of His brilliance, holiness, majesty, and awesomeness. John saw Jesus as He, the Son of God, truly is. He is an awesome God, a powerful God, a majestic God. He is a God worthy of our worship, worthy of our service, worthy of all we can give Him. He is a God whose presence gives us assurance. The Lord knows what is happening in His churches, for He is continually among them. Our Lord is an awesome God, sufficient for every need we may have.

Buist Fanning: The final description compares “*his face*” (ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ) to the rays of the sun at their brightest: “*Like the sun shining in its full force.*” A face radiant as the sunshine seems to speak of heavenly “*glory*,” as reflected by Moses when he came down from talking to God on Sinai (**Exod 34:29**) or by Jesus at the transfiguration (**Matt 17:2**) or the mighty angel coming down from heaven (**Rev 10:1**)

III. (:17-20) THE CONFIRMATION OF THE COMMISSION

A. (:17-18) Confirmation Based on Reassurance of the Authority of Jesus

1. (:17a) Need for Reassurance

“And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man.”

John Walvoord: The revelation of God and His glory on other occasions in the Bible had a similar stunning effect, as illustrated in the cases of Abraham (**Gen. 17:3**), Manoah (**Judg. 13:20**), Ezekiel (**Ezek. 3:23; 43:3; 44:4**), Daniel (**Dan. 8:17; 10:8–9, 15–17**), and the disciples at Jesus’ transfiguration (**Matt. 17:6**).

2. (:17b-18) Nurturing of Reassurance

a. (:17b) Pastoral Care

“And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid;’”

Warren Wiersbe: Lord reassured John by touching him and speaking to him (note **Dan. 8:18; 9:21; 10:10, 16, 18**). “*Fear not!*” is a great **encouragement** for any child of God. We need not fear life, because He is “*The Living One*.” We need not fear death, because He died and is alive, having conquered death. And we need not fear eternity because He holds the keys of hades (the world of the dead) and of death. The One with the keys is the One who has **authority**.

At the very beginning of this book, Jesus presented Himself to His people in **majestic glory**. What the church needs today is a new awareness of Christ and His glory. We need to see Him “high and lifted up” (**Isa. 6:1**). There is a dangerous absence of awe and worship in our assemblies today. We are boasting about standing on our own feet, instead of breaking and falling at His feet. For years, Evan Roberts prayed, “Bend me! Bend me!” and when God answered, the great Welsh Revival resulted.

b. (:17c-18) Pronouncements of Authority

1) Authority over Time

“I am the first and the last,”

Grant Osborne: The “*First and the Last*” title derives from **Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12**, where it refers to God as creator of all and sovereign over history. **Bauckham** (1993a: 27) also says, “God precedes all things, as their Creator, and he will bring all things to eschatological fulfillment. He is the origin and goal of all history. He has the first word, in creation, and the last word, in new creation” (also **Kraft** 1974: 48). In the context of **Rev. 1:17–18**, this sovereignty is now extended to Christ.

2) Authority over Life

“and the living One;

and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore,”

John MacArthur: *Behold* introduces a statement of amazement and wonder: *I am alive forevermore. Christ lives forever in a union of glorified humanity and deity,” according to the power of an indestructible life” (Heb. 7:16). “Christ, having been raised from the dead,” wrote Paul, “is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him” (Rom. 6:9). That truth provides comfort and assurance, because Jesus “is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). In spite of his sinfulness in the presence of the glorious Lord of heaven, John had nothing to fear because that same Lord had paid by His death the penalty for John’s sins (and those of all who believe in Him) and risen to be his eternal advocate.*

3) Authority over Death and Hades *“and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”*

John MacArthur: Hades is the New Testament equivalent of the Old Testament term Sheol and refers to the place of the dead. Keys denote access and authority. Jesus Christ has the authority to decide who dies and who lives; He controls life and death. And John, like all the redeemed, had nothing to fear, since Christ had already delivered him from death and Hades by His own death.

Kendell Easley: Keys are for opening or locking doors. Death and Hades—twin monsters—are limited in their power by the keyholder. As the final Judge, Jesus is able to “open the doors of death” and judge all those who have died. He also has the power to send into eternal death (“*the lake of fire*”) those whose names are not recorded in the Book of Life. The portrait of the last judgment in **Revelation 20** expands this theme, especially **verses 14–15**.

Grant Osborne: Mainly, Christ through his death and resurrection has defeated the powers of evil (the twin forces of “*Death and Hades*”) and gained control over them (cf. **Col. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:19–20**). In the NT, “*key*” in an eschatological text always has the idea of power or authority over a thing (cf. **Matt. 16:19; Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 9:1; 20:1**). Thus here he has overcome and gained mastery over the cosmic forces.

B. (:19) Confirmation Based on Clarification of the Mission

1. Recording of the Vision

“Write therefore the things which you have seen,”

Buist Fanning: This commission gives the **revelatory paradigm** for the whole book of Revelation: John must record what he has seen in his vision and what those things signify, and thus what they reveal about God’s future for the world (cf. **1:1**). The same specific command “*write*” (γράφω; **v. 11**) is repeated here followed by further details about what is to be written down. The content is structured in three relative clauses introduced by “*what*” or “*the things that*” (ὅ, plural). These three are often regarded as a preview of the outline of the book. What is debated within this view is whether the clauses should be seen as three parallel segments or as one overarching element (“*what you have seen*”) followed by two subsidiary points that unpack it (“*that is, what is [now] and what is destined to take place after these things*”). The conjunction “*and*” (καί) can mean “*that is*” (epexegetical use), but the shift in tenses seems to favor the normal sense “*and*,” which yields three parallel units. Also, the reference to what will “*happen after these things*” is a clear allusion to **4:1**, where according to this view the third section would begin. The main objection to a threefold division is that the different sections (especially **chs. 4–22**) contain a mixture of past, present, and future events. But the predominant temporal character of the three sections is still clear despite some overlap: **chapter 1** is what

John has just seen, **chapters 2–3** address the current condition of the churches in Asia Minor, and **chapters 4–22** portray what is yet to occur, as **4:1** indicates.

A different approach to **v. 19** that makes more sense than either of these views is to understand the middle clause as “*what they are* [i.e., represent, mean, or refer to].” John is to record the details from his present vision and what those details signify particularly in regard to future events in God’s program of redemption. This is the sense that the verb “*are*” (εἰσίν) carries in **1:20** (cf. also “*you saw*,” εἶδες, in both verses). The stars and the lampstands represent the churches, and **chapters 2–3** exhort these churches about their present conduct especially in light of God’s judgment and reward that will come in the future. So **v. 19** is not intended to provide an outline of the book’s contents but a **literary pattern** for John to follow in recounting his visions. This pattern (**what John has seen, what it means, and what it shows about the future**) is the **template** not only for his most recent vision but for all the visions that will be included in the book. It can be seen (especially the verb “*be*” as “mean, represent”) in later passages in the book (e.g., **Rev 4:5; 5:6, 8; 7:14–17**).

2. Application of the Vision

a. Application to the Present

“and the things which are,”

b. Application to Future End Time Events

“and the things which shall take place after these things.”

[Alternative Views]

John MacArthur: The astounding vision John saw inspired in him a healthy tension between **fear** and **assurance**. But to that was added a reminder of his **duty**. Christ’s earlier command to write is now expanded, as John is told to record three features. First, *the things which you have seen*, the vision John had just seen and recorded in **verses 10–16**. Next, *the things which are*, a reference to the letters to the seven churches in **chapters 2 and 3**, which describe the present state of the church. Finally, John was to write *the things which will take place after these things*, the prophetic revelations of future events unfolded in **chapters 4–22**. This threefold command provides an outline for the book of Revelation, encompassing (from John’s perspective) the past, present, and future.

Van Parunak: —It is common to associate the three clauses of this expression with three sections of the book: what John has already seen (**ch. 1**), the description of the churches of the first century (**ch. 2–3**), and the distant future (**ch. 4–22**). There are a number of difficulties with this view. Most notably, we will find references to future events in **ch. 2–3**, and descriptions of past and present events in **4–22**. It is preferable to understand the first clause in parallel with **1:11**, “*What thou seest, write in a book,*” and **21:5**, “*Write, for these words are faithful and true.*” The last two clauses then apply to all of the book throughout, both in **ch. 2–3** and **4–22**, we will read of things that have already occurred, and of things that still lie in the future.

C. (:20) Confirmation Based on Interpretation of Major Symbolism

“As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

Grant Osborne: The concept of “*mystery*” is a critical apocalyptic concept (cf. 1 Enoch 51.3; 103.2; 2 Esdr. [4 Ezra] 14:5; 1QS 3.21–23; 1QH 15 [7].27) not only for this book but for the early church as a whole (cf. **Matt. 13:11**; **Rom. 11:25**; **1 Cor. 2:7**; **Eph. 3:3–9**; **Col. 1:26–27**). It refers to hidden secrets kept from the people of the past but now disclosed by God.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: mystery also carries the connotation of unexpected, end-time fulfillment included in the meaning of the stars and lampstands in the present context.

James Hamilton: That Jesus holds the seven stars in his right hand means that he is in control of the churches, and that he is among the lampstands means that he is present with the churches.

Kendell Easley: Both the congregations and their spiritual leaders are symbolized as light-bearing bodies. Both the congregations and their leaders are of special concern for the risen Lord. He will protect his people in spite of all evil that comes their way.

Richard Phillips: it is unlikely that Christ was referring to human messengers here, for the simple reason that elsewhere in Revelation the word angel always describes a supernatural messenger and heavenly servant of God. It is probably best, then, to see Jesus as referring to **guardian angels** assigned to the churches they represent. This fits the pattern of Daniel’s visions, to which John has repeatedly referred, in which an angel spoke of his combat with enemy spiritual powers and referred to the angel Michael as “*your prince*” (**Dan. 10:21**). The idea of heavenly counterparts for God’s earthly people seems to be reflected in the seven stars in Christ’s hand. Lampstands on earth and stars in heaven both shine their light, and it seems that the angels of the churches are so closely identified with the churches themselves that the two can be spoken of as one.

Buist Fanning: The most likely sense is that these “*angels . . . of the seven churches*” are holy angels, that is, supernatural messengers or instruments of God, who serve as guardians or representatives of the congregations. This role of angels regarding the churches is not clearly attested elsewhere in the New Testament, but several clues make this the most plausible understanding. Symbolizing an angel as a “star” occurs in **9:1** (also **Judg 5:20**; **Job 38:7 LXX**), and in general angels appear frequently in apocalyptic literature and in Revelation itself (readers would more likely expect the term to mean “*angel*” rather than “*messenger*”). Angels are viewed as guardians or representatives for individual humans (**Matt 18:10**; **Acts 12:15**; cf. Tob 12:15; 2 Macc 11:6) or for earthly nations (**Dan 10:13, 20, 21**; **12:1**; **Deut 32:8 LXX**; Sir 17:17), and they seem to be attentive to the life of the church (**1 Cor 11:10**; **Eph 3:10**). Most interpreters follow this view. Its weakness is that it is hard to explain why the messages that follow in **chapters 2–3** are addressed to such an angelic representative and not to the churches directly.

Van Parunak: “*the angels of the seven churches*” -- The word ἄγγελος is used in the NT to refer to human messengers as well as heavenly ones:

Luke 7:19 *And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? ... 24 And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*

The Lord goes on to call John himself the ἄγγελος promised in Mal 3:1,

Luke 7:27 *This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*

Later, we read,

Luke 9:51 *And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, 52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.*

The simplest solution seems to be to consider the seven “*messengers*” as envoys sent from the churches to visit John in exile. Perhaps they brought material help; they may enquired of his well-being, or sought his counsel on issues, much as we see in the Corinthian correspondence. Now he sends them back with a message for the churches that they represent, and as members of those churches, they share in the praise and criticism that he expresses.

William Barclay: [Possible Views] Many explanations have been proposed for the angels. If they are human beings (**Matt 11:10** and other verses would allow this), they could be prominent officials of the local congregations or delegates sent to Patmos to be entrusted with the letters. The use of “*angel*” in the book of Revelation (it occurs some 60 times) favors identifying the angels as **heavenly beings**. They could be guardian angels (cf. **Dan 10:13, 20–21; Matt 18:10; Acts 12:15**) or perhaps heavenly counterparts that came to be identified with the church. The most satisfactory answer, however, is that the angel of the church was a way of personifying the prevailing spirit of the church. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that all seven letters are addressed to separate angels, a strange phenomenon if they refer to anything but the church since the contents are obviously intended for the congregation as a whole.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you consider partnership in suffering and tribulation to be an identifying mark of believers?
- 2) What impacts you the most about the vision of the glorified Christ presented here?
- 3) How can we better meditate on the exalted and glorified Christ?
- 4) Why is **worship** the necessary response to the revelation of Jesus Christ?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: In **1:9–20** John introduces the reader to the purpose and content of his book as a whole. Two primary themes run throughout this passage—the glorified Christ and the church that is under his control and care. Christ is depicted as the fulfillment of OT imagery and apocalyptic hopes. The descriptions are not meant literally but as a symbolic portrayal of the one who is at the same time both Messiah and divine. In short, he is the divine ruler and judge over both the world and the church. The church is under his control, in both a positive (vindication and reward) and a negative (warning and accountability) direction. Also, the book of visions is

introduced, and the churches to whom it is addressed are named. Throughout it all, the God who is in control of history (from **1:1–8**) is still sovereign, but now his dominion is passed on to the glorified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

John MacArthur: The apostle John had been banished to the island of Patmos, and at least one person, a pastor, had already been martyred (**Rev. 2:13**). The persecuted, beleaguered, discouraged believers in Asia Minor to whom John addressed the book of Revelation desperately needed encouragement. It had been years since Jesus ascended. Jerusalem had been destroyed and Israel ravaged. The church was losing its first love, compromising, tolerating sin, becoming power-less, and distasteful to the Lord Himself (this is described in Revelation 2 and 3). The other apostles were dead, and John had been exiled. The whole picture looked very bleak. That is why the first vision John received from the inspiring Holy Spirit is of Christ's present ministry in the church.

John's readers took comfort in the knowledge that Christ will one day return in glory and defeat His enemies. The description of those momentous events takes up most of the book of Revelation. But the vision of Jesus Christ that begins the book does not describe Jesus in His future glory, but depicts Him in the present as the **glorified Lord of the church**. In spite of all the disappointments, the Lord had not abandoned His church or His promises. This powerful vision of Christ's present ministry to them must have provided great hope and comfort to the wondering and suffering churches to whom John wrote. **Verses 9–20** provide the setting for the vision, unfold the vision itself, and relate its effects.

John Walvoord: Perhaps the most important thing we can say at this point is that the revelation embodied in this book, though often presented in **symbols**, is designed to **reveal truth**, not to hide it. Symbols in Revelation refer to something literal. There is a reality behind the symbols. Though all the symbols are not explained, in the great majority of cases the symbols are interpreted in one way or another in the Word of God. So even though many people say that Revelation is too hard to understand, or too filled with symbolism to be meaningful in today's world, that is simply not the case. God gave us His revelation for our understanding, our obedience, our warning, and our encouragement.

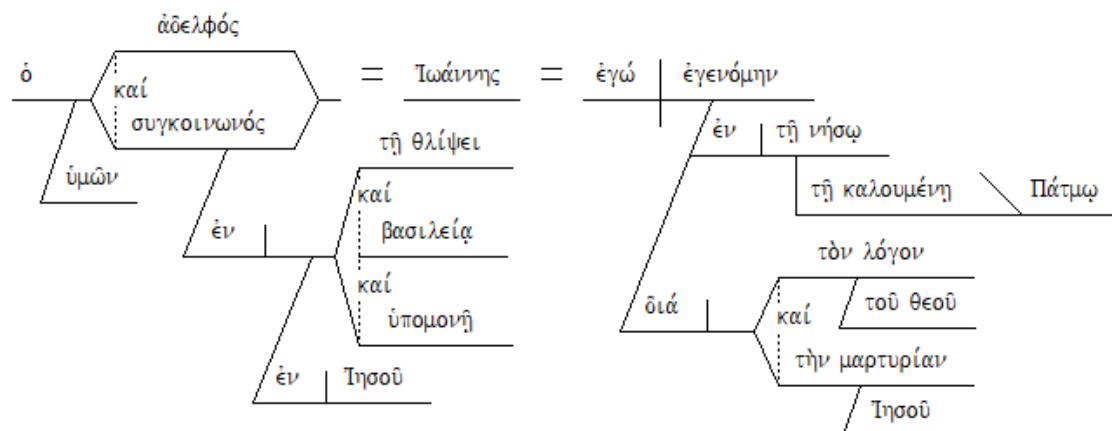
G.R. Beasley-Murray: The purpose of John's prophecy, from its first page to its last, is to assure the saints of God that they are kings and priests to God through the redemptive grace of Christ. The purport of the symbolism of *the seven stars = the angels of the churches* is therefore plain: it declares that the sovereignty of this world belongs not to those who proudly claim to be the saviours and lords of men and who seek to crush the Church of Jesus. It belongs to the Christ of God and his people. **Lohmeyer** affirms that in this feature John's opening vision contains the heart and kernel of the whole of the Revelation. The rest of the prophecy unfolds the significance of this vision of Christ and how the destiny of his people finds its fulfilment.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: The churches are addressed through their representative angels, apparently in order to remind the believers that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly and that their real home is not with the unbelieving "*earth-dwellers*" (**3:10** and elsewhere in Revelation). And one of the purposes of the church meeting on earth in its weekly gatherings . . . is to be reminded of its heavenly existence and identity by modeling its worship on that of the angels' and heavenly church's worship of the exalted lamb. This is why scenes of heavenly worship are woven throughout Revelation. This initial vision has shown Christ standing in complete authority over human history, yet He does so standing amidst the churches

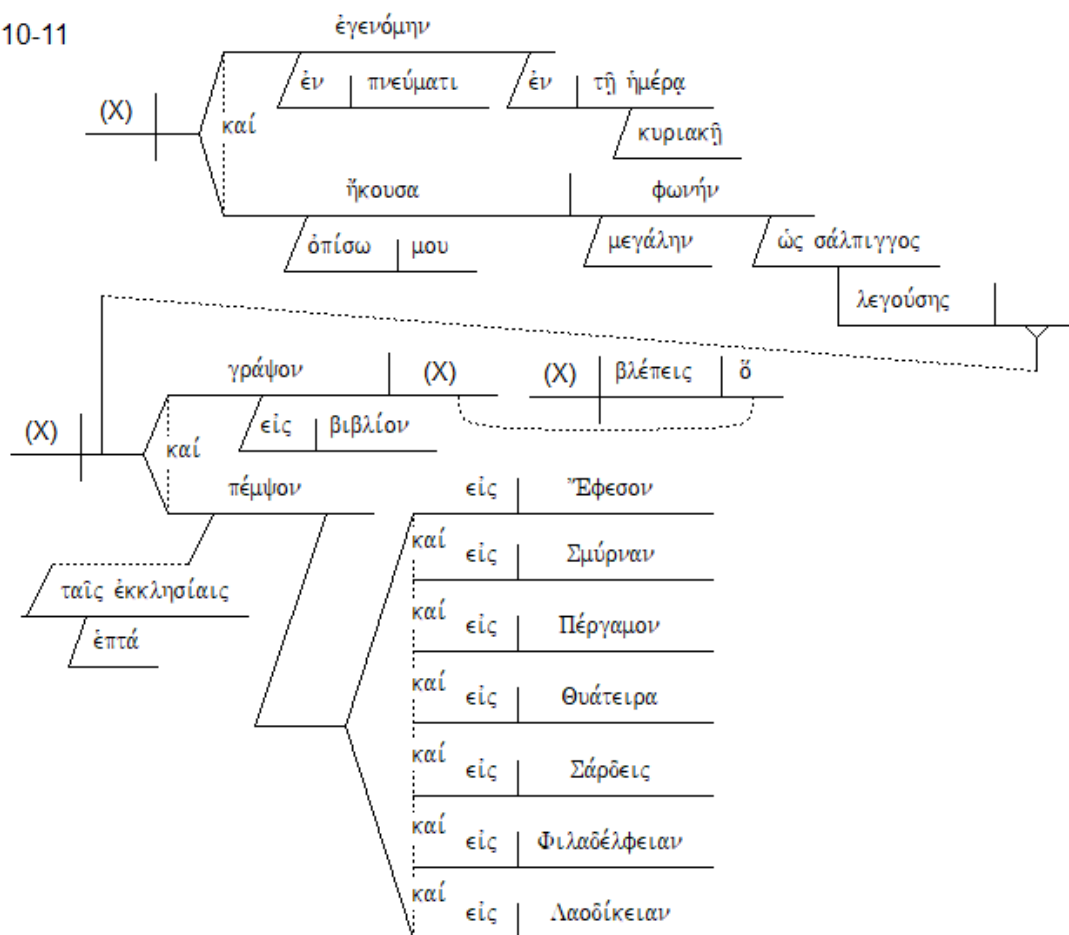
Van Parunak:

Verse	Description	Origin	Significance
13	one like unto the Son of man ,	Dan 7:13	Man
	clothed with a garment ἐνδύω G1746 down to the foot ποδῆρης G4158,	Ex. 29:5 And thou shalt take the garments, and put upon ἐνδύω Aaron the coat ποδῆρης, Zech. 3:4 I will clothe ἐνδύω thee [Joshua the HP] with change of raiment ποδῆρης. Ezek 9:2 one man among them was clothed ἐνδύω with linen ποδῆρης, (also 9:3, 11) <i>to mark the righteous</i>	Priest
	and girt about the paps with a golden girdle .	Dan. 10:5 Then I lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man ... whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz :	Conqueror of kings
14	His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow;	Dan. 7:9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow , and the hair of his head like the pure wool :	God
	and his eyes were as a flame of fire;	Dan. 10:6a ... his eyes as lamps of fire,	Conqueror of kings
15	And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace;	Dan 10:6b his feet like in colour to polished brass,	Conqueror of kings
	and his voice as the sound of many waters .	Ezek. 43:2 And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters :	God
16	his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength .	Judg. 5:31 let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might .	Righteous man

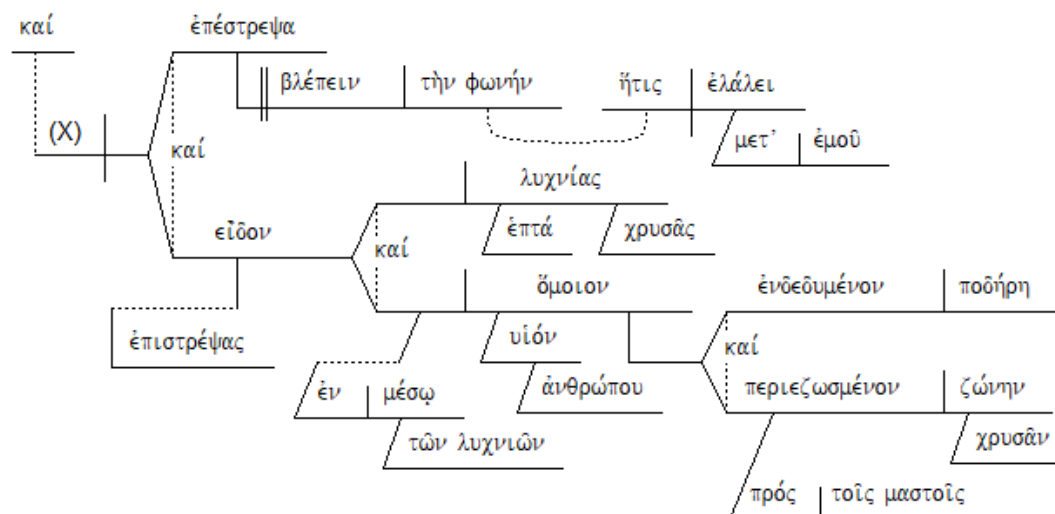
Rev 1:9

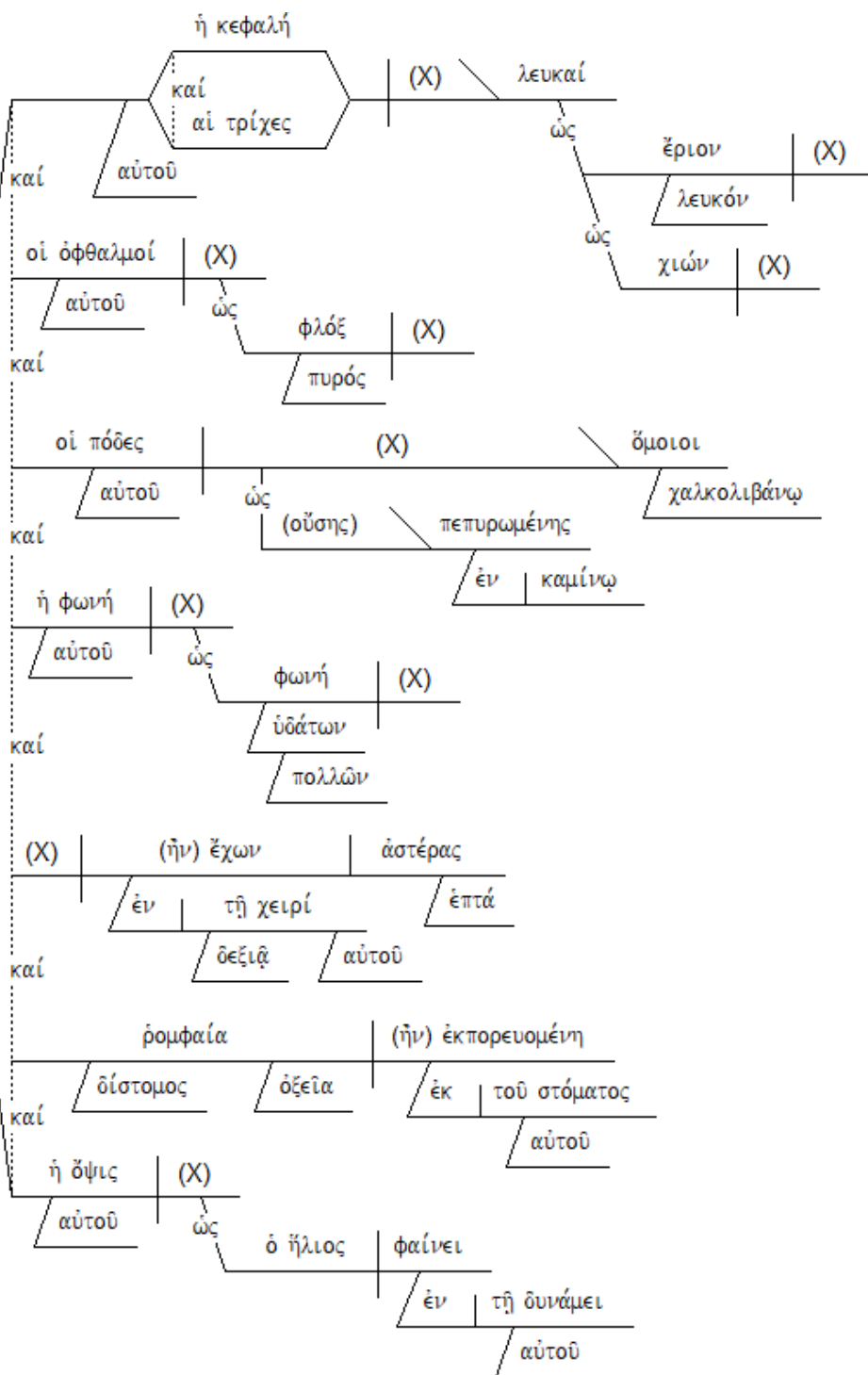


Rev 1:10-11

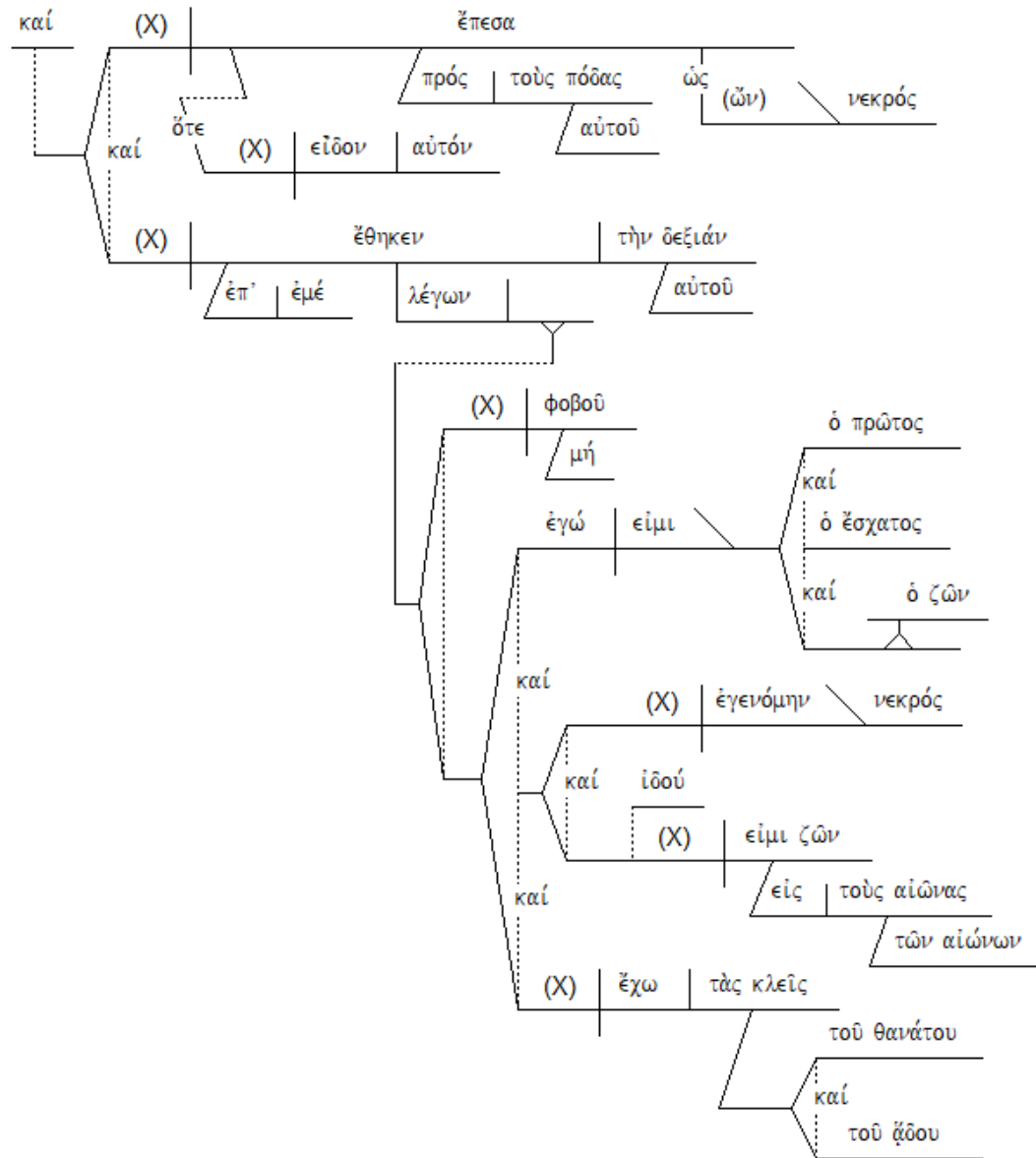


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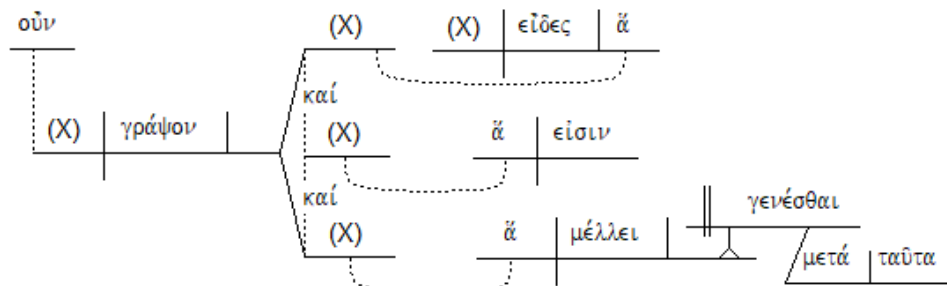


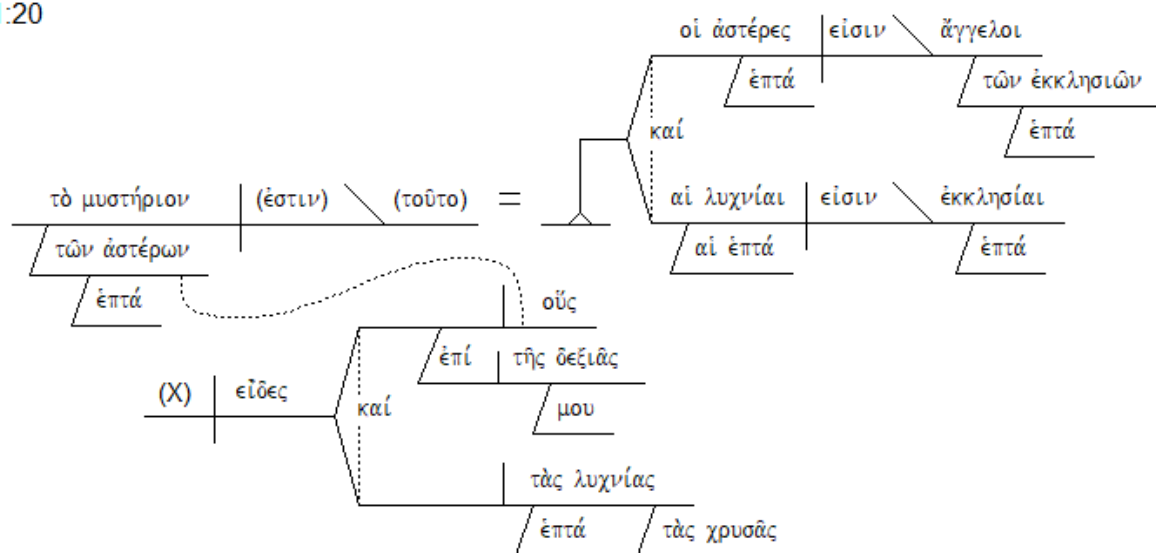


Rev 1:17-18



Rev 1:19





TEXT: Revelation 2:1-7

TITLE: LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS = LOVELESS ORTHODOXY

BIG IDEA:

GOOD WORKS AND DOCTRINAL DISCERNMENT CANNOT EXCUSE A FAILURE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

INTRODUCTION:

Marvin Rosenthal: I believe that the messages to the seven churches of Asia Minor (**Rev. 2-3**) are not descriptions of different periods of church history or characteristics of the church during all periods of its history, as pretribulationism is forced to conclude. Rather, the letters to the seven churches are an urgent warning call to all Christendom – a call to make one’s salvation sure (**2 Pet. 1:10**) – a call to be overcomes (**Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21**), not through exemption from the Tribulation by rapture, but by being willing to suffer and die for Christ, if necessary, under the persecution of the Antichrist – always, however, with the blessed hope of rapture before God’s wrath is poured out during the Day of the Lord. In absolutely no sense does the potential for suffering before the Rapture negate the “*blessed hope*” (**Titus 2:13**).

Van Parunak: The Parallel Structure of the Seven Letters

	Ephesus, 2:1-7	Smyrna, 2:8-11	Pergamos, 2:12-17	Thyatira, 2:18-29	Sardis, 3:1-6	Philadelphia, 3:7-13	Laodicea, 3:14-22
Command to write	1a	8a	12a	18a	1a	7a	14a
Title from ch. 1	1b	8b	12b	18b	1b	7b	14b
Message	2-6	9-10	13-16	19-25	1c-4	8-11	15-20
I know thy works	2a	9a	13a	19a	1c	8a	15a
Praise	2-3	9b	13	19		8-11	
Exhortation		10				11b	
Criticism	4-5		14-16	20-23	2-3		15-20
Exhortation	5		16		3		18-20
Praise	6			24	4		
Exhortation				25			
Promise to Overcomers				26-28	5	12	21
Let him hear	7a	11a	17a	29	6	13	22
Promise to Overcomers	7b	11b	17b				

Table 3: The Structure of the Seven Letters

Grant Osborne: As **Sweet** (1979: 77) says, “It is in fact clear that John had intimate pastoral knowledge of each congregation and was dealing with actual situations in each place.” Most others believe that they are addressed both to individual churches and to all of Asia Minor. As stated in the discussion of **1:11**, the churches were natural centers for disseminating information to the other churches of the province, so the problems in those churches were also representative of the rest of the churches. Each letter ends with “*hear what the Spirit says to the churches,*” so all the churches of Asia Minor were to heed the promises and warnings given to each church and apply it to themselves.

Henry Morris: (*The Revelation Record*) Each church receives a message composed of seven arts:

- (1) salutation;
- (2) identification of Christ as sender;
- (3) assertion of knowledge;
- (4) comment and exhortation;
- (5) promise (or threatened) coming;
- (6) admonition to heed; and
- (7) promised blessing

Buist Fanning: Jesus commends the church in Ephesus for their faithful endurance in the true faith but calls them to repent for their failure to love God and people as they once did. . .

John previously saw Christ in the midst of the lampstands (**1:13**), but here Christ declares that he “walks” (περιπατῶν) in their midst, a picture of active engagement with his churches in their everyday experience of life. He knows intimately their hard circumstances (cf. **vv. 2–3, 6**) and their successes, as well as their failings, and is vigilant to guard their fidelity.

Kendell Easley: Jesus knows the strengths and weaknesses of each local congregation and gives them the proper compliments and challenges.

(:1) PROLOGUE – THE SOVEREIGN LORD SPEAKS WITH AUTHORITY

A. Command to Write to the Church at Ephesus

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:”

Grant Osborne: One of the four most powerful cities in the Roman Empire (with Rome, Alexandria, and Syrian Antioch), Ephesus, a city of more than a quarter of a million people, lay at the harbor where the Cayster River met the Aegean Sea in western Asia Minor. In ancient times it had become a major city after being captured by Croesus of Lydia (550 B.C.), who contributed greatly to rebuilding the temple of Artemis and established the city. Alexander the Great moved the population from the temple site to the harbor, and a thriving city developed. The temple (called the “Artemision”) had been burnt to the ground but was rebuilt in the fourth century and became one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus quickly became a center of commerce and trade for all of western Asia Minor, one of the most prosperous provinces in the Roman Empire. Under the Syrian conqueror Antiochus III (197 B.C.), it became the capital of the region. It came under Roman control in 133 B.C., but at first there was considerable anti-Roman sentiment, and indeed the city joined a revolt by Mithridates VI, put down by Pompey in 69 B.C. Things settled down after that, and during the reign of Augustus, Ephesus and Pergamum were rivals for prominence as the capital of the province of Asia. Ephesus became the greatest city of the area, with major construction projects and a thriving commercial and religious life. Three great trade routes met at the city: from the Euphrates by way of Laodicea and Colosse, from Galatia by way of Sardis, and from the Maeander Valley in the southeast corner of Asia Minor.

Buist Fanning: Ephesus itself in the first century AD was the most important city of Asia Minor (with Pergamum and Smyrna as its rivals) and one of the three most important cities in the eastern Mediterranean (alongside Alexandria and Syrian Antioch). It was the Roman provincial capital and was a major port for trade and the entry point for sea travel from Italy and Greece to

the west. A system of quite serviceable roads connected it to coastal areas to the north and south and to inland regions to the east. It was a populous city (estimates range from 175,000 to 250,000 inhabitants, probably closer to the lower range) and bustling with trade as well as cottage industries and craft workshops of various kinds. Impressive public and private buildings and numerous religious structures (temples, shrines, monuments, statues) dominated the urban scene of Ephesus, especially the gigantic temple of Artemis or Diana. Other religious sites honored Roma, Julius Caesar, Augustus, and the Flavian emperors as well as more traditional western and eastern deities such as Cybele, Hestia, Serapis, and Zeus. There was a Jewish community in Ephesus from the third century BC (according to Josephus, Ag. Ap. 2.39). An important church had existed there since the time of Paul or earlier (**Acts 18–20; Eph; 1 Tim 1**), and Paul's two-year ministry there in the early AD 50s was a catalyst for the spread of Christianity in the whole province (**Acts 19:10**). We know of other early Christians who ministered in Ephesus both before and after Paul's two-year stay there (Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, Timothy). **Revelation 1–3** as well as the letters of Ignatius, the Martyrdom of Polycarp, and later patristic references attest to the ongoing life of the church in Ephesus.

Robert Thomas: religious life of Ephesus revolved about the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis (identified with the Roman goddess Diana) (cf. **Acts 19:24, 27, 28, 34, 35**), for whom it served as the center of worship. Her 425-foot long by 220-foot wide temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Each of its 120 columns was donated by a king. The image of Artemis was one of the most sacred objects of worship in the ancient world, but it was not beautiful. It was a grotesque, squat, black, many-breasted figure that was reputed to have fallen from heaven (cf. **Acts 19:27, 35**). Nevertheless, the citizens were fanatically devoted to worshiping the image. Besides being a religious center, the temple was a gathering place for criminals and the scene of widespread immorality. Criminals came there in droves because it provided them an asylum where they were safe after committing a crime. Prostitution thrived there because the immoral activities were looked upon as sacred, and the prostitutes themselves were viewed as priestesses.

The population of the city was of diverse backgrounds. One group was the original natives who inhabited the area before the arrival of the Greeks. Added to these were the direct descendants of the original colonists from Athens. A third group was composed of three other tribes of Greek lineage. Finally, the city had a substantial Jewish population.

Gordon Fee: Nowhere in these documents are “*angels*” thought of as anything other than angels. What John appears to do, therefore, is to keep the apocalyptic genre alive by the use of this word, since what follows in each case is the least apocalyptic material in the entire document. Most likely it is John's need to address the seven churches in a basically straightforward manner, accompanied by his desire to keep intact the apocalyptic nature of the book as a whole, that has brought about this unusual way of speaking to the seven churches. After all, angels reappear throughout the book as presenting or carrying out the divine plan.

B. Control and Concern Exercised by the Sovereign Head of the Church

1. Sovereign Control over the Churches

“The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand,”

Robert Mounce: The two particples are instructive: Christ holds the angels (they are in his control) and walks among the lampstands (he is present in their midst and aware of their activities).

2. Shepherding Concern for the Churches

“the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands,”

Grant Osborne: The imagery of “walking” combines the ideas of concern for and authority over the church.

Robert Thomas: His constant movement among and watchful eye over the churches have more to do with **control** than with protection. This involves His knowledge of the circumstances and, in the Ephesian situation, may very well relate to the removal of the church’s lampstand from its place (cf. **2:5**). His **constant vigil** of the churches determines whether or not the churches as lampstands are shining as they should (**Scott**). This activity is reminiscent of the OT priests who tended the lamps of the holy place of the Tabernacle to keep them trimmed, oiled, and burning.

C. Communication from the Sovereign Head of the Church

“says this.”

Buist Fanning: This is the Christ then who **authoritatively speaks** to his own in what follows. As mentioned earlier, the introductory phrase “says this” (τάδε λέγει) is a formula used to communicate an inspired message. It was used hundreds of times in the Old Testament to introduce God’s words to his people spoken through his prophets (e.g., **Isa 29:22; Jer 2:2; Ezek 11:5; Amos 1:6; Mic 2:3; Zech 1:3**). Using such a resonant phrase for these messages from Christ reflects the divine status that Revelation regularly assigns to Jesus himself.

I. (:2-3) COMMENDATION FOR FAITHFUL PERSEVERANCE AND DISCERNMENT

A. (:2a) Perseverance in Good Works

“I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance,”

Gordon Fee: “Work” in this case most likely refers to every form of labor that directly involves ministry (= service to others) of any kind, while “perseverance” means that they have not flagged in doing so.

Robert Thomas: The Ephesian church was engaged in slavish toil to the point of exhaustion and endured with lasting patience every burden it encountered. These qualities represent two sides of *erga*, an outward activity of labor (*kopon*) and an inward disposition of perseverance (*hypomonēn*). Κόπος (*Kopos*) originally meant “a beating accompanied by wailing and grief.” It developed into the connotation of hard work to the point of perspiration. The word is frequently connected closely in Revelation and in the rest of the NT with Christian work, carrying with it the idea of the weariness resulting from hard work (cf. **1 Thess. 1:3; Rev. 14:13**) (**Charles; Moffatt**). *Hypomonē* expresses patience with respect to circumstances, whereas a synonym μακροθυμία (*makrothymia*, “longsuffering”) is patience that relates to people. Perseverance triumphs over all opposition, as illustrated in the history of the Maccabean martyrs who are praised for their courage (4 Macc. 1:11) (**Moffatt**). This Christian quality of endurance in the midst of hard labor has the highest ethical standards. It is the brave patience through which Christians contend against hindrances, persecutions, and temptations that come in their conflict with the world.

B. (:2b) Discernment in Exposing False Apostles

1. Tolerance of Evil Imposters Is Anathema

“and that you cannot endure evil men,”

Buist Fanning: It was all too common even in the earliest eras of Christian history for teachers and prophets to travel from community to community under a claim of legitimacy while misleading believers with false doctrine (cf. **2 Cor 11:13–15**; **1 Thess 5:20–21**; **1 John 4:1–3**; as well as Did. 11.1–12; 13.1–2). At earlier stages in their history Paul too warned the leaders of the Ephesian church against the threat of false teachers from outside and inside the church and the need to guard against it (**Acts 20:28–32**; **1 Tim 1:3–7**). All churches must heed this call for vigilance (**Rev 2:7a**).

2. Testing of Evil Imposters Leads to Exposure

“and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;”

William Barclay: More than once, the New Testament insists on the **necessity of testing**. John in his First Letter insists that the spirits who claim to come from God should be tested by their willingness to accept the incarnation in all its fullness (**1 John 4:1–3**). Paul insists that the Thessalonians should test all things and then hold on to that which is good (**1 Thessalonians 5:21**). He insists that, when the prophets preach, they are subject to the testing of the other prophets (**1 Corinthians 14:29**). Individuals cannot proclaim private views in the assembly of God’s people; they must conform to the tradition of the Church. Jesus demanded the hardest test of all: ‘*You will know them by their fruits*’ (**Matthew 7:15–20**).

Van Parunak: Recall that designating a messenger as an apostle emphasizes that they carry the **authority** of the one who has sent them. We have seen that many people passed through Ephesus. Some of those who visited the church sought to bolster their prestige by claiming falsely to represent some respected individual or congregation, perhaps churches such as Antioch or Jerusalem. It is likely that such deception would be invoked to support further false teaching, such as that against which Paul warned the elders when he met them at Miletus (**Acts 20:28–30**), and later warned Timothy (**1 Timothy 6**).

Perhaps because of Paul’s warnings, the church was diligent in examining those who came to it. Consistent with the theological maturity we see in Ephesians, it did not tolerate such error. We have other, even later testimony to this diligence.

Ignatius was bishop of Antioch about AD 100, who was martyred in Rome sometime early in the second century. While being transported there, he wrote seven letters, three of which were to churches among these seven (Ephesus, Philadelphia, and Smyrna). He commends the Ephesians for this same virtue.

C. (:3) Perseverance without Quitting

“and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.”

Robert Thomas: They had so persevered *dia to onoma mou*, “*because of My name*,” says Christ. Here the name of Christ has in view the gospel revelation through which He makes Himself known (**Lenski**). The identical phrase occurs in **Matt. 10:22** and **24:9** in contexts where Christ’s

persecuted followers were engaged in spreading the gospel (Hort). Before leaving earth Jesus had predicted the very thing that Ephesian Christendom was now experiencing. They persevered for the sake of the purity of the message they preached. In spite of toil to the point of weariness (see *kopon*, v. 2) they had not grown weary (*ou kekopiakes*). This is a great paradox. Never did they entertain any thought of giving up (Scott). It was labor to the point of weariness without weariness setting in (Hort). Their loyalty to the Lord preempted weariness.

II. (:4-5) CORRECTION AND CALL FOR REPENTANCE

A. (:4) Complaint

“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”

Buist Fanning: It is a veneer of busy outward activity without the inward motivation of sincere love in response to God’s great love for them in Christ and without the grace and love toward others that is needed. They have “*abandoned*” (CSB, ESV, RSV) or “*forsaken*” (NIV) the heartfelt love that once characterized their Christian conduct.

Robert Mounce: Good works and pure doctrine are not adequate substitutes for that rich relationship of mutual love shared by those who have experienced for the first time the redemptive love of God.

Richard Phillips: This rebuke is understood in two ways. Many commentators hear Jesus saying that in their zeal for correct doctrine, the Ephesians have become unloving toward people. In earlier days they warmly embraced all who named the Lord in faith, but their zealous orthodoxy has made them suspicious and harsh. The second view sees this rebuke as charging the Ephesians with growing cold in their love for Jesus and their zeal for a close relationship with him. It is likely that both are involved, especially since loss of love for God will result in less fervent affection for fellow Christians. This poses a serious challenge for doctrinally minded people: Jesus’ rebuke does not say that zeal for truth must always make our love grow cold, but it certainly indicates that it is possible. This is why Paul warned: “*If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing*” (1 Cor. 13:2).

Robert Thomas: Johannine literature gives great prominence to love for fellow Christians. In fact, brotherly love was very early regarded as authentic proof of faith in Christ (v. 19; John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:13-14; 2 John 5-6; 3 John 6). At the same time, brotherly love cannot be separated from love for Christ, because it is proof of that love (cf. 1 John 4:20). An example of love that serves also as a definition is given in 1 John 4:10: “*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son [to be] a propitiation for our sins.*” Love is not a reciprocation. It takes the initiative, is sacrificial in nature, and meets the needs of its object. In addition, love is inseparable from obeying God’s commands (1 John 5:2; cf. Rom. 13:8-10). Love and moral purity go together (Moffatt).

Something was missing in the relationships among these Ephesians, but this only reflects a deeper need. Most basically, their love for Christ had grown cold, causing the relational problems, and it is this root problem that is primarily addressed. “The love of first conversion had waxed cold, and given place to a lifeless and formal orthodoxy” (Alford). Some vital element that had characterized their initial relationship to the Savior had now disappeared.

Kendell Easley: In their pursuit of truth and their patience in persecution, these Christians had allowed a tragic flaw to infect their fellowship. Christ's criticism surely stung: *You have forsaken your first love*. Some interpreters think this refers to the love (Greek *agapê*) they had for Christ when they were new converts. In the context, however, it refers mainly to their love for one another, which Christ had said was the hallmark for his disciples (**John 13:35**). In rooting out error and expelling false teachers, they had grown suspicious of one another. I once heard a preacher refer to people whose theology was “clear as ice and just as cold.” That was a description of the Ephesians. Their good deeds were now motivated by duty rather than love.

B. (:5a) Call to Repentance

1. Remember

“Remember therefore from where you have fallen,”

2. Repent

“and repent”

3. Reboot

“and do the deeds you did at first,”

Richard Phillips: Remember, repent, and return—this is Christ’s call to reformation for churches that have grown dim and Christians who have abandoned their first love.

C. (:5b) Censure

1. Accountability at Christ’s Soon Return

“or else I am coming to you,”

2. Possibility of Rejection

“and will remove your lampstand out of its place—”

Buist Fanning: The metaphor of “*lamps*” as shining witnesses to Christ’s salvation for all to see is a central theme here as well as later in Revelation (cf. the two witnesses as “*lamps*” in **11:3–4**), and it expresses the larger principle that Christians are lights in a dark world, testifying to God’s love in Christ only in so far as they live in love themselves (**John 13:34–35; Phil 2:14–16**).

Consistent failure to exhibit this cardinal Christian virtue forfeits their right to bear the name of Christ. Just as some individuals claimed to be apostles but were not (**Rev 2:2**), so churches that fail to bear the identifying mark of Christian love will be exposed as counterfeits.

3. Necessity of Repentant

“unless you repent.”

III. (:6) CAVEAT

“Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

John MacArthur: We want to ask, What are the deeds of the Nicolaitans? What were they doing? What was their doctrine? What was their error? What were they all about? There are a number of possibilities. But we find this heresy in another location. The letter to the church at Pergamus, down in **chapter 2** we find it again – **verse 15**. “*Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.*” That’s hard to day. What do you mean the same way? Go

back to **verse 14**, “*I have a few things against you because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.*” Balaam we understand. Right? Back to **Numbers 22** and following, Balaam came along and seduced God’s people into idolatry, seduced God’s people into immorality. He posed as a prophet, which he was, and he came along and instead of leading people to godliness, he led them to sin, to idolatry and to immorality. That’s what Balaam did.

Verse 15 then, “*Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.*” It seems to me that whatever Balaam did, the same thing was being done by the Nicolaitans. Let me take it a step further. The word Nicolas comes from two Greek words: *nikē*, from which you get the word today Nike, which means to conquer; and the word *laos*. Nikos – to conquer, *laos* – people. The word means conqueror of the people, one who conquers the people. Listen to this. The Hebrew word Balaam means destroyer of the people – the Hebrew word Balaam means destroyer of the people. What you have here with Nicolas in the New Testament appears to be the same as you had with Balaam in the Old Testament. **This is someone who by false teaching leads people into destructive sin. . .**

So that’s probably the best guess at who these people were. For sure we know that those who followed Nicolas were involved in immorality and uncleanness and they plied the church with sensual temptations. **Clement of Alexander** says, “They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence.” They were involved in immorality, loose living. Liberty was replaced with license. They were involved in teaching perverted grace. They were probably a pre-gnostic group, thinking that through their sexual activity and their superior knowledge they had ascended to the deities. They may even have perpetrated on the church a classical hierarchical structure which found its final form in Catholicism. But whatever, **verse 6** says Christ hates them – I hate what they do and so do you.

Robert Thomas: the word Nicolaitan comes from the Greek compound νικος (*nikos*) and λαός (*laos*) and means “conqueror of the people.” Its Hebrew counterpart is “Balaam,” “devourer of the people.” These were forerunners of the **clerical hierarchy**.

Craig Keener: The most reasonable guess is that they offer views similar to (but not identical with) those of “Balaam”—hence condone immorality and the eating of food offered to idols (**2:14–15**), apparently common areas of assimilation among early Christians (cf. **1 Cor. 6; 8–10**).

(:7) EPILOGUE – BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME

A. Pay Attention

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Buist Fanning: The command to hear is very similar to Jesus’s words describing the purpose of his parables (**Matt 13:9; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8**), where he acknowledges that some are unreceptive and will not comprehend the spiritual truths veiled within the parable, but he calls all those to whom God has granted understanding to obey what they hear. This fulfills what is seen in **Isaiah 6:9–10** about stubborn people continuing to resist even a word from God. While these circumstances are different (the messages to the churches are not cryptic), the command of **v. 7a** acknowledges that some will be receptive and some not, and it calls on individuals within the community to respond (“*anyone who has an ear*”). There will be some in the churches who are

not prepared to heed the message, who will go their own stubborn way. However, the clear intent is to provoke an active response by those who are receptive: they must pay attention and obey. It is a wake-up call for the faithful in the Ephesian church, but in this way it is a positive encouragement for them to heed the exhortations of vv. 5–6 and so receive the promised blessing of v. 7b (cf. also 1:3).

B. Persevere to Receive the Blessing

1. Condition

“To him who overcomes,”

Buist Fanning: The message closes (v. 7b) with a promise that points beyond current difficulties to God’s future consummation (Rev 21–22). Again, the individual Christian is addressed (*“the one who overcomes”*), but the action referred to has a corporate, even cosmic, dimension. “Overcoming” alludes to the universal and age-long struggle of all that is evil, including the devil and the world system that he controls (1 John 2:13–17; 4:2–4), against God Almighty and the saving purpose he is bringing to fulfillment in his entire creation. Christians are caught in the middle of this conflict and are called to faithful endurance even if it means suffering and martyrdom (John 16:32–33a; Rev 1:9; 13:10; 14:12). However, Christ has already won the decisive victory (John 16:33b; Rev 3:21; see comments on 5:5), and his followers will be victorious not by their own efforts but by their faith in him (1 John 4:4; 5:4–5; Rev 12:11; 15:2; 17:14; 21:5–7).

Because of these parallels in the rest of Revelation and in the wider Johannine literature, it is clear that *“the one who overcomes”* is the one who genuinely believes in Christ and who by virtue of God’s new birth finds the ability to endure in that faith against idolatry and persecution (1 John 4:4; 5:4–5; Rev 13:10; 14:12; 21:5–7). This victory is not limited to those who suffer martyrdom for their faith or to a group of more committed or obedient Christians over against other believers who are less spiritual. Another argument against these views is the benefits promised in Revelation 2–3 to the overcomer, since according to the rest of Revelation these benefits accrue to all believers in Christ, not only to a limited group of them (e.g., 22:2–3, 14, 19).

2. Promise

“I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.”

Van Parunak: The big lesson of the church of Ephesus is the warning not to let our love for the Lord stagnate, but to stand for him, even if we are excluded from this world’s pleasures, knowing that a paradise far greater than that of any pagan temple awaits us.

Robert Thomas: The tree of life stands in *“the Paradise of God.”* *Paradeis* is derived from a Persian word describing a pleasure garden and park with wild animals built for Persian monarchs. Two other NT uses of the word (Luke 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4) with the present verse show it to be a name for the **abode of God**, a permanent home of the redeemed with Christ. What was originally a garden of delight has taken on the connotation of the new heavens and the new earth.

The beauty and satisfaction of such a future existence furnish ample incentive and more for those in this church to overcome by heeding the words of Him who holds fast the seven messengers and walks in the middle of the seven churches (2:1).

John Schultz: The promise connected to this victory is wonderful and glorious. Jesus puts us back in paradise in front of the **tree of life**. We may stretch out our hand, eat of its fruit and live eternally. History repeats itself although not on the same level. This is not the Garden of Eden on earth but the paradise of God. The garden in which Adam found himself was a shadow; this is the reality. If I understand this correctly, the conditions in paradise were a picture of a sublime choice man could make. Adam stood between two trees: the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Eating from the tree of life would have meant an unconditional, loving surrender to God. We all know what happened when the first two human beings ate from the tree of knowledge. The fact that the tree of life is found in the paradise of God means that we will be able to constantly surrender ourselves to God in love. Evidently, this surrender is not “once for all,” it stands to be repeated. The first surrender may be a crisis experience for us more than the following ones, but real love always keeps on surrendering. Jesus Himself gives us the example in that, when the last victory is won, He will submit Himself to the Father. The apostle Paul writes: “*When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.*” The fact that the tree of life that is found in the New Jerusalem bears fruit every month makes us understand that eternal life is not an automatic process. We will live eternally because we eat eternally.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What good deeds have you been accomplishing for the Lord lately?
- 2) Do you place a high value on the exercise of discernment while not forsaking the Christian practice of love?
- 3) What does this passage teach about the process of repentance?
- 4) What are you looking forward to when it comes to spending time with Jesus in Paradise?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Phillips: Christ’s people need to hear Christ’s voice. The tendency is for our ideas about the church to veer in a selfish or worldly direction unless we are constantly under the correction of our Sovereign Lord. This being the case, it is remarkable that the messages of Revelation 2–3 exert so little influence among Christians today. Few believers have given serious study to these chapters, and few churches would highlight these as guiding passages for their life and ministry. Yet the Christ who speaks in these chapters continues to stand in the midst of his lampstands, continues to reign as the Sovereign of his churches, and continues to hold the stars of the churches in his hand. Because the exalted Christ continues to proclaim his priorities to the church through these seven messages, Christians should study **Revelation 2–3** with special care and respond with reverent obedience.

Marvin Rosenthal: These chapters [Rev. 2-3] contain the seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor. They were actual churches which existed in the first century. The apostle John was writing to them concerning problems which existed at that time. . .

Since the book of Revelation is a book of eschatology (the doctrine of last things), the letters to the seven churches must have prophetic significance. . . many pretribulation Bible teachers have suggested that the problems exhibited in the seven churches represent the recurring problems which would occur within the church during every age of its history. . .

many pretribulationists also hold that the seven churches reflect the prophetic character of Christendom during different stages of its history and development. **Gary Cohen** gives an overview of those stages:

Ephesus – The Apostolic Church (A.D. 30-100)
Smyrna – The Persecuted Church (A.D. 100-313)
Pergamos – The State Church (A.D. 313-590)
Thyatira – The Papal Church (A.D. 590-1517)
Sardis – The Reformed Church (A.D. 1517-1790)
Philadelphia – The Missionary Church (A.D. 1730-1900_)
Laodicea – The Apostate Church (A.D. 1900 -)

Problems with this view:

- Based on assumption
- Very subjective
- The designations are stilted and incomplete designations that do not conform to the total content of the letters to the seven churches

How, then, should the letters to the seven churches be understood? Exactly as other prophetic truth is understood. . . They frequently took a near contemporary event and used it as a frame of reference to project into the end times, there to discuss an issue of similar nature but greater magnitude. . .

The seven churches of **Revelation 2 and 3** were chosen from among many churches which then existed to receive letters for two reasons. First, seven is the number of completion and perfection. . . Second, those seven churches perfectly illustrated the full-orbed strengths and weaknesses of Christendom during the seventieth week of Daniel. This commonality allowed the seven churches to be the springboard to give warning to Christendom at the end of the age. . .

Pretribulation rapturism, in its insistence that the church is raptured at the beginning of the seventieth week, cannot allow these churches to represent Christendom during the seventieth week. They are forced to find another way to interpret the letters to the seven churches. More importantly, as in **Matthew 24:42 – 25:30**, in so doing they negate the warnings which God gives for the church during the seventieth week. . .

There is a promise given in common to all seven churches. If they are **overcomers**, they will be rewarded. . . To overcome is to vanquish the enemy, to be triumphant over difficulty. The entire context of the seven churches is set in the arena of the seventieth week and the activity of Satan and the Antichrist. . .

Second, there is the clear statement to the churches that **Christ's return is at the door**. It is highly doubtful that anyone who rightly viewed the book of Revelation as futurist would ever have suggested that the letters to the seven churches were not warnings to Christendom inside the seventieth week – were it not an absolute essential to have the churches removed from that period to sustain pretribulation rapturism. But, to do so, one must ignore the clear and direct warnings to the churches, avoid the urgent atmosphere that is so prevalent in the letters to the seven churches, and sever **chapters 2 and 3** from the seventieth week emphasis of the rest of the book.

If one understands that Christ's second coming is not **imminent** (no prophesied events must occur before Christ's return), as pretribulationism vainly asserts, but **expectant** (the events of the seventieth week, including Christ's return, can occur in any generation), as the weight of biblical evidence teaches, then these warnings become of great significance to every generation of Christians.

Sola Scriptura: [Takes the position that **all believers are not overcomers**]

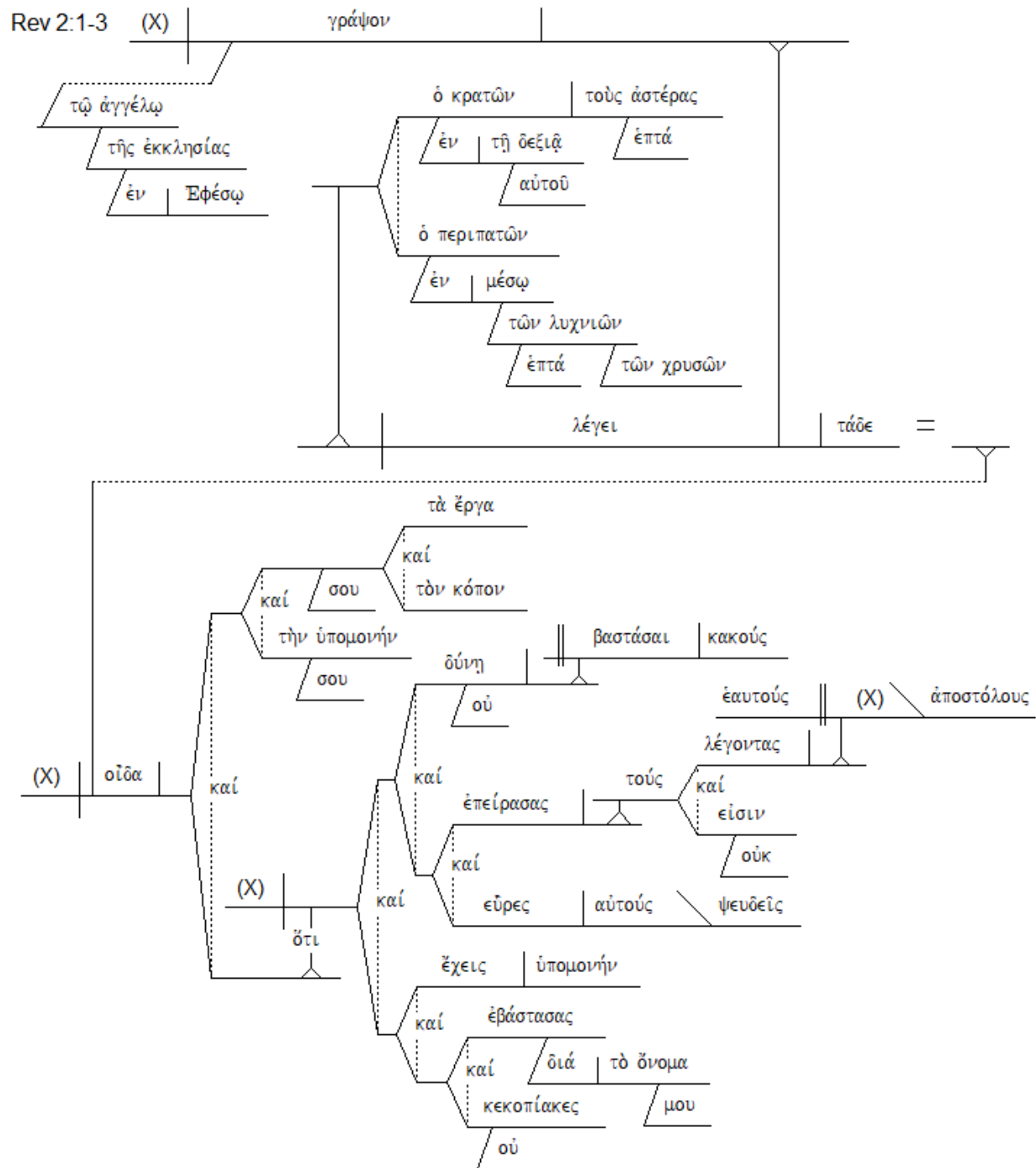
One can be an overcomer in two ways in the New Testament: (1) salvific and (2) sanctification. The difference is one of conditionality. [**1 John 5:4-5** = salvific example]

However, the overcome in Revelation is vastly different. . . The rewards and the warnings make no sense unless some believers will not receive them because of their unfaithfulness. Why warn a person about something he cannot lose? We can debate what is lost, but there is no debate that something is lost with grave consequences to follow (See **1 Cor. 3:16** and **1 John 2:28**). . .

The overcomer in Revelation can lose his reward. It is not eternal. To compromise in the face of physical danger will have severe consequences during the persecution by Antichrist and when one stands before the Lord in judgment.

John MacArthur: [I agree with his position] To whom is this addressed? *To him who overcomes*. You're going to find that phrase repeatedly through these letters – to him who overcomes. You see it in **verse 11**; you see it in **verse 17**. *To him who overcomes* – common – down in **verse 26**. And it always refers to the same person. You know who it is? **Believers**. It's just a reference to believers. People have done all kinds of gymnastics to try to figure out what this means. It just means Christians. You say, how do you know that? First John 5 – **1 John 5**, same writer, John, for whatever is born of God overcomes. "*Whatever is born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world? He who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*" That's John's own definition of his own term that he writes on behalf of Christ. **An overcomer is a Christian**. To you true believers, he says, to you true Christians, I want to give you a promise.

Leedy Greek Diagram:



Rev 2:4 ἄλλ' (X) ἀφῆκες τὴν ἀγάπην
 σου τὴν πρώτην
 (X) ἔχω ὅτι
 κατά σοῦ

Rev 2:5 οὖν (X) πέπτωκας
 πόθεν
 μνημόνευε
 (X) καί μετανόησον
 καί
 οὐδέ ποίησον τὰ ἔργα
 πρώτα
 ἔρχομαι
 (X) καί σοι
 κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν
 σου
 ἐκ τοῦ τόπου
 αὐτῆς
 εἰ (X) μή
 εἰάν (X) μετανόησης
 μή

Rev 2:6 ἀλλά

	(X)	μισεῖς	τὰ ἔργα		ἐγώ	μισῶ	ἅ
	(X)	ἔχεις	τοῦτο	=	ὅτι	τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν	καί

⌋

Rev 2:7 ὁ ἔχων οὖς

	ἀκουσάτω	(X)		τὸ πνεῦμα	λέγει	τί
				ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις		

⌋

τῷ νικῶντι

⌋

	(X)	δώσω	φαγεῖν		ἐκ	τοῦ ξύλου		ὁ	ἐστίν
	αὐτῷ			⌋	τῆς ζωῆς	⌋	ἐν	τῷ παραδείσῳ	τοῦ θεοῦ

TEXT: Revelation 2:8-11

TITLE: LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA – INTENSE PERSECUTION

BIG IDEA:

ANTICIPATING FUTURE RESURRECTION FORTIFIES BELIEVERS TO FAITHFULLY ENDURE PERSECUTION EVEN TO THE POINT OF DEATH

INTRODUCTION:

John MacArthur: Throughout its history, the seemingly paradoxical truth has been that the more the church has been persecuted, the greater has been its purity and strength. For decades, churches in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were oppressed by their atheistic communist governments. Believers continue to be persecuted in Muslim countries and elsewhere to this day. They are forbidden to openly proclaim their faith. Many are imprisoned and some martyred. In the Soviet Union books, even Bibles, were scarce. Yet not only did those churches survive, they prospered. The lifting of the Iron Curtain revealed a powerful, pure church, one characterized by genuine faith, deep spirituality, humility, zeal, love of the truth, and single-minded devotion to the Lord.

Scripture links persecution and spiritual strength. “*Consider it all joy, my brethren,*” wrote James, “*when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing*”(James 1:2–4). Peter encouraged suffering Christians with the truth that “*after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you*” (1 Pet. 5:10). The purest Christian graces are those forged in the furnace of adversity.

The church at Smyrna displayed the power and purity that comes from successfully enduring persecution. Persecution had purified and purged it from sin and affirmed the reality of its members’ faith. Hypocrites do not stay to face persecution, because false believers do not want to endure the pain. Trials and persecution strengthen and refine genuine saving faith, but uncover and destroy false faith.

Warren Wiersbe: It costs to be a dedicated Christian, in some places more than others. As end-time pressures increase, persecution will also increase, and God’s people need to be ready (1 Peter 4:12ff.). The world may call us “poor Christians,” but in God’s sight we are rich!

Daniel Akin: Though followers of Jesus will face opposition and even martyrdom in this world for the sake of the gospel, the promise of Christ is ultimate deliverance and eternal life. . .

Suffering, persecution, and martyrdom have indeed been the calling of the church of the Lord Jesus somewhere among the nations throughout her entire history. At one time the book *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* was a perennial best seller, cataloging the stories of men and women who gave their lives for Christ. Today *Voice of the Martyrs* updates us on the persecution and sufferings of our brothers and sisters around the world.

Kendell Easley: Christ commends the Smyrnan Christians for enduring persecution and pledges them eternal life, even though their troubles are about to intensify for a short time.

(:8) PROLOGUE – ENCOURAGEMENT FROM THE ETERNALITY AND RESURRECTION POWER OF CHRIST

A. Command to Write to the Church at Smyrna

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:”

John MacArthur: At the end of the first century, life was difficult and dangerous for the church at Smyrna. The city, long an ally of Rome, was a hotbed of emperor worship. Under Emperor Domitian, it became a capital offense to refuse to offer the yearly sacrifice to the emperor. Not surprisingly, many Christians faced execution. The most famous of Smyrna’s martyrs was Polycarp, executed half a century after John’s time.

The Greek word translated “*Smyrna*” was used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word for **myrrh**, a resinous substance used as a perfume for the living (**Matt. 2:11**) and the dead (**John 19:39**). Its association with death perfectly pictures the suffering church at Smyrna. Like myrrh, produced by crushing a fragrant plant, the church at Smyrna, crushed by persecution, gave off a fragrant aroma of faithfulness to God. At Smyrna, unlike Ephesus, there was no waning of love for Jesus Christ. Because the believers at Smyrna loved Him, they remained faithful to Him; because of that faithfulness, they were hated; because they were hated, they were persecuted; that persecution in turn incited them to love Christ more.

William Barclay: Smyrna was magnificently situated. It stood at the end of the road which crossed Lydia and Phrygia and travelled out to the far east, and it commanded the trade of the rich Hermus valley. Inevitably, it was a great trading city. The city itself stood at the end of a long arm of the sea, which ended in a small land-locked harbour in the heart of the city. It was the safest of all harbours and the most convenient; and it had the added advantage that in time of war it could be easily closed by a chain across its mouth. It was fitting that on the coins of Smyrna there should be the image of a merchant ship ready for sea.

The setting of the city was equally beautiful. It began at the harbour; it crossed the narrow foothills; and then behind the city there rose the Pagos, a hill covered with temples and noble buildings which were spoken of as ‘the Crown of Smyrna’. One traveller has described it as ‘a queenly city crowned with towers’. Aristides likened Smyrna to a great statue with the feet in the sea, the middle parts in the plain and the foothills, and the head, crowned with great buildings, on the Pagos behind. He called it ‘a flower of beauty such as earth and sun had never shown to mankind.’

Robert Mounce: Smyrna sustained a special relationship to Rome and the imperial cult. During the period when Rome was engaged in a struggle for supremacy against the Carthaginian empire (roughly 265–146 B.C.) Smyrna had placed itself squarely on the side of the Romans, and in 195 B.C. it became the first city in the ancient world to build a temple in honor of Dea Roma. Later, in 23 B.C., Smyrna won permission (over ten other Asian cities) to build a temple to the emperor Tiberius. This strong allegiance to Rome plus a large Jewish population that was actively hostile to the Christians made it exceptionally difficult to live as a Christian in Smyrna. The most famous martyrdom of the early church fathers was that of the elderly Polycarp, the “twelfth

martyr in Smyrna,” who, upon his refusal to acknowledge Caesar as Lord, was placed upon a pyre to be burned.

Robert Thomas: The founding of the Christian church in the city is a mystery. Perhaps it came during Paul’s three-year stay in nearby Ephesus. Whatever its origin, it is safe to say that nowhere was life more dangerous for a Christian. If anyone refused to confess “Caesar is Lord” along with his burning of incense, he was considered disloyal and became the object of persecution by the local and imperial governments. The martyrdom of Polycarp was not an isolated case; mass executions of Christians happened on numbers of occasions. It is no wonder that Jesus’ message to this church “drips” with words of encouragement to believers in a very perilous situation.

B. Characterization of Christ

1. The Eternal God

“The first and the last,”

Van Parunak: As in **1:17**, the title is that used of Jehovah in **Is. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12**. He omits “*and the living one,*” but continues as in **1:18**.

John MacArthur: *The first and the last* is an Old Testament title for God (**Isa. 44:6; 48:12**; cf. **41:4**), and its application here (and in **22:13**) to Christ affirms His equality of nature with God. He is the eternal, infinite God, who already existed when all things were created, and who will continue to exist after they are destroyed. Jesus Christ transcends time, space, and the creation.

Daniel Akin: The emphasis is on His eternality and sovereignty. He is the eternal Lord over all of history, and He will have the last word! He has always been aware of the circumstances of His people. He knows their situation right now. He has their future in plain sight. Time is in His hands. This is a God you can trust today and tomorrow. The city Smyrna may claim to be the “first in Asia,” but it is Christ who is the “First and Last,” and He alone provides “a superior foundation for security” (**Graves**, “Local References,” 25).

2. The Resurrected God-Man

“who was dead, and has come to life,”

John MacArthur: This designation of Christ was to bring comfort to the persecuted believers at Smyrna. Knowing that they were undergoing difficult times, Christ was reminding them that He transcends temporal matters, and, through their union with Him, so should they. And should they face death at the hands of their persecutors, beside them is the One who conquered death (**Heb. 2:14**) and who promised, “*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die*”(**John 11:25–26**).

Robert Mounce: In the salutation of each of the seven letters, Christ identifies himself by means of some part of the description in the initial vision (**1:13–16**). There is normally a certain appropriateness between the identifying characteristic and the church that is addressed. The church at Smyrna was a **persecuted church**, so the letter comes from the **sovereign One** (“*the First and the Last*”), who died and came to life again. As he was victorious over death, so they, too, can face martyrdom knowing that faithfulness is rewarded with eternal life.

Gordon Fee: Indeed it is content such as this that drove the leaders of the early church (the church fathers) to wrestle theologically with this core reality of the Christian faith—that the Eternal One, without beginning or ending, becomes the Incarnate One, who in his incarnation experienced our singular reality of death, but who through his resurrection guaranteed our own future.

Daniel Akin: If “*the First and the Last*” draws attention to His deity, “*the One who was dead and came to life*” speaks to His humanity. The former emphasized His authority over time. The latter emphasizes His authority over death and life. Jesus experienced death for us, a far more horrible death than any human will ever know. He bore the full judgment and wrath of God for the sins of the world (**John 1:29**). He was subject to slander, persecution, rejection, imprisonment, and death. He walked this road. But He came to life! He conquered! He won! Like their Savior, this church too may walk the road of persecution and suffering. Like Him, they may even walk the road of an unjust death. But they should not lose heart. To live is Christ and to die is gain (**Phil 1:21**). In Christ believers are in a win-win scenario. He lives and they will live with Him. Because of this guarantee, they have no fear of the death all should fear, “*the second death*” (**Rev 2:11**).

Robert Thomas: The two characterizations of Christ in **2:8** bring together what Jesus accomplished on earth and what He is by nature. His death and subsequent life as well as His eternal nature are especially relevant to those to whom He promises life subsequent to their death for His sake. As an eternal and living Savior He is able to perform His promises (**2:10c, 11**). As He experienced death and rose in triumph over it, so will the martyrs, a fact guaranteed by His eternal nature.

C. Communication from the Sovereign Head of the Church

“*says this:*”

I. (:9) COMMENDATION FOR FAITHFULNESS IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING – (IN PARTICULAR MATERIAL POVERTY AND MALICIOUS SLANDER)

A. Faithfulness in the Midst of Suffering in General

“*I know your tribulation*”

Robert Thomas: One way to understand the three terms *sou tēn thlipsin kai tēn ptōcheian ... kai tēn blasphemian* is as affliction and blasphemy with poverty falling between the two because it is the result of persecution. The prominence of persecution in this message (cf. **2:10**) and its consequent effect of producing a shortage of material possessions support this understanding. This approach is doubtful, however, because placing poverty in the middle lessens rather than heightens the emphasis on it. Another way of taking the three terms is at face value, expressing three distinct characteristics of the church’s situation. Although this may be the normal way to explain the meaning if it were expressed by some other author, the proclivity of this author for an **ascensive use of kai** is established and probably affects this phrase too. The preferred relationship between the three [*tribulation, poverty, blasphemy*] is to assign the first term a **general connotation** and to make the second and third explanatory of it. This aligns with the force of the comparable triplet in *Rev. 2:2* by giving the former *kai* its frequent **ascensive meaning**: “*your affliction, even [your] poverty and the slander [against you]*.”

B. Faithfulness in the Midst of Suffering in Specific Circumstances

1. Circumstances of Material Poverty

“and your poverty (but you are rich),”

William Barclay: Greek, there are two words for poverty. *Penia* describes the state of those who are not wealthy and who, as the Greeks defined it, must satisfy their needs with their own hands. *Ptōcheia* [used here] describes **complete destitution**. It has been put this way: *penia* describes the state of someone who has nothing superfluous; *ptōcheia* describes the state of someone who has nothing at all.

The poverty of the Christians was due to two things. It was due to the fact that most of them belonged to the lower classes of society. The gulf between the top and the bottom of the social scale was very wide. We know, for instance, that in Rome the poorer classes literally starved because contrary winds delayed the corn ships from Alexandria, and the entitlement of corn could not be distributed to those in need.

There was another reason for the poverty of the Christians. Sometimes they suffered from the plundering of their possessions (**Hebrews 10:34**). There were times when a mob would suddenly attack the Christians and wreck their homes. Life was not easy for a Christian in Smyrna or anywhere else in the ancient world.

2. Circumstances of Malicious Slander

“and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”

Van Parunak: The first feature of the coming suffering is its agent, the one behind it. Note the shift from (the synagogue of) “*Satan*” (v. 10). Satan is the Hebrew name, meaning “*accuser*,” a role that we see in **Job 1**. By translating the name into Greek, the Lord makes its underlying meaning transparent to the Greek recipients of the Revelation. The believers can expect to be accused to the human authorities because of their faith. When this happens, they must recognize that the **real accuser**, who motivates human persecutors, is the devil.

John MacArthur: Unbelieving Jews commonly accused Christians of cannibalism (based on a misunderstanding of the Lord’s Supper), immorality (based on a perversion of the holy kiss with which believers greeted each other; cf. **Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26**), breaking up homes (when one spouse became a Christian and the other did not, it often caused conflict; cf. **Luke 12:51–53**), atheism (because, as already noted, Christians rejected the pagan pantheon of deities), and political disloyalty and rebellion (because Christians refused to offer the required sacrifices to the emperor). Hoping to destroy the Christian faith, some of Smyrna’s wealthy, influential Jews reported these blasphemous, false allegations to the Romans. These haters of the gospel were a synagogue of Satan, meaning they assembled to plan their attack on the church, thus doing Satan’s will. They may have claimed to be a synagogue of God, but they were just the opposite.

William Barclay: Six slanders were regularly levelled against the Christians.

- (1) On the basis of the words of the sacrament – *this is my body, and this is my blood* – the story went about that the Christians were cannibals.
- (2) Because the Christians called their common meal the Agape, the Love Feast, it was said that their gatherings were orgies of lust.

(3) Because Christianity did, in fact, often split families, when some members became Christians and some did not, the Christians were accused of ‘tampering with family relationships’.

(4) Worshipers in the traditional ancient religions accused the Christians of atheism because they could not understand a worship which had no images of the gods such as they themselves had.

(5) The Christians were accused of being politically disloyal because they would not say: ‘Caesar is Lord.’

(6) The Christians were accused of being fire-raisers because they foretold the end of the world in flames.

It was not difficult for maliciously minded people to circulate dangerous slanders about the Christian Church.

Gordon Fee: What seems certain from John’s sentence is that the Jewish community had taken the lead in whatever had happened to bring about the believers’ “*afflictions and . . . poverty.*”

G.R. Beasley Murray: The Lord knows about this situation, but he refrains from intervening. He does not remove the poverty, he does not vindicate his followers in face of the Jewish slanders, nor does he frustrate the Devil’s machinations which will bring about the imprisonment and death of some. He simply encourages them to endure. Why no more than this? The author of the book of Job wrestled with the problem, and so have the saints of God ever since. John provides no answer, but his whole book is written in the conviction that the Church of Christ has the vocation of suffering with its Lord, that it may share his glory in the kingdom he has won for mankind. In this he follows in the footsteps of Jesus and is one with his follow prophets and apostles in the New Testament.

Richard Phillips: Another feature of Smyrna was the large and prominent Jewish community in the city. If the pattern of the apostle Paul had been followed when the gospel came to this city, the evangelists would first have preached the gospel to Jews, and many of the first believers may have come from the Jewish community. This would have been one reason why Jewish leaders were some of the early church’s most resolute oppressors. Another reason was their resolve to retain the cherished privileges under Roman rule. Because of Jerusalem’s support of Julius Caesar in the civil war, over a century earlier, Jews were granted special permission not to worship the emperor but to offer prayers to their own God on his behalf. Not wanting to share this status with converts to Christ, the Jews slandered Christians to the authorities as those who did not worship the God of the Old Testament and blasphemously denied the Christian claim that Jesus is the Messiah.

II. (:10) COUNSEL REGARDING UPCOMING TESTING TO THE POINT OF MARTYRDOM

A. Anticipate Future Suffering with Courage

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer.”

Warren Wiersbe: No words of accusation are given to the congregation in Smyrna! They may not have enjoyed the approval of men, but they certainly received the praise of God. However, the Lord did give them solemn words of **admonition** as they faced increased suffering: “*Don’t be afraid!*”

He assured them that He knew the Devil's plans and was in complete control of the situation. Some of the believers would be imprisoned and tried as traitors to Rome. Yet their tribulation would not be long; to the Bible, ten days signifies "*a brief time*" (**Gen. 24:55; Acts 25:6**). The important thing was **faithfulness**, standing true to Christ no matter what the government might threaten to do.

Kendell Easley: Of all the churches, only Smyrna and Philadelphia escape criticism. This struggling church, however, now hears a message it may have dreaded. Therefore, the Lord's command begins with do not be afraid. The suffering in Smyrna is about to get worse.

B. Anticipate the Attacks of Satan as a Limited Time of Testing

1. Attacks Will Involve Imprisonment

"Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison,"

Craig Koester: Prisoners in city jails lived in squalor and cramped space. Stone walls, often without windows, created a dark, suffocating enclosure. During the day prisoners wore collars and manacles on one hand, while at night they slept on the ground with their legs in stocks so they could not stretch them out. Rations were scant and could be withheld by the jailer. In antiquity, people were not sentenced to prison terms as they are in modern times. People were put into prison in order to force them to obey the authorities, to hold them in custody until their cases came up for trial, or to confine them until they were executed or punished in some other way.

2. Attacks Will Involve Testing

"that you may be tested,"

Daniel Akin: Jesus assures them that their accuser will try to harm them, but Christ will use the Devil's evil intentions to refine and prove them. He will reveal their faith, loyalty, and love for Him. That they "*will have affliction for 10 days*" is symbolic of a definite but limited period of time. He allows it and will control its duration.

Richard Phillips: When Jesus proclaims his lordship over the trial about to be suffered in Smyrna, he not only promises a limited duration and the help of his presence in the flames, but also declares his purpose in the tribulation. There is positive significance to the trial: Jesus permits it so "*that you may be tested*" (**Rev. 2:10**). We should think of our faith being tested in trials in two ways. The first is the proving or displaying of the genuineness of our faith. Peter wrote that we should rejoice in our trials, since they "*have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed*" (**1 Peter 1:6–7 NIV**). When Christians hold fast in faith under trial, the genuineness of our belief and the certainty of our salvation is proved. True believers will pass the test of tribulation by holding fast to Jesus, while false believers who were never truly saved are revealed by falling away under trial.

Joined to this is a second purpose of strengthening or refining our faith. Paul said that "*we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope*" (**Rom. 5:3–4**). We have seen that Peter compared the trial of faith to the refining of precious metals. The aim of refining is to purify the precious metals by removing the dross. Likewise, Christ uses trials to drive out worldliness and sin from our lives and thus purify our faith. A smith refines ore by heating it to a very high temperature,

plunging it into cold water, and then scraping away the dross. He continues this process until he can look upon the gold and see a clear reflection of his own face. So it is with Christ in refining our faith: his goal is through fire and water to separate and scrape away the dross of sin and unbelief, so that he may look upon our faith and see the clear reflection of his own glorious face.

3. Attacks Will Involve Intense but Brief Tribulation

“and you will have tribulation ten days.”

Van Parunak: The testing has a **fixed duration**. The reference is probably not to the actual duration of Roman persecution, but an allusion to the experience of Daniel and his friends:

Dan 1:11 *Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 12 Prove πειράζω G3985 thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. 13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants. 14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved πειράζω them ten days. 15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.*

John MacArthur: God, who alone sovereignly controls all the circumstances of life, would not permit Satan to torment the Smyrna church for long. Jesus promised that they would have tribulation for only ten days. Though some see the ten days as symbolically representing everything from ten periods of persecution under the Romans, to an undetermined period of time, to a time of ten years, there is no exegetical reason to interpret them as anything other than ten actual days. Satan's major assault on that local church would be **intense, but brief**.

Robert Thomas: The ten days are **literal** and refer to an unknown persecution within a definite period of time during the generation to which this message was addressed. [But also could be a foretaste for a specific time of persecution in the seventieth week of Daniel.] Such limited periods of persecution are well known in biblical history (**Gen. 7:4; 40:12, 13, 20; Num. 14:33; Esth. 3:13; Ezek. 4:1-8; Matt. 12:40**). This is the most natural understanding of the expression in epistolary literature such as this. **No reason to take the ten days as symbolic exists.** This explanation also allows for a proper understanding of the genitive case of *hēmerōn*, which was cited above in connection with the fourth view. It is a “ten-day” affliction. The view is illustrated by, but not fulfilled by, the persecution of Polycarp in this city in the mid-second century. A similar surge of opposition against some Christians in Smyrna apparently came a short time after the publication of the Apocalypse.

C. Anticipate Future Reward for Faithfulness

1. Condition of Faithfulness

“Be faithful until death,”

William Barclay: In this passage there is also a demand, and the demand is for **loyalty**, loyal even when death is the price to be paid. Loyalty was a quality of which the people of Smyrna knew something, for their city had flung in its lot with Rome when Rome's greatness was only a far-off possibility, and had never wavered from it in its allegiance, in fair weather and in foul. If all the other noble qualities of life were placed in the balance against it, loyalty would outweigh them all.

Kendell Easley: If there is any key note in this second letter, it is found near the end of **verse 10**: *be faithful, even to the point of death*. These persecuted believers were not promised escape from tribulation; they were promised instead something far greater: the grace to endure afflictions without fear and the pledge that the one who died and came to life again will certainly bring them through to the “*crown of life*.”

2. Promise of Future Reward

“and I will give you the crown of life.”

Robert Mounce: It is not the royal crown (the *diadēma*) that is promised, but the wreath or garland (the *stephanos*) that was awarded to the victor at the games. Its value lay not in itself but in what it symbolized. According to **Pausanias**, Smyrna was famous for its games (6.14.3). With others, **Bruce** thinks that the imagery is suggested by the circle of colonnaded buildings on the crest of Mt. Pagos called the crown of Smyrna.

Daniel Akin: **Crowns** are mentioned a number of times in the Bible, and it is instructive to note their occurrences:

- Crown of life (**Rev 2:10**; also **Jas 1:12**)
- Crown of righteousness (**2 Tim 4:8**)
- Crown of glory (**1 Pet 5:4**)
- Crown of gold (**Rev 4:4**)
- Crown of rejoicing (**1 Thess 2:19**)
- Crown of incorruption (**1 Cor 9:25**)

Each, in some way, draws attention to the blessings of salvation that are ours in Christ.

(:11) EPILOGUE – BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME

A. Pay Attention

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

B. Persevere to Receive the Blessing

1. Condition of Overcoming

“He who overcomes”

Craig Keener: Whereas “overcoming” in Ephesus required restoration of love (**2:4**), in Smyrna it demanded withstanding persecution. Popular Jewish teaching on martyrdom already could identify martyrdom with overcoming (4 Macc. 9:24; 17:15), so no one could miss the point. But Revelation especially underlines the point in the image of the triumphant lion as a slain lamb in **5:5–6**: We overcome not by returning hostility but by laying down our lives in the confidence that God will vindicate us.

2. Promise of Life

“shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Van Parunak: In keeping with the **theme of resurrection**. “*Second death*” appears in the Bible only here and **20:14**; **21:8** (of the *lake of fire*), but appears in the targums and Rabbinic literature in reference to the punishment of the wicked after physical death—either failure to be raised

from the dead, or some future suffering. Thus the big lesson that the Lord urges through the letter to Smyrna is the **promise of resurrection in the face of mortal opposition**. Throughout history, many believers have been borne witness to the Lord with their lives. The city of myrrh reminds us of the Lord's promise of life to those who are faithful unto death.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what sense is it true as the church father **Tertullian** once said, that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church”?
- 2) What is the danger of the pretrib rapture position failing to adequately prepare believers to face the persecution of the Great Tribulation?
- 3) What courage and persevering strength can we derive from the prospect of the resurrection?
- 4) Why is condemnation to the lake of fire called *the second death*?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was martyred on Saturday, 23rd February, AD 155. It was the time of the public games; the city was crowded, and the crowds were excited. Suddenly the shout went up: ‘Away with the atheists; let Polycarp be searched for.’ No doubt Polycarp could have escaped; but already he had had a dream in which he saw the pillow under his head burning with fire; and, when he woke, he told his disciples: ‘I must be burnt alive.’

His whereabouts were betrayed by a slave who collapsed under torture. They came to arrest him. He ordered that they should be given a meal and provided with all they required, while he asked for himself the privilege of one last hour in prayer. Not even the police captain wanted to see Polycarp die. On the brief journey to the city, he pleaded with the old man: ‘What harm is it to say: “Caesar is Lord” and to offer sacrifice and be saved?’ But Polycarp was adamant that for him only Jesus Christ was Lord.

When he entered the arena, there came a voice from heaven saying: ‘Be strong, Polycarp, and play the man.’ The proconsul gave him the choice of cursing the name of Christ and making sacrifice to Caesar – or death. ‘Eighty and six years have I served him,’ said Polycarp, ‘and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?’ The proconsul threatened him with burning, and Polycarp replied: ‘You threaten me with the fire that burns for a time, and is quickly quenched, for you do not know the fire which awaits the wicked in the judgment to come and in everlasting punishment. Why are you waiting? Come, do what you will.’

So the crowds came flocking from the workshops and from the baths with bundles of wood – and the Jews, even though they were breaking the Sabbath law by carrying such burdens, were ahead of everyone in bringing wood for the fire. They were going to bind him to the stake. ‘Leave me

as I am,' he said, 'for he who gives me power to endure the fire will grant me to remain in the flames unmoved even without the security you will give by the nails.' So they left him loosely bound in the flames, and Polycarp prayed his great prayer:

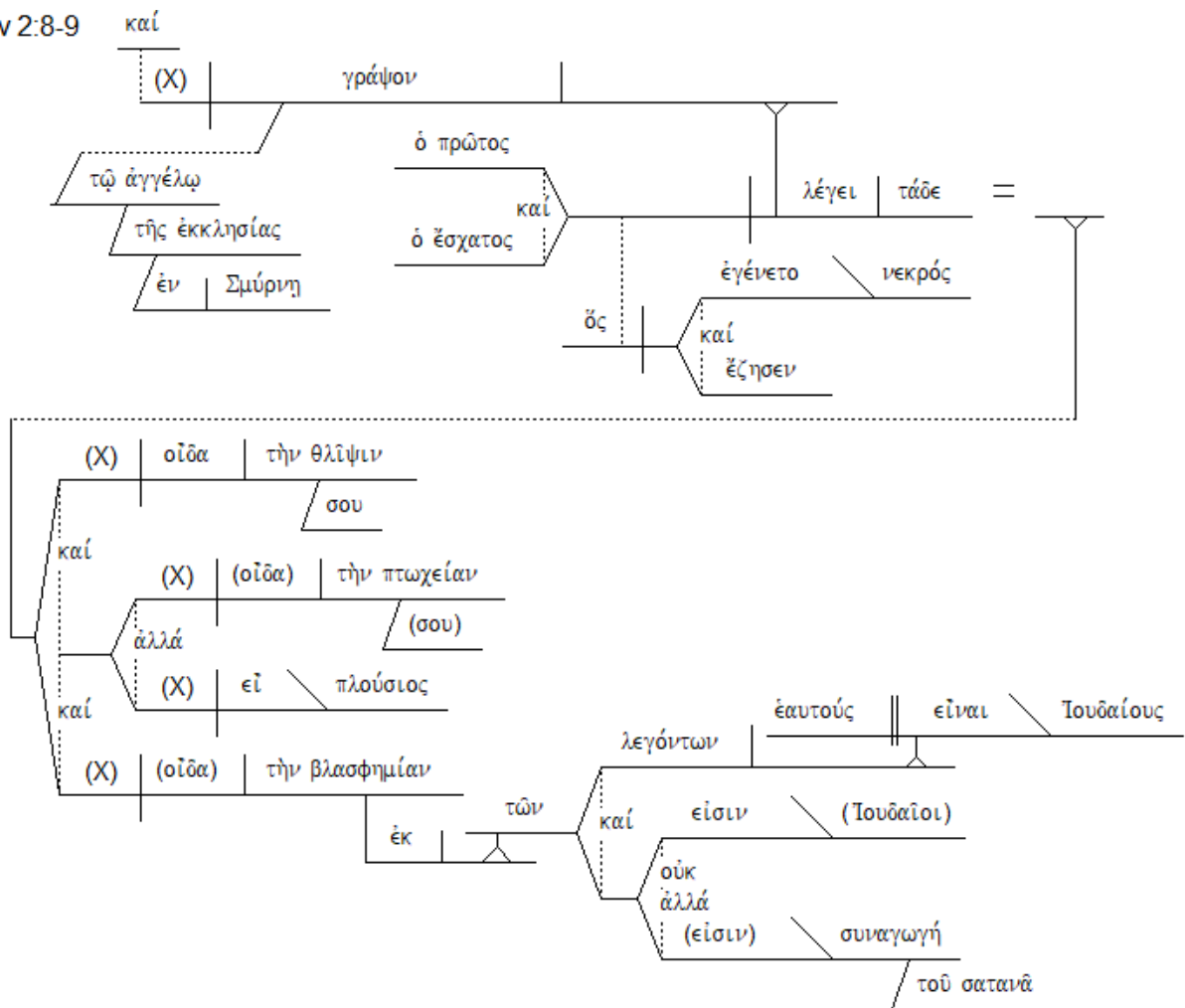
O Lord God Almighty, Father of thy beloved and blessed Child, Jesus Christ, through whom we have received full knowledge of thee, God of angels and powers, and of all creation, and of the whole family of the righteous, who live before thee, I bless thee that thou hast granted unto me this day and hour, that I may share, among the number of the martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, for the resurrection to eternal life, both of soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. And may I today be received among them before thee, as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as thou, the God without falsehood and of truth, hast prepared beforehand and shown forth and fulfilled. For this reason I also praise thee for all things. I bless thee, I glorify thee through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Child, through whom be glory to thee with him and the Holy Spirit, both now and for the ages that are to come. Amen.

Buist Fanning: This message of commendation from Christ to faithful Christians who faced affliction, poverty, and slander should catch today's believers up short in our unconscious expectations that if we really love God we will always be prosperous, happy, and well received by our culture. Scripture is clear about the inevitability of opposition, rejection, and suffering for faithful Christians (**Matt 5:10–12; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12**), but Jesus's call not to fear when facing persecution rings true nonetheless (**Rev 2:10**). Economic oppression (denial or loss of employment or of business opportunities), slander (misrepresentation or rejection of our stance on controversial issues), and ostracism (family conflict or social exclusion for countercultural views) seem hardly possible to many Christians in the secular Western world. But we should be aware that in many parts of the globe persecution rages unchecked even now, and our fellow Christians pay a terrible price for their loyalty to Christ. We can mourn over their suffering and be encouraged and inspired by their example, while doing all we can to alleviate their plight (prayer, advocacy, financial help). We must also prepare ourselves to live faithful and obedient lives amid changes that will certainly come as our societies become increasingly post-Christian and anti-Christian.

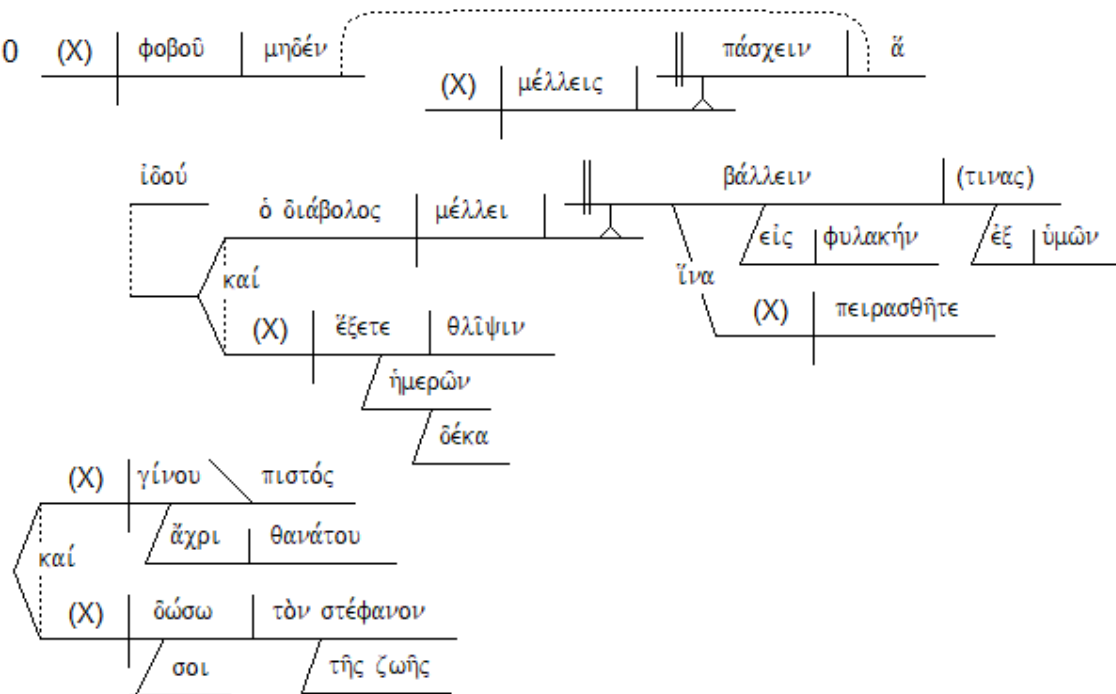
Grant Osborne: This one of only two churches (the other being Philadelphia) with **no weaknesses**. It is telling that these two were also the least significant of the seven churches in terms of numbers and influence. The current preoccupation of the modern church with numbers and influence must be reexamined. It is more important to be faithful than to be powerful. This is also one of two letters (with Pergamum next) without the formula "*I know your (good) deeds.*" Instead, the divine knowledge of (and empathy for) their situation is described. There are three things the exalted Christ "*knows*"—their **tribulation, poverty, slander**—and the presence of *σου* (*sou, your*) at the outset draws them into a unity. Also, the three would never be considered "strengths" today but rather "problems" or even "tragedies." This is because the church today has forgotten the centrality of "*the fellowship of his sufferings*" (**Phil. 3:10**) for the early church. Suffering for Christ was a privilege, not just a sorrow. It was certainly "*painful*" (**Heb. 12:11**) but was also considered a participation in Christ at a deeper level. Smyrna suffered greatly but as a result was even more favored by God.

Leedy Greek Diagram:

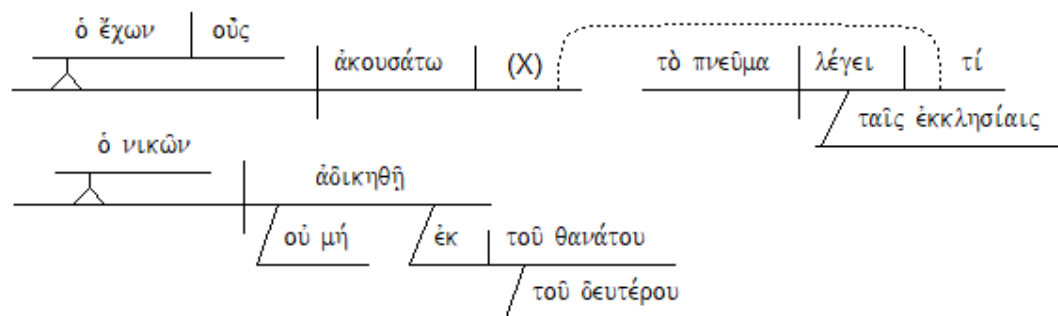
Rev 2:8-9



Rev 2:10



Rev 2:11



TEXT: Revelation 2:12-17

TITLE: LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM = WORLDLY COMPROMISE

BIG IDEA:

MORAL AND THEOLOGICAL COMPROMISE UNDERMINE SPIRITUAL LOYALTY

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: Jesus commends the church in Pergamum for their faithfulness despite deadly persecution, but they will face his judgment unless they turn away from idolatrous influences in their midst.

John MacArthur: **Worldliness** is any preoccupation with or interest in the temporal system of life that places anything perishable before that which is eternal. Since believers are not part of the world system (**John 15:19**), they must not act as though they were. “*Do not be conformed to this world,*” wrote the apostle Paul, “*but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect*” (**Rom. 12:2**). Because they have been redeemed by God’s grace, believers are called to “*deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age*” (**Titus 2:12**). “*Pure and undefiled religion,*” notes James, consists in keeping “*oneself unstained by the world*” (**James 1:27**), because “*friendship with the world is hostility toward God [.] Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*” (**James 4:4**). **First John 2:15–17** makes the believer’s duty to avoid worldliness unmistakably clear:

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

The church at Pergamum, like much of today’s church, had failed to heed the biblical warnings against worldliness. Consequently, it had drifted into compromise and was in danger of becoming intertwined with the world.

Warren Wiersbe: Believers today also face the temptation to achieve personal advancement by ungodly compromise. The name *Pergamos* means “*married*,” reminding us that each local church is “engaged to Christ” and must be kept pure (**2 Cor. 11:1–4**). We shall see later in Revelation that this present world system is pictured as a defiled harlot, while the church is presented as a pure bride. The congregation or the individual Christian that compromises with the world just to avoid suffering or achieve success is committing “spiritual adultery” and being unfaithful to the Lord.

Daniel Akin: Though believers and churches are constantly tempted to compromise both theologically and ethically, true followers of Christ will remain faithful and receive from the Lord the reward of eternal life.

(;12) PROLOGUE – FEAR THE JUDGMENT OF JESUS

A. Command to Write to the Church at Pergamum

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:”

David Thompson: Pergamum was a city of culture, sophistication, politics and religion. It was considered to be the center of artistic and scientific learning. There were theaters and gymnasiums and an impressive library.

If we analyze Pergamum, we get to see the kind of place [Satan] makes his headquarters:

- 1) It was a city of great culture.
- 2) It was a city of great education.
- 3) It was a city of a variety of religions.
- 4) It was a city that had a great library.
- 5) It was a city that had a lot of money.
- 6) It was a city of great political leadership.
- 7) It was a city of great medicine and medical achievement.
- 8) It was a city of art with many different artistic structures.
- 9) It was a city of great location.

Buist Fanning: Pergamum was not on the coast like Ephesus and Smyrna, but inland about 16 miles (25 km) and 65–70 miles (110 km) north of Smyrna (the northernmost of all the seven cities). Its location featured an acropolis rising about a thousand feet (300 m) above a plain through which the Caicus River ran, a perfect site for a strategic military outpost. The Hellenistic kingdom of the Attalids ruled there between Alexander’s successor Lysimachus and a peaceful transfer to Roman power around 130 BC. The Attalids in the interim had turned a fortress town into an impressive and beautiful Greco-Roman city and growing cultural center. The city’s loyalty to Rome was rewarded when the province’s first temple dedicated to the emperor cult was built in Pergamum soon after Augustus consolidated his power in 31 BC. Arrayed near it on the acropolis was a temple to Athena, an altar to Zeus, and temples to Dionysus and to Demeter. On the edge of town was a large complex for the worship of Asclepius where the sick could go to seek healing. As in other cities of Asia Minor at this time, wealthy citizens vied for the distinction (and expense) of serving as priests and priestesses and of hosting banquets in honor of these deities. Various trade associations and community groups would participate in such festivities, and Christians would face questions about what level of involvement was acceptable.

Grant Osborne: The city also became the leading religious center of Asia. Temples, altars, and shrines were dedicated to Zeus (king of the gods and known there as “savior-god” from the primary titles taken by the Attalid kings), Athena (goddess of victory and patron of the city), Dionysus (patron god of the dynasty, symbolized by a bull), and Asklepios (god of healing, symbolized by a serpent). A huge area of the city and a temple were dedicated to Asklepios and the healing arts. As a result Pergamum became a medical center as well as the Lourdes of its day. The great altar to Zeus, forty feet high, depicting the victory of Attalus I over the Galatians and with a frieze around the base depicting the victory of the Hellenistic gods over the giants of the earth (civilization over paganism), stood on a high terrace at the top of the mountain. In addition, Pergamum was the center of the imperial cult in Asia. It was the first city to be allowed a temple to a living ruler when in A.D. 29 Augustus allowed a temple to be erected to him. There was a great deal of precedent for this. Attalus I called himself “savior,” and Eumenes II labeled himself “savior” and “god.” A temple with royal priests and priestesses was erected near the palace, and

Pergamum three times was named *neōkoros* (temple sweeper or warden of the imperial worship). This honor more than anything else made it the leading city in the province.

B. Characterization of Christ as the Judge

“The One who has the sharp two-edged sword”

Grant Osborne: This letter has the simplest description of Christ of any of the seven, containing just one element. The “*sharp double-edged sword*” was a symbol of **Roman justice**. As mentioned in **1:16**, this symbol is drawn from **Isa. 11:4** and the picture of divine justice there. It is linked with **Rev. 2:16** here and thus not only to **1:16** but also to **19:15, 21**, with the imagery of the sword “*coming out of Christ’s mouth*,” referring to his word of judgment. The *ῥομφαία* (*rhomphaia*, sword) was a Thracian broadsword used in cavalry charges; in Roman times it became a symbol of their might. Here it is probably used because the Roman proconsul in charge of the province resided in Pergamum, and the symbol of his total sovereignty over every area of life, especially to execute enemies of the state (called *ius gladii*), was the sword. This tells the church that it is the exalted Christ, not Roman officials, who is the true judge. The **ultimate power belongs to God**, and nothing the pagans can do will change that.

Daniel Akin: The Judgment of Jesus is True

The sword is the **Word of God**. Because it is God’s Word, it is true and trustworthy, inerrant and infallible. And here it is coming from the mouth of Christ! His Word is authoritative and sure. This idea is rooted in the messianic prophecy of **Isaiah 11:4**, where Messiah will judge “*with discipline from His mouth*.” This is a verbal announcement from the exalted Christ. “*Anyone who has an ear should listen*” (**2:17**).

The Judgment of Jesus is Thorough

The sword is sharp and double-edged. It is not dull; it cuts quickly and cleanly. Being double-edged, it hurts and heals. It cuts and cures. This statement recalls **Hebrews 4:12**, which says,

For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart.

This sword of Christ conveys absolute authority, decisive discernment. The Word of God is at once an instrument of life and an instrument of death. Rome had given Pergamum the rare power to exercise capital punishment on its own. The symbol of this authority was the sword (**Johnson, Revelation, 1983, 47**). Rome might wield the sword on earth, but the glorified Christ wielded a mightier sword from heaven. This is the sword the church should fear. This is the sword we should revere.

David Thompson: In the other references, the sharp two-edged sword is connected to a judgment that comes out of His mouth. Now the point of this is that Jesus Christ is the One who is able to carry out fatal capital punishment judgments by what He says. **Gerhard Kittel** says this is a sword so large that it actually could touch the ground (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 6, pp. 993-998). This was a powerful, deadly sword capable of wounding and destroying anyone. Jesus wants this church to understand that He has all authority and power to wound, hurt and destroy any one or any church with one swipe or one spoken word. He can punish and with razor sharp precision cut one to shreds.

C. Communication from the Sovereign Head of the Church

“says this:”

I. (:13) COMMENDATION FOR LOYALTY

A. Difficulties of Living in Pagan Society

“I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is;”

Grant Osborne: This frames the verse with the **satanic presence** at Pergamum. The first part says the city is “*where Satan has his throne*,” and the second part says it is “*where he dwells*.” In other words, they live in Satan’s hometown, and this is proven by Antipas’s martyrdom and by the total opposition of the pagan populace and Roman officials to the saints in Pergamum. Satan is the true origin of this hatred.

Kendell Easley: Twice Christ notes the presence of Satan in the city where these believers lived. The original significance of the throne of Satan is not clear. It may refer to one of several temples to the Roman emperors in the city, or it may refer to the huge altar to Zeus that overlooked the city. (In Smyrna, the “*synagogue of Satan*” was Jewish; in Pergamum, the “*throne of Satan*” was pagan.) The devil had used his stronghold in the city to make life miserable for the Christians.

Robert Thomas: This **throne** is the seat of worship of Asklepios whose traditional image portrayed the god holding a **serpent**, an image that would remind Christians of Satan (cf. **Rev. 12:9; 20:2**). The idolatry at Pergamum was well known. The image of Asklepios rivaled the fame of Diana at Ephesus and of Apollo at Delphi. The popularity of this god in Pergamum caused the city to be viewed as the center for this kind of worship throughout the province of Asia. On every hand, the serpent was visible because of the prominence of this cult. The statement does not exclude the presence of the serpent’s throne from other cities, but it associates the visible supremacy of the serpent with the invisible supremacy of the power of the evil one (**Hort**).

[Another possible interpretation]: The throne of Satan connects somehow with Rev. 13:2 and the impartation of power, a throne, and great authority to the beast out of the sea by the dragon of **Revelation 12**. The throne of the beast mentioned in **Rev. 16:10** will be at Pergamum. This is none other than the place where Satan’s throne will be set up on earth during that future day (**Bullinger**). The martyrdom prominent in this message will characterize that future time (cf. **Rev. 6:9-10; 13:10; 20:4**) (**Bullinger**). . .

A last suggestion about the throne of Satan is the most impressive: **emperor worship was prominent in Pergamum**. The city was a leader in this form of worship, which was relatively new to the province of Asia (**Beckwith**). This form of heathenism best explains the strong terminology regarding the presence of the evil one here, where the imperial cult had its headquarters (**Charles**). A temple erected to the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma had stood in the city since 29 B.C. (Moffatt). Later a temple was erected in honor of Trajan, giving the city the title “*twice neokoros* (i.e., *temple warden* [or *sweeper*])” (**Mounce**). A special priesthood was also devoted to this kind of worship. Throughout the Apocalypse the specter of Caesar-adoration is in the background. Emperor worship is constantly viewed as an agency of Satan’s power (**Moffatt; Beckwith**). Probably Antipas, the city’s Christian martyr (**2:13**), was the victim of Rome, because only the imperial cultus had the power of capital punishment. John’s

personal circumstances probably made him believe that Rome was the most recent and strongest agent of Satan because of its **totalitarian demands for absolute allegiance to the state** and because in her was embodied the epitome of all paganism and worldliness (Caird). The sword (cf. **Rev. 2:12**) was emblematic of the almost unlimited imperial power wielded by the senatorial governor of Asia stationed in Pergamum (Caird).

Van Parunak: Like the **sword**, the reference to a **throne** reflects the city's close relation with Rome. A recurring theme throughout the Revelation is the role of Rome in opposing the church, and it would be natural to identify the emperor as the personification of Satan, and the imperial temple as his throne.

B. Determination to Remain Faithful Despite Persecution

1. Faithful to the Name of Christ

“and you hold fast My name,”

John MacArthur: Despite the persecution and suffering they endured, the believers at Pergamum continued to hold fast the name of Christ, and did not deny the faith. They did not deviate from fidelity to Christ or to the central truths of the Christian faith.

2. Faithful to the Confession of Christ

“and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”

Buist Fanning: Despite the peril they faced, at the time of this message the church was characterized by **strong loyalty to Christ**: they “*hold firmly to [his] name*” (v. **13b**). The backdrop and unmistakable proof of their current commitment was courageous fidelity during a notable ordeal they had previously endured. “*You did not renounce your faith in me,*” Christ says as he reflects on those past events. What follows is a terse recounting of a set of circumstances in Pergamum so hostile to the Christians that tragically one of their number was killed: “*Antipas . . . who was killed among you.*” No further details of this episode or this person “*Antipas*” are preserved for us, and the wording “*was killed*” does not indicate whether his death was due to mob action (e.g., Stephen’s stoning in **Acts 8**) or official execution (e.g., James’s death in **Acts 12**; cf. death sentences under Pliny in Bithynia two decades later [Ep. 10.96–97] or Polycarp’s martyrdom in Smyrna in the mid-second century [Mart. Pol. 10–18]). Antipas’s costly allegiance to Christ is commended (“*my faithful witness*”) in terms that mirror Christ’s own faithfulness to God even until death (**1:5**; **3:14**) as well as the ultimate witness that many Christians would give in the terrible times to come (**1:2**, **9**; **6:9**; **12:11**, **17**; **17:6**; **19:10**; **20:4**). Mention of one specific death likely means that others had not occurred, but Christians in Pergamum would nevertheless have lived under the fearful prospect that deadly hostility could flare up again at any time.

II. (:14-15) CRITICISM FOR COMPROMISE

“But I have a few things against you,”

A. (:14) Compromise in the Moral Realm

“because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.”

Kendell Easley: The strange incident of Balaam and Barak is told in **Numbers 22–24**. The false prophet and the king at first seemed to fail in their direct attempts to curse the Israelites. Later, however, they succeeded in leading the people of God astray indirectly, by idolatry and immorality (**Num. 25:1–2; 31:16**).

Buist Fanning: The “*teaching of Balaam*” is not a specific set of doctrines but a pattern of deceptive, self-serving ministry that promotes false religion. . .

Christians in Pergamum were under threat from some notable feature(s) of **satanic influence**, perhaps focused on centers of pagan worship located there (**v. 13**). These Nicolaitans mirror the pattern of Balaam’s influence toward **compromise with idolatrous practices** long ago (**v. 14**). This is the main point to be drawn from Christ’s rebuke in **vv. 14–15**. In the cities of Asia Minor at this time, Christians would have felt constant pressure to participate in and assimilate to the pagan idolatry all around them. Political and economic life was inextricably intertwined with religious observances of various kinds, and this posed great difficulties for faithful Christians. This had produced a particularly tragic outcome among the Christians in Pergamum in the death of Antipas (**v. 13**).

Richard Phillips: The strange figure Balaam is a famous biblical example of an enemy who **first tried to persecute believers but found greater success by seducing them**. When the Israelites were advancing through the wilderness near Moab, Balak the king of Moab sought to destroy them by having Balaam declare a curse. This attack failed because when Balaam began cursing Israel, the Holy Spirit would come upon him and change his curses into blessings (**Num. 23:1–12**). Like Satan in Pergamum, Balaam realized that persecution was only making God’s people stronger, so he changed tactics. Jesus’ message says that Balaam “*put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel*” (**Rev. 2:14**), so that they ate prohibited foods and entered into sexual sin. Balaam did this by sending the daughters of Moab into the Israelite camp to lure the men into sexual sin and idolatry. **Numbers 25** records that God judged Israel for these sins, slaying twenty-four thousand people by a plague.

John MacArthur: Despite the graphic example of Israel and the clear teaching of the apostle Paul, with which they were likely familiar, some in Pergamum persisted in following Balaam’s teaching. They believed one could attend pagan feasts, with all their debauchery and sexual immorality, and still join the church to worship Jesus Christ. But that is impossible, since “*friendship with the world is hostility toward God. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*” (**James 4:4**). “*I urge you as aliens and strangers,*” wrote Peter, “*to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul*” (1 Pet. 2:11). The issue of whether Christians could participate in idolatrous feasts had been settled decades earlier at the Jerusalem Council, which issued a mandate for believers to “*abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication*” (**Acts 15:29**).

Daniel Akin: Pergamum means “*thoroughly married*.” Here was a church thoroughly married to the world. Satan could not defeat this church with a frontal assault from without, so he revised his strategy and fostered friendly accommodation from within and with deadly success. The congregation was welcoming and affirming to the sexually immoral. On the contrary, we must not compromise our morality. It will destroy our witness and invite the judgment of God.

B. (:15) Compromise in the Theological Realm

“*Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.*”

Grant Osborne: While the Ephesian church was commended for identifying and opposing the Nicolaitan heresy, the church at Pergamum tolerated it and so had to be castigated for their weakness. . .

The best solution is to take this not as a comparison between two similar movements but as a comparison between a **single movement** (the Nicolaitans) and the Jewish tradition about Balaam: “*In the same way that Balaam subverted the Israelites, these false teachers are trying to subvert you.*” This is also favored by the repetition of κρατεῖν (*kratein*, to grab hold of) in **2:14–15**. The followers of the false teachers have “*grabbed hold of the teaching of Balaam*” in **verse 14** and have “*grabbed hold of the teaching of the Nicolaitans*” in **verse 15**. It is likely that they are one and the same set of “*teachings.*”

Robert Thomas: The fault of the church as a whole was not adherence to the teaching or doctrine of Balaam, but rather indifference to those within who were in sympathy with it (**Moffatt**). . .

That the teaching of the two groups is **identical** (**Charles; Beckwith**) does not demand that the two groups be the same. Support for the sameness of the two groups notes that both verses speak of an antinomian group accepting the religious and social requirement of that pagan society, one church being too small for two groups of the exact same kind (**Mounce**). Yet the view of a single group is questionable, because it must view the *homoiōs* at the end of the verse as merely emphasizing the *houtōs* that begins the verse (**Swete**). *Echeis* (“*you have*”) would take up the thread of **v. 14**, and *houtōs echeis kai* would compare the situation with Israel of old. The above-stated objections to the view are stronger than its supports.

A better case exists for **distinguishing the two groups**. *Houtōs* reflects that they were like, but not identical with, those who held the Balaamite doctrine. The introduction of the Nicolaitans with *kai* (“*also*”) and *homoiōs* (“*thus*” or “*in like manner*”) also argues for two separate groups. The best conclusion is that there were two different but similar groups in this church, both of which had disobeyed the decision of the Jerusalem council in regard to idolatrous practices and fornication (cf. **Acts 15:20, 29**).

John MacArthur: The majority of the believers at Pergamum did not participate in the errors of either heretical group. They remained steadfastly loyal to Christ and the Christian faith. But by tolerating the groups and refusing to exercise church discipline, they shared in their guilt, which brought the Lord’s judgment.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Whoever the Nicolaitans were, they were conquering the people by bringing them under Satan’s authority through influential teachers who were tolerating or even promoting evil or license. In our study of the messages to the seven churches, we have gone, then, from “**murder**” to “**mixture**.” **Martyrdom** tends to purify the church, but **mixture**, a breakdown in biblical separation into worldliness, putrefies the church.

III. (:16) CALL FOR REPENTANCE

A. Urgency of Repentance

“*Repent therefore;*”

Richard Phillips: Pergamum reminds us, in this way, of two great strategies employed by Satan against the Christian church. The first is persecution, which the believers of Pergamum had withstood. The second was false teaching leading to unholy and worldly living, and to this Pergamum was in danger of succumbing. Jesus thus warns his people: “*Therefore repent*” (Rev. 2:16).

Charles Swindoll: In concrete terms, Christ demanded that the Pergamum Christians amend their attitudes regarding the Balaamites and the Nicolaitans, that they take the necessary actions to remove those false teachings from their midst. The compromise had to end. Christ’s call for repentance included a warning for those who refused. If the faithful remnant refused to change their lackadaisical policies and if the wicked minority continued their libertine practices, Christ would discipline them. He would come swiftly, waging war against them with the double-edged sword—His just discipline as the righteous Judge.

B. Ultimatum Threatening Rejection and Judgment – Divine Warfare

*“or else I am coming to you quickly,
and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”*

Robert Thomas: The apparent problem of making the second coming of Christ conditioned upon the non-repentance of the Pergamene church has been discussed in connection with the similar issue regarding Ephesus. Applied to the present verse, the proposed grammatical analysis produces the following meaning: “*When I come quickly, I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth, if you shall not have repented before that coming, whenever it happens.*” . . .

In essence, this is a call to the church at Pergamum to demonstrate its genuineness by repenting of its lenience toward the errorists who had become part of that local fellowship. Failure to do so would mean dreadful consequences for them.

(;17) EPILOGUE – BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME

A. Pay Attention

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

B. Persevere to Receive the Blessing

1. Condition of Overcoming

“To him who overcomes,”

2. Promise of Eternal Life

a. Hidden Manna

“to him I will give some of the hidden manna,”

Buist Fanning: The first gift that is promised is “*some of the hidden manna*” (τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου), in clear contrast to the food of idol-meat offered by the Nicolaitans (vv. 14–15). Alluding to God’s life-sustaining provision for Israel in the wilderness (Exod 16:4, 14–36; Num 11:6–7), this image speaks of how Christ’s deliverance will provide all that his people truly need for human life as God designed it to be lived in his renewed creation (John 6:25–40; Rev 7:16–17; 21:1–7; 22:1–3). The initiation of this deliverance has already been accomplished because Jesus came from heaven and gave himself on the cross so that all who believe may have eternal life (John 6:41–59). But the full-orbed consummation awaits the time when Christ “*will raise*

them up” (**John 6:54**) and God renews all things as described in **Revelation 21–22**. This appears to be the point of the description of this manna as “*hidden*.” It is concealed in the sense that it is out of human sight but preserved in heaven until it is made evident on earth in the final days (cf. **Col 3:1–4**). God’s provision of nourishment from heaven at the exodus (**Exod 16:4**) anticipates the coming of his ultimate and complete provision for his people in the last days (a feature of eschatological expectation among some Jews as seen in 2 Bar. 29:8; Sib. Or. 7:141–49; Mek. on **Exod 16:25**).

Robert Mounce: The idea of hidden manna reflects a Jewish tradition that the pot of manna that was placed in the ark for a memorial to future generations (**Exod. 16:32–34**; see **Heb. 9:4**) was taken by Jeremiah at the time of the destruction of Solomon’s temple (sixth century B.C.) and hidden underground in Mt. Nebo (2 Macc. 2:4–7). . . . In the context of the letter to Pergamum it alludes to the proper and heavenly food of spiritual Israel in contrast to the unclean food supplied by the Balaamites. While the promise is primarily eschatological, it is not without immediate application for a persecuted people.

Richard Phillips: Let me conclude by noting four ways in which Jesus is like the manna that fell from heaven, and like the bread that gives life to our souls. First, just as manna was necessary for the life of Israel in the desert, so also Jesus is **necessary for our salvation**. Are you trying to live without Jesus? You may satisfy your ego with success, your material needs with money, or your desires with pleasure. But you will never satisfy the inescapable needs of your soul without Jesus Christ.

Second, Jesus, like bread, is **suited for everyone**. **James Boice** writes: “Jesus is . . . the Savior of the world, and that includes the peasant as well as the king on his throne. . . . He has what you need. What is more, he knows you and he knows how to meet that need.”

Third, just as bread must be chewed and swallowed, **Christians must feed on Jesus and his Word by faith**. The hearts of children are fed by the kind and loving words of their parents. An army feeds on the brave words of its leaders. A nation feeds on the inspiring speeches of its best politicians. But there is nothing compared to the Word of God to feed the soul of every man, woman, and child. If Christians or churches are weak today, easily falling prey to false teaching and foolishly seeking to accommodate worldly styles and demands, the explanation may be that we have been feeding on the world instead of on the Word. To be strong in faith and to have a strong witness to the world, we must be constantly feeding on the life-giving bread of Christ and his Word.

Finally, we are told that when Jesus fed the five thousand, he “*broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples*” (**Matt. 14:19**). Likewise, Jesus is the Bread of Life because he was **broken on the cross for our sins**. “*This is my body*,” Jesus later explained, “*which is [broken] for you*” (**1 Cor. 11:24**). Jesus gave himself to pay the penalty of our sins, restore us to the Father in love, and grant a new kind of life to those who believe. To them, Jesus gives heavenly manna of divine provision, a white stone of justification through faith alone, and a personal relationship with himself as Lord. How can we know and experience these truths for ourselves? **Psalms 34:8** gives us the best advice: “*Taste and see that the LORD is good!*”

John MacArthur: The hidden manna represents Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life who came down from heaven (**John 6:48–51**). He provides spiritual sustenance for those who put their faith in Him. The hidden manna symbolizes all the blessings and benefits of knowing Christ (**Eph. 1:3**).

Kendell Easley: These are **two different symbols for eternal life**, the first Jewish; the second Gentile. The ancient Israelites had “*hidden*” a pot of their divinely given bread in their ark of the covenant. Jewish tradition held that this manna had been miraculously preserved and would be multiplied to feed God's people when the Messiah came (**Exod. 16:32–35; 2 Macc. 2:5–7**). Later in Revelation the wedding supper of the Lamb (**19:9**) similarly symbolizes eternal life.

In the ancient pagan world, special white stones were often used as **admission tickets** for public festivals. Possessing a stone with a special name—perhaps the name engraved is “Christ” or “Jesus,” serving to certify the stone as genuine—means that admission to heaven is absolutely sure for believers in Christ.

b. White Stone

*“and I will give him a white stone,
and a new name written on the stone
which no one knows but he who receives it.”*

Grant Osborne: In short, the manna and white stone are both **eschatological symbols** related to the messianic feast at the eschaton but also teaching the spiritual food and new name that God gives to the believer in the present as well.

John MacArthur: It seems best, however, to understand the white stone in light of the Roman custom of awarding white stones to the victors in athletic contests. A white stone, inscribed with the athlete's name, served as his ticket to a special awards banquet. In this view, Christ promises the overcomers entrance to the eternal victory celebration in heaven.

Richard Phillips: In courts of law, jurors would vote for acquittal by setting forth a white stone, in contrast with a black stone for conviction. Where Satan dwelt in power, faithful Christians were accused and condemned, and some (like Antipas) were put to the sword for their conviction of fidelity to Jesus Christ. Jesus, in turn, would present a white stone to his justified people.

Derek Thomas writes: “Jesus promises to give them the white stone of acquittal—an assurance of eternal life.”

Robert Thomas: The most satisfactory understanding of the white stone derives significance from the free doles of bread and free admission to entertainments that people of the Roman Empire received from time to time. These were in exchange for “tickets,” which often took the form of white stones (**Alford**). Such a white stone with one's name on it was the **basis for admission to special events**. It was also a well-established custom to reward victors at the games with such a token enabling them to gain admission to a special feast. This practice coincides with the victor's participation in the feast of **Rev. 3:20** (cf. also **19:9**) (**Lee**). The “*hidden manna*,” the other part of the reward in **v. 17**, suggests a reference to the **Messianic feast**. The white stone is, then, a personalized *tessera*, which would serve as his token of admission to this great future feast (**Mounce**). This furnishes sufficient incentive for faithfulness to Christ in the meantime. Admittedly, limited information about ancient customs makes identification of the white stone difficult, but repeated contextual reminders about the future Messianic feast make this the most probable of the proposals made to date.

Buist Fanning: The further description in **v. 17e**, “*that no one knows except the one who receives it*,” also **individualizes** the reference since if it were Christ's name (**19:12; 22:4**) others would

know it. So it seems to represent **individual identity and transformation** in that future day. While God's redemptive consummation has a number of important corporate dimensions (**Rev 5:9–14; 7:9–10; 21:1–7**), at the level of this transformation each Christian relates to Christ intimately and personally in a way that no one else can fathom. It is likely also, along the lines of Christ's name that only he knows (**19:12**), to understand that the "*new name*" for each Christian is not a previously unknown name or identity but the full flowering of the individual character that God has in mind for each of his children in Christ. Our ultimate conformity to the image of Christ (**Rom 8:29; 1 John 3:2**) will bear the family likeness but will reflect **God's design for each of its members**, whom he calls by name (**John 10:3**).

S. Lewis Johnson: Now you know your name and you know the name that your husband or your wife uses to speak of you in the most endearing way. That's the kind of relationship that is set forth here. Our relationship with our Lord is not the relationship of a body of people, my Christian friend. It's the relationship of one person to another person. And every one of us is special to our Lord. And in the ages of eternity in the future we each shall have a very special place with him. After all, he's accomplished the miracle of making us all look different. Nobody looks the same. Even twins have a mark of difference. So also in our persons and our character we each have a special name.

Van Parunak: So here I suggest that the Lord is promising, "*I will cast a vote for acquittal with reference to the one who overcomes,*" consistent with his role elsewhere in Scripture as the one to whom all judgment has been committed (**John 5**). The rest of the verse goes on to reinforce this. and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.— The unknowable name elsewhere (**19:12**) is the **Lord Jesus**. On the reading I am proposing, he is signing his ballot for acquittal of the overcomer, using a name that no one can forge. The **forensic nature of the promise** is particularly appropriate to a city where Roman authority was centered, including the authority of capital punishment. The authorities in Pergamos may persecute the believers. In the case of Antipas, they cast their black pebbles to condemn him to death. But **the Lord holds the deciding vote** in the final decision of eternal life and death.

G.K. Beale: In the ancient world and the Old Testament, to know someone's name, especially that of God, often meant to enter into an intimate relationship with that person and to share in the person's character or power. To be given a new name was an indication of a new status. . . . Therefore, believers' reception of this name represents their final reward of consummate identification and unity with the intimate, end-time presence and power of Christ in his kingdom and under his sovereign authority. . . . The "*new name*" is a mark of genuine membership in the community of the redeemed, without which entry into the eternal "city of God" is impossible. It stands in contrast to the satanic "name" that unbelievers receive, which identifies them with the character of the devil and with the ungodly "city of man."

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How powerful and terrifying is the image of Christ with a two-edged sword coming out of His mouth?
- 2) What type of moral and theological compromise undermine the church's testimony today?

3) How will the intensified persecution of the Great Tribulation increase the pressure to remain loyal to the name of Jesus and faithful confession?

4) How reassuring are the two symbols of secure eternal life – the hidden manna and the white stone with the special name?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: church of the Lord Jesus has struggled to understand a valuable lesson throughout her history: Her greatest dangers are almost never from the outside. They are always on the inside. The enemy really is within. Our greatest threats to spiritual health and life are not opposition or even persecution from unbelieving, evil, and wicked men energized by Satan. Rather, it is when we allow into our community of faith spiritual Trojan horses that will sow seeds of destruction given the opportunity. Now, this toxin is easy to identify with a simple word: compromise. Nothing will poison the body of Christ like the poison called **compromise**. And the church cannot say it has not been warned. Listen to just a few of God’s faithful servants:

“Compromise has been a cancer in the church from its inception.”—**David Levy**

“A new Decalogue has been adopted by the neo-Christians of our day, ‘Thou shalt not disagree,’ and a new set of Beatitudes too, ‘Blessed are they that tolerate everything for they shall not be made accountable.’”—**A. W. Tozer**

“Truth always carries confrontation. Truth demands confrontation; loving confrontation nevertheless. If our reflex action is always accommodation of the centrality of the truth involved, there is something wrong.”—**Francis Schaeffer**

Indeed, something is seriously wrong when Christians begin to compromise the truth to accommodate the culture and world in which they live. Such compromise may be theological or moral. At a church in the city of Pergamum, it was both. In fact, their particular situation was so dire, the glorified Christ of **1:9-20** said that if they did not repent, He would come against them quickly and fight them (**2:16**). What a striking and painful image: King Jesus fighting His church! Obviously our Lord takes spiritual compromise seriously, and so should we. . .

Compromise is one of Satan’s favorite and most effective weapons. This is so for at least four reasons:

- It never occurs quickly, so you hardly notice the change.
- It always lowers the original standards you once held important.
- It is seldom offensive because it is perceived as loving.
- It eventually leads you to accept what you once rejected and even thought repulsive. It has been well said that what one generation tolerates, the next generation will accept; what that generation accepts, the next generation will celebrate.

John MacArthur: The church cannot tolerate evil in any form. To the boastful Corinthians, proudly tolerating a man guilty of incest, Paul wrote, “*Your boasting is not good. Do you not*

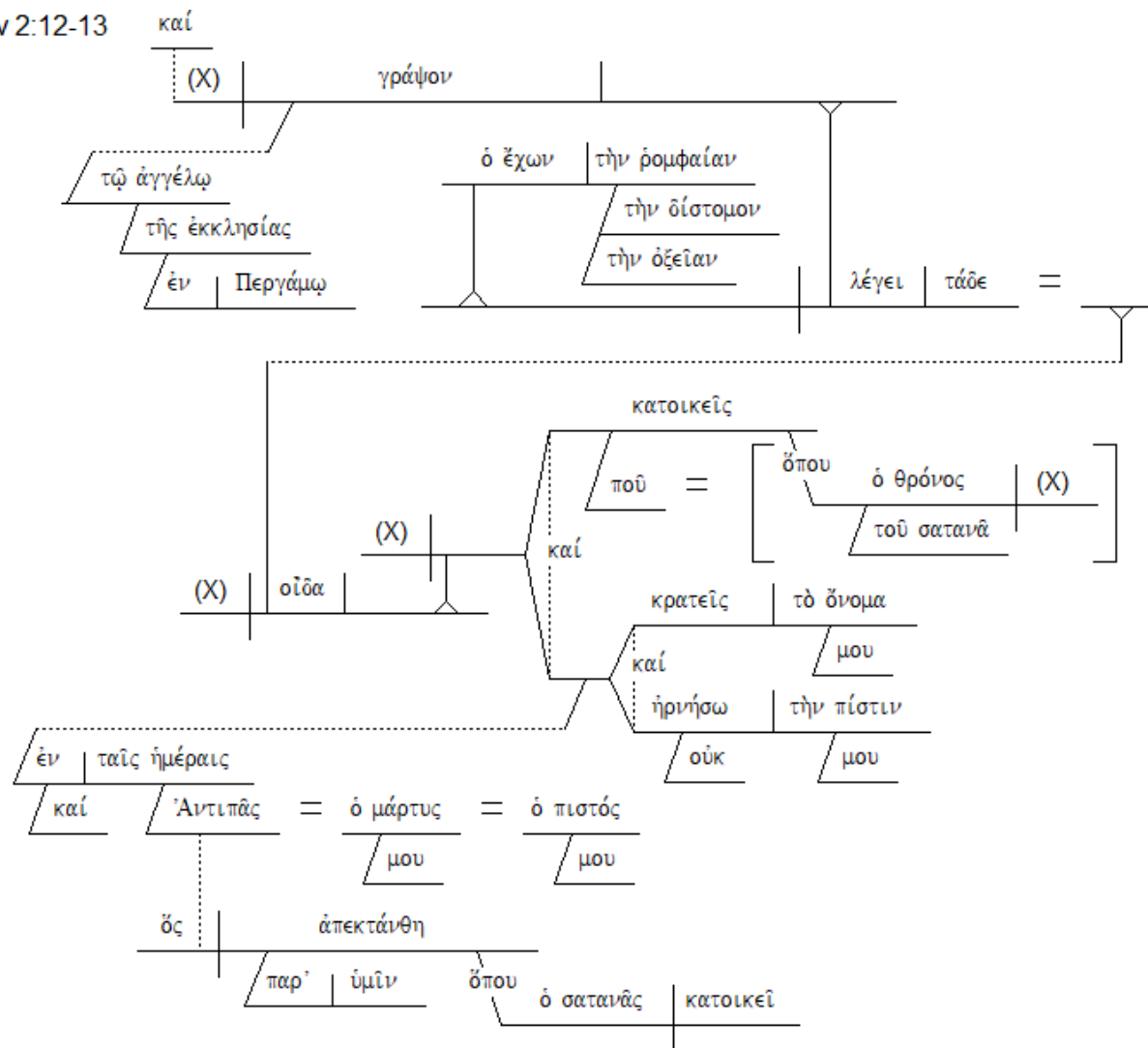
know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened” (1 Cor. 5:6-7). Sinning believers should be made to feel miserable in the fellowship and worship of the church by being confronted powerfully with the Word of God. Neither is the goal of the church to provide an environment where unbelievers feel comfortable; it is to be a place where they can hear the truth and be convicted of their sins so as to be saved (Rom. 10:13-17). Gently (cf. 2 Tim. 2:24-26), lovingly, graciously, yet firmly, unbelievers need to be confronted with the reality of their sin and God’s gracious provision through the sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Error will never be suppressed by compromising with it. Today’s nonconfrontive church is largely repeating the error of the Pergamum church on a grand scale, and faces the judgment of the Lord of the church.

Grant Osborne: The church at Pergamum can be compared to the church today in the midst of the pressures of the secular world, though we have nothing in the Western world comparable to the imperial cult (Satan’s throne), with its rejection and persecution of all things Christian (though many other nations are experiencing this). We do, however, have a secular society that places a great deal of pressure on Christians to compromise and conform (cf. 1 Pet. 4:3-4), and a syncretism similar to that faced by the Christians in Pergamum is taking over Christianity with its rampant materialism. Polls have shown that while evangelicalism is at an all-time high in popularity, it has seldom had less effect on society, and on the whole it is hard to tell the Christians from the non-Christians by their lifestyle and attitudes. Moreover, we have even more false teachers in the church today (most of the cults have originated in church settings), and this is a worldwide problem. Therefore, like Pergamum, most of us live in Satan’s realm and face great pressure to weaken our faith and our walk with Christ. All too often we are guilty of watering down our Christian theology (all too many Christians are turned off to theology and want only a “feel-good” religion). We must develop teachers and preachers who make theological truth exciting and relevant. We need to “repent” and develop “overcomers” as much as the church at Pergamum did.

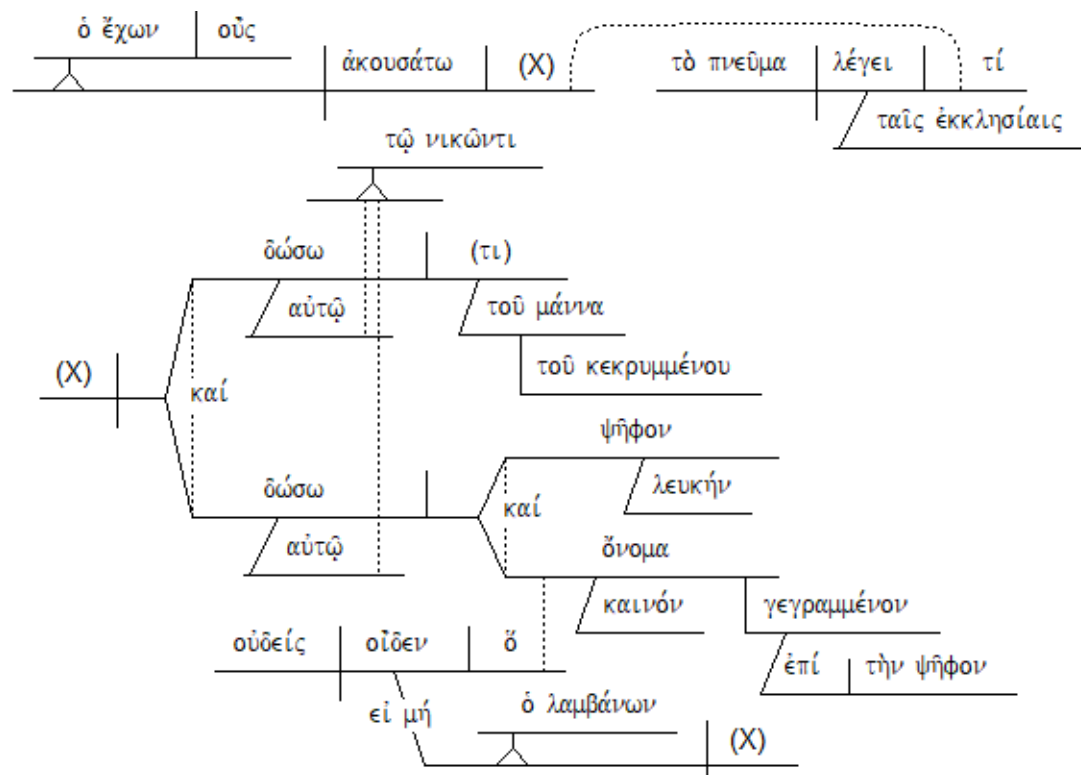
Buist Fanning: As individual Christians we are called to live toward the future God has for us. I will receive a new name from Jesus, an identity and character hardly imagined now but which represents the full transformation of my person and gifts according to God’s good design for me in Christ. Who am I in Christ and what community or extended family do I belong to because of him? How I see myself now and in the future largely controls how I live in the present, and God’s revelation in Scripture should inform that image. I must discover and inhabit Christ’s intent for my life, not my own self-chosen identity or one molded by the overpowering culture around me (autonomous, self-absorbed, without God). Our identity and conduct in the present is formed from our history as well as from our destiny and hope for the future.

Leedy Greek Diagram:

Rev 2:12-13



Rev 2:17



TEXT: Revelation 2:18-29

TITLE: LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA = TOLERATION OF JEZEBEL

BIG IDEA:

FALSE PROPHETS SEDUCE THE SAINTS TO IDOLATROUS COMPROMISE BUT THE CHURCH MUST PERSEVERE IN FAITH, LOVE AND GOOD WORKS

INTRODUCTION:

William Barclay: What, then, was the problem in Thyatira? We know less about Thyatira than about any other of the seven cities and are, therefore, seriously handicapped in trying to reconstruct the situation. The one thing we do know is that it was a **great commercial centre**, especially of the dyeing industry and of the trade in woollen goods. It was from Thyatira that Lydia, the seller of purple, came (**Acts 16:14**). From inscriptions discovered, we learn that it had an extraordinary number of **trade guilds**. These were associations for mutual profit and pleasure of people employed in certain trades. There were guilds of workers in wool, leather, linen and bronze, makers of outer garments, dyers, potters, bakers and slave-dealers.

Here, we think, was the problem of the church in Thyatira. To refuse to join one of these guilds would mean to give up all prospect of commercial existence. Why should a Christian not join one of these guilds? They held common meals. These would very often be held in a temple; and, even if not, they would begin and end with a formal sacrifice to the gods, and the meat eaten would be meat which had already been offered to idols. Further, it often happened that these communal meals were occasions of drunken revelry and slack morality. Was it possible for a Christian to be part of such occasions?

Here was the problem at Thyatira: the threat came from inside the church. There was a strong movement, led by the woman referred to as Jezebel, which pleaded for compromise with the world's standards in the interests of business and commercial prosperity, maintaining, no doubt, that the Holy Spirit could preserve them from any harm. The answer of the risen Christ is uncompromising. Christians must have nothing to do with such things.

Richard Phillips: Here, Jesus displays himself in a way that many professing Christians will be challenged to accept but that should inspire us to holy, faithful lives. He describes himself as "*the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze*" (**Rev. 2:18**). He is the Lord who knows our works, who hates all sin, who judges the unrepentant in his church, and who bestows glory on those who conquer in his name.

Craig Keener: Babylon the prostitute later in this book is probably modeled partly on "*Jezebel*," Thyatira's local embodiment of the larger system of "*Babylon*," because she advocated participation in local civic and commercial life even where they demanded compromise with paganism.

G.K. Beale: Christ commends the church of Thyatira for its Christian works of witness, condemns it for its permissive spirit of **idolatrous compromise**, and exhorts it to overcome this in order not to be judged but to inherit end-time rule together with Christ.

Daniel Akin: The church that tolerates false teaching and corrupt morality will receive judgment, while those who hold fast to the true gospel will receive the ultimate reward.

Kendell Easley: A false teacher was leading many Christians of Thyatira to embrace open immorality, but an all-knowing, all-powerful Lord will punish her followers severely.

Buist Fanning: Jesus commends the church in Thyatira for their growth in Christian character and exhorts them to hold fast, but he rebukes their toleration of idolatrous teaching and warns them of judgment for any who follow it.

(:18) PROLOGUE – JUDGMENT BEGINS AT THE HOUSE OF GOD

A. Command to Write to the Church at Thyatira

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:”

Craig Koester: The issue of **assimilation** continues in the message to Christians in Thyatira, a town located in a broad valley southeast of Pergamum. Here, too, Christians would have faced pressures to accommodate Greco-Roman religious practices. There were associations of linen workers, dyers, wool merchants, leather cutters, and other professions. Christians who practiced those trades would have found it good business to join such a group, even though the trade associations often included Greco-Roman religious rites at their gatherings. The principal deities worshiped at Thyatira were Apollo and Artemis. Moreover, townspeople were grateful that the Romans maintained the roads, which facilitated commerce, and they dedicated a colonnade to Caesar Augustus as “son of god.”

Buist Fanning: Thyatira was a medium-sized city located further inland in a wide valley on the main road going southeast from Pergamum to Sardis. Its location made it an important commercial center with a thriving textile industry (wool trade, weaving, dyeing). Lydia as mentioned in **Acts 16:14** was a merchant from Thyatira who sold purple cloth. Inscriptions give evidence of various other trades that flourished in the city (coppersmiths, tanners and leather workers, potters, slave traders).

Grant Osborne: Each guild had its own patron god or goddess, and the frequent feasts of the guilds were religious in character. The pressure on Christians to participate in the idolatrous life of the people was probably linked to the guilds, for their feasts were the heart of the social (and commercial) life of the city. To refuse to participate meant the loss of both goodwill and business.

David Thompson: Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities, but it had the longest message given by Jesus Christ. . . **Dr. Alan Johnson** said that each union had three main features:

- 1) Its own deity - each guild had its own “guardian god”
- 2) Its own feasts
- 3) Its own seasonal festivals which were wild parties with immoral revelry

B. Characterization of the Son of God as Penetrating and Powerful Judge

“The Son of God,”

Van Parunak: This is the only instance of this title in the Revelation. The scarcity of the title in the Revelation is remarkable, since John’s epistles and gospel account for nearly half of the

instances of this title in the NT. In **1 John** (where the title is densest), the point is that “*Jesus Christ is come in the flesh*” (**1 John 4:2, 3**), that the man Jesus is the divine Son. The title thus emphasizes the incarnation, in direct contradiction to the gnostic claim of the Nicolaitans that our physical life and conduct is irrelevant to our spiritual condition.

1. Judgment of Christ is Perceptive

“who has eyes like a flame of fire,”

Robert Mounce: The blazing eyes suggest the penetrating power of Christ’s ability to see through the seductive arguments of Jezebel and those who were being led astray by her pernicious teaching. Feet (or legs; cf. on **1:15**) like burnished bronze convey the idea of strength and splendor.

2. Judgment of Christ is Powerful

“and His feet are like burnished bronze,”

William Barclay: The description is taken from that of the angelic messenger in **Daniel 10:6**: ‘His face [was] like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze.’ The flaming eyes must stand for two things – blazing anger against sin and the awful penetration of that gaze which strips the disguises away and sees into the depths of a person’s heart. The bronze feet must stand for the immovable power of the risen Christ.

Buist Fanning: reinforcing his resplendent, heavenly glory (see **Rev 1:15**), but also perhaps indirectly making a connection to the well-known metalworking trade of Thyatira. The word rendered “*gleaming bronze*” (χαλκολίβανον; found only here and in **Rev 1:15** in all of extant Greek literature) seems to refer to a type of fine brass or bronze, and it could be a specialized term familiar in the local area. In any case it also serves to connect the glorious vision of Christ (**1:15**) with his appearance in judgment, perhaps alluding in this case to his future coming in irresistible power as Lord of all (**19:11–16**).

John MacArthur: That Christ’s feet glowed brilliantly like burnished bronze depicts His purity and holiness as He tramples out impurity.

David Thompson: Christ wants the people in this church to realize that the One addressing them had better be taken seriously. All churches need to realize that Jesus Christ sees all sin in a church and He does have the ability as God to judge it and stamp it out. He will not tolerate idolatrous and immoral things forever in His church and sooner or later, He will get rid of it.

C. Communication from the Sovereign Head of the Church

“says this:”

I. (:19-) COMMENDATION FOR FAITH, LOVE AND GOOD WORKS

A. Praiseworthy Past Performance

“I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance,”

Sola Scriptura: The deeds of the Thyatirans are described by four nouns:

- 1) Love = mental attitude.
- 2) Faith = dependability or faithfulness.

- 3) Service = attending someone for the purpose of performing a task.
- 4) Perseverance = the correct way to respond to suffering by the overcomer.

John MacArthur: Out of faith and love grow service and perseverance. Those who love will express that love through meeting the needs of others. Those who are faithful will steadfastly persevere in the faith (cf. **Matt. 16:24–26; 24:13**).

Robert Thomas: Love and faith are abstract qualities or motive forces for Christian activity, and service and endurance are outward fruit or the results that flow from these motive forces (**Charles; Mounce**). This arrangement, in agreement with the frequent ascensive use of *kai* in this book, takes the last two words to be in apposition with the first two (**Beckwith**). In other words, love is demonstrated in service to others and faith is shown through endurance of hardship imposed through persecution.

Grant Osborne: Love is indeed a primary characteristic of those who would call themselves the children of God. “Faith” (πίστιν, *pistin*) is even more central to this book (see on **2:13**), describing not only trust in God rather than in this world but even more a faithful perseverance in the midst of oppression and pressure from the pagans. While **Sweet** (1979: 94) argues for “faithfulness” here and **Thomas** (1992: 212) for “faith/belief,” it is more likely that the two aspects shade into one another. In the parallel **2:13**, both terms are found and clarify each other. “Service” (διακονίαν, *diakonian*) occurs only here in the book and refers to an active life of care and help, to charitable service and ministry to others. As **Weiser** (EDNT 1:302) points out, the διακονέω (*diakoneō*, *serve*) word group differs from the δουλεύω (*douleuō*, *serve*) word group in that the former connotes “service” on behalf of someone while the latter speaks of “service” under or subordinate to someone (the “lord” or “master”). “Endurance” (ὑπομονήν, *hypomonēn*) is another major term in the book (see on **1:9; 2:2, 3**), referring to an active perseverance in the midst of pressure and hard times. It is the key characteristic of the “overcomer” who remains true to God even if it means martyrdom. These four describe a life of Christian caring for others and faithfulness to God.

B. Positive Progressive Growth

“and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.”

Warren Wiersbe: The believers in Thyatira were a busy lot! They were involved in sacrificial ministry for the sake of others. What’s more, their works were increasing and characterized by faith, love, and patience; so the church was not guilty of mere “religious activity.”

Daniel Akin: Jesus likes these characteristics of His church. He also loves that “*your last works are greater than the first*.” They are not stagnant or satisfied in their service to their King. They had gotten better! They were doing more than ever! “Do good things and grow in good things” is a wonderful goal for any church of Christ, and that goal had been met in the church at Thyatira

Buist Fanning: In deliberate contrast to what was said to the Ephesian church, where some of these same commendations occur (**2:2–3**), Christ does not need to rebuke them for spiritual regression (**2:4–5**: “*You abandoned the love you had at first. . . . Do the works you did at first*”). Instead they are **moving forward** in Christian conduct (**v. 19c**): “*Your last works are greater than the first*,” undeterred by adverse circumstances (cf. **2 Cor 10:15; Eph 4:15–16; Phil 1:25; Col 1:6, 10; 1 Tim 4:15; 2 Pet 3:18**).

Richard Phillips: What particularly stands out in Thyatira is that the church was continuing to grow spiritually and in good works: Jesus says, “*Your latter works exceed the first*” (**Rev. 2:19**). These believers set a good example for us today. Part of what makes Christianity so exciting is that we are called to continually grow in terms of our knowledge of God’s grace (**2 Peter 3:18**), our personal holiness (**Eph. 4:24**), our love for others, and our good works. **John Stott** writes: “The church of Thyatira understood that the Christian life is a life of growth, of progress, of development.” Knowing this, each of us should pray that our “*latter works*” will “*exceed the first*.”

David Thompson: What I understand Christ to mean is that this church was better developed and far more mature when Christ made His assessment than when it first began. Both in numbers . of works and in quality of work, this church was much more developed than when it first began. This church did not rely on its past laurels and the people were always seeking to serve and do more for God.

II. (:20-23) CRITICISM FOR TOLERATING THE INFLUENCE OF JEZEBEL

A. (:20) Seduction of Jezebel Demands Confrontation, Not Toleration

“But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel,”

Richard Phillips: In the ninth century B.C., Jezebel was an unbelieving princess from Sidon whom Israel’s King Ahab married for political reasons. Jezebel brought her false gods with her, and soon her legions of pagan priests had spread the worship of Baal and Asherah throughout the land. The Israelites were **seduced** with the idea that these Sidonian gods, male and female, would bring economic prosperity in the form of fertile lands and wombs. Jezebel’s idolatry, which involved ritual prostitution at the pagan shrines, swept through God’s people. . .

Jesus’ response to this Jezebel’s seductive ministry reminds us of two things concerning **sexual purity**. First, the Bible associates sexual sin with idolatry. The Old Testament often compared idolatry to sexual infidelity. Hosea condemned Israel, saying that “*the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD*” (**Hos. 1:2**). Jeremiah complained that by worshiping at Baal altars and Asherah poles, Jews “*polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree*” (**Jer. 3:9**). Sex is God’s gift to be blessed within marriage and for the procreation of holy children. Those who engage in sexual sin divorce God’s gift from God’s holy purpose and thus make a god of their desires. This is why Paul wrote: “*Flee from sexual immorality. . . . Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body*” (**1 Cor. 6:18–20**).

Second, Jesus’ emphasis highlights the importance of sexual purity to the Christian life. In general, the idea that believers in Christ may continue to live like the world is false. James wrote: “*Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*” (**James 4:4**). This principle is especially true when it comes to the Christian calling to sexual purity, through abstinence outside marriage and fidelity within marriage. The Bible teaches that “*this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality*” (**1 Thess. 4:3**). Jesus therefore rebuked the church in Thyatira: “*I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who . . . [is] seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality*” (**Rev. 2:20**).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Thyatira had a definite and even greater ministry of service and endurance, one that seemed to be motivated by faith and love (cf. **vs. 19**), but Thyatira lacked on the side of zeal for sound doctrine, moral purity, holiness of life, and zeal against false teaching and practice. Obviously, the church needs to have both, it needs a balance or it must eventually lose its testimony and capacity for ministry.

Daniel Akin: Guard Against a Personality Cult

Jesus has something against this church: “*You tolerate the woman Jezebel.*” This is most certainly a descriptive title and not the woman’s actual name. It would conjure up images of the evil and vile queen of Israel. However, I do believe our Lord is talking about an **actual person**. This woman was a powerful personality who had built her own following and kingdom in our Lord’s church. She was smart, influential in personality, and powerful in speech. It was easy to join her because she made so much sense. However, like Jezebel of old, she was evil and deceptive, domineering and scheming, idolatrous and sexually immoral. The liberty she promised would actually lead them into slavery and away from God and the lordship of Jesus.

There is such a valuable lesson here, one we must never forget. Anything or anyone that gets your eyes off of Jesus is not of God. Any-thing or anyone that minimizes or adds to the gospel is not of God. Anything or anyone that compromises on biblical truth is not of God. The impressiveness of their abilities, gifts, and visions makes no difference. Indeed, the greater the gifts, the greater the dangers.

Robert Mounce: The Thyatiran Jezebel is probably some prominent woman within the church who, like her OT counterpart, was influencing the people of God to forsake loyalty to God by promoting a tolerance toward and involvement in pagan practices. This extended to sexual immorality and participation in the religious feasts connected with membership in trade guilds. Jezebel “symbolizes the corrosive powers of false religion among the people of God.”

1. False Prophetess

*“who calls herself a prophetess,
and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray,”*

Robert Thomas: In the first-century church a prophet was an inspired messenger of God who ranked high, just behind the apostles, in the capability of edifying the church (cf. **1 Cor. 12:28**). But the early church also had false prophets. In her own eyes, Jezebel’s alleged special revelations from God qualified her as an authoritative teacher in the church. Some others agreed and she became a recognized leader, the critical problem being that she was leading people astray.

Grant Osborne: This is the only place in the book where Christians are “*deceived*”; elsewhere it is always unbelievers. It is possible that those who fall into this “error” are considered thereby to be unbelievers, but the use of “*my slaves*” makes that unlikely. The verb means to “*seduce*” a person into sin by leading that one into error. **Braun** (TDNT 6:238–49) notes three characteristics in Jewish and Christian apocalyptic passages: seduction by evil powers (e.g., the angel of darkness), dualism (light vs. darkness, truth vs. error), and eschatology (the false prophets claim to be the deliverers of the last day). There is a close connection between Revelation and the Olivet discourse in this, as Jesus prophesied of “*false prophets*” and “*false messiahs*” who would “*deceive*” many in the church (**Mark 13:5–6, 22; Matt. 24:4–5, 11, 24**). Jezebel is seen as a

satanic force (this is the only place in the book a person wields this terrible power) claiming the Spirit's authority (as a prophetess) but leading many of God's "*slaves*" astray into heresy.

David Thompson: God did not call her a prophetess; she called herself one. The Greek means she continually went around telling people she was a prophetess. She told people she received direct messages from God that she was supposed to share with the people. We have already pointed out that at the time John wrote Revelation, God was stressing that He revealed Himself through the written Word (1:3, 11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12,18; 3:1, 7, 14; 22:18-19). This woman was luring people to believe that she was a spokesperson for God

2. Faithlessness of Idolatrous Immorality

*"so that they commit acts of immorality
and eat things sacrificed to idols."*

Key Question: Do the "*acts of immorality*" refer just to spiritual adultery or extend to sexual immorality? It would seem to me that the impurity of sexual sin is included here.

Alan Johnson: Each guild had its own patron deity, feasts, and seasonal festivities that included **sexual revelries**.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The adultery mentioned here includes both spiritual adultery (idolatry), and physical adultery (fornication in cultic prostitution). This is the only place adultery is indicated. The fact adultery constitutes a violation of the marriage vow could indicate that some of those who had been seduced by this Jezebel's teaching were believers, those who had been betrothed to Christ as His bride (cf. **2 Cor. 11:2; Jam. 4:4**). . .

First, there were those who tolerated her (**verse 20**). In other words, they rejected her teaching, refused to follow her, and refused to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols. But, contrary to the believers in Ephesus, they refused to deal with her through church discipline. What she was teaching was clearly license versus true Christian liberty. This teaching was contrary to Scripture, but they tolerated her presence rather than deal with the problem.

Second, there were those who were her children—her spiritual progeny. These are referred to in **verses 20b-23**. Evidently, these were those who accepted her teaching and, like Ahab who was influenced by Jezebel of old, followed her example by participating in the activities of the labor guilds which meant involvement in eating things sacrificed to idols and fornication. Some of these could have been true believers who were judged and died the sin unto physical death (**1 Cor. 11:28-32; 1 John 5:16-17**).

Buist Fanning: Her influence on Christians in Thyatira is probably not toward physical fornication but **spiritual infidelity**: both phrases, "*to commit sexual immorality and eat meat offered to idols*" (v. 20d), seem to describe entanglement with idolatrous worship that constitutes disloyalty to the true God (see v. 21, which seems to summarize both as "*her sexual immorality*," τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς). The same two items appear in vv. 14–15, but as argued there the Nicolaitans of Pergamum likewise advocated not sexual sin but spiritual disloyalty disguised as participation in certain rituals of their pagan culture.

B. (:21) Stubborn Rebellion Must Be Stamped Out

"And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality."

Daniel Akin: Jesus gave the Jezebel “*time to repent*.” However, “*she does not want to repent of her sexual immorality*.” Our Lord gave her time to change her evil ways. She said no.

Buist Fanning: The way Christ’s intervention is described in vv. 21–23 (giving “*time to repent*” and pledging disciplinary judgment on her and others when there is no repentance) echoes the process of church discipline touched on in other parts of the New Testament. Action is taken in a step-by-step way, hopeful of and allowing time for a repentant response, but involving the wider congregation and escalating the consequences if sinful action persists (**Matt 18:15–17**). The goal of such action is the purity of the church as well as the restoration of the sinful church member (**1 Cor 5:1–5, 11–13; Gal 6:1–2**). The sinful person is treated as no longer part of the community, while still being appealed to as a brother or sister (**2 Thess 3:6, 11–15**). God’s judgment on grave sin can extend to physical sickness or even death (**Acts 5:1–11; 1 Cor 5:5; 11:31–34**; see vv. 22–23 below).

Richard Phillips: This indicates that church leaders had previously confronted her for her false teaching and wicked behavior. Here we see the importance of loving and faithful church discipline. Jesus reminds Christians to take biblical reproofs seriously, especially when coming from faithful pastors or church elders. “*But she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality*,” Jesus goes on, and therefore his judgment was the only recourse.

C. (:22-23a) Severe Judgment Oracle

1. (:22) Misery of Great Catastrophes

*“Behold, I will cast her upon a bed of sickness,
and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation,
unless they repent of her deeds.”*

William Barclay: There is every likelihood that Jezebel was teaching that Christians ought to accommodate themselves to the world; in other words, she was urging on the Church a spiritual infidelity which was bound to result in physical adultery.

Gordon Fee: Very likely the phrase “*cast her on a bed*” is intended as irony: her “*bed*” as the place of harlotry is now a place of illness, since she is playing the role of a harlot with regard to the truth.

John MacArthur: The Lord threatens to cast them into **great tribulation**—not the eschatological tribulation described in **Revelation 4–19**, but distress or trouble. Since these were the sinning Christians who had believed her lies, the Lord does not threaten to send them to hell as He did the false prophetess. He promises to bring them **severe chastening**—possibly even physical death (cf. **1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16**)—unless they repent of her deeds.

David Thompson: The words “*great tribulation*” are anarthrous (without article) which means this is not speaking of “*The Great Tribulation*” (i.e. **Rev. 7:14**) described in **Revelation 6-19**, it is a reference to the fact that Jesus Christ would see to it that all who were connected to this woman would be hit with a string of great affliction, trial and suffering. I would understand this to mean that all kinds of **catastrophes** would begin to hit those who were connected to this woman. This would be a time of unprecedented and unparalleled misery for those who are intimately connected to this woman.

2. (:23a) Morbid Attack against Her Loyal Followers

“And I will kill her children with pestilence;”

Robert Thomas: “Children” is a customary way of referring to one’s spiritual progeny. These people had embraced the antinomian doctrines of their spiritual mother and are properly referred to as her spiritual offspring. No distinction between these and her associates in **v. 22** is intended (**Mounce**).

G.K. Beale: Note also how the judgment on Jezebel foreshadows the judgment on the harlot Babylon in **ch. 18**. In both cases, people fornicate with a harlot (see **17:1, 2** and **18:3, 8-9**), who deceives them (see **18:23**), and sexual immorality is a picture of participation in shadowy forms of commerce (see **18:3, 11-22** and note that many of these forms of commerce, such as trade in linen, purple, bronze, and slaves, were present in Thyatira). In both cases God’s people are commanded not to participate in her sins lest they be judged by being put to death (see **18:4, 8**), and in both cases God judges everyone according to their deeds (see **18:6**). The **extraordinary similarities** are not coincidental and show how to some degree the visions portray present realities in society and even in the church.

Grant Osborne: There is a debate as to whether there are **one or two other groups** in her entourage. Some (e.g., **Beasley-Murray** 1978: 91; **Thomas** 1992: 222) believe that the “adulterers” of **Rev. 2:22** and the “children” of **2:23** are the same group, looked at in terms of participation in her sins (adulterers) and acceptance of her teachings (children). This is certainly viable, but it is **better to take them as separate groups**. At the end of **2:22** there is a further chance for repentance for the adulterers: “*unless they repent of her ways.*” However, there does not seem to be that chance for the others: “*I will strike her children dead.*” Therefore, “*those who commit adultery with her*” (τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς, *tous moicheuontas met’ autēs*) are those church members who have been drawn into her syncretistic teaching and practices but have not yet gone as far as she, that is, they have not as yet been “unwilling” to repent and so here are being given the same chance she had. It is possible (so **Beckwith, Alford, Thomas**) that “*with her*” refers more to their indirect tolerance of her teaching or their following her example than to their direct participation with her in those sins (direct participation often has the object in the accusative case). In other words, these people were being drawn into her circle but had not yet become full members.

D. (:23b) Standard of Judgment a Warning to All Churches

1. Fairly Evaluated by the All-Knowing and All-Seeing Sovereign

*“and all the churches will know that I am He
who searches the minds and hearts;”*

2. Fairly Administered on the Basis of Works

“and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.”

John MacArthur: Works have always been the basis for divine judgment. That does not mean, however, that salvation is by works (cf. **Eph. 2:8–9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5**). **People’s deeds reveal their spiritual condition.** That is what James meant when he said, “*I will show you my faith by my works*” (**James 2:18**). Saving faith will inevitably express itself in good works, causing James to declare that “*faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself*” (**James 2:17**, cf. **v. 26**). Christians are new creatures (**2 Cor. 5:17**), “*created in Christ Jesus for good works,*

which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them”(Eph. 2:10). Works cannot save, but they do damn.

Judgment must begin with the household of God (1 Pet. 4:17). But Christ’s judgment will fairly reflect each person’s deeds—a reality that should bring fear to those who teach and practice false doctrine, but comfort and hope to those whose faith is genuine.

III. (:24-25) CAVEAT – REMAIN FAITHFUL

A. (:24) Exhortation to Faithful Remnant

“But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you.”

John MacArthur: There is a **progressive worsening** in the character of these seven churches, as they depict becoming more and more influenced by evil. That downward spiral reached its lowest point at Laodicea.

The phrase “*the deep things of Satan*” (2:24) reveals how far the Thyatira church had slipped in relation to those in Smyrna and Pergamum. The Smyrna church faced hostility from the “*synagogue of Satan*,” that is, from unbelieving Jews (2:9). The Pergamum church existed at the site of Satan’s throne (2:13), symbolizing Gentile false religion (particularly the cult of emperor worship). But the church at Thyatira had plunged headlong into the very depths of satanic deception.

G.K. Beale: But *the rest who are in Thyatira* have not known *the deep things of Satan* and have not been led astray by the false teachers. The latter is possibly Christ’s description of what Jezebel and her followers may have called the “*deep things of God*.” This expression implies the erroneous view that it was possible for Christians to participate worshipfully to some degree in idolatrous situations and thus to have experience with the demonic-satanic realm, and yet not be harmed spiritually by such participation. Jezebel’s “revelation” was similar to that of the Israelites who created the golden calf (Exod. 32:1-6) or that of the Corinthians who frequented the idol temples (1 Cor. 10:14-24). Possibly the false teachers were misapplying Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 8:4 by saying that if, indeed, an idol has no real existence in the world, then participation at a feast honoring an idol could not harm one spiritually. This teaching may also have emphasized the spiritual dimension to such a degree that the physical world was considered unimportant, so that one’s presence in an idolatrous temple or at an idol’s feast table had no effect on one’s faith. Christians must always beware of those who lay claim to new revelations or deeper truths that have never before been discerned or widely practiced in the body of Christ.

B. (:25) Endurance until Christ Returns Is the Key

“Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: In verse 25 the words, “*what you have, hold fast until I come*,” warns against the universal principle that **things always tend to degenerate rather regenerate**. It’s much like the second law of thermodynamics which simply put says, life goes from order to disorder and not vice versa. Things naturally go downhill unless there is great effort against those forces that, like gravity, tend to pull us downward. So there is always the need to cling to the Lord and hold tightly through a close walk with Him in the Word, regardless of the many

blessing we possess in Christ and where we are in our spiritual journey, babe in Christ or mature (cf. **1 Cor. 10:1-13; Phil. 3:12-14**).

(:26-29) EPILOGUE – BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME

A. (:26-28) Persevere to Receive the Blessing

1. (:26a) Condition of Overcoming and Faithfulness

a. Overcoming

“And he who overcomes,”

b. Faithfulness

“and he who keeps My deeds until the end,”

2. (:26b-28) Blessing of Reigning with Christ

a. (:26b) Authority over the Nations

“to him I will give authority over the nations;”

Buist Fanning: The derived authority Christ will grant to the overcomer is associated with the supreme authority granted to Christ already: *“Just as I received authority from my Father.”* In his resurrection and exaltation, Christ has already been installed in the position of greatest authority in God’s presence in heaven, now awaiting the full establishment of that authority on earth at his second coming (**Rev 19:11–21**). The governing role that the saints will exercise in that future realm will take place only because of their relationship to Christ who will wield his scepter as *“King of kings and Lord of lords”* (**19:15–19**).

b. (:27) Administration of Strength

*“and he shall rule them with a rod of iron,
as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces,
as I also have received authority from My Father;”*

Warren Wiersbe: The believers in Thyatira are promised authority over the nations, which probably refers to the fact that God’s people will live and reign with Christ (see **Rev. 20:4**). When the Lord sets up His kingdom on earth, it will be a righteous kingdom with perfect justice. He will rule with a rod of iron (**Ps. 2:8–9**). Rebellious men will be like clay pots, easily broken to pieces!

John Walvoord: The word for “rule” (Gr., *poimanei*) means literally “to shepherd.” The rule of Christ’s faithful ones in the millennium will not be simply that of executing judgment, but also that of administering mercy and direction to those who are the sheep as contrasted to the goats (**Matt. 25:31–46**). The power to rule in this way was given to Christ by His heavenly Father (**John 5:22**).

c. (:28) Access to Christ’s Glory

“and I will give him the morning star.”

Gordon Fee: The term first occurs in an especially obscure passage in **Isaiah 14:12**, where it most likely refers to the fallen king of Babylon, and thus has a negative referent. But the present usage is altogether positive, and in **22:16** below Christ himself is called *“the bright Morning Star.”* Thus perhaps what John understood this to mean was that the victors will be given

eschatological glory, which they will share with Christ himself. Or perhaps this is a somewhat obtuse way of indicating that they will receive Christ himself (= be eternally in his presence) as the ultimate prize of their victory.

Craig Keener: Although **Psalm 2** addressed God’s messianic viceroy alone (see also **Ps. Sol. 17:23–25**), Jesus shares his rule with his people, for God has delegated rule over the earth to humanity (**Gen. 1:26–27; Ps. 8:6; cf. Dan. 7:14, 22**). Jesus will also give those who overcome the morning star (**Rev. 2:28**). Ancients emphasized the glory of the planet Venus, the “*morning star*” (**Sir. 50:6–7**), and could apply the image to magnificent rulers (**Isa. 14:12**). Romans associated Venus with triumph and reign, hence praised this goddess for their conquests. In Revelation, however—although one might not catch this until one’s second time through the book—Jesus is himself the morning star (**Rev. 22:16**), probably alluding to the promised star of **Numbers 24:17**, which many ancient Jews understood messianically.

In other words, Jesus’ promise to the church in Thyatira suggests that he will share not only victory in an abstract sense (**2:26**) but himself as the morning star with his people (**2:28**). He is greater than the stars, who are angels of the churches (**1:20**).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The Lord is promising the overcomer that he will share His royalty and splendor as the morning star.

B. (:29) Pay Attention

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Robert Mounce: Once again the exhortation to hear what the Spirit says to the churches is repeated (cf. **2:7, 11, 17**). This same emphasis on hearing and doing also marks the conclusion of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. The wise build against the coming storm of judgment by hearing and doing (**Matt 7:24–25**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can you guard against a personality cult gaining a foothold in your church or a charismatic leader attracting a following that does not match his doctrinal integrity or level of spiritual maturity?
- 2) What practices or social norms exist in our culture that place churches under pressure to conform and compromise? (**G.K. Beale**)
- 3) What is the significance of the fact that believers are pictured as overcoming in this life? And what does it mean that so often in Revelation this overcoming is expressed in suffering and even death? (**G.K. Beale**)
- 4) What type of governing responsibilities might Jesus allocate to His followers in the millennial kingdom?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: It is interesting to contrast the churches at Ephesus and Thyatira. The Ephesian church was weakening in its love, yet faithful to judge false teachers; while the people in the assembly at Thyatira were growing in their love, but too tolerant of false doctrine. Both extremes must be avoided in the church. “*Speaking the truth in love*” is the biblical balance (**Eph. 4:15**). Unloving orthodoxy and loving compromise are both hateful to God.

William Barclay: On the surface, the church at Thyatira was strong and flourishing. A stranger who went into it would be impressed with its abounding energy and its generous liberality and its apparent steadfastness. For all that, there was something essential missing.

Here is a warning. A church which is crowded with people and which is a hive of energy is not necessarily a real church. It is possible for a church to be crowded because its people come to be entertained instead of instructed, and to be soothed instead of confronted with the fact of sin and the offer of salvation; it may be a highly successful Christian club rather than a real Christian congregation.

Grant Osborne: There are three areas of emphasis in this letter, and all relate closely to the church today.

- First, it is crucial to be growing in the same deeds—love, faith, service, and perseverance (**2:19, 25**). The church today is facing the same pressures as Thyatira, and it would be good if the Lord could say of us too, “*Your latter deeds are greater than your first.*”
- Second, as already stated in the previous letter, we too are fighting many heretical cult movements and need to take a strong stand. We must protect the church from the unscrupulous who lead their followers astray in order to build their own kingdom, who water down the faith to make it more amenable to the secular market.
- Third, the major area Thyatira differs from Pergamum is that the greatest pressure came not from pagan religion but from the world of business or commerce. This in many ways fits our culture even more closely, for many Christians compromise their walk with Christ to enhance their profits or to keep their jobs. The judgment of Christ can fall upon our churches in the same way it did Thyatira. We must make certain that God is our primary business partner, and that we consider our careers a calling from God and an opportunity to magnify Christ. Otherwise, we may end up like Jezebel.

Buist Fanning: The Glory of Everyday Faithfulness

In our world of short attention spans and fascination with celebrities, it seems so pedestrian to ask for solid continuity and steady progress. How unglamorous! Yet this is what Jesus acclaims in this church: they have held fast to God’s ways and continued to grow and advance in Christian character (**love, faith, service, endurance, maturity**). They were not taken in by Jezebel’s esoteric teachings (“*deep things*”) that really came from Satan himself. Our world’s penchant for what is fresh and new, “the latest thing,” can be a trap for the unsuspecting. Amid unprecedented change and turmoil all around us, we need to see the value of **spiritual continuity and fidelity**, the old pathways of following Jesus in enduring faith and sacrificial service. We will be surprised by how fresh and new such a walk with him will turn out to be even in this world! And as **vv. 26–27** show, such faithful followers are the ones who will someday share his rule in the

future kingdom: “*If we endure, we will also reign with him*” (2 Tim 2:12). Nothing pedestrian about that.

Daniel Akin: Christ Corrects Us with Loving Discipline (2:21-25).

- A. God’s discipline is fair (2:21).
- B. God’s discipline is full (2:22).
- C. God’s discipline is final (2:23).
- D. God’s discipline is fearful (2:23).
- E. God’s discipline is faithful (2:24-25).

John MacArthur: Three important truths stand out.

- First, this letter reveals the seriousness of practicing and tolerating sin, and that God will judge continued, unrepentant sin in the church.
- Second, a pattern of obedience marks true Christians.
- Finally, God’s gracious promise to His own is that, in spite of struggles with sin and error in churches, they will experience all the fullness of Christ as they reign with Him in His kingdom. Those churches, like Thyatira, who fail to heed the message will receive divine judgment; those who do heed its message will receive divine blessing.

Craig Keener: Yet the world is not alone in its **excessive tolerance**. Like the Thyatiran Christians, we may tolerate some who falsely claim “*deep*” teachings that directly undermine the gospel or Christian ethics. As noted above, few evangelicals today are tempted to question some cardinal Christian teachings like Jesus’ deity or resurrection. But because **relativism** has become increasingly popular in our culture, the absolute necessity of faith in Christ for salvation has become a more uncomfortable position for many to hold. “Over nineteen centuries of Christian missionary activity hinged on this belief alone,” but studies reveal that this remains “the single most socially offensive aspect of Christian theology,” and that this has been the most prominent impact of theological liberalism.

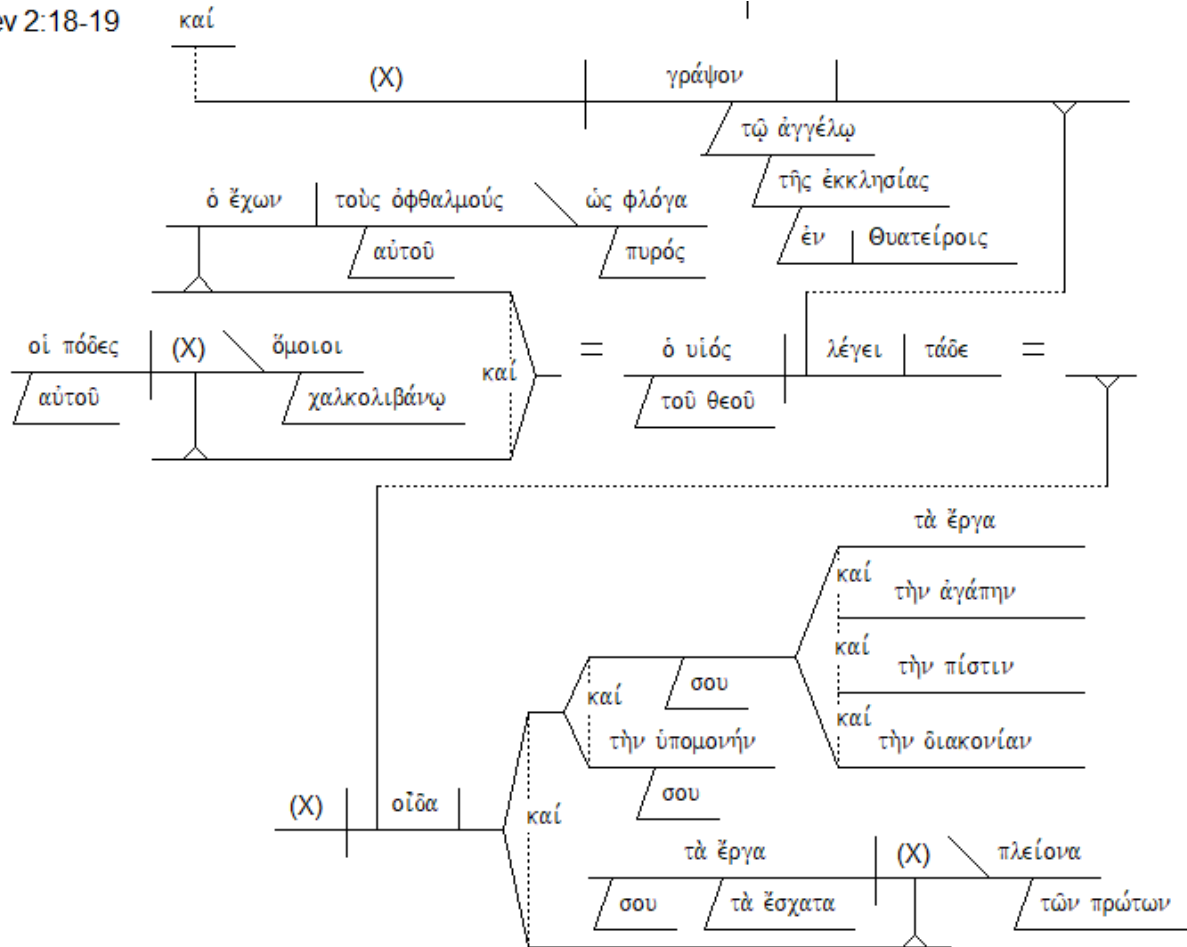
This trend toward accepting relativism is likely to take its toll in evangelical circles and will probably become a primary battleground of early twenty-first century evangelicalism. Among students at “elite” evangelical liberal arts colleges and seminaries, one third believe that other ways of salvation may be possible for those who have never heard of Jesus Christ. Most will not go so far as a Hindu acquaintance of mine who acknowledged Jesus as a legitimate but not the only path of salvation; they simply claim that God may have a special plan for those who have never heard the gospel.

S. Lewis Johnson: “The longest letter,” **R.H. Charles** has said, “is addressed to the least important of the seven cities, but surely not the least interesting.” Thyatira was a church that was suffering a sorcerer, conniving with a crone, and winking at a witch in her midst. The name Jezebel, like our English word, Agnes, is a word that means “pure or chaste” by one etymology. But Ahab’s fascinator, for that’s what Jezebel was, was characterized by, according to the Old Testament, whoredoms and witchcraft. One cannot understand this letter, I don’t think, as well as it should be understood if we do not understand something of the situation at Thyatira. . .

So the problem at Thyatira was that here is a church that evidently is compromising, to some extent, the holy truth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We remember that the Apostle Paul said, “*This is the will of God, even your sanctification.*”

Leedy Greek Diagram:

Rev 2:18-19

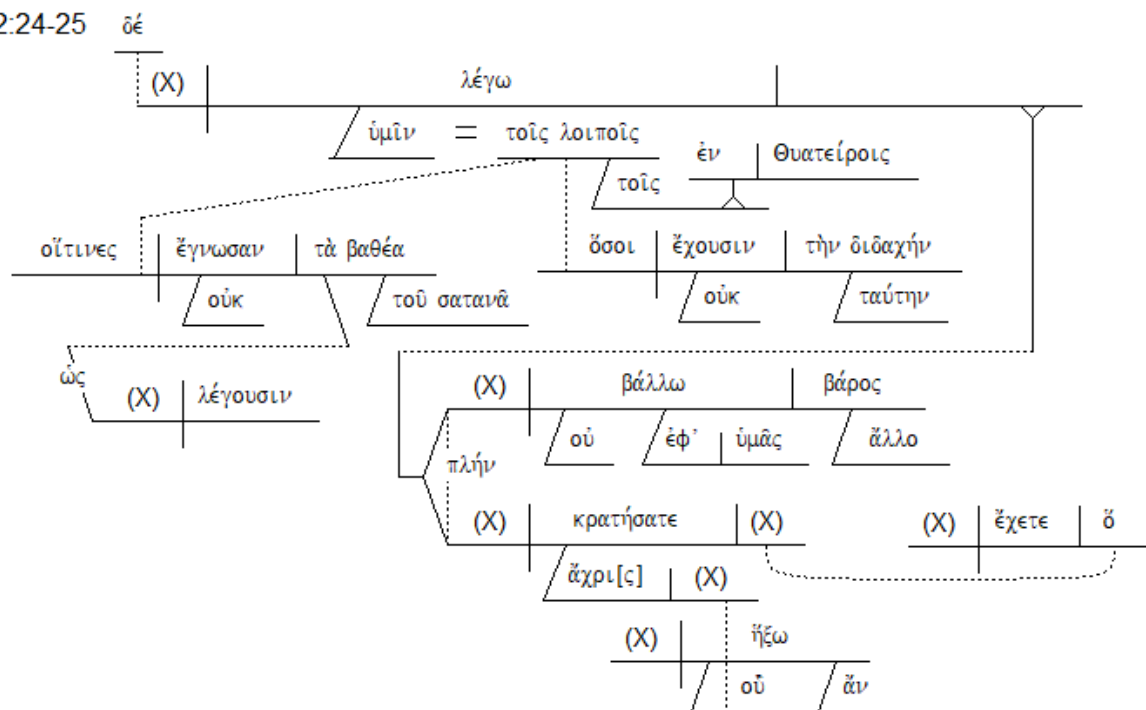


Rev 2:20 ἄλλ' (X) ἀφείξ | τὴν γυναῖκα = Ἰεζάβελ
 (X) ἔχω | ὅτι
 κατά | σοῦ
 λέγουσα | ἐαυτήν || (X) προφήτην
 ἡ | καί | διδάσκει | πορνεῦσαι
 καί | πλανᾷ | τοὺς δούλους || καί | φαγεῖν | εἰδωλόθυτα
 ἐμούς

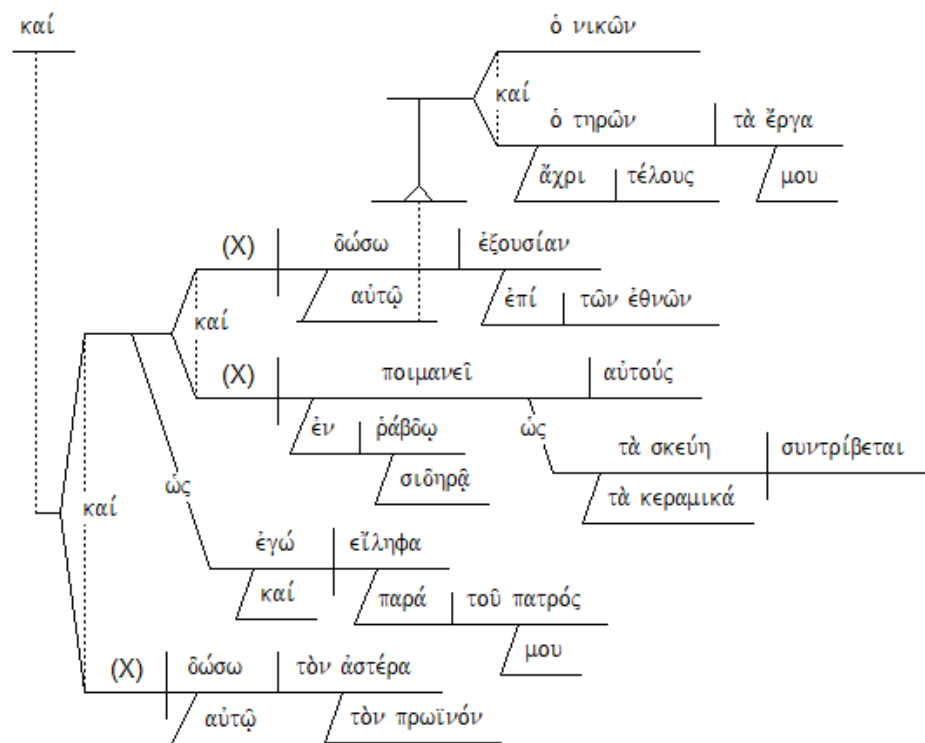
Rev 2:21 καί (X) ἔδωκα | χρόνον
 αὐτῇ | ἵνα (X) μετανοήσῃ
 καί | μετανοῆσαι
 (X) θέλει | ἐκ | τῆς πορνείας
 οὐ | αὐτῆς

Rev 2:22-23 ἰδοὺ
 βάλλω | αὐτήν
 εἰς | κλίνην
 καί | τοὺς μοιχεύοντας
 ἐάν (X) μετανοήσωσιν | μετ' αὐτῆς
 (X) καί | μή | ἐκ | τῶν ἔργων | εἰς | θλίψιν
 αὐτῆς | μεγάλην
 ἀποκτείνω | τὰ τέκνα
 ἐν | θανάτῳ | αὐτῆς
 καί | ἐγώ | εἰμι | ὁ ἐραυνῶν | καί | νεφροῦς
 αἱ ἐκκλησίαι | γνώσονται | ὅτι | καρδίας
 καί | πᾶσαι
 (X) | δώσω
 ὑμῖν = ἐκάστω | κατά | τὰ ἔργα
 ὑμῶν

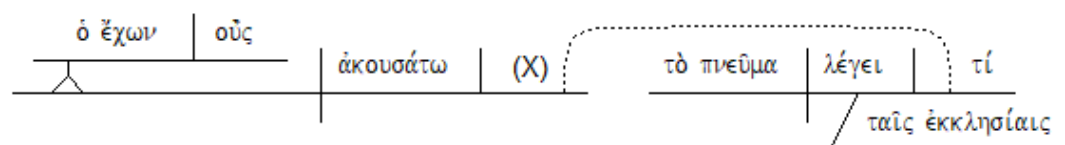
Rev 2:24-25



Rev 2:26-28



Rev 2:29



TEXT: Revelation 3:1-6

TITLE: LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT SARDIS = ZOMBIE CHURCH

BIG IDEA:

SPIRITUAL LETHARGY CALLS FOR REVIVAL -- FOR THE BELIEVING REMNANT TO WAKE UP AND STRENGTHEN WHAT REMAINS

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: One would hope that there are few churches like Sardis today, but there are many. Lack of spiritual vigilance in a secular world is as prevalent today (perhaps more so) as it was in John's day. It is easy to get so caught up in the things of this life that we lose sight of the fact that only Christ controls the "stars"/churches. That is the heart of watchfulness, to acknowledge the supremacy of Christ in everything. Many churches, even entire denominations, have so compromised their beliefs and practices by accommodating to the fads of intelligentsia or the ways of the world that they have virtually ceased to be Christian. Every passage on the return of Christ in the NT (e.g., Rom. 13:11; James 5:8; 1 Pet. 4:7; 1 John 2:18) makes the point of living life from the perspective of future accountability to God. In such churches the righteous few, as here, must stand up and be counted. They must consider themselves missionaries to their own church and wake up those who are about to die while there is still time. In fact, they are responsible before God to do so.

Robert Thomas: In a sense this message is not too different from the one to Ephesus. To both churches He introduces Himself as one who holds (or holds fast) the seven stars, both churches are said to have fallen from a former position (though the decline at Ephesus was of a much smaller degree) (cf. **2:5; 3:3**), both are invited to remember and repent (**2:5; 3:3**), and the overcomers in both receive promises of "life" (**2:7; 3:5**) (**Hemer**). A better, though not altogether satisfying, explanation is to see in Christ's self-description of this fifth message a reference to the adequacy of the life-giving Spirit to resolve the problem of the deadness of the Sardian church.¹⁶ Christ, the life-giver (cf. **Rev. 1:18**), imparts life through the Spirit (cf. **Rom. 8:2**). In accord with the Holy Spirit's procession from the Son (cf. **John 15:26**), it is Christ's part to bestow or withhold the powers of the life-giving Spirit on which the life of the church depends (cf. **Acts 2:33; Eph. 4:7-8**) (**Swete**). His power is sufficient to meet every need, even to the point of restoring life to those about to die (**Hemer**). This view cannot account for why no specific reference to life is found in the introduction, but its concept of the implication of such is supported by the position of contemporary Judaism that the two chief works of the Spirit were the inspiration of prophecy and the **quickenings of the dead** (**Beasley-Murray**).

Buist Fanning: Jesus rebukes most of the church in Sardis for their spiritual lethargy and commands them to wake up or face his judgment, but the faithful few among them will experience holiness with him forever. . .

The message to the church in Sardis is almost entirely **negative**, and this seems to cause departure from the general structure. The church's deplorable spiritual condition is presented in **vv. 1c-2** with fierce irony, prompting several imperatives prior to the actual exhortation section. The exhortation itself begins with "so" (οὕτως) as is common and includes several further demands for action, yet also includes a reassuring promise about future blessing (**vv. 3-4**) that is normally

included later in other messages. In the conclusion (vv. 5–6) the promise to the overcomer continues with the theme of blessing as well as further assurance for the minority in Sardis who prove faithful.

Gordon Fee: Indeed, perhaps the most striking thing about this letter, especially for those who are reading the letters in sequence, is this reversal of the order of things. Up to now there has been commendation or praise, followed by judgment; here that is reversed: judgment followed by commendation.

Robert Mounce: The church at Sardis comes under the most severe denunciation of the seven. Apparently untroubled by heresy and free from outside opposition, it had so completely come to terms with its pagan environment that although it retained the outward appearance of life, it was spiritually dead. Like the fig tree of **Mark 11:20** it had leaves but no fruit.

Daniel Akin: Spiritual lethargy and compromise will bring destruction to a church, but Christ is faithful to graciously call those who will hear back to faithfulness and life.

G.K. Beale: Christ condemns the church in Sardis for its lack of witness and its compromise and exhorts it to overcome this in order to inherit the blessings of salvation. . . The likelihood is that the Christians in Sardis had for the most part fallen into a stupor of compromise and fear of the consequences of a bold witness for Christ.

James Hamilton: Jesus, the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars that seem to symbolize God’s watchful and empowering presence, calls the church in Sardis to wake up and strengthen what remains.

(:1a) PROLOGUE – THE SOVEREIGN LORD CAN EMPOWER REVIVAL

A. Command to Write to Church at Sardis

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:”

David Thompson: Each church has a specific angel assigned to that church. **Walter Scott** said that he believed that this angel was responsible for the oversight of the entire ministry and history of the church (*Revelation*, p. 92). What that would mean is that this specific angelic being would work in harmony with Jesus Christ in regard to what the specific church becomes and what it accomplishes.

William Barclay: The archaeologist Sir William Ramsay said of Sardis that nowhere was there a greater example of the melancholy contrast between past splendour and present decay. Sardis was a city of **degeneration**. . .

When John wrote his letter to Sardis, it was wealthy but degenerate. Even the once great citadel was now only an ancient monument on the hilltop. There was no life or spirit there. The once great Sardians were soft, and twice they had lost their city because they were too lazy to keep watch. In that atmosphere so lacking in energy or concern, the Christian church too had lost its vitality and was a corpse instead of a living church.

John MacArthur: Though the details are not recorded in Scripture, the church at Sardis was probably founded as an outreach of Paul’s ministry at Ephesus (**Acts 19:10**). The most

prominent person from the church at Sardis known to history is **Melito**. He was an apologist (one who wrote in defense of Christianity) who served as bishop of Sardis in the late second century. He also wrote the earliest known commentary on passages from Revelation. The letter does not speak of persecution (why would Satan bother to persecute a dead church?), false doctrine, false teachers, or corrupt living. Yet some combination of those things was obviously present at Sardis, since the church had died. . .

Sardis was located about thirty miles south of Thyatira in the fertile valley of the Hermus River. A series of spurs or hills jutted out from the ridge of Mount Tmolus, south of the Hermus River. On one of those hills, some fifteen hundred feet above the valley floor, stood Sardis. Its location made the city all but impregnable. The hill on which Sardis was built had smooth, nearly perpendicular rock walls on three sides. Only from the south could the city be approached, via a steep, difficult path. The one drawback to an otherwise ideal site was that there was limited room for the city to expand. Eventually, as Sardis grew, a new city sprang up at the foot of the hill. The old site remained a refuge to retreat into when danger threatened.

Its **seemingly impregnable location** caused the inhabitants of Sardis to become **overconfident**. That complacency eventually led to the city's downfall. Through carelessness, the unimaginable happened: Sardis was conquered. The news of its downfall sent shock waves through the Greek world. Even in John's day, several centuries later, a proverbial saying equated "to capture the acropolis of Sardis" with "to do the impossible" (**Colin J. Hemer**, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986], 133). **Dr. Robert L. Thomas** relates the account of Sardis's fall:

Despite an alleged warning against self-satisfaction by the Greek god whom he consulted, Croesus the king of Lydia initiated an attack against Cyrus king of Persia, but was soundly defeated. Returning to Sardis to recoup and rebuild his army for another attack, he was pursued quickly by Cyrus who laid siege against Sardis. Croesus felt utterly secure in his impregnable situation atop the acropolis and foresaw an easy victory over the Persians who were cornered among the perpendicular rocks in the lower city, an easy prey for the assembling Lydian army to crush. After retiring one evening while the drama was unfolding, he awakened to discover that the Persians had gained control of the acropolis by scaling one-by-one the steep walls (549 B. C.). So secure did the Sardians feel that they left this means of access completely unguarded, permitting the climbers to ascend unobserved. It is said that even a child could have defended the city from this kind of attack, but not so much as one observer had been appointed to watch the side that was believed to be inaccessible.

History repeated itself more than three and a half centuries later when Antiochus the Great conquered Sardis by utilizing the services of a sure-footed mountain climber from Crete (195 B. C.). His army entered the city by another route while the defenders in careless confidence were content to guard the one known approach, the isthmus of land connected to Mount Tmolus on the south. (*Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1992], 241)

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Sardis was a city exceedingly fabled for its past wealth and splendor, but it had deteriorated greatly. Its greatness lay in the past. Sardis had, at one time, been considered to be impregnable because of its ideal physical arrangement and topography for defense. It sat on a hill or mountain surrounded by steep cliffs almost impossible to scale with

only one narrow way of approach. Yet Sardis had been attacked and conquered twice because of its arrogance manifested in its lack of watchfulness (3:2-3). The city was also famous for its woolen, textile, and jewelry industry.

Sardis was devoted to the worship of the mother-goddess Cybele and no temple worshipper was allowed to approach the temple of the gods with soiled or unclean garments. A white and clean robe was required to approach its so-called gods. Yet note the following account of the actual moral conditions of this idolatry. Andrew Tate writes,

Her worship was of the most debasing character and orgies like those of Dionysos were practiced at the festivals held in her honour. Sins of the foulest and darkest impurity were committed on those occasions; and when we think of a small community of Christians rescued from such abominable idolatry, living in the midst of scenes of the grossest depravity, with early associations, and companionships, and connections, all exerting a force in the direction of heathenism, it may be wondered that the few members of the church in Sardis were not drawn away altogether, and swallowed up in the great vortex.

B. Characterization of Christ Who Alone Can Empower Revival

“He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars,”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: *“The seven Spirits of God”* is a reference to the **Holy Spirit** who proceeds from the Father and the Son to the believer (**John 7:37-39; 15:16, 26**). He is the Son’s gift to enable believers to experience genuine spirituality through the multiple ministries and work of the Spirit symbolized here in the number seven which is a clear allusion to the seven-fold ministries of the Spirit mentioned in **Isaiah 11:2-5**. But believers have a responsibility to walk by the Spirit who indwells them. The responsibility is to walk by faith in His enabling power and to deal with the sin in their lives through honest confession or they will hinder (grieve and quench) the work of the Spirit. So part of the problem was the believers in the church at Sardis were grieving and quenching the ministry of the Holy Spirit (**Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19**).

Buist Fanning: The description of Christ who speaks (v. 1b) comes from the vision of **1:16, 20** (*“who has . . . the seven stars”*; cf. also **2:1**) but also from **1:4** (*“the seven spirits of God”*). The Trinitarian motif in **1:4-5** shows that *“seven spirits”* is a figurative way to describe the Holy Spirit in his fullness (in an allusion to **Isa 11:2** and **Zech 4:6, 10**). To say that Christ “has” or possesses the Spirit is the common idiom for the Spirit’s empowering presence and activity in someone’s life (**Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 6:19; 7:40; 2 Cor 4:13; Jude 19**). To add *“and the seven stars”* shows that his authority over the **angels of the churches** (see **1:20; 2:1**) is infused with the Spirit’s full power as he oversees and exhorts the churches through these angelic mediators. This is quite relevant in the call for revival of true spiritual vitality and holiness in the message that follows (vv. 1b-2, 4).

William Barclay: He is the one who has *the seven stars*. The stars stand for the churches and their angels. The Church is the possession of Jesus Christ. People often act as if the Church belonged to them; but it belongs to Jesus Christ, and all its members are his servants. In any decision regarding the Church, the decisive factor must be not what any individual wants the Church to do but what Jesus Christ desires to be done.

C. Communication from the Sovereign Head of the Church

“says this:”

Authoritative word from the Head of the Church

I. (:1b-2) CRITICISM FOR SELF-DECEIVED DEADNESS

A. Rebuke for Spiritual Lethargy and False Security

“I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”

David Thompson: From Christ’s assessment, this church had a very serious **deception problem**. It had a Divine name or title that it was a church that was alive, but they did not have real spiritual life or power. They had a reputation without reality. They were superficial. There was a huge contrast between what the people continually said and projected and what Jesus Christ knew and saw.

Buist Fanning: The lofty opinion they had of themselves—and assumed that others shared—is summarily contradicted by Christ. They were purportedly spiritually healthy and vigorous (“*alive*”), but in reality they had no life from God, as genuine Christians have (**John 3:36; 5:24; 6:53; 20:21**); they were “*dead*” (cf. **Eph 2:1–2**). As Christ assessed their conduct, he saw mainly empty claims to Christian commitment without the fruit of transformed lives to confirm its inward reality (**Rev 3:2b**; cf. John 14:21, 23; Eph 2:10; Jas 2:14, 20; 1 John 2:3–6, 29; 3:9–10). They were Christian in name only. This is the start of a wordplay using “*name*” as a theme in this letter (ὄνομα is used 4x in **Rev 3:1–6**). The occurrence in **v. 1b** (“*reputation*”) departs from the almost uniform biblical usage that “*name*” reflects the reality of the person, but later uses return to that pattern.

Daniel Akin: Looks can be deceiving. A body that from all outward appearances seems strong and healthy can, on closer inspection, be found to be racked with cancer or some other terminal disease. Our Lord performs a battery of spiritual tests on the church at Sardis. He subjects her to a divine CAT-scan, MRI, and X-ray. The diagnosis is far worse than any external, superficial examination could have ever revealed: she is dead! They were a **zombie church**!

John MacArthur: Because the Sardis church was dead, Christ skipped the usual commendation for the moment and went directly to His concerns for it. Though its outward appearance may have fooled men (it had a name, or reputation of being alive), the Sardis church could not fool the omniscient Lord Jesus Christ, who knew its deeds. With His infallible knowledge, He pronounced the Sardis church to be dead. Like so many churches today it was defiled by the world, characterized by inward decay, and populated by unredeemed people playing church. . .

What are the danger signs that a church is dying? A church is in danger when it is content to rest on its past laurels, when it is more concerned with liturgical forms than spiritual reality, when it focuses on curing social ills rather than changing people’s hearts through preaching the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ, when it is more concerned with material than spiritual things, when it is more concerned with what men think than what God said, when it is more enamored with doctrinal creeds and systems of theology than with the Word of God, or when it loses its conviction that every word of the Bible is the word of God Himself. No matter what its attendance, no matter how impressive its buildings, no matter what its status in the community, such a church, having denied the only source of spiritual life, is dead.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: This is a warning. A church is in danger of death:

- when it begins to worship its own past or history, its reputation or name, or the names in the church,
- when it is more concerned with forms than with function and life,
- when it is more concerned with numbers and noses, than with the spiritual quality of life it is producing in its people,
- when it is more involved with management than with ministry or with the physical over the spiritual.

This illustrates the problem of **institutionalism** in the church, but today, we also have a new scenario that can be a part of this picture, the megachurch which has become a part of American jargon with megabucks, megatrends, and the megamall. Our megamalls have been styled as “cathedrals of consumption” because they are designed to feed the consumer appetites of our lifestyle today. But if we are not careful, churches can become “cathedrals of consumption” as well.

B. Remedy of Revival

1. Wake Up

“Wake up,”

Grant Osborne: vv. 2-3 – Five imperatives occur in these verses, all of them focusing on the need for **spiritual vigilance**. The church is like the city. Twice before, the city had fallen because the watchmen were not on the walls and assailants had climbed the cliffs to let in invaders. The church is being rebuked for the same lack of vigilance.

Warren Wiersbe: Our Lord’s counsel to the church began with, *“Be watchful! Wake up!”* (see **Rom. 13:11ff.**) The “sentries” were asleep! The first step toward renewal in a dying church is honest awareness that something is wrong. When an organism is alive, there is growth, repair, reproduction, and power; if these elements are lacking in a church, then that church is either dying or already dead.

Ladd: This admonition suggests that the church was not yet entirely beyond hope. It was not too late to awaken from spiritual lethargy; there still remained a residuum of life which could be revived. But unless such a revival occurs, this small remainder will also fall subject to spiritual death.

Van Parunak: γίνου γρηγορῶν, *become watchful*. Wake up from your lethargy. Recognize the spiritual foes that you face, the temptations to compromise with the fornication and idolatry promoted by emperor worship and the trade guilds. Remember that your city fell twice because the defenders were careless. If the Sardians had been watchful, neither Cyrus nor Antiochus could have conquered them, so strong was their natural position. Spiritually, in the Lord Jesus, we have a strong fortress:

Psa. 18:2 *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*

But the history of Sardis should remind them that even the strong citadel of a sovereign God cannot defend those who are careless and do not watch against Satan’s attacks. We usually think

of exhortations to watchfulness in reference to the unknown time of the Lord's return:

Matt. 24:42 *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

But the history of Sardis, whose lack of watchfulness led twice to enemy victory, suggests that the exhortation here is to being on guard against the devil:

1Pet. 5:8 *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*

2. Work Urgently

"and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die;"

Daniel Akin: They had grown content with a mediocre, halfway, comfortable, and convenient Christianity. Their faith was not radical; it was almost invisible. The lost among whom they lived, worked, and prayed saw nothing different or unique about them. The culture did not oppose them; it simply ignored them as of no real consequence or significance. They were so weak in their confession of Christ that they bothered no one. Like the unfinished temple of Cybele in their city, they too were incomplete in what Christ saved them and called them to be.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: *Strengthen* is an aorist imperative of the verb *sthrizw* which means "to strengthen, make stable, firm." The aspect of the verb (an aorist imperative in the Greek) carries the idea of **urgency** like, do it now, before it is too late. This is basically a command to get with God's plan for spiritual stabilization and strength. And what is that? A life in the Word. If you have any doubt about that, spend some time reading and meditating on **Psalm 119**.

Note the following verses where *sthrizw* is used:

(1) **Romans 1:11**, compare this with **Luke 22:32** (Christ's warning and command to Peter) and **John 21:15-17**. Here is the principle of pastors and teachers strengthening believers by feeding the lambs and the sheep with the Word.

(2) **Romans 16:25-26**. Here we have the principle of believers receiving the Word in the assembly as well as from personal study.

Warren Wiersbe: The warning here is that we not grow comfortable in our churches, lest we find ourselves slowly dying. The encouragement is that no church is beyond hope as long as there is a remnant in it, willing to strengthen the things that remain.

C. Reality Contradicting Their Lack of Awareness

"for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God."

Buist Fanning: The reason ("for," γάρ) they must wake up and strengthen any remaining traces of life is that according to Christ's assessment their present spiritual condition falls far short in God's view, however satisfactory it may be in their self-estimation (v. 1d). God's evaluation is that their "works" (i.e., conduct in general; cf. 2:2; 3:1c) are not adequate, that is, "fulfilled" (πεπληρωμένα) or accomplished to a degree reflective of genuine Christian life.¹⁶ The rest of the New Testament warns of the absence of conduct that confirms a claim of genuine life from God

(e.g., **Matt 7:21–23; Jas 2:14; 1 John 3:17–19; 4:20**). Faith is what overcomes, but genuine faith is seen in behavior that shows forth the new life that is within.

Richard Phillips: Jesus complains, “*I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God*” (**Rev. 3:2**). The word for *complete* (Greek, *pleroo*) is elsewhere used by John to mean “full” (see **John 3:29; 16:24**). While their works may have been spiritually impressive to men, in God’s sight they were **empty of substance**. This may involve a reference to a gigantic temple to Artemis begun in Sardis but never finished. In the Old Testament, God rejected blemished lambs offered for sacrifice (**Lev. 1:3; Deut. 15:21**). Likewise, Christ saw that the religion in Sardis was empty of real devotion or thanks to God.

II. (3) WARNING TO WAKE UP AND REPENT OR FACE JUDGMENT

A. Directive

1. Remember

“Remember therefore what you have received and heard;”

William Barclay: It is a fact of life that certain things sharpen memory which has grown dull. When, for instance, we return to a graveside, the sorrow from which the years have taken the edge grows piercingly poignant again. Time and time again, Christians must stand before the cross and remember again what God has done for them.

Richard Phillips: The people were, of course, to remember the gospel truths that had brought them salvation. They were also to remember Jesus himself, the grace of his salvation, and the power for new life he gives through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is probably the significance of the opening words of this letter: “*The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars*” (**3:1**). Jesus holds in his hand the manifold gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit—this is the meaning of “*the seven spirits of God*”—just as he holds “*the seven stars*” of the churches in his hand. The point is that Jesus is able to grant **reviving power** through the Holy Spirit. Discouraged Christians are to remember this so as to go forth ministering with the Word and calling on God in prayer. The same Jesus who called his friend Lazarus out from the grave possesses power to raise spiritually dead churches back to life (**John 11:43–44**).

Robert Thomas: The Greek perfect and aorist tenses are used in the two verbs *eilēphas* (“*you have received*”) and *ēkousas* (“*you heard*”), indicating that the hearing of the gospel was a momentary act and that results from the reception still abide. The deposit of doctrine that the church received was permanent (**Alford; Swete; Charles; Mounce**).

Gordon Fee: At the heart of their having **lost touch with reality** is an apparent complacency with regard to the coming of the Lord. Thus they are exhorted first to *remember . . . what you have received and heard*. And “*remember*” does not mean simply to recall the past, but to act on it. They are further urged to *hold it fast*, and *repent*. Here is yet another of those moments in this book where the reader is slightly jarred by the order of things. That is, the logical sequence here would be to “repent” and thus return to “holding fast” the gospel that they had embraced a generation ago; but Christ’s order here represents the basic concern, which is not their repentance per se, but their returning to a steadfastness toward the gospel in their complacent city.

2. Obey

“and keep it,”

Daniel Akin: With the command to “*keep it*,” Jesus encourages the church to hold on, to guard what they received and heard. The truth of the gospel and the truths that flow from it are easily lost. It is a precious treasure that should never be taken for granted. We must never let it slip away.

The fact is, we never drift toward anything worthwhile. Never. We never slide into truth, but we can slide into error. You slide and slip into theological liberalism. You slide and slip into moral compromise. No, we never drift anywhere worth going. Furthermore, you do not want to drift and add to the gospel. And you don’t want to slip and subtract from the gospel. Stay where you are. Keep it. Hold on. Guard it. Never let it go. Stay with what you received and heard when you put your faith in Jesus.

3. Repent

“and repent.”

B. Danger

*“If therefore you will not wake up,
I will come like a thief,
and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.”*

Buist Fanning: The point of the simile is certainly that the coming is **unexpected**—this is reinforced in v. 3e: they cannot know when he will come. But the second point is that a thief’s coming is a hostile, unwelcome thing (v. 3e: “*against you*”), one that a person should prepare for and prevent if possible. The Christians in Sardis must take heed and prepare themselves spiritually so that Christ’s coming will not have that hostile character for them.

Grant Osborne: As many have noted (Caird, Beasley-Murray, Mounce, Giesen, Aune, Beale), this is not the second coming here but a **historical visitation in judgment**. The second coming is taught in 2:25; 3:11; and 16:15, but this is a warning that Christ will visit the church in judgment now if they do not repent.

Robert Thomas: One mark of the degeneracy of the Gentile world is certainly the worsening moral condition of the professing Christian church as it comes under the influence of its surrounding culture. In the sovereign purpose of God, these three human indicators, the repentance of Israel, the fullness of the Body of Christ, and the bottoming out of Gentile morality, will occur simultaneously, and Christ will return. A threat of an eschatological coming of Christ to punish sleeping Sardis fits well into this broader picture.

James Hamilton: There will be no anticipating and preparing for the coming of Jesus; so immediate and constant vigilance is required. They must act now! Because if they do not, Jesus says, “*I will come against you*” (3:3). There is nothing in the world more frightening than the thought of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the conqueror of sin, death, and Hell, the everlasting Son of God, the one who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, the one who has a sharp two-edged sword coming out of his mouth, coming against you.

III. (:4) REASSURANCE FOR A FAITHFUL FEW

A. Precarious Remnant

“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments;”

Van Parunak: We are reminded of the twin sins of idolatry and fornication that we have seen in other churches, resulting from the temptation to blend into the culture and go along with the celebrations of the imperial cult and the guilds. The general practice of the church is to go along with the culture, in disobedience to the Lord. Only a few have refused to compromise.

B. Promise of Victory

“and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy.”

Grant Osborne: the meaning of λευκός (*leukos*, *white*) in apocalyptic. It occurs fourteen times in this book (of twenty-three in the NT) and signifies not just victory but purity, holiness, glory, and celebration. Several (e.g., **Mounce, Morris, Roloff, Beale**) connect it strongly to the idea of justification in the book. In the transfiguration of Jesus (**Mark 9:3** par.), it depicts the “radiance” of heavenly glory. While victory is the emphasis in **Rev. 14:14** and **19:11** and part of the picture here, the primary thrust (especially due to the “*soiled garment*” earlier in the verse) is **purity** and **holiness**. They are victorious by remaining pure in a church that has increasingly gone apostate. The reason they can “*walk in white*” is ὅτι ἄξιοι εἰσιν (*hoti axioi eisin*, because they are worthy). Their “worthiness” is due to the fact that they have remained pure and their works are complete. Elsewhere in this book ἄξιος is predicated of God (**4:11**) or Christ (**5:2, 4, 9, 12**), though in **16:6** it is used of the earth-dwellers (who are “*worthy*” of judgment) and here of the saints (“*worthy*” of reward; cf. **Luke 20:35; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; 1 Thess. 2:12**). The faithful few in Sardis are called to emulate God and Christ, not the pagans. . .

Those who remain true to Christ have a new identity, a new citizenship, and a new future—eternal life in heaven.

John MacArthur: Specifically, Christ says of them that they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. In ancient times, such garments were worn for celebrations and festivals. Because they refused to defile their garments, Christ would replace those humanly preserved clean garments with divinely pure ones (cf. **7:14**). The white robes of purity Christ promises here and in **verse 5** (cf. **6:11; 7:9, 13; 19:8, 14**) are elsewhere worn by Christ Himself (**Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:3**) and the holy angels (**Matt. 28:3; Mark 16:5; Acts 1:10**). Those who have a measure of holiness and purity now will be given perfect holiness and purity in the future.

Gordon Fee: Given the history of this city and its loyalty to Rome, this metaphor is very likely an allusion to the Roman triumphal procession, where to honor their returning, conquering heroes the citizens lined the streets in white and thus joined in the parade. In like manner some in Sardis will be considered worthy to join in the Lord’s triumph when he returns as conqueror.

(:5-6) EPILOGUE – BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME

A. (:5) Persevere to Receive the Blessing

1. Condition of Overcoming

“He who overcomes”

2. Promise

a. Righteousness

“shall thus be clothed in white garments;”

b. Recognition

*“and I will not erase his name from the book of life,
and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels.”*

Buist Fanning: The image of a **heavenly ledger of names**, a “book” or “book of life,” is widely attested in the Old Testament, ancient Judaism, and early Christianity. John utilizes this symbolism frequently in Revelation, but adapts it in significant ways to express his Christian theology. One distinctive of his usage is that while he briefly mentions in one place “books” from which people are judged at the end time (20:12), he gives repeated attention to a single “book of life” (as here; also 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). References in Daniel (7:10, “books”; 12:1, “book”) preserve this distinction as well and seem to be the primary influence on Revelation. Another clearly Christian difference is that “the book of life” belongs to the Lamb (it is “the Lamb’s book of life,” 13:8; 21:27), by virtue of his sacrificial death (13:8 “who was slain”; cf. 5:9), and it is this sacrifice that opens the way to life with God for those whose names appear in it. The third unique feature of “the book of life” in Revelation is that names are enrolled in it “from the foundation of the world” (17:8; cf. 13:8), symbolizing God’s initiative to select individuals for eternal life based on his mercy and love apart from their own merit or demerit. This focus on God’s gracious election coheres with other texts in the New Testament (e.g., **John 6:35–44, 65; 10:26; 17:2, 6–9, 12, 24; Acts 13:48; Rom 8:28–30; 9:11–12; 11:5–6; 1 Cor 1:26–31; Eph 1:4–5, 11**). It also suggests that the enrollment symbolizes “life” beyond the bounds of earthly time and place.

David Thompson: The idea of erasing a name from a book is something clearly understood by those living in the days of John. In Roman cities, there was a census book that contained the names of all citizens. If a citizen did something against Rome, their name was removed and they were no longer subject to the benefits of citizenship.

Craig Keener: The promise that Jesus will confess the faithful remnant before his Father echoes what he told his disciples (**Matt. 10:32; Luke 12:8**). . .

The promise that those who persevere will not be blotted from the book of life also offers a serious warning to many nominal Christians in our culture who depend purely on a past profession of faith to ensure their salvation.

B. (:6) Pay Attention

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Robert Thomas: In Revelation this is Jesus’ repeated method of issuing an individualized call for the hearer to respond (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:13, 22; cf. also 1:3). In the gospels He uses the phrase seven times, the only variation being the pluralization of the “ears” (cf. **Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35**). Jesus is the only one in Scripture to use this invitation, and He reserves it for occasions when He is speaking of the need for significant changes to be made (**Bullinger**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What would you say are some characteristics of a dying church?
- 2) Do you see churches around you that seem to have a large reputation but actually are hollow when it comes to vibrant spiritual life?
- 3) Why must **repentance** be an ongoing requirement for believers rather than just a factor in entering into the Christian life?
- 4) Are the **overcomers** addressed in these letters to the seven churches a subset of elite faithful believers or inclusive of all believers?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: In 2014 **Thom Rainer**, president of LifeWay Christian Resources, wrote a highly acclaimed book titled *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*. Its genesis was a popular blog article with the same title. In this book Rainer identifies several fatal causes that put once-alive and vibrant churches in the grave. These include

- treating the past as the hero;
- refusing to adapt to the needs of the present community;
- moving the focus of the budget inward;
- allowing the Great Commission to become the Great Omission;
- letting the church become preference-driven out of selfishness and personal agendas;
- seeing the tenure of the pastors decreasing;
- failing to have regular, corporate prayer;
- having no clear purpose or vision;
- and obsessing over the facilities.

Here I would like to build on Rainer's excellent points with a simple observation. Many a church begins with a man, reaches out with a mission, becomes a movement, but ends up a monument or in the mortuary. This is a polite way of saying many a church begins with life but ends in death. It has a glorious past, but a glorious past is all it has. It is now a **zombie church**, a church of the living dead. There are live bodies walking around with dead souls on the inside. Amazingly, astonishingly, sometimes only God notices. Spiritually there is no pulse, no heartbeat. Spiritually they are flat-lined, a dead church.

Another complement to Rainer's precise analysis might be an article titled "*When Does My Church Need Revival?*" in which **Stevan Manley** highlights six tell-tale signs of a church standing at death's door:

- The church is plagued with disagreements.
- The preaching is ineffective.
- Few can remember when a person was last saved.
- God's supernatural power is never seen.

- God is not praised regularly.
- No one is being called into God's work. (*Herald*)

Richard Phillips: In considering this fifth of the seven letters of Revelation, we find no threat of persecution, as at Smyrna, and no false teaching, as at Pergamum. Evidently, Satan did not consider Sardis worthy of spiritual assault. **William Hendriksen** writes: "Sardis was a very 'peaceful' church. It enjoyed peace, but it was the peace of the cemetery!" Sardis was what we refer to today as a "**nominal**" church. It was Christian in name, but name only. The members professed faith in Jesus, but in reality their hearts were turned from him.

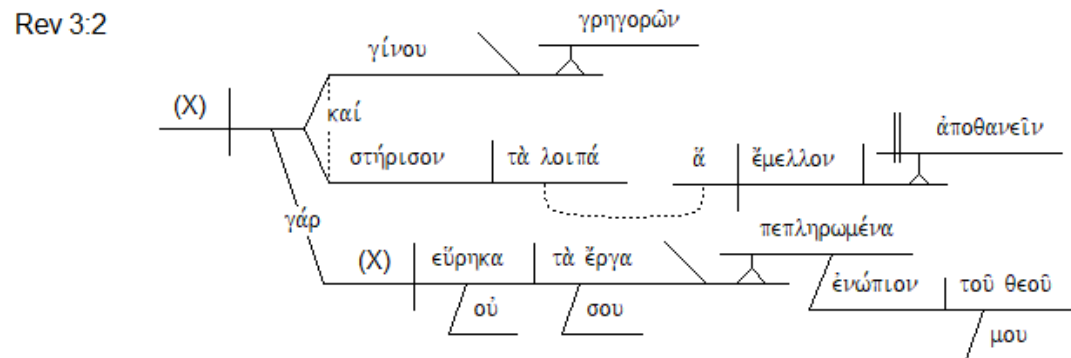
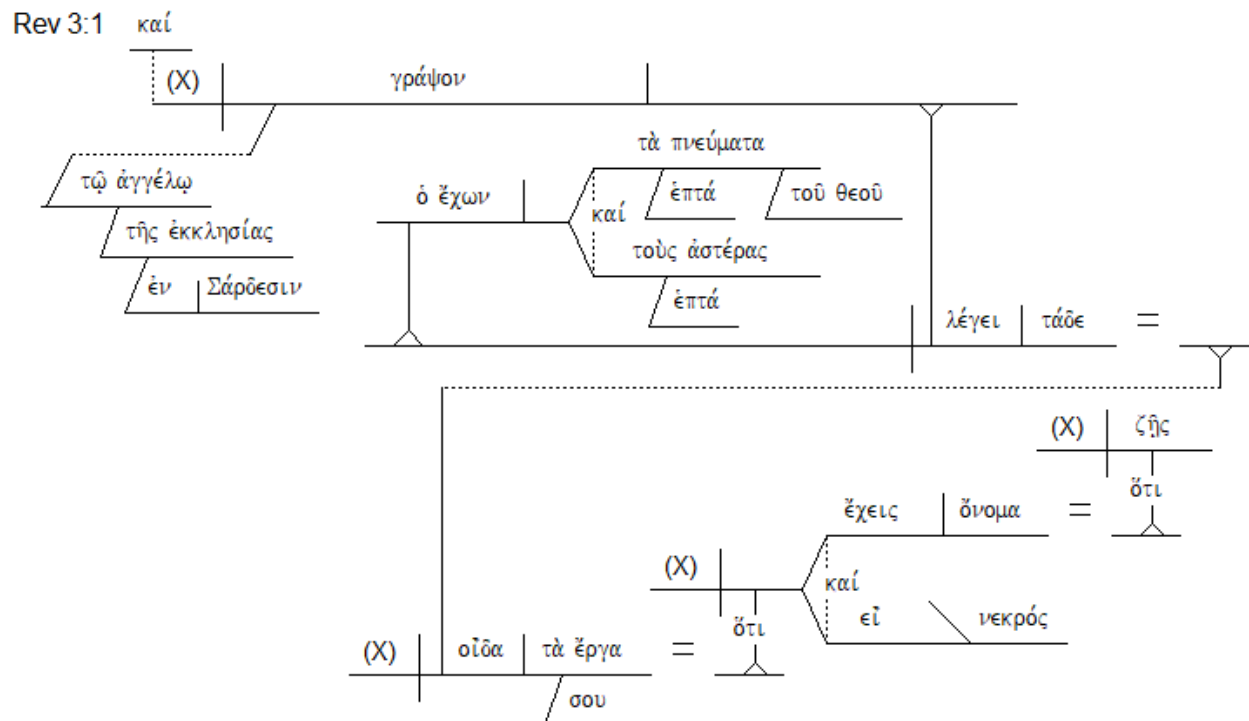
John Walvoord: The saints' white garments are thus a token of their **acceptance by God**. This is accompanied by the promise that their name will never be blotted out of the book of life. To some, this verse seems to indicate that a believer's name could be blotted out, which is contrary to the Bible's clear teaching of the believer's eternal security. To make the continuance of our salvation depend upon works is gross failure to comprehend that salvation is by grace alone. If it depended upon the believer's perseverance, the name would not have been written there in the first place.

Does this verse teach the possibility of the loss of salvation? If so, it hardly sounds like a promise. **MacArthur** states, "Incredibly, although the text says just the opposite, some people assume that this verse teaches that a person's name can be erased from the book of life. They thus foolishly turn a promise into a threat."⁵ The implication of the passage is that those who put their trust in Christ and thus conquer by faith have the privilege of being recognized as the saints of God throughout eternity—even saints from the church at Sardis where so much was offensive to their holy Lord.

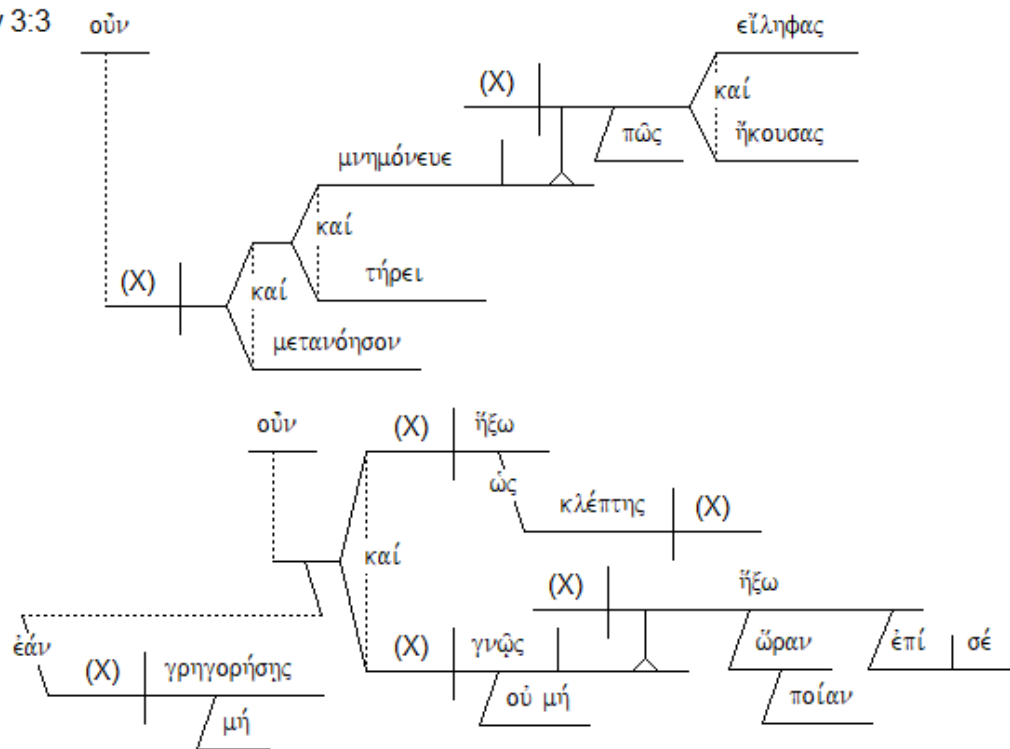
Craig Koester: There are several issues at Sardis.

- A **lack of self-awareness** is indicated by repeated calls to "*wake up*" (**3:2, 3**). The Christians are like members of a household who settle comfortably to sleep, unaware that an intruder might come. In their case the most dangerous intruder will not be an agent sent to arrest them but Christ himself. For Christ warns: "*I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you*" (**3:3**; compare **16:15**; **Matt. 24:43**; **Luke 12:39**; **1 Thess. 5:2**; **2 Pet. 3:10**). Christ comes to rob them of the **complacency** that they mistake for true security.
- A second issue is that they seem **content with incomplete obedience** to Christ, which is a form of self-deception. Many consider the congregation to be "*alive*," but measured against the standard of unwavering faithfulness to God, their efforts are far from complete (**Rev. 3:2**). **Caird** provocatively calls the church at Sardis "the perfect model of inoffensive Christianity" (*A Commentary*, 48).
- Third, many in Sardis have "*soiled their clothes*" (**3:4**). **Uncleanness** was a common image for sin, although sin can be understood in various ways. Revelation identifies Christ as the one in whose blood people have "*washed their robes and made them white*" (**7:14**). Sin and uncleanness include whatever compromises relationships with God and Christ.

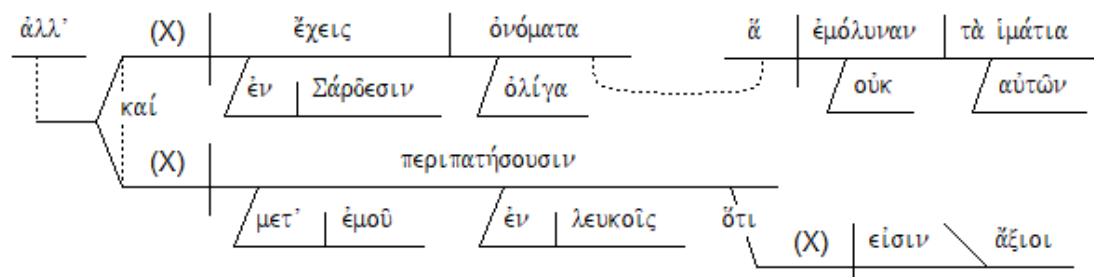
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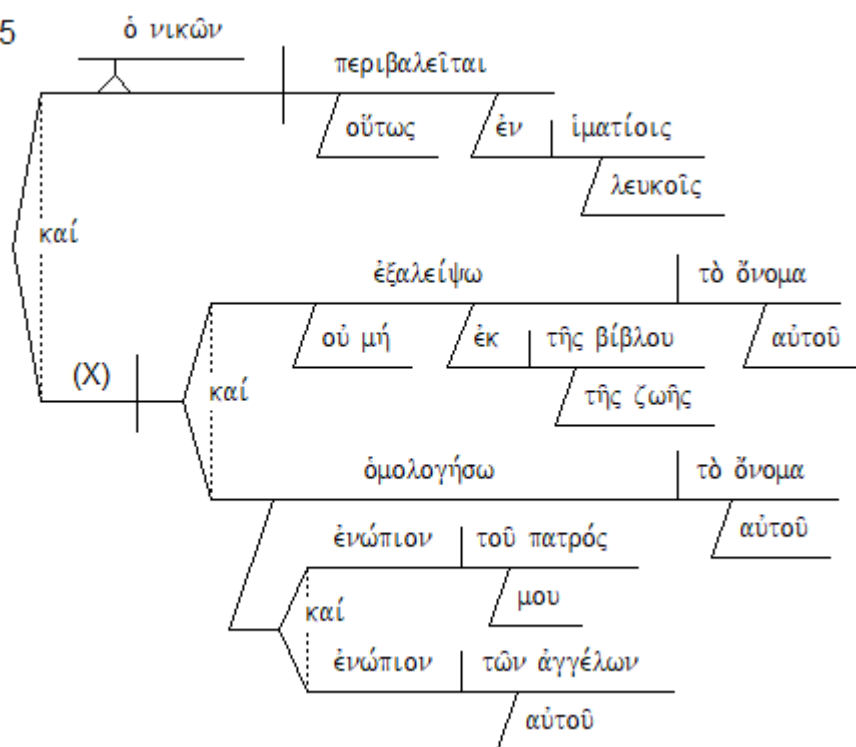
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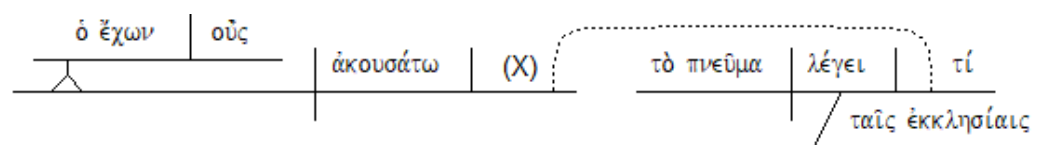
Rev 3:4



Rev 3:5



Rev 3:6



TEXT: Revelation 3:7-13

TITLE: LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA = FAITHFUL CHURCH

BIG IDEA:

BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITHFULNESS (DESPITE NOT BEING OUTWARDLY IMPRESSIVE), THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA IS PROMISED SPECIAL PROTECTION FROM THE GREAT TRIBULATION

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: Jesus commends the church in Philadelphia for fidelity despite weakness, and he pledges to vindicate them against their enemies and protect them from the unprecedented testing that will fall on the whole world.

John MacArthur: Occasionally I am asked by young men seeking a church to pastor if I know of a church without any problems. My response to them is “If I did, I wouldn’t tell you; you’d go there and spoil it.” The point is that there are no perfect churches. Churches struggle because all are made up of imperfect, sinning people. The church is not a place for people with no weaknesses; it is a fellowship of those who are aware of their weaknesses and long for the strength and grace of God to fill their lives. It is a kind of hospital for those who know they are sick and needy.

Like all churches, the one in Philadelphia had its imperfections. Yet the Lord commended its members for their faithfulness and loyalty. They and the congregation at Smyrna were the only two of the seven that received no rebuke from the Lord of the church. In spite of their fleshly struggles, the Christians at Philadelphia were faithful and obedient, serving and worshiping the Lord. They provide a good model of a loyal church.

Kendell Easley: Christ encourages the congregation of Philadelphia to take heart that the open door to heaven is theirs despite human and satanic hostility and to “hold on” as Christ promises to protect them in the face of a coming worldwide trial.

(:7) PROLOGUE – JESUS CONTROLS KINGDOM ACCESS

A. Command to Write to the Church at Philadelphia

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:”

Robert Thomas: The city of Philadelphia, now the site of the modern town of Alasehir, was located in Lydia about twenty-five miles southeast of Sardis. It lay in the valley of the Cogamis River, which was a tributary of the Hermus. At some point after 189 B.C., it had been founded by a Pergamenian king, either Eumenes II or his brother Attalus II, who correctly thought this to be an excellent site for a city. The long Cogamis Valley extends southeast from the Hermus Valley and connects into the side of the central plateau. It affords the best path for ascending from the Hermus Valley, about 500 feet above sea level, to the main plateau about 1,500 feet higher. Though the climb was steep, this was the path along which trade and communication from the harbor at Smyrna and from Lydia and the northwest regions were maintained with Phrygia and the east. It rivaled the road east from Ephesus in importance as a trade route. It also

served as the imperial postal road during the first century A.D. Communications from Rome moved to Troas, whence they continued overland to Pergamum, Sardis, and then to Philadelphia and on to the east. Philadelphia was thus a stage on the main line of Imperial communication. In later Byzantine times, it became the greatest trade route of the whole country.

Grant Osborne: It was the most recent of the seven cities, founded sometime after 189 B.C. by either Eumenes II, king of Pergamum, or his younger brother Attalus Philadelphus, so-called because of his love and loyalty for his older sibling. He lent his name to the city, which became known as the city of “brotherly love” and was proud of its origins. As a Pergamene city, Philadelphia was labeled by Ramsay “the missionary city.” Situated at the head of the trade and military road to Phrygia, the monarchs expected Philadelphia to introduce both Lydia and Phrygia (which had oriental customs) to Greek ways and to make them loyal subjects. The efforts were successful, and by the first century, Greek was the language spoken in those lands. .

As in all the letters, the letter is sent to the guardian angel of the church to add eschatological power to its message and to remind them of the seriousness of these issues. Philadelphia and Smyrna are the only two churches with no rebuke, and it is interesting that both were under severe threat from a powerful Jewish presence in the city. Therefore, the names of Christ chosen here reflect that situation and reassure the beleaguered Philadelphia Christians that the Messiah is indeed on their side, not on the side of the “*synagogue of Satan*” (3:9).

Warren Wiersbe: Philadelphia was situated in a **strategic place** on the main route of the Imperial Post from Rome to the East, and thus was called “the gateway to the East.” It was also called “little Athens” because of the many temples in the city. The church was certainly located in a place of tremendous opportunity.

The only major problem with the location was that the area was prone to earthquakes. Philadelphia sat on a geological fault, and in 17 BC it was destroyed by a severe earthquake that also destroyed Sardis and ten other cities. Afterward, some of the citizens refused to move back into the city and remained in the surrounding countryside, which they called “the burnt land.” There did not seem to be much security in the city of brotherly love!

B. Characterization of Christ as Worthy of Trust = Holy, Genuine and Sovereign

1. Uniquely Set Apart to God

“He who is holy,”

John MacArthur: The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine author of the seven letters, always introduces Himself with a description reflecting His character. In the previous five letters, those descriptions had come from the vision recorded in 1:12–17. But this description of Him is unique and not drawn from that earlier vision. It has distinctly Old Testament features.

Robert Thomas: *Hagios* characterizes Jesus, not so much as the sinless one, but as one especially *set apart*, belonging exclusively to God. Though opposed and rejected by the synagogue of Satan (cf. 3:9), Christ remains characteristically holy. Hence, His words are also holy, carrying with them a mandate for obedience.

Gordon Fee: Thus Christ is here designated as “*the Holy One*” and “*the True One*.” The significance of these referents is that, in the first case, it reflects Old Testament language about God, who is frequently designated as “*the Holy One*” (see e.g., **Isaiah 40:25; Habakkuk 3:3**).

Later, in **Revelation 6:10**, this is the very language used of God the Father—“*the Holy and True One*”—while in **19:11** Christ is called “*Faithful and True*.” All of this again reflects John’s assumed **high Christology**, where titles elsewhere used for God the Father are without note or argumentation used for the Son.

2. Genuine

“who is true,”

Robert Thomas: *Ho alēthinos* (“*the true one*”) emphasizes Christ’s **genuineness**. He is the real as opposed to the unreal. A cognate word, ληθής (*alēthēs*, “*true*”), speaks of what is true as fact, the opposite of spurious or imperfect. This term has to do with reality, however. When confronted by Christ, we are confronted by no shadowy outline of the truth, but with the truth itself.

James Hamilton: The fact that he is “*true*” speaks to his reliability. He can be trusted.

Warren Wiersbe: It is worth noting that when the martyrs in heaven addressed the Lord, they called Him “*holy and true*” (**Rev. 6:10**). Their argument was that, because He was holy, He had to judge sin, and because He was true, He had to vindicate His people who had been wickedly slain.

3. Sovereign over Access to His Kingdom

*“who has the key of David,
who opens and no one will shut,
and who shuts and no one opens,”*

Buist Fanning: The next description, “*the one who has the key of David*” harks back to **1:18** (“*I have the keys of Death and of Hades*”) and seems to carry a sense complementary to it. In **3:7b** this “*key*” relates to opening and closing in a context that speaks of “*an open door*” (**v. 8b**) and access to the new Jerusalem (**v. 12**), and so it refers to Christ’s control over the eternal destiny of humans (cf. **Matt 16:19**: “*keys of the kingdom of heaven*”). The connection with David is drawn directly from **Isaiah 22:22** (with allusions to **Isa 9:7; 16:5; 55:3**).

Warren Wiersbe: The background of this imagery is **Isaiah 22:15–25**. Assyria had invaded Judah (as Isaiah had warned), but the Jewish leaders were trusting Egypt, not God, to deliver the nation. One of the treacherous leaders was a man named Shebna who had used his office, not for the good of the people, but for his own private gain. God saw to it that Shebna was removed from office and that a faithful man, Eliakim, was put in his place and given the keys of authority. Eliakim was a picture of Jesus Christ, a dependable administrator of the affairs of God’s people. Jesus Christ also has the keys of Hades and of death (**Rev. 1:18**).

Van Parunak: (cf. **Is. 36:2–3**) -- By claiming to have the key of David, the Lord is presenting himself as the **chief steward of the kingdom of heaven**. He has the keys to every door in the heavenly palace. It would be consistent with this image for him to **control access to death and Hades**, comparable to the steward having the keys to the dungeon. Furthermore, the allusion to the story of Shebna and Eliakim suggests that the Lord has taken the keys from a prior but unworthy custodian, those “*which say they are Jews, and are not*” (**3:9**).

Grant Osborne: The Jews had probably excommunicated the Christians in Philadelphia from the synagogue (as throughout the Jewish world), but this declares unequivocally that only Christ, not

they, has that authority. He alone can “open” and “shut” the gates to heaven. Moreover, the Jews excluded the believers from the synagogue, but Christ will exclude these Jews from God’s eternal kingdom. His decision will be final. When he “opens” the New Jerusalem (to the Gentiles), no one can change that decision. When he “closes” the door (to these Jews), this decision also cannot be altered.

C. Communication from the Sovereign Head of the Church

“says this:”

I. (:8-10) COMMENDATION FOR FAITHFULNESS WITH CORRESPONDING PROMISES

A. (:8) Promise of Open Door for Faithfulness

1. Orientation of Christian Ministry

“I know your deeds.”

2. Open Door for Kingdom Entrance

“Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut,”

Buist Fanning: Bible students might readily think of Paul’s “open door” as a metaphor for wider ministry opportunities, especially in evangelism (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12; Col 4:3; cf. Acts 14:27) and understand that same sense here. But related images in this context (Christ’s authority over the eternal destiny of people in v. 7b and indications in vv. 9 and 11 that these Christians truly belong to him) make it more likely that this “open door” assures their own access to God rather than success at leading others to him. Christ’s own divine authority guarantees that their access will never be taken away (“no one is able to close” it; v. 8b).

Grant Osborne: Many scholars (Swete, R. Charles, Hort, Ramsay, Caird, Walvoord, Hemer, P. Hughes, Harrington) take this as a reference to **missionary opportunity**, fitting Paul’s use of the “wide door” to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; cf. Acts 14:27) and the situation of Philadelphia as a “missionary city” spreading Hellenistic culture. Others have seen this as referring to **martyrdom** as the “door” to God (Kiddle 1940: 49), **prayer** as the “door” (Barclay 1960: 1.164), or **Christ** as the “door” to salvation (Moffatt 1983: 366; Sweet 1979: 103, on the basis of John 10:7–9, “the door of the sheep”). However, the most common view today (Beckwith, Lohmeyer, Ladd, Mounce, Johnson, Prigent, Krodel, Thomas, Fekkes, Giesen, Aune, Beale) is to see this as the “door” to the **kingdom**. While the church has been excommunicated from the synagogue, Christ has the “keys” to the kingdom. He has opened the “door,” and “no one could shut it.” This is certainly more in keeping with 3:7.

Robert Thomas: Overwhelming evidence points to a third explanation of the “opened door” as the correct one. It speaks of a **sure entrance into the messianic kingdom**, promised to this church as a reward for their faithfulness. No one, not even those of “the synagogue of Satan,” can shut them out. Jewish opponents would seek to deny Gentiles, such as Christians in this city, entrance into the messianic kingdom (Beckwith). This meaning is clear from the immediate context of the message. The use of David’s name just before recalls the Messiah’s prerogative of admitting to or turning away from David’s future kingdom (Rev. 5:5; 22:16; cf. Luke 1:32) (Johnson). David is always the type of the supreme ruler of the theocracy (cf. Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 34:23; 37:24; Hos. 3:5) (Lee). Furthermore, *ēne gmenēn* (“opened”) is a form of *voίγω* (*anoigō*, “I open”), which is used twice at the end of v. 7 in describing Jesus’ administration of His

messianic office. If He who controls the opening and closing of access to the Davidic kingdom speaks of an opened door in the same breath as describing messianic prerogative, the inevitable conclusion is to see a reference to admission to that kingdom (Johnson). It is natural to refer to this final reward for fidelity immediately after “*I know your works*,” because these works amounted to the church’s faithful stand for Christ (Beckwith). The words *hēn oudeis dynatai kleisai autēn* (“*which no one can shut*,” 3:8) recall the words *oudeis kleisei* (“*no one will shut*”) from v. 7 and come into play in connection with v. 9. This promise amounts to a promise of deliverance from their Jewish adversaries, a deliverance that will come at Christ’s second advent (cf. 3:11). Added affirmation of this solution comes in noting that it makes this *idou* clause a promise, thus paralleling the two *idou* clauses of v. 9. It also matches the distinctly eschatological tone of this message to Philadelphia.

3. Prioritizing Faithfulness over Outward Success

a. Power/Influence Limited

“because you have a little power,”

Robert Thomas: Some argue that this alludes to the meager number of believers in the church and consequently the limited influence they exercised (Hort; Beckwith). Support for this theory comes from observing that the members of the church probably came from the lower classes (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-27) in contrast with the wealth of their Jewish adversaries. It is also observed that the church is not blamed for its lack of equipment, a factor beyond its control, but is praised for making good use of the slight resources at its disposal (Moffatt). Others are of the opinion that the church’s “*little power*” refers to the small spiritual vitality of the believers in the church, noting that the expression obviously falls short of a full commendation (Walvoord). Although neither view has particularly strong support, the latter meets with formidable objections. This could hardly imply a limited spiritual vitality because it is part of the good qualities that constitute the commended works (Lee). It is further disproved by the commendations that are issued to the church in the remaining verses of the message. “*Little power*” must refer to the **church’s limited influence** because of its numerical smallness.

James Hamilton: This probably refers to the beleaguered position of the church in Philadelphia—small, seemingly insignificant, with an appearance, perhaps, of ineffectiveness in the eyes of those who look through the lens of the Roman Empire. And yet this is God’s vehicle for advancing his purposes in the world.

b. Priority of Obedience

“and have kept My word,”

c. Priority of Loyalty

“and have not denied My name.”

Grant Osborne: the church lacked size and stature in the community and was looked down upon and persecuted. They had “*little authority*” or influence. But they were faithful, and that has always been the test of divine blessing rather than success.

John Walvoord: The church will always encounter Satanic opposition when it attempts to faithfully declare the gospel and stand for Christ. Those believers today who are experiencing such affliction and persecution may be assured that however violent the opposition and however

direct the efforts to thwart the work of God, in the end there will be victory for the cause of Christ.

B. (:9) Promise of Vindication against Opponents

1. Denunciation of Opponents

- a. Denounced as Affiliated with Satan

“Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan,”

- b. Denounced as Liars – Fake Jews

“who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie—”

John MacArthur: Christians in Philadelphia faced hostility from unbelieving Jews. Ignatius later debated some hostile Jews during his visit to Philadelphia. Because of their rejection of Jesus Christ as the Messiah, they were not at all a synagogue of God, but a synagogue of Satan. Though they claimed that they were Jews, that claim was a lie. Racially, culturally, and ceremonially they were Jews, but spiritually they were not. Paul defines a true Jew in **Romans 2:28–29**: *“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God”* (cf. **Rom. 9:6–7**).

2. Dominion over Opponents

- a. Submission of Opponents

“behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet,”

Grant Osborne: The passage alludes to **Isa. 60:14**, *“The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet”* (cf. also **Isa. 2:3; 14:2; 45:14; 49:23; Ezek. 36:23; Zech. 8:20–23**). The OT taught that the Gentiles would be forced to pay homage to the Jews at the eschaton, and now this promise is turned on its head: Jewish oppressors would be forced to pay homage to Gentile believers. Christ is promising these persecuted Christians that they would be vindicated by God, and this is a theme that will appear again and again in the book (**6:9–11; 16:6; 18:20; 19:2**). The telling point in favor of this interpretation is that they (the Jews) will bow *“at your (σου, sou) feet”* and not *“at my (μου, mou) feet.”* This is **submission, not worship**, and parallels **2:26–27**, where the faithful saints are promised that they will participate in the judgment of their (and God’s) enemies.

John MacArthur: Bowing at someone’s feet depicts abject, total defeat and submission. The Philadelphia church’s enemies would be utterly vanquished, humbled, and defeated.

- b. Status of Believers at Philadelphia = Loved by Jesus

“and to know that I have loved you.”

C. (:10) Promise of Protection from Coming Time of Testing in the Great Tribulation

1. Faithfulness in the Midst of Adversity

“Because you have kept the word of My perseverance,”

Richard Phillips: Notice that it is Christ who keeps his people safe, and that this safety takes place through a living and persevering faith. Christians are kept eternally secure by God’s sovereign will and power, yet this security is experienced by an active, striving faith by which Christ’s people conquer in this world (see **1 Peter 1:4–5**).

Marvin Rosenthal: The word translated *patience* in Revelation 3:10 occurs twenty-eight times in the New Testament. It consistently conveys the idea of **endurance in the midst of adversity**. . . cf. **Luke 21:16-19** – Believers are admonished to remain faithful in the midst of adversity. (Also **1 Thess. 1:3, 6; 2 Thess. 1:4; Rev. 13:10**). . .

Patience is frequently used in the context of the seventieth week of Daniel (**Luke 21:19; Rev. 13:10; 14:12**). There is a reason for an appeal to patience for believers living during that seventieth week. “*For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall show signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect*” (**Mark 13:22**; also **Matt. 24:4-5, 11, 24**).

2. Free Pass from the Great Tribulation Test

*“I also will keep you from the hour of testing,
that hour which is about to come upon the whole world,
to test those who dwell upon the earth.”*

From the perspective of the **Pre-Wrath Rapture** position, I would interpret the “*hour of testing*” to refer to the **Great Tribulation** period of Satanic persecution of believers. This occurs just after the mid-point of Daniel’s 70th week and before the Rapture of the church and the pouring out of God’s wrath in the Day of the Lord. God is not promising to remove the believers from that time of testing but rather to protect them in the midst of that suffering as they persevere by His grace.

Gordon Fee: Is this to be understood as a temporal event, soon to take place in the period of this writing? Or is it a more purely eschatological event, a way of describing the days preceding the coming of our Lord? Furthermore, in this particular case the readers are promised they will be to be “kept from” this hour of trial. Does this mean to be delivered from it altogether when it comes? Or does it mean to be kept secure by Christ even during its most intense expression?

Grant Osborne: The debate is whether it means “*protect from*” or “*remove from*,” and the issue centers on the significance of ἐκ (*ek*, *out of*). Many scholars (**Moffatt; Mounce; Beasley-Murray; Brown 1966; Gundry 1973; Hemer 1986: 164–65; Giesen; Beale; Aune**) connect this with **John 17:15**, “*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from [also τηρέω ἐκ] the evil one*” (the same preposition occurs in **2 Pet. 2:9**, “*rescue from trials*”). **Gundry** (1973: 55–60) argues that ἐκ must have a local force, meaning protection “out from within” the trial. In this sense it connotes not exemption from trials but protection within trials. However, others (**Walvoord, Johnson, Townsend, Winfrey, Thomas**) argue that **John 17:15** has a different context (a present battle with evil rather than the final future battle) and that the preposition does not necessarily have a local sense but could also mean “*preservation after removal from the period*” (**Thomas 1992: 285**). It must be admitted that both readings are possible from the language, so context must show which is more likely.

Obviously, a decision on the meaning of τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ (*tēs hōras tou peirasmou*, *the hour of trial*) is essential to the meaning. The consensus view is that it refers to the final end-time trials that precede the eschaton. This is differentiated from the local “*ten-day tribulation*” of Smyrna (**2:10**) by its involvement of “*the whole world*” (τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης, *tēs oikoumenēs holēs*) and so connotes a worldwide conflagration, the messianic judgments of the rest of this book (cf. **Dan. 12:1–2; Matt. 24:21–22; 2 Thess. 2:1–12**).

Marvin Rosenthal: Because commentators have not generally understood that there are three sections to the seventieth week – the beginning birth pangs [first 3 ½ years], the Great Tribulation [starting right after the Abomination of Desolation at the mid point], and the Day of the Lord – they have, in the view of this author, made a fundamental error. . .

Those who keep the word of His *patience* are those who, under the stress and pressure of the first three and one-half years of the seventieth week, stay steadfast and true in the face of adversity. They will be the overcomers. As a result, they will be kept “*from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*” The “*hour of temptation*” (a specifically appointed time) is the Great Tribulation. It begins in the middle of the seventieth week but will be “*cut short*” before the end of the seventieth week. Some men will be kept from that hour in two ways. They will be kept “*from the hour*” by physical removal (perhaps men of faith and patience who are watchful will flee Jerusalem, as history records a believed remnant did before the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70), and others will be kept “*through the hour of temptation*” by direct, divine protection. Both concepts, **removal from** and **protection from** the hour of testing, are correct. , ,

This phrase has nothing whatever to do with the timing of the Rapture. It deals with the **Great Tribulation** and holds out the promise – the glorious promise – that a remnant who have stayed true to the Lord during the first three and one-half years will be kept from the temptation of the Great Tribulation which will try the souls of men under the barbaric reign of the Antichrist. It is following the Great Tribulation that the Rapture and the Day of the Lord will occur.

Kendell Easley: The **hour of trial** that is going to come upon the whole world is the first specific reference to a coming time of trouble for the whole world—“**the Great Tribulation**”—initiated by God. (This is distinct from the Christians of Smyrna being tested by the devil, **Rev. 2:10**.) This will be a terrible time for those who live on the earth, a phrase meaning “*the body of unbelievers.*” In one obvious sense, the first-century Philadelphians were kept from this time, for this final trial did not happen in their lifetime. However, the meaning must be broader: “If the worldwide time of trial comes in your day, you will be kept from it.”

II. (:11) EXHORTATION TO HOLD FIRM UNTIL CHRIST RETURNS

A. The Future Is Secure – Christ Is Coming Quickly

“I am coming quickly;”

There is not only divine help but deliverance that will keep believers secure for all eternity as Christ returns.

B. The Present Demands Perseverance

“hold fast what you have,”

Craig Keener: Despite Jesus’ praises for the Philadelphian Christians’ perseverance to this point, however, “it’s not over till it’s over.” They must continue to hold fast what they have (**3:11**), that is, to continue to keep the message that demands their perseverance (**3:10**), lest their persecutors seize from them their crown (**3:11**; cf. **2:25**). The “crown” is a victor’s wreath appropriate to overcomers (see comments on 2:10, where the crown of life contrasts with the second death in **2:11**), and losing it means roughly the same as the warning to the preceding church: exclusion from the kingdom (**3:5**).

John MacArthur: It is true that believers are eternally secure because of the power of God. Yet the means by which He secures them is by providing believers with a persevering faith. Christians are saved by God's power, but not apart from their constant, undying faith. Paul writes in **Colossians 1:22–23** that *“He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard.”* According to **1 John 2:19**, those who abandon the faith reveal that they were never truly saved to begin with: *“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”*

C. The Reward Will Be Glorious

“in order that no one take your crown.”

This is the crown of eternal life – not some temporal reward that only is applied to an elite class of believers.

(;12-13) EPILOGUE – BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME

A. (;12) Persevere to Receive Blessing

1. Condition of Overcoming

“He who overcomes,”

2. Promise of Blessing

a. Assurance of Secure Status in the Kingdom

1) Prominent Status

“I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God,”

Robert Thomas: The stable relationship to God is guaranteed by *poiēsō auton stylon en t na tou theou mou, kai exō ou mē exelth eti* (*“I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not possibly go outside any longer”*). The language is clearly **metaphorical**, as is evident from *stylon* (*“pillar”*). Because the person is likened to a *pillar*, *na* (*“temple”*) must be metaphorical also (**Charles**). Hence, this promise is not inconsistent with the later statement that there is no temple in the heavenly Jerusalem (**Rev. 21:22**). The Jerusalem that comes down from heaven is **all temple**, and Christ's victorious ones are its living stones and pillars. The Philadelphian Christians will be **permanent**, like a pillar in the Temple, and will stand when all else has fallen. They are assured of continuance in God's presence throughout all eternity (**Walvoord**).

John MacArthur: A pillar represents stability, permanence, and immovability. Pillars can also represent honor; in pagan temples they were often carved in such a way as to honor a particular deity. The marvelous promise Christ makes to believers is that they will have an eternal place of honor in the temple of God (heaven). To people used to fleeing their city because of earthquakes and enemies, the promise that they will not go out from heaven was understood as security in eternal glory.

2) Permanent Status

“and he will not go out from it anymore;”

John Walvoord: The promise “*Never shall he go out of it*” seems to mean that they will no longer be exposed to the temptations and trials of this life and will have their **permanent residence** in the very presence of God.

b. Assurance of Belonging to God

1) Identity as Belonging to God

“and I will write upon him the name of My God,”

Robert Thomas: The threefold occurrence of *onoma* (“*name*”) is impressive and amounts to a threefold assurance of his identity with God. To have “*the name of My God*” was equivalent to belonging to God, being endowed with divine power (**Moffatt**). This sets the overcomer in utter contrast with the assumptions of his present Jewish persecutors (**Beckwith**).

2) Inclusion as Citizen of God’s Kingdom

*“and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem,
which comes down out of heaven from My God,”*

Robert Thomas: To have “*the name of the city of My God*” meant the right of citizenship in the new Jerusalem (**Charles**). This is “*the new Jerusalem*” that descends from God after the white throne judgment and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth (cf. **21:10 ff.**). Like the holy city of **21:2, 10**, this one is described as descending out of heaven, “*from My God*” as Christ describes it. It is the successor to the old Jerusalem with which John was familiar (**Swete**). Citizenship in this city is yet another mark of assurance for the overcomer.

Gordon Fee: Thus these believers in earthquake-prone Philadelphia will inherit a city that will endure—and will exist without the tremors!

3) Intimate Knowledge of God

“and My new name.”

William Barclay: Philadelphia had one particular characteristic which has left its mark upon this letter. It was on the edge of a great plain called the Katakekaumenē, which means the Burned Land. The Katakekaumenē was a great volcanic plain bearing the marks of the lava and the ashes of volcanoes then extinct. Such land is fertile; and Philadelphia was the centre of a great grape-growing area and a famous producer of wines. But that situation had its perils, and these perils had left their mark more deeply on Philadelphia than on any other city. In AD 17, there was a **great earthquake** which destroyed Sardis and ten other cities. In Philadelphia, the tremors went on for years; Strabo describes it as a ‘city full of earthquakes’ . . .

When this earthquake devastated it, Tiberius was as generous to Philadelphia as he had been to Sardis. In gratitude, it changed its name to Neocaesarea – the New City of Caesar. In the time of Vespasian, Philadelphia was to change its name, again out of gratitude, to Flavia, for Flavius was the emperor’s family name. It is true that neither of these new names lasted and ‘Philadelphia’ was restored. But the people of Philadelphia knew what it was to receive ‘*a new name*’.

Grant Osborne: Most likely this is a name hidden until the eschaton. The most amazing thing is not the meaning of the “*new name*” but the fact that we will share it.

Robert Thomas: Christ's "*new name*" symbolizes the **full revelation of His character** promised to the overcomer at Christ's second advent. Currently, man is incapable of grasping the full theological significance of the incarnation, but that will change. When He comes, the victors will not only appreciate fully who Christ is, but they will bear His new name with Him (**Charles; Mounce**). Herein is further assurance.

John MacArthur: Christ's name represents the **fullness of His person**. In heaven, believers will "*see Him just as He is*" (**1 John 3:2**), and whatever we may have known of Him will pale in the reality in which we will then see Him. The new name by which we will be privileged to call Him will reflect that glorious revelation of His person.

Gordon Fee: First, the writing of Christ's name on their foreheads is the ultimate sign of **ownership**, but an ownership not of enslavement but of ultimate and glorious **freedom**. Second, the "*new name*" is almost certainly an intentional foreshadowing of the vision in **19:11–21**, where Christ the heavenly warrior defeats and thus destroys the beast. There Christ's "*new name*" is "*King of kings and Lord of lords*"; and now in anticipation of that scene the victors in Philadelphia are promised to have that name written on them as well (but with location unmentioned, since it is a name of divine ownership, not of personal gain).

B. (:13) Pay Attention

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

G.K. Beale: The saints are given the concluding exhortation hear what the Spirit says because they need spiritual discernment in the midst of the affliction which they are about to endure in order not to deny Christ's name (cf. **3:8b**; cf. **v. 10a**) and thus inherit the final reward. If they are not heavenly-minded and focusing on their final reward, they will be tempted to conform themselves to earthly circumstances around them, which includes compromising their faith because of persecution.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage encourage those who are faithfully ministering to the Lord where He has placed them even though they don't see impressive visible results?
- 2) Do you find acceptance by God to more than compensate for the rejection you experience from the world?
- 3) Why is it important that the Lord vindicate His children before their oppressors?
- 4) Despite adversity and persecution, how can we hang in there until the Lord returns?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Van Parunak: Next he promises to keep the Philadelphians from a coming "*hour of temptation*." Let's consider first the hour of temptation, and then the promise to keep them.

the hour of temptation πειρασμός G3986,—Recall the announcement to Smyrna (**2:10**) that they would be tested (the related verb πειράζω G3985) for a limited period (10 days). There, the testing was explicitly said to come from the devil, and is so characteristic of him that he is called “*the tempter*” (**Matt 4:3; 1 Thes 3:5**). So here, the Lord is warning Philadelphia of a **coming short period of intense Satanic opposition**.

which shall come upon all the world οἰκουμένη G3625,—Satan’s temptations down through history have been focused on specific individuals, but a time is coming when he will attempt to bring all the inhabited world into subjection to himself. This same expression appears later in the book, where Satan’s activity (“*deceiving*”) is part of his activity of tempting:

Rev. 12:9 *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world* οἰκουμένη G3625:

Paul warned Timothy that Satan’s opposition against believers would increase through time:

2Ti 3:12 *Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.*

Eventually he will seek to bring all the earth into rebellion against God.

to try πειράζω G3985 *them that dwell upon the earth.*—Here is the verb from **2:10** again.

Satan’s focus is on those who “*dwell upon the earth.*” Throughout the Revelation, this expression often describes those against whom Satan directs his attacks and who yield to him. But the verb can also be used of those who resist successfully, as it was of the believers in Pergamos.

Rev. 2:13 *I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.*

Antipas of Pergamos is the only martyr identified in the seven churches. Persecution had already become intense in Pergamos, but the people were steadfast.

I (ἐγώ emphatic) *also will keep thee from* τηρέω G5083 ἐκ.—In the face of this warning, the Lord offers protection. The pronoun is emphatic: “*I myself will keep thee.*”

Some understand this promise to refer to the rapture of the church, described in **1 Thes 4:15-17**, when the Lord comes to raise the faithful dead. He could have made this clear in this verse if he had spoken of “*taking*” them from the world, rather than “*keeping them.*” But in his great high priestly prayer in **John 17**, he uses this same phrase “*keep from*” in contrast with “*take from*”:

John 17:15 *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of* αἶρω ἐκ *the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from* τηρέω G5083 ἐκ *the evil.*

The strong parallel with Smyrna encourages us to see this as an assurance of the Lord’s presence and protection through coming trials, rather than exemption from them (Rev. 2:10).

His “*keeping*” will enable them, like those in Smyrna, to “*be ... faithful unto death*” if necessary.

Grant Osborne: Every small church in a difficult area of ministry will find this letter encouraging. Every Christian uncertain about his or her gifts and place in the church as a whole will be comforted. The basic message is profound: **God is more interested in faithfulness than success.** I met a pastor who had been ministering in an inner-city situation where growth was impossible. He was told by a church growth leader that he should leave since there was no future in that church. The leaders in Philadelphia would have been told the same. Does God care only about suburban ministry where neighborhoods are exploding with people and “church growth” is almost inevitable? I think not. When we get to heaven, the greatest rewards may well be for the kind of Christians who persevered in situations like that in Philadelphia, who remained true to the Lord in an extremely difficult situation. They are given an “open door” and a “crown” that no one can take away. Still, they can lose it by failing to “hold fast to what they have.” Thus the message begins and ends with perseverance, with “overcoming” any and all obstacles to the centrality of God and Christ in our lives. We will be vindicated; we will be given the very names of God and Christ for our own. We are citizens of heaven. But we must remain steadfast.

James Hamilton: Note the contrast between what Jews in the synagogue have and what true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have:

- The Jews have the synagogue. Jesus has the key of David.
- The Jews have the synagogue. Those who belong to Jesus have and keep his word.
- The Jews have the synagogue. Jesus will make the overcomers pillars in the temple.
- The Jews have the synagogue. Those who belong to Jesus and keep his word will never be made to leave God’s temple, in which they themselves are pillars.
- The Jews have the synagogue. Those who belong to Jesus and keep his word will have God’s name written on them.
- The Jews have the synagogue. Those who belong to Jesus and keep his word will have the name of God’s city, the new Jerusalem, written on them.
- The Jews have the synagogue. Those who belong to Jesus and keep his word will have Jesus’ new name written on them.

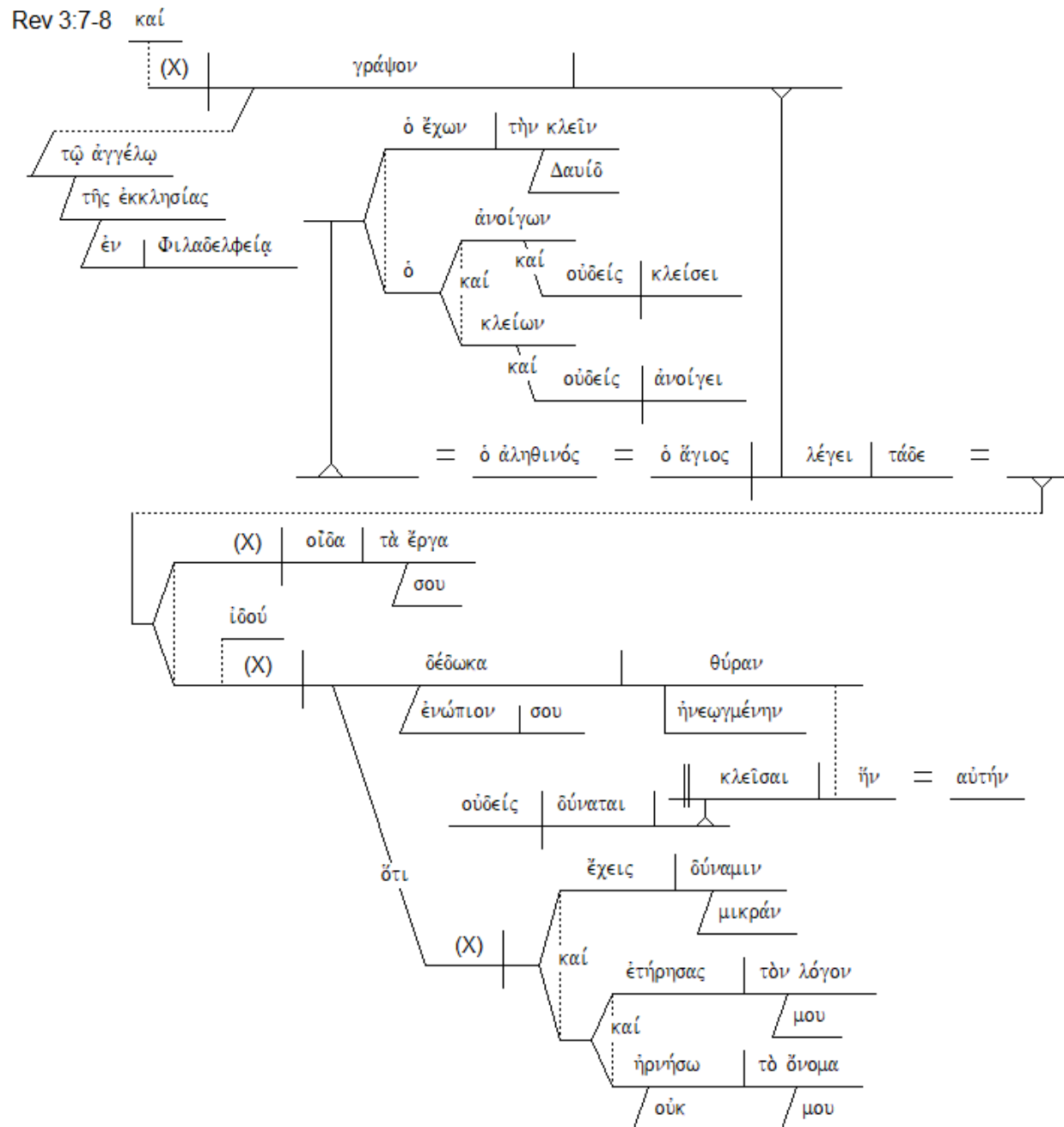
Do you see the point? What Jesus offers is better than any other place of shelter, security, confidence, or refuge. Do you want to belong to Jesus? Keep his word.

Richard Phillips: James Boice concluded his sermon on this text with a line from the popular movie Rocky. The journeyman boxer Rocky Balboa was given a chance to fight the undefeated champion, Apollo Creed. People told Rocky that he could never win, but he went on training for the fight. The day of the fight came, and Rocky confided to his girlfriend, “There’s no way I can beat Apollo Creed.” Christians will feel this way in our witness to a hostile and rebellious world. Rocky didn’t plan to win, but said, “I just want to go the distance.” To everyone’s astonishment, that is what Rocky did. He was not knocked out but went the full fifteen rounds in the ring against the terrifying foe.

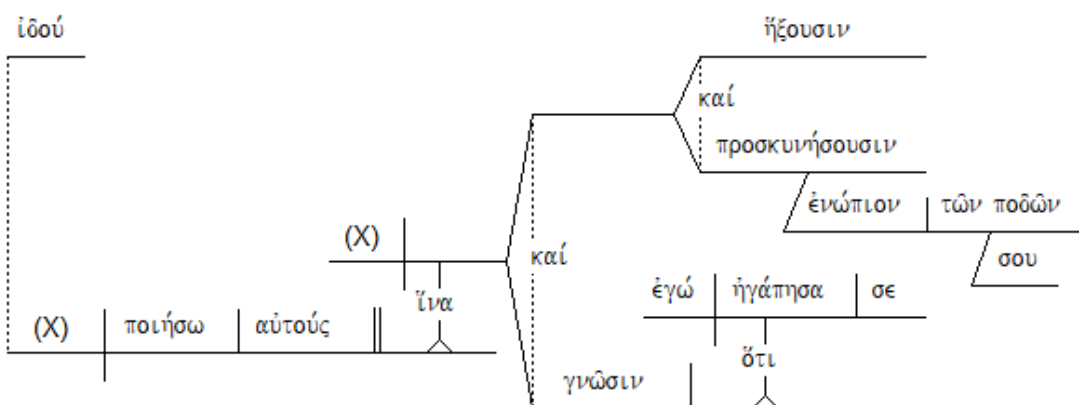
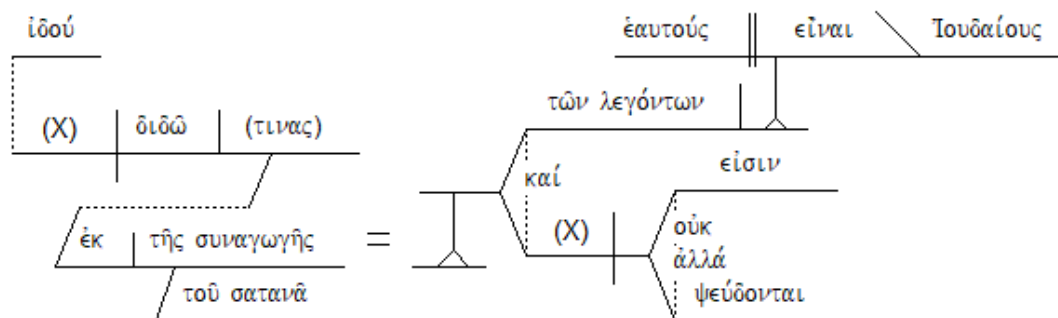
This is what we are called to do, holding fast to the Bible, honoring Christ’s name, and bearing testimony to his gospel. Jesus declares, “*I am coming soon*” (**Rev. 3:11**). We say in answer, “*Jesus, with your strength, I will go the distance.*” As we trust in him, no one will seize our crown of eternal life, but instead, as Paul said, “*there is laid up for me the crown of*

righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

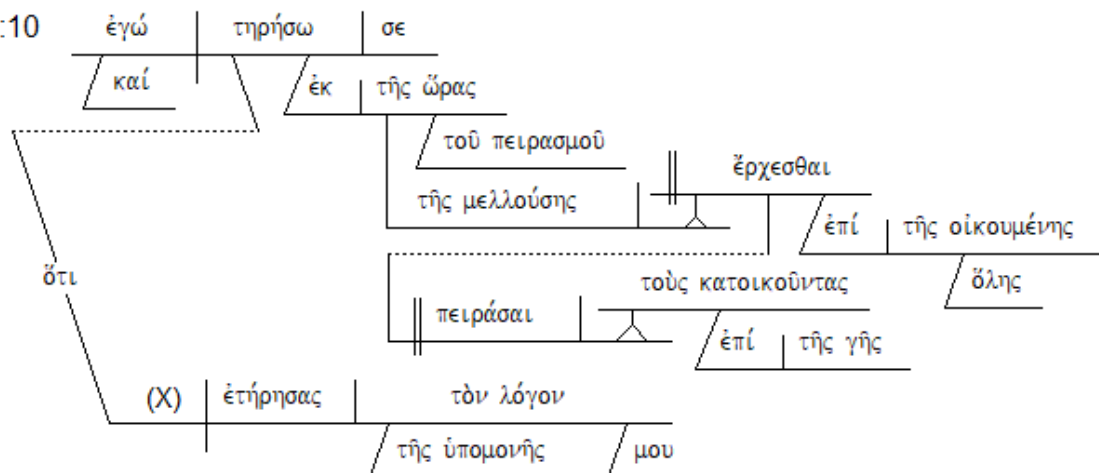
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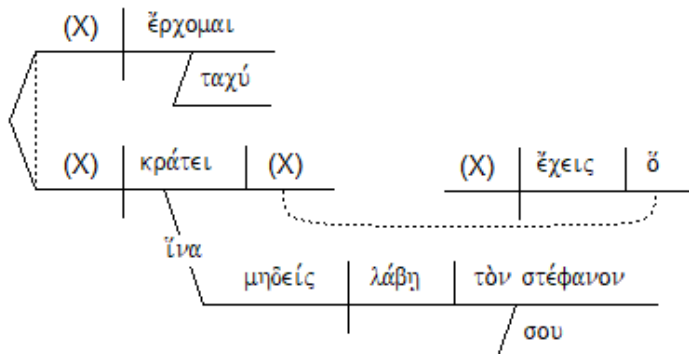
Rev 3:9



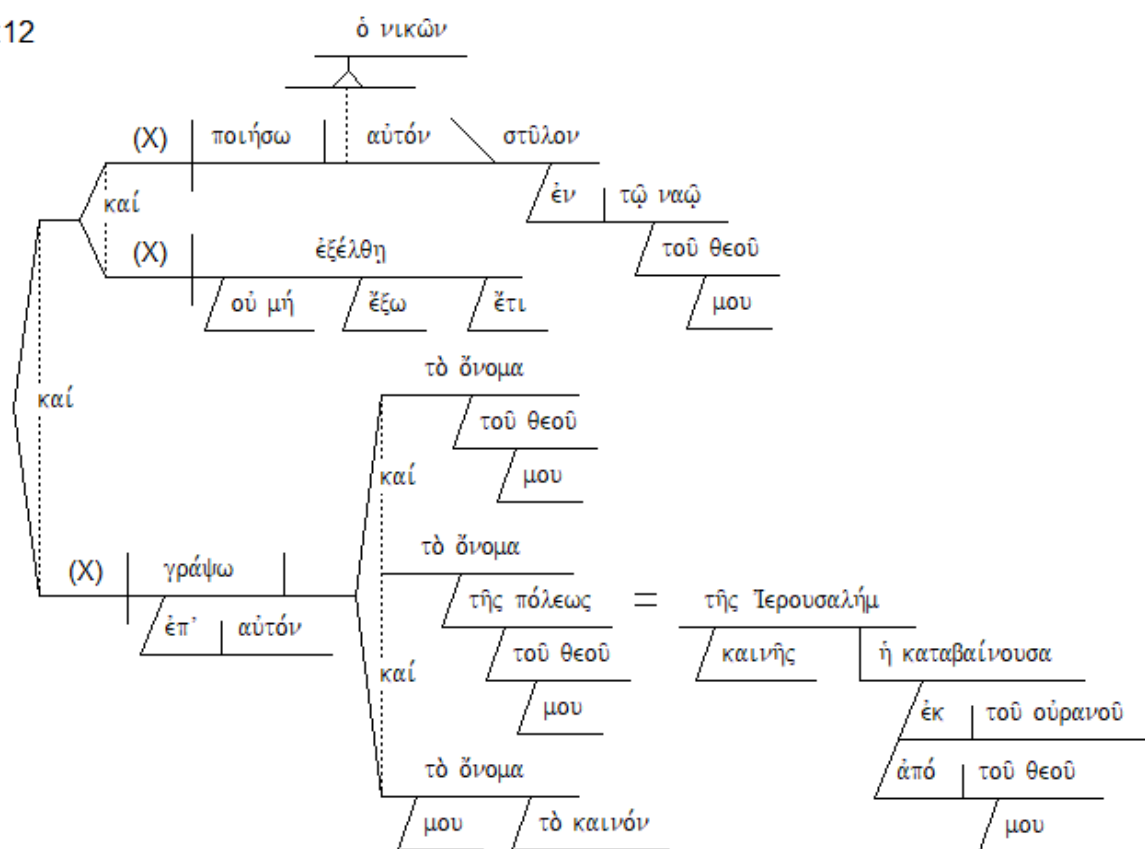
Rev 3:10



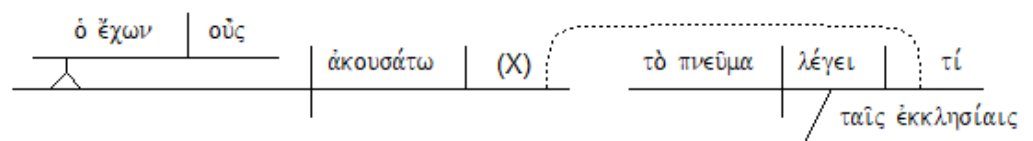
Rev 3:11



Rev 3:12



Rev 3:13



TEXT: Revelation 3:14-22

TITLE: *LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA = LUKEWARM CHURCH*

BIG IDEA:

NOMINAL CHRISTIANITY WITH ITS SELF-RELIANCE DESERVES CHRIST'S CRITICISM AS REPULSIVE

INTRODUCTION:

GotQuestions.org: What is nominal Christianity?

Outside of arcane discussions in medieval philosophy, nominalism is the **possession of a baseless name, title, or description**. A nominal presidency, for example, is one in which the president is nothing more than a figurehead. A nominal vacation is one in which the vacationers must still work. Nominalism has to do with **empty formalities, things so-called, and meaningless labels**.

Nominalism exists in religious circles. Nominal Christians are church-goers or otherwise religious people whose “faith” does not go beyond being identified with a church, Christian group, or denomination. They are **Christians in name only**; Christ has no bearing in their lives. Nominal Christians may attend church and Christian functions, and they self-identify as “Christians,” but it is just a label. They view religion primarily as a social construct, and they do not allow it to require much of them in terms of morality or responsibility. Nominalists take a minimalist approach to their faith.

Nominalism is of concern to many pastors, preachers, and Christian theologians, as it appears to be on the rise today. Many identify themselves as Christians, but the overall impact of Christianity in the West is not what it once was. But what causes nominalism? Why do people prefer a nominal or in-name-only type of Christianity? One possible reason is that nominal religion is easy. **It does not require a changed life**. A nominal Christian can point to membership in a church as evidence of his salvation. Church attendance and participation in routines, activities, and programs become the measuring stick rather than a changed life, a new heart, a love for God, and obedience to the Word (see 2 Corinthians 5:17; John 14:23).

Another cause of nominal Christianity is the habit of declaring oneself a Christian because of custom or culture. Whole countries, including Costa Rica, Norway, Denmark, and England, have a form of Christianity as the official state religion. This allows a Norwegian, for example, to culturally identify as a Christian—he is a member of the Church of Norway by default, having been registered in infancy when he was baptized. Even in countries with no state religion, such as the United States, cultural Christianity can lead to nominalism. Someone who was reared in a Christian family, attended church all his life, was baptized, lives in the Bible Belt, etc., often claims allegiance to the Christian faith, in spite of evidence in his life to the contrary.

Another cause of nominalism within the church is **legalism**, the attempt to transform oneself (or others) inwardly by working on the outward behavior. Some people, especially those raised in the church, conform to standards imposed upon them by parents, other Christians, or the church hierarchy without the inner transformation that can only be produced by the Spirit through the Word (Galatians 6:15). Legalists substitute good deeds for saving faith and compliance for

conversion. This naturally leads to nominal Christianity, as church-goers and rule-keepers claim the label “Christian” but have no relationship with Christ.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/nominal-Christianity.html>

Buist Fanning: Jesus rebukes the church in Laodicea for their uselessness and their pitiable self-sufficiency; only he can provide what they need, and he appeals to them to repent and renew their fellowship with him.

The message to the church in Laodicea is even more **negative** than the one to Sardis (3:1–6), but ends with a warm appeal for renewed fellowship. Christ who is full of truth and ruler of all (v. 14) strongly rebukes their conduct (vv. 15–18), but he reminds them of his love even in chastening and invites them to repentance and restoration of intimacy (vv. 19–20). The promise to the overcomer looks to the continuation of that intimacy in sharing Christ’s rule in the new age (v. 21). The message is structured in inverted parallelism moving through three main themes: rule (vv. 14, 21), dining fellowship (vv. 15–16, 19–20), and true prosperity (vv. 17–18).

Kendell Easley: The church of Laodicea is guilty of such self-sufficiency that they must repent and receive Christ’s provision of righteousness in order again to experience intimate fellowship with him.

James Hamilton: It seems that the **affluence** of Laodicea made the church there particularly vulnerable to **self-reliance**. Given the enormous affluence of our own culture, we need to hear what Jesus says to the church in Laodicea. We need to be shown that the wealth of our culture does not meet our deepest needs.

Jesus calls the church in Laodicea to rely on him and his resources rather than on their own. . . Jesus calls the church to recognize that their needs go deeper than what their resources can handle. Their problem is not physical and economic but spiritual. Their abundant physical and economic resources have dulled their sense of need for God and the gospel, and Jesus calls them to recognize the deep need they have so that they will cease to be lukewarm.

(;14) PROLOGUE – LISTEN TO THE RELIABLE TESTIMONY OF JESUS CHRIST

A. Command to Write to the Church at Laodicea

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:”

D. A. Waite: [Regarding the name of this city] The Lord Jesus Christ is addressing the Laodicean church. *LAOS* is *people* and *DOKEO* is *to say or to think*. It’s WHAT THE PEOPLE THINK. My friends, who cares what the people think? **What does GOD THINK?** That’s THE important issue!! The Laodicean church was a lackadaisical church!”

Buist Fanning: Laodicea was the city located farthest south and east among the seven cities, about 50 miles southeast of Philadelphia in the Lycus River valley, with Hierapolis a few miles to its north and Colossae a few miles to its south. The Seleucids founded it in the mid-third century BC on the site of earlier settlements. The location was advantageous for agriculture and herding as well as strategic for trade, and the city prospered immediately. It was at a major intersection of highways, one running west-to-east from Ephesus to Iconium and on to Syria, and one running northwest-to-southeast from Smyrna and Sardis to Colossae and Attalia. Strabo, writing about AD 25, extolled its rapid growth, its wealth, and the soft black wool it produced

(Geogr. 12.8.16). Tacitus records its severe damage from an earthquake around AD 60 from which it recovered from its own resources without any help from Rome (Ann. 14.27). Its extant ruins reflect a large city with impressive public buildings including two theaters, monumental gates, a colonnaded main street, and a stadium built in AD 79 in honor of the emperor Titus.

Grant Osborne: It is likely that the three sister churches (Laodicea, Hierapolis, Colosse) were established at the same time by Epaphras, who founded the Colossian church (**Col. 1:7**) as well as evangelized Laodicea and Hierapolis (**Col. 4:13**) during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus (**Acts 19**). Paul had not visited these churches at the time of his first imprisonment (**Col. 2:1**), though he may have done so subsequently (**Philem. 22**). Many believe that the "*epistle to Laodicea*" (**Col. 4:16**) may have been Ephesians, which we know to have been a circular letter. The church, like the city itself, had grown fat and complacent, satisfied with its wealth but quite devoid of any spiritual depth. This letter has nothing good to say about Laodicea, which was thus worse than Sardis.

B. Characterization of Christ as the Reliable Witness

1. Trustworthy

"The Amen,"

Grant Osborne: All three terms are in deliberate contrast with the lukewarm Laodiceans, who were neither faithful nor true to Christ and whose witness was virtually nonexistent.

Buist Fanning: Jesus in his earthly life and supremely in his death embodied **completely reliable testimony** about God and his redemption, and his trustworthy witness continues in the revelation he now communicates through John (cf. **22:20**; also **2:13**: Antipas, "*my faithful witness*"). The addition of the adjective "*true*" suggests how the preceding description came to be used here. The title "*the Amen*" (ὁ Ἀμήν) is transliterated from the Hebrew אָמֵן (meaning "*surely*," from the verbal root "*be firm, trustworthy*"). As a title it is likely drawn from **Isaiah 65:16** that refers twice to God's people counting on "*the God of truth*," translated in the LXX as "*the true [reliable] God*" (τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἀληθινόν). This theme of Christ as fully reliable in bearing witness to the truth should encourage this church to accept his forthcoming counsel about their true condition and its remedy (**vv. 17–18**).

John MacArthur: Amen is a transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning "*truth*," "*affirmation*," or "*certainty*." It refers to that which is firm, fixed, and unchangeable. Amen is often used in Scripture to affirm the truthfulness of a statement (e. g., **Num. 5:22**; **Neh. 8:6**; **Matt. 6:13**; **Rom. 16:27**; **1 Cor. 16:24**; and also **Matt. 5:18**; **6:2**; **Mark 9:1**; **Luke 4:24**; **John 1:51**; **3:3**, **5**, **11**; **5:19**; where the underlying Greek amen is rendered "*verily*" in the KJV and "*truly*" in the NASB). Whatever God says is true and certain; therefore, He is the God of truth.

Robert Thomas: Since the principal indictment against the Laodicean church is lukewarmness, Christ's attributes of sincerity and truth come to the forefront as He deals with those whose alleged devotion to Him is only superficial and not substantial.

2. Reliable

"the faithful and true Witness,"

Robert Thomas: This title given to Christ stands in conspicuous contrast to the Laodicean church, which was neither faithful nor true. *Alēthinos* supplies the dimension of "true" or

“genuine” to Christ’s witness. The picture of Christ is not merely that of His truthfulness, but goes beyond to portray the exemplification of the perfect ideal of a witness in whom all the highest conditions of a witness are met, one whose testimony never falls short of the truth (Trench; Swete; Moffatt; Beckwith; Lenski).

David Thompson: The people of the church were **phonies**. They were not faithful and they were not true. In contrast to them, Jesus Christ is the witness who is faithful and true in everything He says. His assessment of this church will be a faithful and true assessment. He cannot say or do anything false.

Van Parunak: He is the perfect example of a witness:

- He has first-hand knowledge of the information in question;
- He is willing to testify to that knowledge;
- He is truthful

3. Sovereign

“the Beginning of the creation of God,”

Buist Fanning: The connection with **1:5** (see above) suggests that “*ruler, authority*” (paralleling **1:5**, “*ruler [ἄρχων] over the kings of the earth*”) is a better sense for ἀρχή here. Revelation speaks often about God’s sovereign rule over all things (**1:8; 11:17; 15:3; 19:6**) or Christ’s (**1:5; 2:26–27; 3:21; 12:5; 17:14; 19:15–16; 20:4–6**) or God’s and Christ’s together (**5:12–13; 11:15; 12:10**). Within this immediate context the ideas seem to flow in an inverted thematic structure by which this verse is parallel to **v. 21** in speaking about Christ’s authority or rule with his Father, and this is done in preparation for the vision (**chs. 4–5**) of the heavenly throne room where every creature offers worship to God and the Lamb (**5:13**).

John MacArthur: “*Firstborn*” (prōtotokos) is not limited to the first one born chronologically, but refers to the supreme or preeminent one, the one receiving the highest honor (cf. **Ps. 89:27**). Christ is thus the source (*archē*) of the creation, and the supreme person (*prōtotokos*) in it.

Van Parunak: The third title echos several earlier scriptures. Most immediately, “*beginning*” ἀρχή G746 is closely related to “*prince*” ἄρχων G758 in **1:5** (“*prince of the kings of the earth*”), and can also mean “*ruler*” (cf. use of the root in **Gn 1:26, 28**; see note on Christ’s authority). He is the beginning of the creation, but he is also its human ruler, as **1:5** anticipates. Isa 65:15 makes this point, where the God of Amen slays his enemies and exercising the ruler’s prerogative of renaming his subjects, as we saw already in **3:12**.

That which he begins and rules is called the creation. The emphasis we have already seen on **Isaiah 65** suggests that the focus here is not on the original creation, but on the **new creation** promised in **Isa 65:17**, the new heavens and new earth.

The first step in that new creation was the **resurrection** of our Lord, which **1:5** emphasizes by giving him the title “*firstborn of the dead*.” That title in turn leads us to yet another text that lies behind **3:14, Col 1:15–18**, the only other reference in the Bible to “*the firstborn of the dead*.” This passage is particularly relevant because Laodicea would have read this epistle.

Colossians 1 is often used by those who would deny the full deity of our Lord to suggest that he is a created being. But a careful consideration of its structure shows that this is not the case. The first verse of this passage summarizes the rest, a summary-exposition pattern common in Paul. It presents our Lord as both God (the image of the invisible God) and man (the firstborn of every creature, or “*all creation*,” as AV translates the word in **Rev 3:14**).

Col 1:15 *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:*

As the visible manifestation of God, he is the one who actually carried out the work of creation (**1:16-17**), as reported in **Gen 1:1**, “*God created the heavens and the earth.*”

[image of the invisible God:] 16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Even before the incarnation, throughout the OT, the Son is the form in which God revealed himself visibly to his creatures, as “the angel of the Lord.” Four times in these two verses Paul insists that he made “all things.” As John would later write in his gospel,

John 1:3 *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

John is quite clear: if it was created, he created it. So he himself cannot be created.

The confusion has come by trying to interpret “*firstborn of every creature*” as an introduction to **vv. 16-17**. But Paul’s repetition of the word “*firstborn*” in **v. 18** shows that this second clause is meant as a **summary** of **v. 18**. The reference here is not to the first creation, but to the second, which begins with his resurrection:

[firstborn of all creation:] 18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

In **Col 1:18**, Paul calls the Lord “*the beginning*,” the same title the Lord takes in **Rev 3:14**. But note that it is associated with his place as “*firstborn of the dead*.” Our Lord, having become a man, is the first participant (by resurrection) in the new creation promised in **Isa 65:17-18**.

Isa 65:17 *For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. 18 But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.*

In Colossians, the centerpiece of this new creation is the church. Revelation ends in “a new heaven and a new earth” (21:1). Again, the church is central, represented as a city:

Rev 21:9 *And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. 10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,*

As the faithful and true witness, our Lord attests not only to what is true now, but also to what is coming. Laodicea is proud of its strategic location and the wealth that comes from it. But it has already been dominated by another city, Rome, and a major theme of the Revelation is that Rome itself will one day be defeated by the new Jerusalem, representing the people of God in their eternal state. If the church of the Laodicea wishes to participate in that glorious future, they must heed what this faithful witness says.

C. Communication from the Sovereign Head of the Church

“says this:”

I. (:15-18) CRITICISM OF LUKEWARM CHURCH

A. (:15-16) Categorization of Lukewarm Church as Repulsive

1. (:15) Nominal Christianity Defined as Lukewarm

*“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot;
I would that you were cold or hot.”*

Robert Thomas: As in the previous messages, the Lord follows His self-description with *oida* (“I know”), a word depicting intimate knowledge that is complete and infallible (**Swete; Lenski**). When used of human knowledge, this word designates something known by observation; but referring to divine knowledge, it points to a comprehension that is absolute because it is based on omniscience. The objects of His knowledge are *sou ta erga* (“your works”) as in four of the six earlier messages (**Rev. 2:2, 19; 3:1, 8**). In each case the works are more than the deeds done. They are a reflection of life and conduct in general, including outward and inward spiritual activities (**Alford**). They are evidence of the inward spiritual condition the Lord alone sees and knows directly (**Beckwith; Lenski**). It is by means of these that men prove what they actually are.

[Argues for the position that the **temperament** of this church left much to be desired by way of devotion to Christ.]

Ineffectiveness in service [the position advocated by **Fanning** below] is a strange way for Christ to evaluate this church. The other messages define works in terms of inner qualities of the Christian life. Would He censure the Laodiceans on the basis of external accomplishments? Probably not. How then is the objection that Christ would not want a church to be cold to be answered? The best suggestion is that spiritual coldness, even to the point of open hostility, is preferable to lukewarmness and repulsive indifference because it at least suggests that religion is something to be in earnest about. From an ethical standpoint, a frank repudiation is at least more promising than a half-and-half attachment (**Alford; Moffatt; Caird**). To prefer outright rejection over a halfway response is startling, to say the least, but to profess Christianity while remaining untouched by its fire is a disaster. There is more hope for the openly antagonistic than for the coolly indifferent. The state of coldness is more conducive to a person’s coming to Christ than the state of lukewarmness, as illustrated in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (**Walvoord; Beasley-Murray**).

Buist Fanning: He then captures their behavior specifically with a powerful metaphor, sharply rebuking **how useless and displeasing their conduct is to him**. It is the metaphor of cold, hot, or lukewarm water—in this case specifically drinking water, since **v. 16b** refers to expelling it “*out of my mouth*.” Construing the appropriate sense for this can be challenging because we must

be careful to understand the ancient cultural and linguistic setting and not just impose what seems natural to our modern situation. Most modern readers are likely to take “lukewarm” and “neither hot nor cold” to mean **half-hearted, indifferent**, vacillating, and in religious matters perhaps also nominal or syncretistic. This would be in contrast to “hot” as **fervent, ardent, enthusiastic** (cf. the related verb in **Acts 18:25; Rom 12:11**) and “cold” as **lifeless, aloof, hard-hearted** (cf. related verb in **Matt 24:12**). There may be evidence for this in the command of **v. 19** to be earnest or zealous (ζήλεε). But is this really the point of Christ’s rebuke? The context suggests that “lukewarm” is the only negative here, and **“hot” or “cold” are equally desirable alternatives**. Does Christ actually prefer even outright spiritual hostility or rejection rather than half-heartedness (**v. 15c**: “*I wish that you were cold or hot*”)?

One approach leading toward a better understanding has been advanced by a number of recent commentaries and aims to incorporate cultural insights drawn from studies of the ancient site of Laodicea and its surrounding area. These studies focused on the water supply of Laodicea and the nearby cities of Colossae and Hierapolis. Literary and archeological evidence from the ancient world suggests that Colossae had an abundant supply of fresh, cool water for drinking and Hierapolis was known for hot mineral waters (evident even today to visitors to the site). **Both could be seen as desirable and useful for human use and consumption**. In contrast, it was thought that the site of Laodicea itself lacked a ready water supply, and pipes that carried hot waters from another site (five miles away) provided only a tepid and mineral-laden supply. Given these notable local conditions, being “lukewarm,” it is argued, means not half-hearted or indifferent but **useless or ineffective**, “providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary, nor healing for the spiritually sick.”

This interpretation itself seems essentially correct, but the archeological evidence to support it has been seriously questioned in recent years, and it fails to explain certain details from the text. This reading sees the value of hot water to lie in its healing and soothing properties for bathing, while the **text seems to imply water for drinking** at all three temperature levels. The reason for “*spitting*” out the displeasing water is not due to its high mineral content, as implied by some explanations just noted, but is due to its tepid temperature, which for some reason was not preferred compared to hot or cold. A better suggestion is to ground the sense in ancient practices more broadly rather than in local conditions understandable only in Laodicea. **Koester** has found evidence of common dining practices across the Greco-Roman world that explain the imagery of **Revelation 3:15–16** more satisfactorily than the localized explanations. For example, drinks taken with a meal (water as well as wine) were not always served at room temperature. If a host could manage it, there was a **preference for cold drinks on some occasions and for hot on others, depending on the climate**. Diners desired cold drinks when it was hot and hot drinks when it was cold according to **Plato** (Rep. 437 d–e), and other writers reflect this too. At a minimum this background for the imagery of **3:15–16** suggests that Christ faults the Laodicean church not so much for half-hearted commitment or passivity as for **conduct repulsive to him**, conduct that he vehemently rejects (he is about to “*spit*” it from his mouth, **v. 16b**). Their conduct is further described in **vv. 17–18** as **self-sufficient** and satisfied with material wealth (see below), which certainly displeases the Lord.

Grant Osborne: The church should not have matched its water supply. The Laodiceans should have been known for their **spiritual healing** (like Hierapolis) or their **refreshing, life-giving ministry** (like Colosse). Instead, as Jesus’ next statement reads, they were “*lukewarm*.” **They were devoid of works and useless to the Lord**.

2. (:16) Nauseating Rejection of Lukewarm Church

*“So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold,
I will spit you out of My mouth.”*

Apparently the church included many apostate professing believers who will ultimately be rejected by Christ.

Robert Thomas: The key term describing their state is *chliaros* (“lukewarm”). It appears only here in biblical Greek (**Charles**). Traditionally, the image behind this metaphor is related to the water supply in Laodicea. The city appears to have had difficulty in this regard. Some recent studies have proposed that the problem was impurities in the water that caused vomiting (**Hemer**), but this contradicts the plain testimony of the text. The problem was the **temperature** of the water. Neighboring Hierapolis had hot, spring water, valuable for its medicinal effects. In its journey to Laodicea it lost some of its heat and consequently medicinal value by the time it arrived either overland or by aqueduct in Laodicea. Nearby Colosse had cool, life-giving water that was refreshing as a beverage (**Hemer**). The water in Laodicea was somewhere between these two in temperature. Such **tepid water** was sickening to drink on either a hot or a cold day. The metaphorical meaning of this divine estimate of the church portrays most vividly the **revulsion** Laodicea provoked in Christ.

The obvious question is, **What was the spiritual status of this people?** Clearly their problem was not spiritual immaturity. Jesus would not express dissatisfaction of a young Christian passing through a justifiable stage of Christian growth. It is not sufficient to analyze them simply as spiritually complacent. Nor can they be seen simply as those who have shown some interest in the things of God, but have fallen short of the true testimony of Christ. Neither of these goes far enough in explaining the terrible plight of the ones addressed. Lukewarm is a description of church people who have **professed Christ hypocritically** but do not have in their hearts the reality of what they pretend to be in their actions. Such **hypocrisy** offers the only possible reason Christ would prefer coldness to lukewarmness. In fact, the spirit of **vv. 15-16** resembles His denunciation of the religious authorities of His day because of their hypocrisy, in contrast with His hopeful expectations with regard to harlots and tax-gatherers. A person who professes to be a Christian, but secretly has not believed in Christ, thinks that such a profession is enough to get him by. Nothing can be done with a **nominal Christian** who cannot recognize that he needs repentance and that Jesus is really outside His life (**Moffatt**). The five adjectives that describe this church in **v. 17** make it quite evident that, corporately speaking, they did not have a relationship with Christ as Savior. This probably cannot be pressed to mean that there were no genuine Christians there. It simply means they were so few in number and insignificant in influence that the Lord did not find it necessary to acknowledge their presence as He did in a similar situation with the church of Sardis (cf. **3:4**). By and large, **the church had come under the dominance of pretending Christians.**

[Yet as noted below, it also seems that Jesus is addressing believers who have slipped into a self-deceived, self-sufficient state of complacency regarding spiritual matters. So this is not a monolithic group that Jesus is addressing.]

Van Parunak: The threat here is another metaphor for the danger facing Ephesus, there represented as **removal of the candlestick**. In both cases, the church is **at risk of losing its standing with the Lord**. If the work of the Spirit stops in a church, if the members no longer do their functions, the formal institution may continue, in the form of rituals and traditions, but over

it is written the lament of the tabernacle when the ark was removed— **Ichabod, the glory is departed.**

B. (:17-18) Condemnation of Self-Deception and Self-Sufficiency

1. (:17) Exposure of Self-Deception and Self-Sufficiency

a. Self-Deceived Regarding Resources

*“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy,
and have need of nothing,’
and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable
and poor”*

Grant Osborne: The purpose (*iva, hina, so that*) is true wealth. There is a double irony here. They think they are rich but are actually poor; the only way they can be truly wealthy is to “purchase” gold from Jesus. Yet this cannot be bought; it must be accepted as a gift on the basis of faith.

Beale (1999: 305) notes the contrast with Smyrna, which was poor in this world but spiritually rich, while Laodicea had all the wealth of this world but was spiritually poverty-stricken.

b. Self-Deceived Regarding Spiritual Sight

“and blind”

c. Self-Deceived Regarding Righteousness

“and naked,”

Buist Fanning: Their self-perception as “wealthy” and needing nothing is an intermingling of the metaphorical and the real sense: they possess material, earthly riches, and they suppose that this represents true and lasting prosperity. In this regard they are the opposite of the church in Smyrna (2:9), but they foreshadow Babylon (18:7–8, 16–19). Their true situation is that they are “not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). Spiritually and ethically they are in great need, and Christ lays bare their true condition in a crescendo of woeful descriptions: “wretched and pitiable” as well as “poor and blind and naked.” The last three are figurative for their true spiritual bankruptcy, ignorance, and shameful exposure as evil and helpless.

2. (:18) Exhortation to Seek Their Sufficiency in Christ

a. Seek True Riches

*“I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire,
that you may become rich,”*

b. Seek True Righteousness

*“and white garments, that you may clothe yourself,
and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed;”*

Kendell Easley: Laodicea’s famed black wool symbolized the filthy, sinful garments with which the unregenerate are clothed (Isa. 64:6; Zech. 3:3–4). In contrast, God clothes the redeemed with white garments (3:4–5; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13–14; cf. Isa. 61:10), symbolizing the righteous deeds that always accompany genuine saving faith (19:8).

c. Seek True Spiritual Discernment

“and eye salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.”

Buist Fanning: The three failings expressed figuratively at the end of v. 17 (poor, blind, naked) are taken up here in close parallels, and Christ stipulates the cure for them. But the most important point of the verse is that the remedy in each case is something beyond their own vaunted resources (see their **clueless self-sufficiency** portrayed in v. 17a) and must be obtained from Christ. The image of “*buying from me*” (ἀγοράσαι παρ’ ἐμοῦ) does not imply that they have any means of payment for such benefits, but it emphasizes the **true source** of what is required. It alludes to the Lord’s words in **Isaiah 55:1** inviting the needy to “*buy*” (repeated twice in MT; LXX has ἀγοράσατε) without money or payment (alluded to also in **Rev 21:6; 22:17**).

Kendell Easley: Salve to put on your eyes recalls the miracle of Jesus in which he applied a salve of saliva mixed with dirt in healing the man born blind (**John 9:1–12**). On that occasion he told his accusers, “*If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains*” (**John 9:41**). The Laodicean church claimed that it had spiritual insight. Would it recognize its blindness and ask for Christ’s wisdom and insight (**Col. 1:9**)?

II. (:19-20) CALL FOR REPENTANCE

A. (:19) Grand Plan

1. Purpose of Discipline

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline;”

This would seem to indicate that Christ’s message was largely directed towards believers who had grown complacent in their sense of self sufficiency and were no longer whole-heartedly pursuing godliness.

2. Plea for Repentance

“be zealous therefore, and repent.”

Grant Osborne: A “*zeal*” or eagerness to get right with God must replace the “*lukewarm*” spirituality that characterized the church. That zeal will be seen in “*repentance*” (see **2:5, 16, 22; 3:3**). The Laodiceans had been blind to their own indifferent spirituality. They had apparently listened to their worldly affluence rather than Christ and had thought material success meant they were right with God (a mistaken theology that paralleled some aspects of ancient Jewish thinking and continues today). Their enthusiasm needed to change focus from self to God, and the only way to do so was to repent.

B. (:20) Gracious Invitation

1. Divine Initiative

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock;”

Richard Phillips: This verse is frequently seen as an evangelistic appeal, but the context shows that this is not the case. This text does not urge unbelievers to “ask Jesus into your heart”; instead, Jesus is speaking to his church that has closed its door to him. Moreover, the idea of opening an unbelieving heart to Jesus is not the biblical idea of conversion. Biblical evangelism is the proclaiming of Christ in his person and work so that hearers believe in him as God grants them new hearts (**Ezek. 36:25–26**), which he opens by his Word (**Acts 16:14**). **James Boice** explains that here, Christ “is knocking at the closed hearts of those who are his but who have turned their backs on him and shut him out of their complacent, self-satisfied, worldly Christian

lives. The knocking Christ is an image, not of Jesus calling unbelievers to give their hearts to him but of calling drifting, worldly believers to sincere repentance and renewal.”

Grant Osborne: Christ’s compassion is nowhere better exemplified than in this image of him as a loving visitor seeking admittance to one’s home.

John Schultz: At Adam’s creation, God expected that man would himself take the initiative and approach the tree of life in order to eat the fruit thereof. That would have initiated the same feast of love and fellowship as the one Jesus mentions here. Adam’s choice of the tree of knowledge did not annul God’s feast. God’s table has remained spread. The difference is that now man can no longer take the initiative of love. The chasm caused by sin is unbridgeable for us. If God does not take the initiative for us, we are lost for eternity.

2. Desired Response

“if anyone hears My voice and opens the door,”

3. Divine Reconciliation

“I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.”

John MacArthur: Christ’s offer to dine with the repentant church speaks of fellowship, communion, and intimacy. Sharing a meal in ancient times symbolized the union of people in loving fellowship. Believers will dine with Christ at the marriage supper of the Lamb (**19:9**), and in the millennial kingdom (**Luke 22:16, 29–30**). Dine is from *deipneō*, which refers to the evening meal, the last meal of the day (cf. **Luke 17:8; 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25**, where the underlying Greek is rendered “sup,” “supper,” and “supped,” respectively). The Lord Jesus Christ urged them to repent and have fellowship with Him before the night of judgment fell and it was too late forever.

(;21-22) EPILOGUE – BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME

A. (:21) Persevere to Receive Blessing

1. Condition of Overcoming

“He who overcomes,”

There is still the opportunity to repent and be included in the party of the overcomers who inherit all of the blessings of Christ’s kingdom.

2. Promise of Blessing = Co-Reigning with Christ

*“I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne,
as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”*

B. (:22) Pay Attention

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does our affluent culture make our churches especially susceptible to the lukewarm spirit demonstrated by the church of Laodicea?
- 2) Have we insured ourselves against every type of calamity so that the request in the Lord's Prayer – "*Give us this day our daily bread*" – has become meaningless in terms of moment-by-moment dependence on the Lord?
- 3) Where do we see **self-deception** creeping into our life and our church?
- 4) What is our conception of **reigning with Christ** in His millennial kingdom?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: There are four historical facts that Jesus Christ Himself brings out in this message:

Historical Fact #1 - Laodicea was known for its **banking**. Laodicea was a major financial center and one of the wealthiest cities in the world. In A.D. 61, the city was destroyed by an earthquake and the leaders of the city refused to apply for any governmental financial help from the Roman Empire to rebuild.

They underwrote the entire project by themselves. Laodicea was the only city in Asia with enough money to totally rely on her own resources. This is a key historical fact that shows up in **verses 17 and 18a**. This city was in stark contrast to a city like Philadelphia. As we mentioned, even the ruins look rich.

Historical Fact #2 - Laodicea was known for its **manufacturing**. One of the great resources of this city was the manufacturing of clothes, particularly black woolen clothing. There are still black sheep that supposedly live in this area, and although I did not see them, I have seen pictures of them. The black wool is a soft wool texture that is very desirable. This city was known for its mass production of clothing for the entire world and this fact is alluded to in **verse 18**.

Historical Fact #3 - Laodicea was known for its **medical research**. Laodicea was a city that featured a very progressive medical center. In fact, Strabo claims that there was a school of medicine that was located near Laodicea. There were two main contributions that Laodicea made to the medical world, to which Christ refers in **verse 18 and 20**:

- 1) Eye Salve - ointment that treated eye problems
- 2) Ear Salve - ointment that treated ear problems

Now because this was such a prosperous city, people could get good jobs that offered good pay.

Historical Fact #4 - Laodicea was known for its **aqueduct**. Laodicea was an inland city and the nearest water source was about six miles away to the south. A six mile aqueduct was constructed,

which we actually saw. That aqueduct brought water into the city.

The problem was if water were drawn from the cold springs, by the time it reached the city, it had warmed. If the water were drawn from the hot springs of Hierapolis, by the time it got to the city, it had cooled. It appeared to me that The Laodiceans tried to compensate for this by creating a tunnel and covering it with sod. But it never completely worked. Jesus Christ refers to this water issue in **verses 15-16**.

The great lesson we learn from this historical background is self-reliant prosperity can be an indication of spiritual poverty. Physical prosperity can be an indication of spiritual bankruptcy. Just because some church or individual has a lot of money, doesn't mean he is right with God.

Van Parunak: Compare the source of the introductory characterization of Christ in each of the 7 letters to the parallel seed expression in **Rev. 1:**

Church	Intro in Epistle	Revelation 1
Ephesus	2:1 These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks ;	1:13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, ... 16 And he had in his right hand seven stars :
Smyrna	2:8 These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive ;	1:17 Fear not; I am the first and the last: 18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore,
Pergamos	2:12 These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges ;	1:16 out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword .
Thyatira	2:18 These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass ;	1:14 and his eyes were as a flame of fire ; 15 And his feet like unto fine brass , as if they burned in a furnace;
Sardis	3:1 These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars ;	1:4 ... Grace be unto you, and peace, ... from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; ... 16 And he had in his right hand seven stars :
Philadelphia	3:7 These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David , he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;	1:18 ... behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death .
Laodicea	3:14 These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning ἀρχή of the creation of God;	1:4 Grace be unto you, and peace, ... 5 ... from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness , and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince ἀρχων of the kings of the earth.

Table 15: Epistle Introductions from Revelation 1

Buist Fanning: The Wounds of a Friend

The most loving thing anyone can do for us is to help us, in all gentleness and sensitivity, to see the truth about ourselves and about God. When we are self-deceived and sinning, we don't need sentimental reinforcement that we're doing fine and that everything will be okay. Proverbs's down-to-earth wisdom tells us that real friends will not coddle our foolishness (**Prov 27:5-6**), and God himself will take the role of a loving parent to discipline an erring child and set him

back on the right path (3:11–12). When we utterly misapprehend our own wretched spiritual condition (Rev 3:17–18), we likewise need Jesus’s challenging love (v. 19) to call us back to repentance and renewed fellowship (v. 20). A good church or good Christian friend can be Jesus’s instrument to do this for us if we will allow it, but our society resists such “interference” and “violation of privacy.” The sentiment that such correction is hateful and out of line is another sign that our Christian walk may be more like the compromising Laodiceans than we’d like to admit. This message from Jesus, like several of the others, shows that John’s book is written not just to comfort the afflicted but to afflict the comfortable, to stir them out of complacency and sinfulness toward true repentance and change.

J.A. Seiss: It is lukewarm, -- nothing decided, -- partly hot and partly cold, -- divided between Christ and the world, -- not willing to give up pretension and claim to the heavenly, and yet clinging close to the earthy, -- having too much conscience to cast off the name of Christ, and too much love for the world to take a firm and honest stand entirely on His side. There is much religiousness, but very little religion; much sentiment, but very little of life to correspond; much profession, but very little faith; a joining of the ball-room to the communion-table, of the opera with the worship of God, and of the feasting and riot of the world with pretended charity and Christian benevolence.

And it is self-satisfied, boastful, and empty. Having come down to the world’s tastes, and gained the world’s praise and patronage, the Laodiceans think they are rich, and increased with goods, and have need in nothing. Such splendid churches, and influential and intelligent congregations, and learned, agreeable preachers! Such admirable worship and music! Such excellently manned and endowed institutions! So many missionaries in the field! So much given for magnificent charities! Such an array in all the attributes of greatness and power! What more can be wanted?

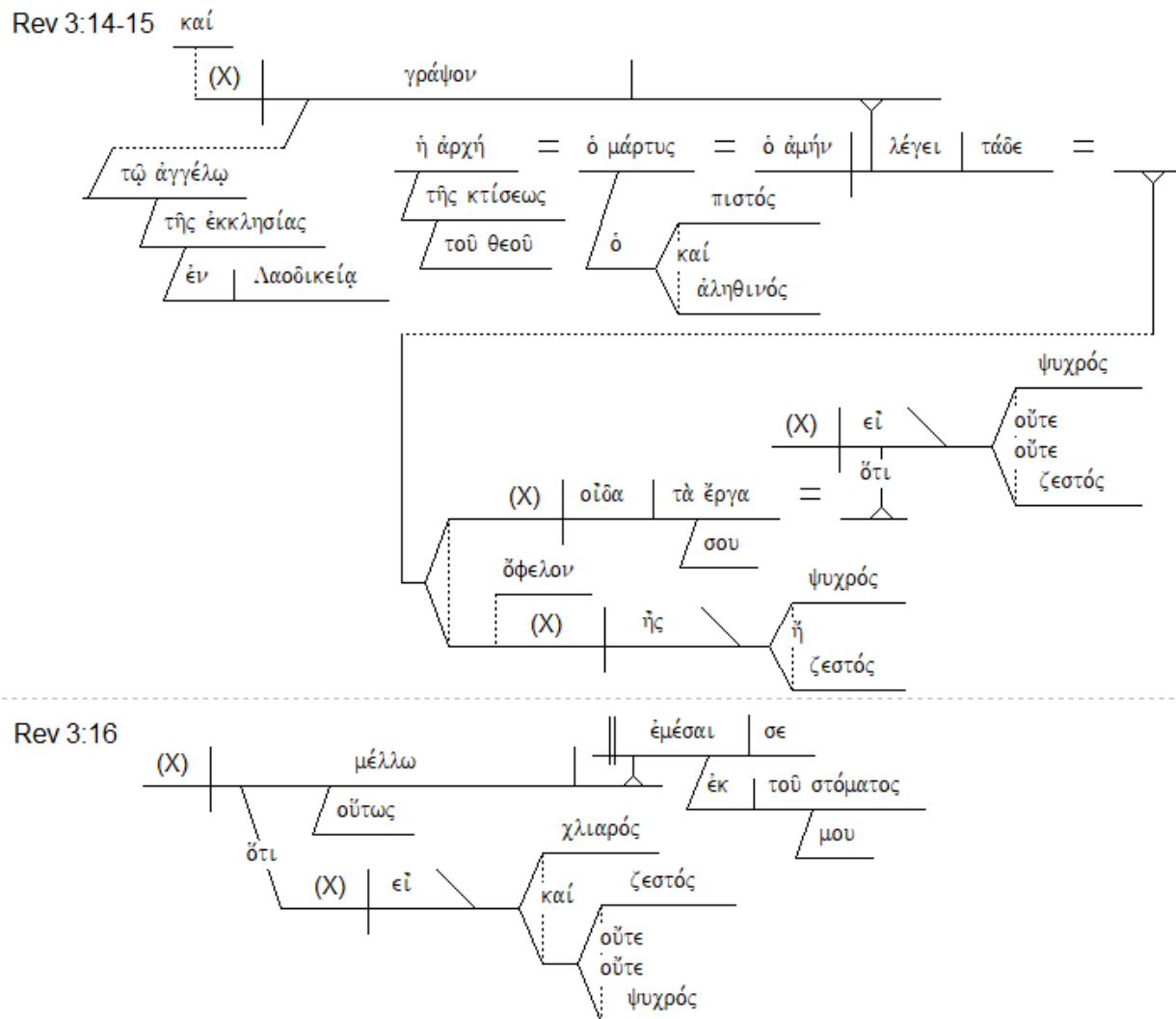
Richard Phillips: Notice from this passage that Christians tend to estimate themselves wrongly. This is one reason why we so greatly need sound and clear teaching from the Bible, which alone will present a true portrait and convict us of our weakness and sin. The Bible tells us, “*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble*” (1 Peter 5:5). We therefore need messages such as the one to Laodicea to realize the trend of our lives and to make changes while there is still time. We need to see the truth about our corruption in sin, our toleration of false teaching, our partnership in idolatry, and our self-absorbed indifference to Christ—in order to avoid wasting our lives and even disgusting our Lord.

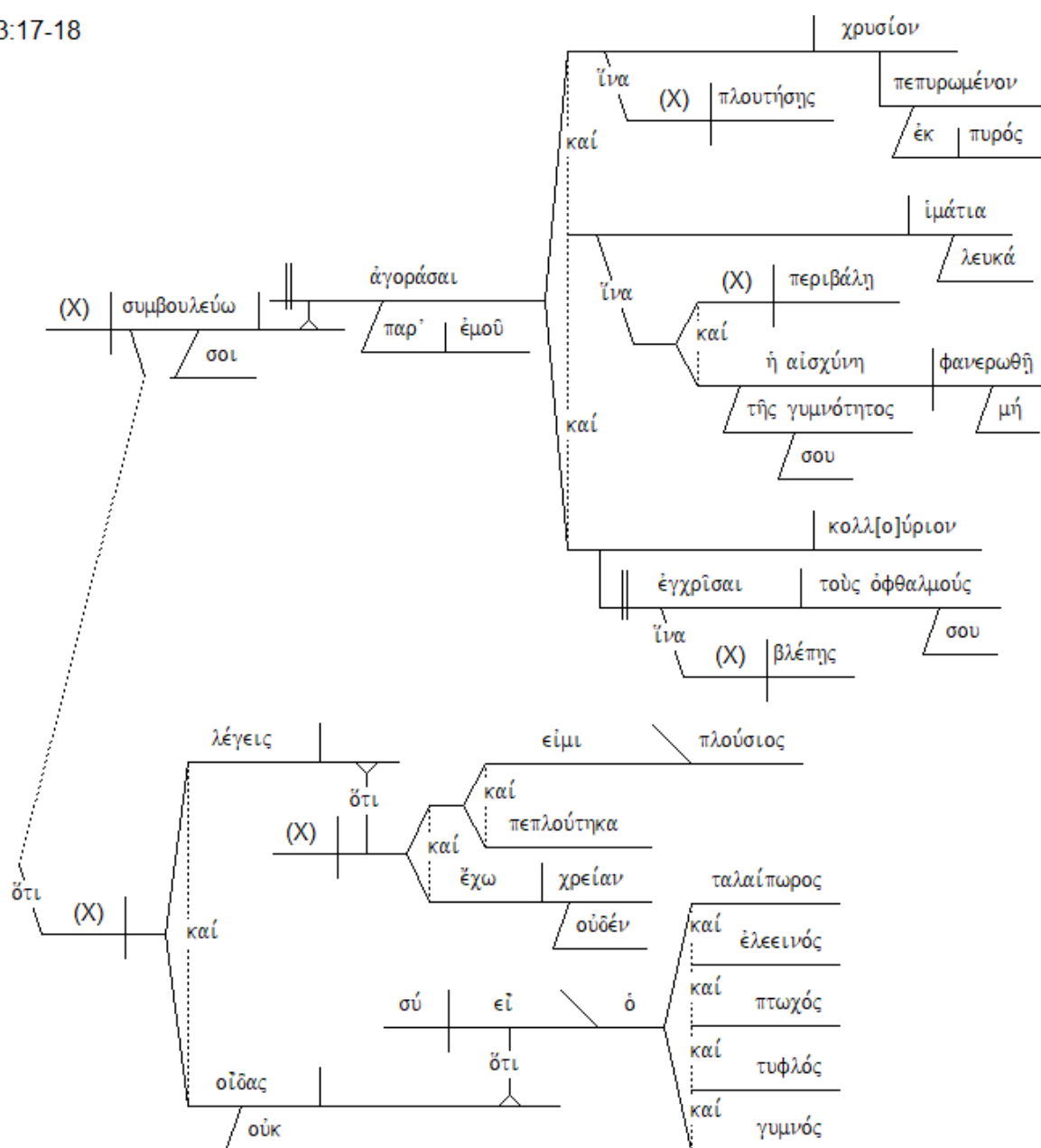
John Schultz: [Summarizing the seven letters to the churches]

There is a sevenfold promise of recompense to those who gain the victory:

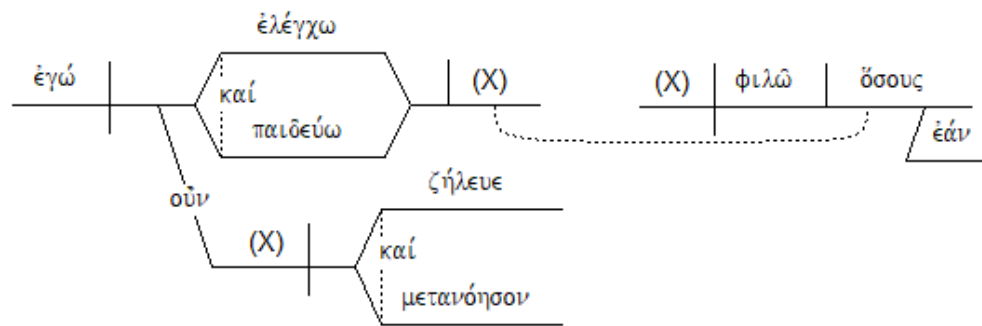
- 1) Eating from the tree of life (Ephesus);
- 2) Not being hurt at all by the second death (Smyrna);
- 3) Receiving of the hidden manna and also a white stone with a new name written on it (Pergamum);
- 4) Receiving authority to rule and break the nations, as well as the morning star (Thyatira);
- 5) Being dressed in white, a guarantee that their name is written in the book of life, and confessing their name before the Father (Sardis);
- 6) Being made a pillar in God’s temple with a permanent guarantee and inscription of the Name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem, and Jesus’ new Name (Philadelphia);
- 7) Sitting with Jesus upon God’s throne

Leedy Greek Diagram:

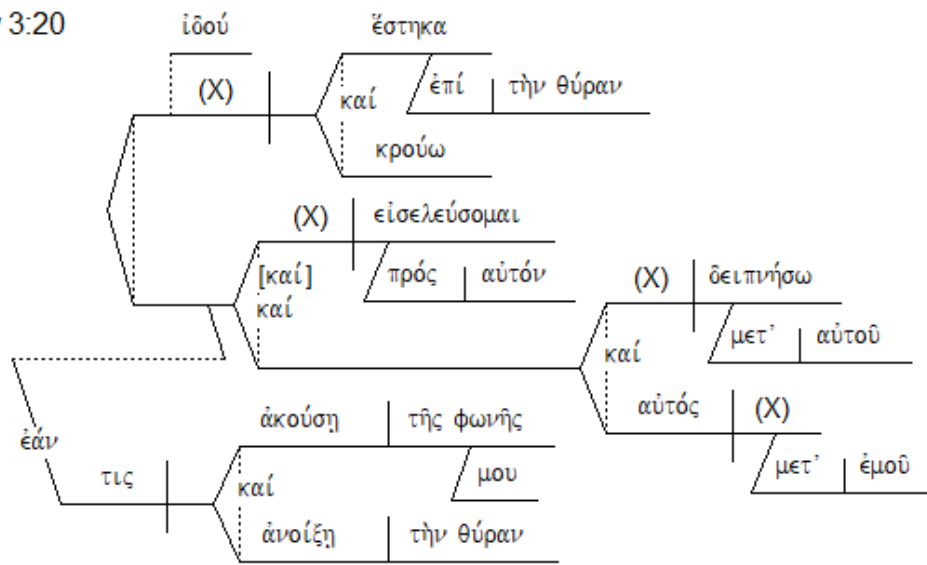




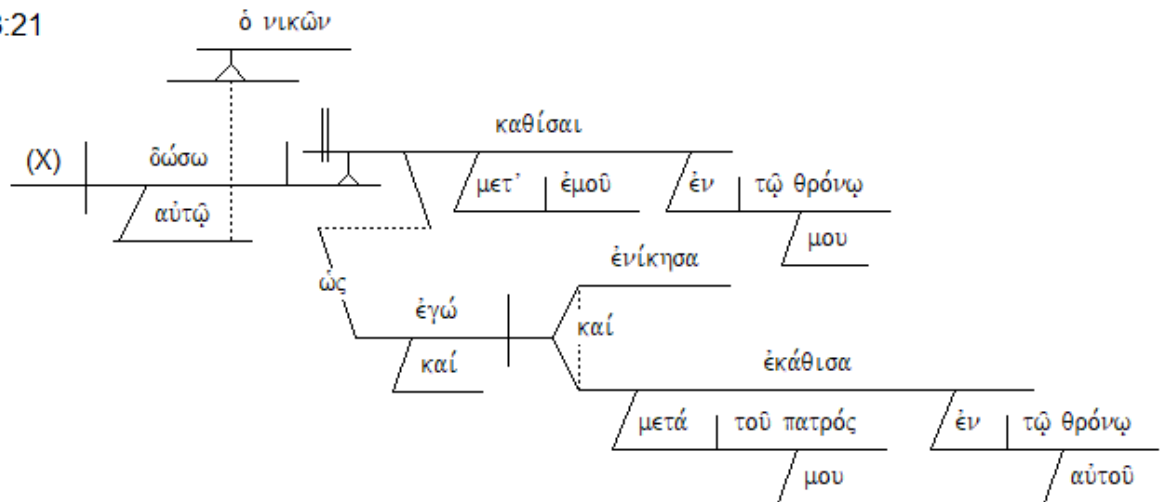
Rev 3:19



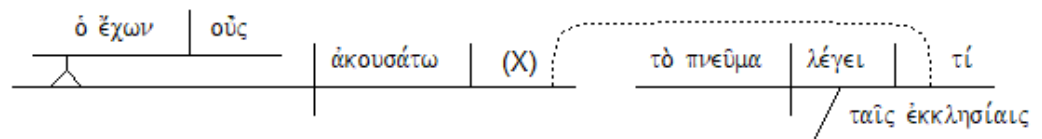
Rev 3:20



Rev 3:21



Rev 3:22



TEXT: Revelation 4:1-11

TITLE: WORSHIP SCENE IN HEAVEN AROUND GOD'S THRONE

BIG IDEA:

THE VISION OF GOD ENTHRONED IN HEAVEN CALLS FORTH THE HYMN OF CREATION FROM HIS WORSHIPING ATTENDANTS IN PREPARATION FOR JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: The phrases that introduce this passage, “*after these things I looked*” (4:1) and “*I came to be in the Spirit*” (4:2; also in 1:10), indicate that 4:1–2 is a **major transition** in the structure of the book of Revelation (cf. the similar phrase “*he carried me away in the Spirit*” in 17:3 and 21:10). These expressions signal a new phase in the complex of visions that began in 1:9–10 and are now extended in 4:1–2 and will be extended further in 17:3 and 21:10.

After its prologue, Revelation opens with a spectacular vision of the exalted Christ (1:9–20) and the messages Christ commissioned John to write to the seven churches of Asia Minor (chs. 2–3). Now John experiences a second magnificent vision of the Lord God on his heavenly throne and of Jesus Christ the slain lamb, both receiving the worship of all creation for their majesty, sovereignty, and redemptive purpose (chs. 4–5). This serves as the grounding vision to orient the reader to the descriptions of wrath and redemption that will follow in the subsequent chapters: to **chapters 6–16** most specifically (the seals, trumpets, and bowls) as well as to **chapters 17–22** (the further descriptions of judgment and salvation that finish out the body of the book). John’s vision of the scene in heaven gives “the appropriate perspective from which to view and make sense of what is happening on earth” in his own day and in days to come.

Main Idea: All the creatures in the heavenly throne room continually worship the Lord God Almighty as the eternal creator and sovereign of all things.

Grant Osborne: **Chapter 4** celebrates the God of creation and **chapter 5** the God of redemption (so **Beasley-Murray** 1978: 108–9). First, God is seated in splendor on his throne, far above earth’s petty rulers, obviously in control of his world and its history. As 1:4, 8 say, he “*was, and is, and is to come*.” He alone is “*Lord God Almighty*” (4:8) and “*our Lord and God*” (4:11a). He alone “*created all things*” and gave them life (4:11b). Second, only God and the Lamb are “*worthy*” because God is “*creator*” (4:11) and the Lamb “*has triumphed*” (5:2–5), and this victory was achieved by his sacrificial death as the “*slain Lamb*” (5:6, 9, 12). The Father and the Son are one not only by the throne theme but also by the unity of creation and redemption. It is important to realize that the victory of the Lamb and his exaltation to a place of authority occurs not at the end of the book but has already been achieved at the cross. Even here it is celebrated and not merely proclaimed. The victory was won at the cross, and the eschaton is the final result of that victory which has already taken place.

Richard Phillips: As the book of Revelation begins its series of prophetic visions of events present and future, the apostle John receives virtually the same vision as the one presented to Ezekiel seven centuries earlier. While some details are different, the similarities between **Ezekiel 1** and **Revelation 4** are striking, and the message for John was the same as Ezekiel’s. Though

John was an exile on Patmos and though the churches of Asia faced looming persecution from the throne of Caesar in Rome, it was God who truly reigned over history. This message is important for today's Christians, who are pilgrims in a world that is not our home. As we prepare to face tribulation in our own day, we also are to know that **our trials are all controlled by a faithful God** and thus are certain to result in our salvation and the overthrow of evil. . .

When you consider the four living creatures, standing for the created order of living beings, together with the redeemed church, and add the myriads of angels that **Revelation 5:11** says are gathered around the believers, you have all those who will dwell in the eternal glory assembled around heaven's throne engaging in the single most important activity of all time: **the worship of God**. Therefore, the purpose of John's vision was to remind beleaguered believers not only of the sovereignty of God on the throne in heaven but also of the great calling of his people to give him glory in all things and at all times. **James Boice** summarizes: "Because God is in control of all things we and all the creation must make it our primary activity and duty to worship him."

James Hamilton: There are two statements of praise for God the Father in **Revelation 4** and two statements of praise for Jesus in **Revelation 5**. Then **Revelation 5** concludes with a statement of praise made to God and Christ together.

(:1-2a) PROLOGUE – ACCESS GRANTED TO THE HEAVENLY THRONE

A. (:1a) Open Door to Heaven

"After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven,"

Robert Thomas: Immediately after Christ's completion of the messages to the seven churches, the majestic figure that first dominated John's attention (cf. **1:12-18**) faces him no more, and he moves into a **new phase of his revelatory experience**: ("*I looked, and behold, a door opened in heaven*"). *Eidon* ("*I looked*") does not mean that John turned in order to see as he did in the first vision (cf. **1:12**), but simply that he came to recognize an object that was before him in prophetic vision. This action should not be equated with sight with the physical eye. Rather, it is sight with **the eye of ecstatic vision** as throughout the Apocalypse.

Kendell Easley: A door standing open in heaven is like the beginning of the prophet Ezekiel's visions (**Ezek. 1:1**). In the New Testament the heavens opened when Jesus was baptized (**Matt. 3:16**), when Stephen was stoned (**Acts 7:6**), and when Peter saw a vision of a sheet filled with "*unclean*" animals (**Acts 10:11**). Later on in vision two John will see even more deeply into heaven when its temple is thrown open (**11:19; 15:5**). The last time heaven opens is when John sees the conquering rider on a white horse sent out from heaven to earth in vengeance (**19:11**).

Charles Swindoll: What is this **biblical view of the cosmos**? The Bible understands three basic "levels" of the universe —the heavens, the earth, and below the earth. The term "heavens" may be further divided into three levels. The "first heaven" includes the sphere surrounding the earth. Today we call this the "atmosphere" or "sky," in which birds fly and clouds drift. The "second heaven" includes everything in the cosmos above the earth's atmosphere —the moon, sun, planets, stars, and galaxies. From a modern worldview perspective, both the first and second "heavens" are technically still part of the physical universe. Not so with the "third heaven." In the biblical sense, the "third heaven" was the term used to describe the **dwelling place of God**, the angels, and any other spirit beings. Paul says he was "*caught up to the third heaven. . . . into*

Paradise” (2 Cor. 12:2, 4). Today we might call this the “spiritual realm,” a plane of reality accessible only by heavenly invitation, like the one John received in **Revelation 4:1**.

The realm of existence “below the earth” also has both a physical and a spiritual dimension. Physically, it may refer simply to the grave or to underground spaces from which water may flow or lava may spew. Or it may refer to the place of spirits who have departed from the earthly plane but have not been admitted into the presence of God. In both cases the same terms are often used —*sheol* [H7585] in the Old Testament and *hades* [86] in the New. Context helps determine whether the text is referring to the physical or the spiritual realm.

So when John was taken up into heaven, he was not transported to another planet or even another galaxy. Rather, he was caught up to the “third heaven,” to the presence of the living God.

B. (:1b) Summons to Come Up to Receive Special Revelation

“and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.’”

Buist Fanning: While God’s heaven seems distant and alien to everyday reality on earth, it is close at hand and pervades all that takes place on earth, as John will be shown. While this is not the case for all of John’s visions, the heavenly “time” of this vision, as well as the related one in chapter 5, is portrayed as contemporaneous with John’s earthly time, since songs of worship in both chapters celebrate creation and the cross as already past (4:11; 5:6, 9) yet anticipate the seal judgments and the saints’ reign on earth as yet future (5:9–10).

Robert Thomas: some have taken it as a summons to the church into heaven at that future moment when Christ returns for her (**Walvoord**). This interpretation is supported by noting the similarity between this summons and the one the church anticipates at the rapture and by the absence of any reference to the church between **Rev. 4:1** and **22:16**. It is acknowledged even by some supporters of this view, however, that there is no authority for connecting John’s summons with the rapture of the church (**Walvoord**). In fact, **the two events are quite dissimilar** in that John’s body remained on Patmos throughout his experience, whereas at the rapture of the church the bodies of the saints will be transferred to heaven. Another basic difference is that John’s summons is a command to receive revelation, but that of the church is one that accomplishes final salvation for the redeemed ones of the Body of Christ. (“*to ascend into heaven*”) is one of the ways of describing a penetration into the heavenly mysteries (cf. **Rom. 10:6; 2 Cor. 12:1-2**) (**Moffatt**). This summons is best understood as an invitation for John to assume a new vantage point for the sake of the revelation he was about to receive (**Ladd; Mounce**).

Kendell Easley: The verb *come up* is singular, referring to **John alone**. (Some have thought that Christ’s command here may also refer to the “*catching up*” of Christians that Paul mentions in **1 Thessalonians 4:17**, but the singular verb here in Revelation excludes this possibility.)

C. (:2a) Entrance into Apocalyptic State

“Immediately I was in the Spirit;”

I. (:2b-6a) VISION OF GOD ENTHRONED IN HEAVEN

A. (:2b-3) Two Primary Elements of the Vision

Chiastic: ABBA structure:

1a. The Throne in Heave

“and behold, a throne was standing in heaven,”

Grant Osborne: Only here in the NT is the throne of God described. The background can be found in **Isa. 6:1–4** and especially **Ezek. 1:26–28**. From **Isa. 6** comes the emphasis on the Lord “*seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple*” (see **Rev. 1:1**), as well as the presence of angelic beings (“*seraphim*”). From **Ezek. 1** come the four living creatures, the vault of heaven, and the transcendent splendor of the throne. Unlike Isaiah, however, here the throne is in heaven rather than the temple (though there is temple imagery associated with the throne in **Rev. 7:15; 8:3**), and unlike Ezekiel it is fixed rather than moving like a whirlwind. This is the culmination of all throne scenes in the Bible.

Robert Thomas: The major focus of **chapter 4** upon the throne is its symbolism of God’s sovereignty exercised in judgment.

John MacArthur: The central theme of John’s vision is **the throne of God**, mentioned eleven times in this chapter. All the features of the chapter can be outlined based on how they relate to that throne of divine glory. After describing the throne, John tells us who is on the throne, what is going on around the throne, what comes from the throne, what stands before the throne, who is in the center and around the throne, and what is directed toward the throne. . .

The use of the term temple symbolizes **God’s presence**. The throne was said to be standing because God’s sovereign rule is fixed, permanent, and unshakable. A vision of God’s immovable throne reveals He is in permanent, unchanging, and complete control of the universe. That is a comforting realization in light of the horror and trauma of the end-time events about to be revealed (**chaps. 6–19**). In much the same way, Isaiah was comforted during a traumatic time in Israel’s history by his vision of God’s glory (**Isa. 6**).

2a. The One Sitting on the Throne

“and One sitting on the throne.”

Buist Fanning: In his visionary trance John begins to see through the “*door standing open in heaven*” and to glimpse details of the heavenly scene. Two central features appear right away: a locus of ruling authority in heaven and someone who wields that authority. As in several of his later vision accounts, John’s style is somewhat impressionistic, somewhat minimalist at first and then adding descriptive details as he moves along. In a masterful way John gently unfolds for the reader—most likely mirroring the way Christ did so for him—this overwhelming, luminous vision (as we discover in the verses that follow) of God Almighty in his glorious throne room surrounded by his heavenly retinue.

Robert Thomas: This person is undoubtedly **God the Father**, because He is distinguished from the Lamb in **5:5, 7; 6:16; 7:10** and from the Spirit in **4:5** (cf. **19:4**) (**Alford; Bullinger; Charles**).

2b. (:3a) Appearance of One Enthroned Compared to Precious Stones

*“And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone
and a sardius in appearance;”*

Robert Thomas: The sitting posture denotes the **activity of reigning**, not resting or a cessation of priestly functioning as in **Heb. 1:3; 10:12; 12:2**. . .

The key to probable identification of this stone is **Rev. 21:11** where it represents a watery crystalline brightness (**Alford; Morris**). The modern jasper is opaque, but the ancient stone must have been **translucent rock crystal**, possibly a diamond. . .

Suggested symbolisms have included judgment by water and judgment by fire, the goodness of God in nature and His severity in judgment, deity and humanity, and the holiness of God and the justice of God (**Alford**). The last seems most probable because the same mixture of white light (i.e., the diamond) with fire (i.e., the carnelian) pervades the OT and apocalyptic visions of divine majesty (cf. **Ezek. 1:4; 8:2; Dan. 7:9**; cf. **Rev. 1:14; 10:1**) (**Alford**). The picture is that of His anger because of His holy nature reacting in response to the prevailing sinfulness of mankind, resulting in the judgment He is about to send upon the earth (**Smith**).

John MacArthur: Revelation 21:11 describes *jasper* as “crystal-clear”; therefore, it is best to identify this stone as a **diamond**. All the shining, flashing facets of the glory of God are compared to a diamond, brilliantly refracting all the colors of the spectrum. A *sardius*, from which the city of Sardis got its name, is a fiery, bloodred ruby. It too expresses the shining beauty of God’s glory, and may also symbolize God’s blazing wrath, about to be poured out on the sinful, rebellious world (**chaps. 6–19**).

There is a possible further symbolism in the choice of these two stones. The sardius and the jasper were the first and last stones on the high priest’s breastplate (**Ex. 28:17–20**; “*ruby*,” “*jasper*”), representing the firstborn (Reuben) and lastborn (Benjamin) of the twelve sons of Jacob. It may be that those stones depict God’s covenant relationship with Israel; His wrath and judgment will not abrogate that relationship. In fact, it is during the Tribulation that, largely through the zealous evangelistic efforts of the 144,000 (**Rev. 7:3ff.**), “*all Israel will be saved*” (**Rom. 11:26**).

1b. (:3b) Appearance of Throne Highlighted by Surrounding Rainbow

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

Grant Osborne: The “rainbow” (ἵρις) is an unusual term used only here and in **10:1** in the Greek Bible and can mean either a **rainbow** or a **halo**. Nearly all agree that the rainbow is meant (contra **Lohse** 1960: 38), but it has an unusual shape in that it “*encircles the throne*.” This may explain the term ἵρις (the LXX uses τόξον [toxon] for “rainbow”), for **this rainbow has the shape of a halo of light surrounding the throne**. The imagery combines the rainbow as typifying the radiant light surrounding God in **Ezek. 1:28** and the Noahic covenant of **Gen. 9:13–17** (so **Bauckham** 1993a: 51–52). The promise never again to destroy the earth with water prepares for the judgment theme in the rest of the book (note the flood imagery of **Rev. 11:18**). The description of the rainbow as “*like an emerald*” can have two implications. The σμαράγδιος can be a bright green precious stone or a transparent rock crystal that could serve as a prism and yield a “rainbow” of colors. **Beasley-Murray** (1978: 113) suggests the latter as best fitting the Noahic imagery. Either way, the imagery is that of **the glory surrounding God on his throne**.

Kendell Easley: Whether this encircled the throne horizontally or vertically or was like an aura or halo we don't know. The only rainbows mentioned in Scripture are these: the beautiful but fleeting covenant rainbow of Noah's time (**Gen. 9:13–16**) and the beautiful but everlasting rainbow surrounding beings in heaven (**Ezek. 1:28; Rev. 4:3; 10:1**). When God made the rainbow a sign of his covenant with humanity, he took something from his eternal throne and

endowed it with fresh meaning. At the same time, the rainbow around the throne of heaven has become an eternal reminder of **God's covenant promise to humanity**.

John MacArthur: The rainbow provides a comforting balance to the fiery flashings of judgment earlier seen emanating from God's throne. According to **Genesis 9:13–17**, a rainbow symbolizes God's covenant faithfulness, mercy, and grace. God's attributes always operate in perfect harmony. His wrath never operates at the expense of His faithfulness; His judgments never abrogate His promises. God's power and holiness would cause us to live in abject terror were it not for His faithfulness and mercy.

B. (:4) Twenty-four Elders Seated on Thrones

1. Vision of Subordinate Twenty-four Thrones

“And around the throne were twenty-four thrones;”

Richard Phillips: As John's vision centers all creation on the realities of heaven, so also the heavenly occupation with the **worship of God** is creation's highest calling. **Vern Poythress** comments: “God is the all-important, all-determining spiritual center and power center for the universe.” Therefore, “creatures find their consummate fulfillment, the meaning and full satisfaction of their existence, in worshiping, serving, and adoring him.”

2. Occupants of Thrones = Twenty-four Elders

“and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting,”

Van Parunak: The details in this verse help us to identify the elders. The thrones, white raiment, and crowns are all promised to those who are faithful in the churches. So it seems reasonable to identify these elders as **symbolizing believers**, seated with Christ in heavenly places (**Eph 2:6**). But why are there **24**?

At the end of the book the number 24 comes up again. We are given a vision of the bride, the lamb's wife, pictured as the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven. This city has twelve foundations and twelve gates:

Rev. 21:12 [that great city ...] *had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:*

Rev. 21:14 *And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

The imagery strongly suggests that the lamb's wife is made up of the saints of the old and new covenants, together. Both groups have major architectural roles in the city, and the number of each is twelve, for a total of 24. Similarly, in the churches of Asia, there would be both Jews and Gentiles who confessed the Lord Jesus and sought to overcome in their Christian lives.

So the 24 elders represent the people of God, the true saints under both covenants, seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).

John MacArthur: *Presbuteroi* (elders) is never used in Scripture to refer to angels, but always to men. It is used to speak of **older men** in general, and the **rulers of both Israel and the church**.

There is no indisputable use of *presbuteroi* outside of Revelation to refer to angels. (Some believe that “*elders*” in **Isaiah 24:23** refers to angels, but it could as well refer to humans.) Further, “*elder*” would be an inappropriate term to describe angels, who do not age.

Richard Phillips: Another reason to be confident that the twenty-four elders correspond to the church is the description that John highlights: they were “*clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads*” (**Rev. 4:4**). This represents the consummation of the salvation promised and begun on earth. The white garments signify the righteousness granted to Christians through Christ as well as their calling to lives of holiness. Jesus wrote to Sardis that those “*who have not soiled their garments . . . will walk with me in white, for they are worthy*” (**3:4**). A crown is the reward for true believers, who in Christ triumph over sin: “*Be faithful unto death,*” Jesus wrote to Smyrna, “*and I will give you the crown of life*” (**2:10**). Jesus had promised at the end of his seven letters that “*the one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne*” (**3:21**). These blessings, now dramatized in the vision of **chapter 4**, represent the reward not merely of certain choice believers but of all true Christians, those who not only profess faith in Jesus but live in faith to the end. **Paul Gardner** writes: “This is how it will be for all the redeemed. They will be in the presence of God and will reign with him and with Jesus.”

[Alternate View:]

Grant Osborne: There is great debate as to the **identification** of the twenty-four elders—are they human or heavenly figures? The basis of the decision is their description in **4:4**, “*clothed in white garments*” with “*crowns of gold on their heads.*” Those who argue for the elders as human beings (**Swete, Alford, Walvoord, Feuillet, Sweet, Kraft, Ford, Wall, McDonald, Harrington**) state that angels are not called elders, nor do they wear crowns or sit on thrones in the Bible. Moreover, white clothing in Revelation is always worn by the saints (**3:4–5, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 19:14**). Within this position several views are posited. The “*twenty-four elders*” could be

- (1) the twelve patriarchs (OT) and twelve apostles (NT), thus the whole people of God (see **21:12–14**, with the names of the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles on the gates and foundations of the New Jerusalem);
- (2) the great saints of the OT seen as preceding the NT saints;
- (3) the whole community built on the twenty-four orders of the priesthood in **1 Chron. 24:4–5**;
- (4) the church as the true Israel, the heavenly counterpart of all “*victors*” (στέφανος as the victor’s wreath rather than the ruler’s crown) who remain true to God; or
- (5) a heavenly court sitting on thrones of judgment (fulfilling **3:21**).

However, many others (**Beckwith, R. Charles, Moffatt, Ladd, Beasley-Murray, Morris, Mounce, Johnson, Roloff, Krodel, Thomas**) believe these are angelic figures. There are no other human beings in **chapter 4**, and in **Isa. 24:23** angels might be called “*elders*” (it is debated whether they are angels or the elders of Israel). In **Ps. 89:7** (cf. **1 Kings 22:19; Job 15:8**) God sits in the “*council of his holy ones*” (= angels). Moreover, angels are called “*thrones or powers or rulers or authorities*” in **Col. 1:16** (cf. **Eph. 3:10; 6:12**), and they wear white in **Matt. 28:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10**. The thrones and golden crowns could refer to their royal function under God similar to the way first-century kings were subject to the Roman emperor.

The key is the function of the πρεσβύτεροι (*presbyteroi*, *elders*) in the book. Their primary role is that of worship (**5:14; 11:16; 19:4**) and praise (**4:11; 5:9–10; 11:17–18; 14:3; 19:4**). In addition, they serve as intermediaries and interpreters (**5:5; 7:13–17**). A close examination of

these texts shows a distinct differentiation between the elders and the saints. In **5:8** they hold golden bowls that contain the prayers of the saints; in **7:13–14** one of them explains who the victorious saints are; in **11:18** they thank God for rewarding the saints; in **14:3** the 144,000 sing “*a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders*”; and in **19:4** they join the heavenly chorus. The elders are seated on thrones (**4:4**; **11:16**), while the saints stand before the throne (**7:9**). From this evidence it is more likely that these are **heavenly beings who reign with God and are part of the retinue surrounding his throne**. Moreover, since “*all the angels*” also stand before the throne (**7:11**), these must be **celestial beings with a ruling function**.

As with the living creatures (v. 8), **we do not know what type of heavenly being they are**, only that they form part of the heavenly council. Their “*white garments*” signify purity and holiness (perhaps part of their priestly function in presenting the prayers of his saints and in their leading worship) and the “*golden crowns*” their royal status. The number “*twenty-four*” could refer to the priestly orders if that function is being highlighted here, or to the patriarchs and apostles if they are the counterpart of the church on earth. Although neither is certain, a priestly role would fit their function as leaders of heavenly worship and as presenting the prayers of the saints to God (**5:8**; **8:3–4**). **Beale** (1999: 322) sees a link between the angelic beings and the saints; they symbolize the twelve tribes and twelve apostles, thus the redeemed of both Testaments. While the symbolic function of angels is probably correct, the twenty-four priestly orders make better sense (so also **Aune** 1997: 289), thus giving the angels a priestly function. **Hurtado** (1985: 120) believes that these angels build on the priestly orders and so represent the elect before God. On the whole, I conclude that **the elders were a ruling class of heavenly beings who encircled the throne and led heavenly praise, thus exhibiting a priestly role**.

Robert Thomas: The remaining explanation appears to be the correct one, that the twenty-four elders are a **special class or college of angels**, beings of high authority that belong to the court of God in heaven. In this book they are always grouped with angels rather than men, but are distinguished from other angelic subgroups (cf. **7:9–11**; **19:1–4**) (**Ladd**). That they are such a class of angels is well borne out when one of the elders performs the same function of offering bowls of incense that is later performed by an angel (cf. **5:8**; **8:3**). In addition, in **7:13** the phrase “*one of the elders*” indicates that the elders were separate created beings rather than corporately representing a larger group. He is separate and different both from the great multitude and from John (cf. also **5:5**) (**Bullinger**). In **7:14**, this elder acts as an agent of revelation in much the same manner as angels function in the book (cf. **1:1**; **17:3**; **22:6**). Such duties belong only to angels (cf. **Dan. 9:21–27**) (**Charles**). This particular group of angels primarily **assists in execution of the divine rule of the universe**. Very probably they are part of the assembly of heavenly beings that are regularly pictured as present with God in heaven (cf. **1 Kings 22:19**; **Ps. 89:7**; **Isa. 24:23**) (**Ladd**).

[Alternate View:]

Marvin Rosenthal: Many pretribulationists argue that the twenty-four elders of **Revelation 4** represent the church (cf. **Walvoord**). . . there is no agreement on the part of conservative scholars as to the identity of the twenty-four elders. The great scholar **Henry Alford** believed that the twenty-four elders represent the redeemed of the Old and New Testaments. . .

In marked contrast, **William Newell**, whose premillennial, pretribulational commentary on Revelation has remained a standard for years, took a different position. He suggests that the

elders of **Revelation 4** are angelic beings of some kind . . . created and associated by God with His government. . .

There is significant evidence to suggest that the twenty-four elders do, in fact, represent those redeemed from within Israel and the Old Testament. . .

The priesthood of ancient Israel, made up of the house of Aaron, was divided into twenty-four courses or groups of priests (**1 Chron. 24**). Each group served for two weeks each year on a rotation basis. As the prophet was God's spokesman to the people, so the priest was the people's representative before God. The number twenty-four in connection with the priesthood would speak of **complete representation**. . .

- they are seen performing their representative priestly ministry in intercession
- they are seen in their priestly ministry of praise
- they are heard to be singing a new song

3. Appearance of Twenty-four Elders

"clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads."

Buist Fanning: The **prominence** of these "*elders*" comes across unmistakably in the way John portrays them here and in later visions. First, like a royal council they sit on thrones arranged in a circle around God's throne (**v. 4a–b**). The fact that other thrones exist in God's presence does not detract from his unique supremacy already recognized (**vv. 2–3**) and acknowledged repeatedly (e.g., **v. 10; 5:8, 14**). Second, they are "*clothed in white garments*," symbolizing the **holiness** expected of those who approach God. Third, they have "*golden crowns on their heads*," representing their exalted status and perhaps victory in the face of struggle. In later verses they offer worship to God (**4:10–11; 5:8–14; 19:4**) and interact with John in his visionary experiences (**5:5; 7:13–14**).

John gives attention to describing these "*elders*" and their activities, but he tells us nothing explicit about their being or identity. Are they angelic or human? If human, do they represent Old Testament worthies, New Testament saints, or God's people from all ages? John saw no need to specify such matters. We are left to ponder possible clues based on what John does tell us about them. Of the descriptions mentioned already, offering worship to God in heaven does not seem to be distinctive since **5:11–14** shows both angels and humans doing so. Wearing of white is likewise shared by Christ, angels, and humans (**1:14; 3:4–5; 6:11; 7:9, 13**).

Enthronement and possession of a "*crown*" or victory wreath is sometimes thought to tip the scales toward seeing them as glorified humans, since these are promised to faithful Christians (**2:10; 3:11, 21**). But crowns may denote a broader sort of victory or exalted status in Revelation (**6:2; 9:7; 12:1; 14:14**) and elsewhere. Finally, the significance of their number, "*twenty-four*," is likewise debatable. This possibly symbolizes the whole people of God, representing the sum of both Israel (the twelve tribes as in **7:4–8; 21:12**) and the church (the twelve apostles as in **21:14**). Or it may picture them as a heavenly order of priestly ministers in heaven like the twenty-four Levitical orders of **1 Chronicles 24:4; 25:9–31**.

The fact that these are called "*elders*" seems to be rooted in the term's use for leaders among the people in the Old Testament and later Judaism, a group of officials who shared various social and tribal responsibilities as a ruling council (e.g., **Exod 17:5; 18:12; Num 11:30; 2 Sam 5:3**). This favors the view that these elders are a council of heavenly beings who surround God's

throne (as seen, e.g., in **1 Kgs 22:19; Job 1:6; Ps 89:7; Dan 7:9–10**; possibly **Isa 24:23**). Also favoring this view is the fact that John seems to distinguish the “*elders*” from martyred earthly saints who have come to be present in heaven after their physical deaths (**Rev 7:13–14**) and from redeemed saints whether on earth or in heaven (**14:1–3**).

C. (:5-6a) Additional Elements Highlighting the Awesome Presence of God

1. Lightning and Thunder

*“And from the throne proceed flashes of lightning
and sounds and peals of thunder.”*

Buist Fanning: The first set of items (“*flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder*”; v. **5a**) represent God’s awesome presence taken from Israel’s Sinai experience (**Exod 19:16–19**) and repeated often thereafter as symbols of theophany and portents of coming judgment (**Judg 5:4–5; Pss 18:7–15; 68:7–8; 77:18; Isa 13:13; 64:2–4; Jer 10:10; Ezek 1:13; Hag 2:6–7, 21**). In Revelation the same three phenomena (with additions) appear also at the end of the three series of judgments (**8:5; 11:19; 16:18**), linking them to this vision of God in his heavenly rule as the source of the seals, trumpets, and bowls that will prepare the way for his rule on earth.

Craig Keener: The thunders around God’s throne (**4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18**) reveal his **sovereignty**. This would have been clear to Revelation’s first readers; not only Jews (**Ps. 29:3**) but other prominent Mediterranean religions portrayed the supreme deity associated with lightning and thunder. Lightnings were also characteristic of the heavens, as one might expect (cf. 1 Enoch 14:8; 17:3; 69:23); some Jewish texts delegated lightnings to the high angels (3 Enoch 29:2). Most important, however, the thunders and lightnings around the throne recall the revelation of God’s majesty when he gave the law at Mount Sinai (**Ex. 19:16; 20:18**).

2. Seven Lamps of Fire -- Manifestation of the Holy Spirit

*“And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne,
which are the seven Spirits of God;”*

John Walvoord: John’s attention is also directed to seven torches of fire that are burning before the throne. These are identified as “*the seven Spirits of God*” mentioned earlier in **1:4** and **3:1**. These are best understood as a visible representation of the **Holy Spirit**, symbolizing the perfection and completeness of His activities.

Robert Thomas: The *lampades* (“torches”) should be distinguished from the *λυχναι* (*lychniai*, “lampstands”) of **1:12, 20**. They were used **outdoors** rather than indoors. They were better suited for open air because of less likelihood that they would be extinguished by gusts of wind (cf. **John 18:3**) (**Lenski**). This feature, coupled with the use of *kaiomenai* (“burning”) elsewhere in the Apocalypse (cf. **8:8, 10; 19:20; 21:8**), indicates that the torches emitted “a blazing and fierce” light rather than a calm and soft one. Fire in this book symbolizes **judgment**, and these torches are no exception. Here is the divine preparedness for the battle against wickedness (cf. **Judg. 7:16, 20; Nah. 2:3–4**) (**Seiss**). The close proximity of these torches “*before the throne*” (*enōpion tou thronou*) harmonizes with the continuing emphasis of the chapter upon God’s wrath against sinful humanity.

The text removes all doubt concerning the specific representation of the torches. The words *ha eisin ta hepta pneumata tou theou* (“*which are the seven spirits of God*”) equate them with a Person already introduced in **Rev. 1:4**, the **Holy Spirit**.⁵ There He was seen as part of the source

of divine grace and peace with which the prophet greeted the seven churches. Here His role as consumer of the ungodly is more prominent. A further correlation to His presence in this scene may also be His part in creation and preservation of the natural world, which comes into focus at the end of the chapter (4:11; cf. **Gen. 1:2; 2:7; Ps. 104:29-30**) (**Ladd**). A picture of a heavenly court poised to launch its massive program to purify God's creation is enhanced by this additional feature.

3. Sea of Glass Like Crystal

"and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal;"

Buist Fanning: This is also drawn from Ezekiel's vision (**Ezek 1:22**) as well as Israel's experience at Sinai (**Exod 24:10**) and may likewise reflect a heavenly parallel to the furnishings of the earthly sanctuary, the bronze laver or "sea" (**Exod 30:18–21; 40:7, 30; 1 Kgs 7:23–25**). As it appears to John in his vision, it is like a gleaming, translucent floor stretching out in front of God's throne, reinforcing the astounding impression of the glory and purity of heaven.

Grant Osborne: Crystal-clear" glass resembles a sea and adds to the imagery. Note that John does not say this "sea" exists in heaven but that what is there "looks like" a sea of glass. The emphasis is on God's **awesome vastness, his transcendence and his holiness** that separate him from his creation (like the firmament separated the waters). The scene is enhanced greatly by this spectacular image. In one sense it is like glass, reflecting the magnificence and kaleidoscopic colors of the throne room. In another sense it is transparent, crystal clear, radiating his awesome holiness (note the "crystal-clear jasper" of **21:11**, the "gold like pure glass" of **21:18**, and the "crystal-clear river of the water of life" of **22:1** in the description of the New Jerusalem). This "sea" appears twice more in the book: at **15:2** the "sea of glass" is "mingled with fire," pointing to divine judgment (as has every other image in this section); and in **21:1** we are told "there was no longer any sea," which may refer to the "sea" as the "abyss," the chaos of the deep that in ancient times signified the reign of evil in this world (see the excellent discussion in **Sweet** 1979: 119). All three are interconnected, with **4:6** the basis of the others. Here the crystal-clear sea of glass symbolizes God's **transcendent holiness and his awesome sovereignty** that is a source of worship (**4:6**) and then becomes the basis of judgment (**15:2**) when God will eradicate evil from his creation (**21:1**).

Robert Thomas: pictures the splendor and majesty of God on His throne that set Him apart from all His creation, a separation stemming from His purity and absolute holiness, which He shares with no one else. The term *krystall* ("crystal") enhances the emphasis on God's **purity**.

John MacArthur: Heaven is not a shadowy world of mists and indistinct apparitions. It is a world of dazzlingly brilliant light, refracting and shining as through jewels and crystal in a manner beyond our ability to describe or imagine (cf. Rev. **21:10–11, 18**).

William Barclay: There are three things that this sea like shining glass does symbolize.

(1) It symbolizes **preciousness**. In the ancient world, glass was usually dull and semi-opaque, and glass as clear as crystal was as precious as gold. In **Job 28:17**, gold and glass are mentioned together as examples of precious things.

(2) It symbolizes **dazzling purity**. The blinding light reflected from the glassy sea would be too much for the eyes to look upon, like the purity of God.

(3) It symbolizes **immense distance**. The throne of God was in the far distance, as if at the other side of a great sea. **Swete** writes of ‘the vast distance which, even in the case of one who stood in the door of heaven, intervened between himself and the throne of God’.

One of the greatest characteristics of the writing of the seer is the reverence which, even in the heavenly places, never dares to be familiar with God, but paints its picture in terms of light and distance.

Gordon Fee: All together this series of images is intended to inspire **awe** and **wonder** on the part of the reader, who is being brought into the presence of God, and before whom only awe and worship are the worthy responses; and that is what John now goes on to describe.

II. (:6b-8) WORSHIP FROM THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

A. (:6b) Location of the Four Living Creatures

“and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.”

Grant Osborne: Possible Views for the identification of these four living creatures:

- The **church fathers** saw these as representing the **four Gospels**, but there was little unanimity as to which image represented which Gospel. This is too fanciful to be seriously considered.
- Another popular interpretation (**R. Charles, Farrer, Kraft, Beasley-Murray**) has been to trace their origin through Ezekiel (who lived in Babylon) to **Babylonian mythology**, which saw these as the **four corners of the zodiac** (Taurus = the ox; Leo = the lion; Scorpio = the man; Aquarius = the eagle). While this fits the first three, no valid explanation has been made as to why the eagle came to represent Aquarius, for no eagle was ever used in the zodiac. Moreover, the movement from Babylonian beliefs to Ezekiel to Jewish understanding to John is exceedingly speculative. Finally, John never builds on any such astrological motif in this book, so there is no supporting evidence. Such a theory must remain doubtful.
- Similar to this, some (**Albright, Ford**) see the background in **Assyrian and Babylonian representations of royalty** with winged sphinxes or winged lions. Also, kings are depicted riding on thrones supported by cherubim (as in Ezekiel), so these could be a class of throne-bearing angels who serve Yahweh. This is closer to John’s use here, but again there is no hint of Babylonian imagery in Revelation.
- (**Walvoord, Johnson**) see these as representing **divine attributes** or spiritual characteristics, such as courage and majesty (lion), patience and strength (ox), intelligence and spirituality (man), and sovereignty and swiftness of action (eagle). This is an interesting speculation but again lacks support in Revelation, for these creatures are never worshiped, nor are they seen in this way.
- Another view (**W. Scott** 1900: 126 n.) is that these represent **four tribes of Israel** (Judah, Reuben, Ephraim, Dan) whose standards stood at the four sides of the tabernacle (**Num.**

2:2). As the tabernacle/temple is seen to be in heaven in the book, this is also possible. It can never go beyond mere possibility, however, for there is no proof.

- Still others believe they represent **the whole of animate creation** (Swete, Ladd, Mounce, Harrington, Wall, Roloff, Giesen, Beale), perhaps detailing what is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in God’s creation. This seems to be the **most viable option**, and it avoids the tendency to allegorize the four overmuch. However, there is too little evidence to be certain.

Van Parunak: We must distinguish the “*beasts*” of **Revelation 4-5** from the **satanic beasts** that come later: the beast from the bottomless pit (**11:7**), from the sea (**13:1**), and from the earth (**13:11**). The word that describes those beasts is θηρίον G2342, “*wild animal*.” The word here is ζῷον G2226, “*living creature*,” and continues to direct our attention to **Ezekiel**.

Note the Comparisons between Revelation 4 and Ezekiel 1

Revelation 4	Ezekiel 1
6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal	22 And the likeness of the firmament ... was as the colour of the terrible crystal , stretched forth over their heads above.
and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts [living creatures]	5 Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures
full of eyes before and behind. [8, full of eyes within]	18 As for their rings [rims], they were so high that they were dreadful; and their rings were full of eyes round about them four.
7 And the first beast was like a lion , and the second beast like a calf , and the third beast had a face as a man , and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle .	10 As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man , and the face of a lion , on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle .

But then you have to note how the Living Creatures of **Rev. 4** are some type of **hybrid angelic creatures** – combining some of the characteristics of the Cherubim from **Ezekiel 1 and 10**, and of the Seraphim from **Isaiah 6**:

Feature	Cherubim (Ezekiel 1, 10)	Seraphim (Isaiah 6)	Living Creatures (Rev 4-5)
Position	Below the throne	Above the throne	Beside the throne
# Wings	Four	Six	Six
Four Faces	Each creature has all four	Not seen	One per creature
Eyes	Wheel rims full of eyes	Faces covered	Full of eyes
Meaning	Akkadian <i>karabu</i> “to bless” Also called “living creatures”	Burning ones— purifiers	“Living creatures”
Utterance	None	“Holy, holy, holy”	“Holy, holy, holy”

Robert Thomas: they have something to do with the **judicial authority of the throne** (**Scott**). The present scene and its emphasis upon **God's judicial dealings with the creation** provide part of the hint. Added to this is the suggestion that the number four speaks of **universality** as in "*the four winds*." It is the recognized signature of creation, especially as it is the witness and manifestation of God (**Lee; Caird**). The four likenesses represent each part of the animal creation (**Scott; Morris**). Their **participation in the administration of divine justice** is evident later in the book (e.g., **Rev. 6:1, 3, 5, 7**). . .

they are of an exalted angelic order engaged in worship, who bear a special relationship to those angelic beings described in Ezekiel and Isaiah and whose special function in the context of the Apocalypse is the administering of divine justice in the realm of animate creation.

David Thompson: From the book of Revelation, we may conclude the following about these living creatures:

- 1) These beings always appear near the throne of God. **4:6; 5:6; 14:3**
- 2) These beings are particularly involved in worshipping God for His Holiness and Mercy, specifically in regard to sinful man. **4:8; 5:9, 14; 7:11; 19:4**
- 3) These beings are closely connected to the actual process of judgment. **6:7**
- 4) These beings are involved in knowing and revealing God's final program. **6:1, 7**
- 5) These beings were not hostile to the Apostle John. **6:1, 7**
- 6) These beings are in a position of recognizable authority. **4:9-10; 14:3**

A. (:7) Description of the Four Living Creatures – Related Role in Judgment

1. Lion -- Ferocity

"And the first creature was like a lion,"

David Thompson: The majority of uses of the noun lion are metaphorical and when it is used this way in Scripture it is specifically used of a **fierce anger** and **ferocious judgment** of God against God's enemies (**Isaiah 31:4; Jeremiah 25:37-38; Hosea 5:14**).

[Alternate View: Nobility]

Robert Thomas: Among the wild animals the lion is viewed as "king of the jungle" and, in general, represents what is the most **noble**; so this first being should be understood in this sense.

2. Calf -- Strength

"and the second creature like a calf,"

David Thompson: Metaphorically - it is used in three different ways:

- A. As a symbol of idolatry concerning the nation Israel - by far the most uses. **Exodus 32:4, 8, 19, 24, 35; Deuteronomy 9:16, 21; Nehemiah 9:18; Psalm 106:19; Hosea 8:5-6**
- B. As a symbol of millennial peace . A calf dwelling with the young lion. **Isaiah 11:6**
- C. As a symbol of the future Promised Land . **Jeremiah 34:18-19; Genesis 15:7-17**

As we relate this face to these living beings, we conclude that these three points specifically connect this living being to Israel and the idolatry that has kept her out of the land, but also the Grace of God that will give her the land. This beast praises and worships God because Israel will receive her land and **all idolatry and immorality will be eliminated**. It is more than

coincidental that just before Israel gets her land, the world in the Tribulation will be dominated by idolatry and immorality (**Revelation 9:20-21**).

Robert Thomas: The ox pictures that part of animate creation that is **strongest**. The Greek word in general usage sometimes refers to a calf in distinction from the grown bullock, but the LXX regularly uses it to refer to an ox, regardless of age (cf. **Ex. 21:36; Lev. 22:23**; cf. also **Gen. 12:16; Exod. 29:10**) (**Alford**).

3. Man – Wisdom, Intelligence

“and the third creature had a face like that of a man,”

4. Eagle – Speed and Mobility in Judgment

“and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.”

David Thompson: We need to observe that this fourth living being is not just any eagle, but like a “*flying eagle*.” There are five O.T. passages that are specifically related to this picture:

- 1) **Deuteronomy 28:49**;
- 2) **Jeremiah 48:40**;
- 3) **Jeremiah 49:22**;
- 4) **Hosea 8:1**;
- 5) **Habakkuk 1:8**.

In examining these texts we may observe the following:

1. The flying eagle represents God’s swift, devastating judgment against rebellious Israel. **Deuteronomy 28:49-50**
- 2) The flying eagle represents God’s swift, devastating judgment against Israel’s enemies. **Jeremiah 48:40; 49:22**
- 3) The flying eagle represents God’s swift, devastating judgment by raising up nations against Israel. **Hosea 8:1**
- 4) The flying eagle represents God’s final , swift, devastating judgment by rising up nations to come against Israel just before He delivers her. **Habakkuk 1:8**

Collectively speaking, the flying eagle represents **the swift judgment of God** against His own rebellious nation and against all of Israel’s enemies. This living being worships God because the final and swift judgment of God is about to hit the world, and in the end Israel will stand and all nations who were against her will be quickly destroyed.

These living beings worship God continually in regard to His holy judgments, and at this point, there is much action because God is about to take over everything.

Daniel Akin: Dogmatism on their fourfold appearance is unwarranted. However, we can suggest a few truths our God may be communicating to us through this image. First, God is **perfect in His authority**. The lion is king of the animal world. It emphasizes strength and honor—that which is noble, respected. Second, God is **perfect in His activity**. The calf or ox is a servant. It exercises great power for the benefit of others. It was the mightiest among the domesticated animals. Third, God is **perfect in His majesty**. Man is the pinnacle of creation, and only man has a “face” in this vision. He is intelligent, rational, and spiritual. He is the apex of all God made. He is God’s vice-regent on earth. And finally, God is **perfect in His deity**. The eagle soars in the heavens and often represented deity. It is the mightiest among the birds and the

swiftest of God's creatures. These creatures are strong like a lion, serve like an ox, see like a man, and are swift like an eagle. Each in its particular appearance gives witness to the **greatness and glory of our God**. No creature is as strong as He. No creature serves as does He. No creature sees as does He. No creature is as swift as is He! (**Mounce**, *Revelation*, 124–25; also **Osborne**, *Revelation*, 233–34).

Kendell Easley: All nature is called on to declare the praises of God (**Ps. 150**), so God has designed the creatures nearest his throne to serve as constant reminders of this.

B. (:8) Worship Refrain of the Four Living Creatures

1. Characteristics of the Four Living Creatures

“And the four living creatures,

a. Six Wings

“each one of them having six wings,”

John MacArthur: Their six wings denote that their supreme responsibility and privilege is to constantly worship God. From Isaiah's vision, we learn that the seraphim (possibly the same beings as the cherubim) used their six wings in the following manner: *“with two [they] covered [their faces], and with two [they] covered [their] feet, and with two [they] flew”* (**Isa. 6:2**). Four of their six wings related to worship; with two they covered their faces, since even the most exalted created beings cannot look on the unveiled glory of God without being consumed. They also used two wings to cover their feet, since they stood on holy ground. Worship is thus their privilege, calling, and permanent occupation.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: In **verse 8** they have six wings which reminds us of the seraphim of **Isaiah 6**. This would emphasize their quickness and availability in service to the One sitting on the throne.

b. Full of Eyes

“are full of eyes around and within,”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The cherubim of **Ezekiel 10** were also full of eyes signifying their intelligence and spiritual perception of the ways and judgments of God. This is most likely the emphasis here.

2. Constant Refrain

“and day and night they do not cease to say,”

Grant Osborne: What they “never cease saying” is the first of the many **hymns of worship** in the book. The hymns are strategically placed throughout to draw attention to two things: the majesty and sovereignty of God, and the worship of his people, heavenly as well as earthly. The emphasis is on the God who delivers and vindicates his people as well as judges the evildoers. Praise is the valid response of those who are the objects of his omnipotent love. **Johnson** (1981: 463–64) notes how the hymns of these two chapters (**4:8, 11; 5:9–10, 12, 13**) bring out the unity of the Father and the Son. The first two relate to God, the second two to the Lamb, and the final hymn addresses both. Moreover, the choir gets greater each time, beginning with the four living creatures and concluding with *“every creature in heaven and on earth”* (5:13).

G.K. Beale: The hymns make explicit the main point of the vision and of the whole chapter: **God is to be glorified because of His holiness and sovereignty**. Also in this section is found the reason that the four living beings represent the whole of animate life. They are performing the function which all of creation is meant to fulfill. That is, all things were created to praise God for His holiness and glorify Him for His work of creation. The twenty-four elders specifically represent redeemed humanity's purpose to praise and glorify God, which is actually carried out, not only by them in heaven, but also by the true community of faith on earth.

a. Holiness of God

"Holy, holy, holy,"

b. Power and Sovereignty of God

"is the LORD God, the Almighty,"

G.K. Beale: The threefold name for God, *the Lord God, the Almighty*, is based on its recurrent use in the LXX (**Amos 3:13; 4:13; 5:14-16; 9:5-6, 15; Hos. 12:5; Nah. 3:5; Zech. 10:3; cf. Mal. 2:16**).

c. Eternality of God and Control over History

"who was and who is and who is to come."

Buist Fanning: The expression draws on God's own self-disclosure in **Exodus 3:14** and acknowledges him as the eternal, self-existent One who controls history from beginning to end (a significant foundation for the complementary vision that will follow in **5:1-14**).

Van Parunak: Though the hymn deviates from **Isaiah 6**, a later verse in Isaiah combines holiness and eternity:

Isa 57:15 *For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

The Lord assures Isaiah that, though he is Holy (separated) and unconstrained by time, yet he devotes himself to the care of his contrite and humble people. That is precisely the message that we need, living in the world that the Revelation envisions—a humble people, poor in the eyes of the world, persecuted by Satan, but under God's watchful care.

Robert Thomas: A complete absence from this song of any direct reference to **salvation** has caused some surprise. The reason is that redemption has not yet entered the picture, and will not do so until the next scene of this vision in **chapter 5**. All praise to God thus far centers in His creative endeavors. The song is quite in keeping with the progress of the revelation to John up to this point. This continual song from the four living beings underscores the central role of the one sitting upon the throne in the present setting. As the absolutely holy one, He is thoroughly entitled and has ample might to initiate stringent measures against His own creation in order to return it to its original holy state.

Richard Phillips: God's eternity emphasizes his sovereign control, since he is before and after all things. **William Barclay** comments: "Empires might come and empires might go; God lasts

forever. Here is the triumphant affirmation that God endures unchanging amid the enmity and the rebellion of human beings.”

III. (:9-11) WORSHIP FROM THE 24 ELDERS

A. (:9) Summary of Worship

“And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever,”

Gordon Fee: First they give him “*glory*,” which has to do with God’s own inherent splendor or magnificence, thus using language to give expression to the creatures’ wonder in the presence of that splendor. Second, they give him “*honor*,” a form of acknowledging God’s inherent worthiness to receive praise from his creatures. And third, they give him “*thanks*,” the inherent recognition that everything the creation is or the creature has comes as a divine gift. Thus the proper posture of all beings created with the power of thought and speech is thanksgiving, to accompany the praise.

Buist Fanning: The implication of the [temporal] clause is that, as seen in **v. 8b**, the living creatures offer their unceasing praise to God (**v. 9**), and the twenty-four elders join in (**vv. 10–11**).

Daniel Akin: Because our God is eternal, infinite, and omnipotent, the worshiping creatures in heaven acknowledge that their existence and being are completely dependent on the One who sits on the throne in heaven. In witness and word they testify to His greatness, to His worthiness. Wonderfully, we can join them in their worship.

B. (:10) Activity of Worship

“the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,”

G.K. Beale: The chapter builds to a crescendo in the giving of glory to God, which is the main point of the chapter and the central focus of heaven and should thus become the central focus also of the church on earth. God’s people should remember that God is orchestrating history not to make them great but to make His name great and glorified.

William Barclay: Here is the other section of the choir of thanksgiving. We have seen that the living creatures stand for nature in all its greatness and the twenty-four elders for the great united Church in Jesus Christ. So, when the living creatures and the elders unite in praise, it symbolizes nature and the Church both praising God.

C. (:11) Verbalization of Worship

1. Praise for His Sovereign Role as Ruler

“Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power;”

Charles Swindoll: *Axios* (ἄξιος) [514] “worthy,” “deserving,” “fit”

Worthiness stands out as a major theme in chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation. The word *axios* means “deserving.” God the Father is fit “to receive glory and honor and power” because He is the creator of all things (**4:11**). Jesus Christ is worthy “to receive power and riches and wisdom

and might and honor and glory and blessing” (5:12) because He is the Redeemer and heir of all things (5:9).

William Barclay: Here is something which would be even more meaningful to John’s readers than it is to us. The phrase for Lord and God is *kurios kai theos*; and that was the official title of Domitian, the Roman emperor. It was, indeed, because the Christians would not acknowledge that claim that they were persecuted and killed. Simply to call God *Lord and God* was a triumphant confession of faith, an assertion that God holds first place in all the universe.

John Macarthur: *Axios* (worthy) was used of the Roman emperor when he marched in a triumphal procession. The focus of the elders’ song is on God’s glory manifested in creation; He is presented as Creator throughout Scripture (cf. 10:6; Gen. 1:1; Ex. 20:11; Isa. 40:26, 28; Jer. 10:10–12; 32:17; Col. 1:16). The elders are acknowledging that God has the right both to redeem and to judge His creation. Their song anticipates paradise lost becoming paradise regained.

This first movement of the **oratorio of praise** pictures God about to judge Satan, demons, and sinners and take back His creation. Both the living creatures and the twenty-four elders can only worship in awe and wonder as God prepares to bring about the glorious day of which Paul wrote:

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.
(Rom. 8:19–22)

2. Praise for His Sovereign Role as Creator

*“for Thou didst create all things,
and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.”*

Grant Osborne: Three main verbs in the last half of this hymn form an ABA pattern: “created,” “exist,” and “were created.” God is the emphatic subject (σύ, sy, *you yourself*), and all creation is the object (τὰ πάντα, *ta panta*, *all things*). The first element centers on the creation theology that virtually dominates the Bible (Ps. 19:1–2; 33:9; Isa. 40:28; 45:18; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16) and is a key theme throughout the Apocalypse (Rev. 3:14; 4:11; 10:6; 14:7; 21:1). There is certainly a further contrast with Caesar, for only God creates life, but the major message is the worship of the Creator who has made “*all things*” possible. Christ has already been called “*the ruler of God’s creation*” (3:14), and here we see that celebrated. Moreover, in 12:16 (the earth swallowing the serpent’s flood) and 16:8 (the sun scorching the earth-dwellers) creation fights on the side of God against the dragon and his followers. This is part of the apocalyptic theme attested in Rom. 8:19–22, the “*groaning*” of creation as it longs to be released from the “decay” of this present evil world. In Revelation the created world participates in the process of its release.

The next two aspects further explicate this theme. In ἦσαν (*ēsan*, *were*) the very existence of creation is διὰ τὸ θέλημα σου (*dia to thelēma sou*, *because of your will*). Behind creation is divine providence; his “*will*” is the basis for every aspect of creation. In Heb. 11:3 (also Rom.

4:17) we are told that God by his command created the universe out of nothing. Here we know that the world is also sustained by his will. All this is preparatory for the fact that this world will be consummated and destroyed in his own sovereign time (**2 Pet. 3:7, 10**). God is the “*Alpha and Omega*” of creation!

Many have noted the strange order in the two final verbs; one would expect them to be reversed, with the act of creation preceding the existence of creation. Some (**R. Charles, Swete, Mounce**) interpret ἦσαν as teaching the preexistence of creation in the mind of God, the potential of existence before it was created. This is ingenious but unnecessary. It is far simpler to note the **ABA pattern** and see ἐκτίσθησαν (*ektisthēsan, were created*) as **restating** the “*created all things*” of the first element. We do not have chronology here but rather a logical order (so **Ladd** 1972: 78; **Thomas** 1992: 368). God is creator and sustainer of the whole of creation. As **Beale** (1999: 335) says, the purpose “is to emphasize preservation because the pastoral intention throughout the book is to encourage God’s people to recognize that everything that happens to them throughout history is part of God’s creation purposes.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we appreciate the graciousness of our God in opening the door to heaven and allowing us a glimpse of His enthronement?
- 2) Does our expression of worship properly exhibit an appreciation for the majesty and glory of God and a recognition of His worthiness?
- 3) Will we be surprised in heaven at the variety of angelic beings that worship and serve the Almighty Creator?
- 4) How does God’s plan of creation, preservation and redemption of His created order encourage you as you face difficult circumstances?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Walvoord: The concept that the book of Revelation beginning with **4:1** is **future**, from the standpoint of the twentieth century, is a broad conclusion growing out of the lack of correspondence of these prophecies to anything that has been fulfilled. A normal interpretation of this section which understands these prophecies as literal events would require that they be viewed as future. The futuristic concept is supported by the similarity of the expression in **1:19**, “*the things which shall be hereafter*” (Gr., *ha mellei genesthai meta tauta*) to the clause in **4:1**, “*things which must be hereafter*” (Gr., *ha dei genesthai meta tauta*). Chapters 4 and 5 are the introduction and background of the tremendous sweep of prophetic events predicted in the rest of the book. If chapter 4 and succeeding chapters relate to the future, they provide an important clue concerning the interpretation of the vision and the prophetic events which unfold in those chapters. One of the principal reasons for **confusion** in the study of the book of Revelation has been the failure to grasp this point. If Revelation has no **chronological structure** and is merely a

symbolic presentation of moral truth, its prophetic significance is reduced to a minimum. If, as others hold, the predictions of this section of Revelation are already fulfilled in the early persecution of the church, it also robs the book of any prophecy of the future. . . A literal interpretation of the prophecies beginning in **chapter 4** is not fulfilled in any historic event and must therefore be regarded from the futuristic viewpoint if it is indeed valid prophecy. The events anticipated in the angel's promise to "*shew thee things which must be hereafter*" (4:1), should be regarded as a prediction of events which shall occur **at the end of the age**.

Van Parunak: Each of these [four visions introduced by similar language – 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10] introduces a coherent section of the book:

- **1:10-3:22** consists of the seven letters to the churches, prefaced by a vision of the Lord instructing John to write those letters.
- **4:1-16:21** consists of three series of seven judgments, the seals, trumpets, and bowls, prefaced by a vision of the heavenly throne room from which the judgments are sent.
- **17:1-21:8** introduces the great whore, the kingdom of antichrist, and describes its defeat by the Lord and the establishment of his kingdom.
- 21:9 reveals the Lamb's bride, the New Jerusalem.

These four sections are **chiastic**: the outer two focus on the Lord's dealings with his own people, while the inner two describe his judgments on the world.

In **ch. 4-16**, the central features are three series of seven things: seals, trumpets, and bowls. Note several features:

- The first series (seals) begins with the court of heaven; the last (vials) with Satan and his courtiers the two beasts.
- The first and second series (seals and trumpets) have an interruption between the sixth and the seventh. Each of these separations prepares us for the next series of seven.
- As we study the contents of the series, we will find that they are not sequential, but **nested**. The seventh seal contains the seven trumpets, while the seven vials are announced. in the interruption between the sixth and seventh trumpet, and the seventh trumpet and vial describe the same event.

The imagery in the second vision is very surrealistic, with many allusions to earlier portions of Scripture. That's why the Revelation is the last book of our Bible to be revealed: the reader needs to know all that has come before.

David Akin: Main Idea: In both His person (holiness and goodness) and His work (creation and redemption), God alone is worthy of all worship and honor and praise, and He will receive it.

I. Praise God Because He Is the King over All Things (4:1-5).

- A. The plan of God demands our praise (4:1).
- B. The person of God demands our praise (4:2-3).
- C. The privileges of God demand our praise (4:4).
- D. The power of God demands our praise (4:5).

II. Praise God Because He Is Holy in His Nature (4:6-8).

- A. His creatures show His holiness (4:6-8).
- B. His creatures tell of His holiness (4:8).

III. Praise God Because He Created Everything That Exists (4:9-11).

- A. Show Him you believe He is worthy of your worship (4:9-10).
- B. Tell Him you believe He is worthy of your worship (4:10-11).

Robert Thomas: [Proper approach to interpreting the symbols in Revelation]

Details of Scripture are always significant. There must be a reason for the use of these symbols instead of others. Granted that the precise symbolic import of some of the stones in the vision may be difficult to comprehend, other parts of the vision are relatively clear in their symbolic import. For example, the rainbow later in v. 3 paints the picture of divine judgment, including the hope of deliverance therefrom for those who benefit from the covenant symbolized thereby (**Bullinger**). Without the rest of the Bible, the conclusion might be to consider the details relatively meaningless, but in light of Scriptures that form such a vital background for John and his readers, one can hardly conclude other than that the details have deep significance (**Walvoord**). This is further confirmed by a recollection of the symbolic (cf. *σ μανεν* [*esēmanen*, “he signified”]) nature of the manner in which the revelation was communicated to John.

Buist Fanning: The Majesty of God

All healthy Christian living and service is rooted in a right view of God, the biblical view of him rather than our cultural or personal distortions. As **Tozer** wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Do we see him in his majesty, sovereignty, and goodness, or do we create him in our image as something far less? According to **Packer**, modern people, “though they cherish great thoughts of man, have as a rule small thoughts of God. When the man in the Church, let alone the man in the street, uses the word ‘God,’ the thought in his mind is rarely of divine majesty.” He adds:

“Today, vast stress is laid on the thought that God is personal, but this truth is so stated as to leave the impression that God is a person of the same sort as we are—weak, inadequate, ineffective, a little pathetic. . . . He is personal, but unlike us He is great. In all its constant stress on the reality of God’s personal concern for His people, and on the gentleness, tenderness, sympathy, patience, and yearning compassion that He shows towards them, the Bible never lets us lose sight of His majesty, and His unlimited dominion over all His creatures.”

This is the dominant point of John’s vision in **chapter 4: God’s eternal majesty and sovereignty** above all that exists. The descriptions of his heavenly throne room and the angelic retinue offering him constant worship are relevant only insofar as they show us the majestic God in all his heavenly glory and worth. Everything that follows in the remaining chapters of Revelation is set in its proper framework by seeing God on his throne receiving worship for his perfect holiness and his eternal power to create and sustain all things. The preoccupation, even obsession, of such heavenly worship of God himself in all his glory and honor and power should be our model—or at least our aspiration—for the corporate and individual worship that we engage in today in our earthly setting that is so different. The degree to which we imitate such worship will speak worlds about how healthy our Christian life and service actually are.

The Tension of God’s Sovereignty

John’s great vision of God on his heavenly throne and of Jesus the Lamb who will consummate God’s worldwide judgment and redemption (**chs. 4–5**) is perfectly placed. On one side of this picture of the majestic God ruling and directing the world’s destiny, we see seven accounts of

churches in John's day suffering and struggling to live for Christ amid first-century idolatry and hostility to the true God (**chs. 2–3**). On the other side, we see unprecedented divine judgment poured out on a future world in which that idolatry and hostility have grown exponentially (**chs. 6–19**). The tension between John's vision of God being worshiped and in control in heaven, and human empires and individuals vehemently resisting his rule on earth, could not be more blatant. Our own earthly experience displays the same paradox. Intermingled with periods of peace and stability in our personal lives and in the wider world, we also confront episodes of unspeakable agony and tragedy, of seemingly uncontrollable chaos and turmoil that make us wonder if anyone is at the helm. Yet this is one of the purposes of revelatory or apocalyptic visions such as the one John provides in this book: to see all of life from a heavenly perspective that rises above the earthly hysteria and disorientation that can easily overwhelm us. To see God as sovereign, as creator, as redeemer and judge is the all-important theological foundation for understanding the rest of the book as well as the rest of our lives. The judgments that follow should not be seen in isolation but in light of God's sovereign right as creator. His promises of victory and renewal ring true in light of his control of all things, according to his plan in Christ to establish his kingdom in its fullness on earth as it is in heaven. Heartfelt worship and faithful service for such a God, even in our less-than-heavenly circumstances, is the only appropriate response to this vision.

James Hamilton: **Ezekiel 1:22** states that the expanse was “*over the heads of the living creatures.*” John tells us in **4:6**, “*around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures.*” These four living creatures are very similar to the seraphim that Isaiah describes in **Isaiah 6:2**: “*Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.*”

In **4:7** John describes the four living creatures: “*the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight.*” It seems that John saw either the same living creatures Ezekiel and Isaiah saw, or at least they were very similar. Ezekiel relates in **Ezekiel 1:5, 6**, “*And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings*” (cf. **Ezekiel 1:10**). John states that the living creatures were like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle, while Ezekiel states that each living creature had four faces. Either they saw different but similar living creatures, or perhaps Ezekiel had a different angle, so that where he could see four faces on each living creature, John only saw the likeness of each one to a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle.

There is also a difference between the descriptions in that the seraphim that Isaiah saw and the living creatures that John saw had six wings (**Isaiah 6:2; Revelation 4:8**), but Ezekiel says that the living creatures he saw had four wings (**Ezekiel 1:6**). Again, either Ezekiel did not see the other two wings from the perspective he had, or perhaps these are different from and yet similar living creatures to the ones seen by Isaiah and John.

S. Lewis Johnson: The subject for today, as we continue our exposition of John's apocalypse is “**The Throne of the Lord God Almighty,**” and as you can tell from the reading of the Scripture, we're turning to the fourth chapter, in order to expound that chapter. One of the most salient and signal themes of the apocalypse, as everyone who has read it knows, is the **activity of Jesus Christ as judge and as king**. No human empire can endure permanently. We have the ancient kingdom of Egypt, the greatest on the face of the earth in its day. It no longer is such. The great kingdom of Assyria, a magnificent kingdom so far as power and authority was concerned, it no

longer exists today. Babylon, all readers of Scripture know the greatness of Babylon the Great. It does not exist today. Greece, the kingdom of the Greeks, it's no longer a kingdom. Greece can hardly get along with itself, much less conquer any one else today. Rome followed, and Rome is no longer with us, so will all the philosophies of men such as fascism, communism, we are seeing the disintegration of communism today in the Soviet Union, and democracy will also follow.

It was **Mr. Churchill** who said that democracy was the greatest of all the kingdoms of the earth. He said something like, "Democracy was the greatest of those failures," or something like that. They're all **failures**, all of the kingdoms of men. They will never be able to meet the tests of human life. Scripture tells us, of course, that there is coming a time that there will be kingdom that will prevail and last, and that is the kingdom in which our Lord shall rule and reign. . .

John's words had local reference and application to the **emperor worship** to his day. We shouldn't really forget that because if we do we lose some of the force of the book of Revelation. Emperor worship was the political bond of the empire. We've talked about this before and how it was required of every citizen that once a year should take a pinch of incense, burn the incense in the temple, the local temple, and confess that Caesar was Lord. This is what got the Christians into so much trouble because they couldn't do that.

The Romans didn't care if you worshipped other gods as well, just so you made that acknowledgement that Caesar was your king and god, and you could worship your own god, but Christians they have only one God. They cannot do that, and so that got them into a lot of trouble. John, of all people, was probably the one that Rome feared the most at this time. Domitian was on the throne in John's day. He was the first to have himself officially titled lord and god. Domitian loved to have the Romans and others shout, "Hail, the lord" to him at the festival of the seven hills that was common, all of the authority that he had, he sought to make it divine authority. He's the one who was called lord and god, in fact, there were a number of titles that were given to him such as lord forever, lord from eternity to eternity, lord in all eons.

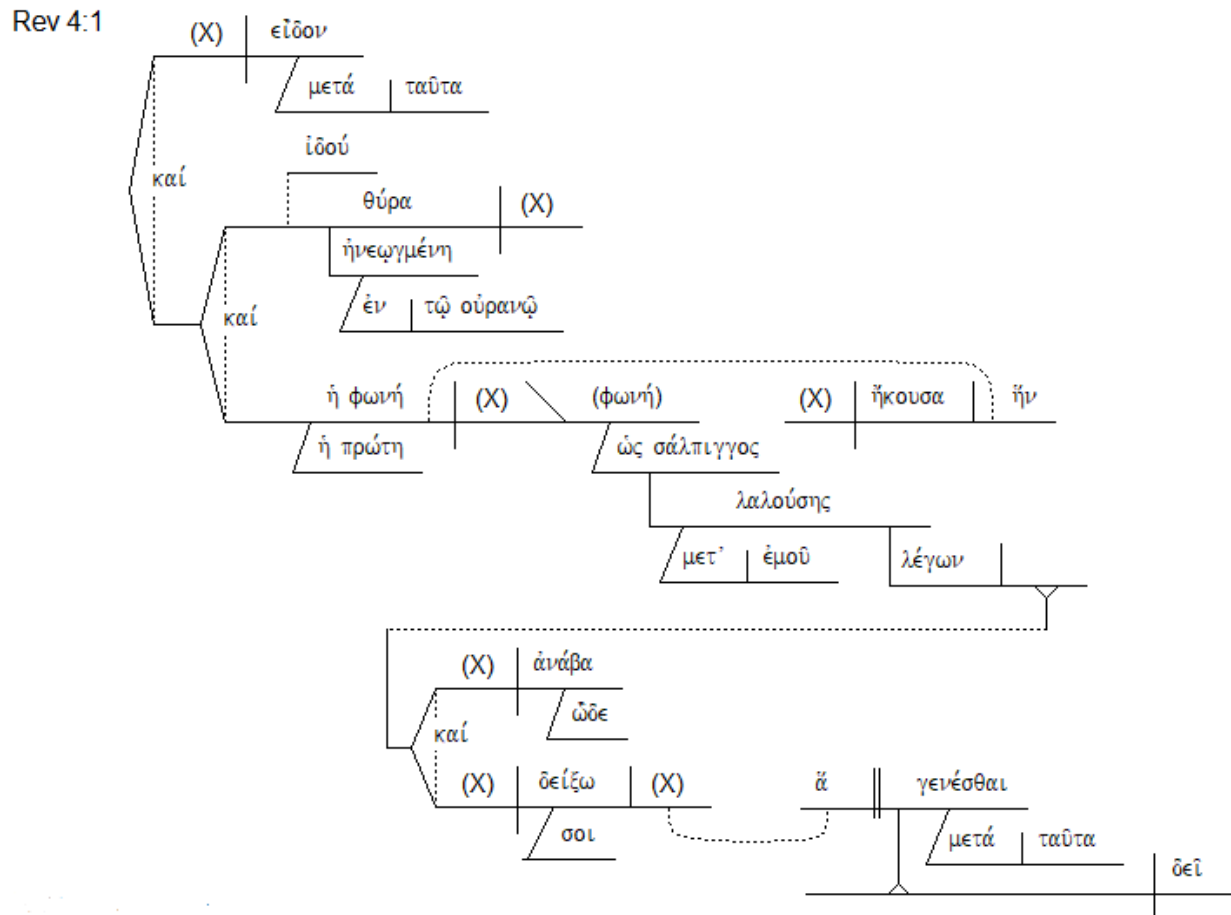
Grant Osborne: There have been scores of articles and books on the **crisis of worship** in the church today. The average service so centers on the horizontal life of the Christian that the experience of awe in the worship of God, the feeling that we are in his presence, is all too often lost. The church as the throne of God, the minister as mediating his presence in the same way as the living creatures and elders in this chapter, is one antidote to this paucity of worship. **Christians must experience God in his glorious splendor**, and few passages are better than this for that purpose.

Warren Wiersbe: True spiritual worship is perhaps one of the greatest needs in our individual lives and in our churches. There is a constant emphasis today on witnessing for Christ and working for Christ, but not enough is said about **worshipping Him**. To worship means "*to ascribe worth*" (see **Rev. 4:11; 5:12**). It means to use all that we are and have to praise God for all that He is and does. Heaven is a place of worship, and God's people shall worship Him throughout all eternity. Perhaps it would be good for us to get in practice now! A study of **Revelation 4-5** will certainly help us better understand how to worship God and give Him the glory that He deserves.

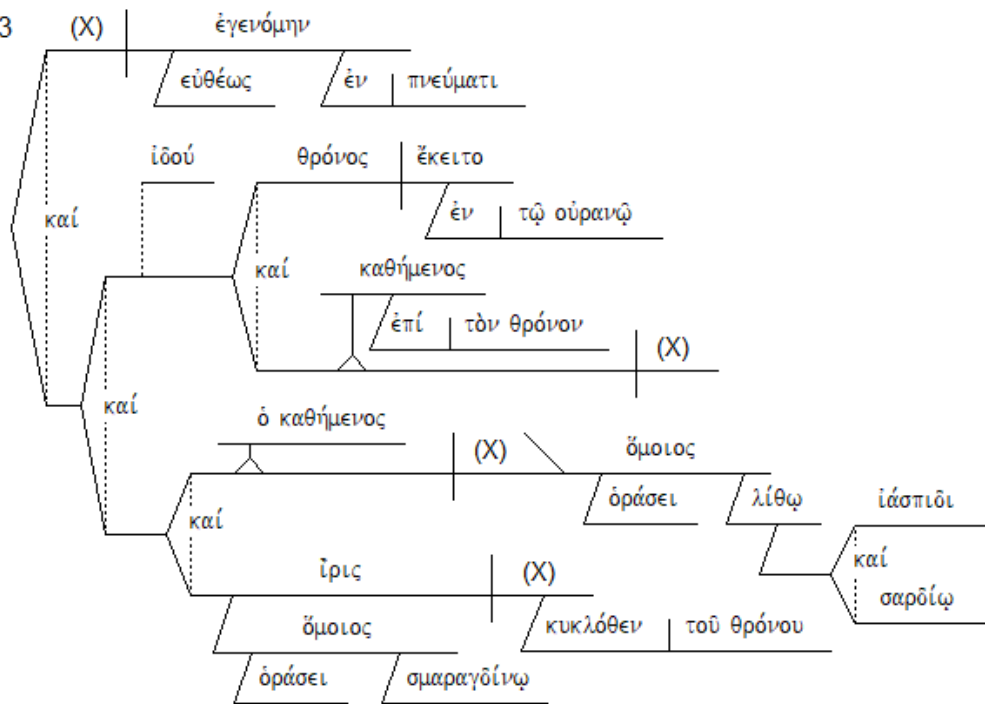
Craig Keener: **God's grandeur** dwarfs the emperor's majesty, it also challenges in a different way the numbing triteness of modern Western culture. God's greatness summons our attention:

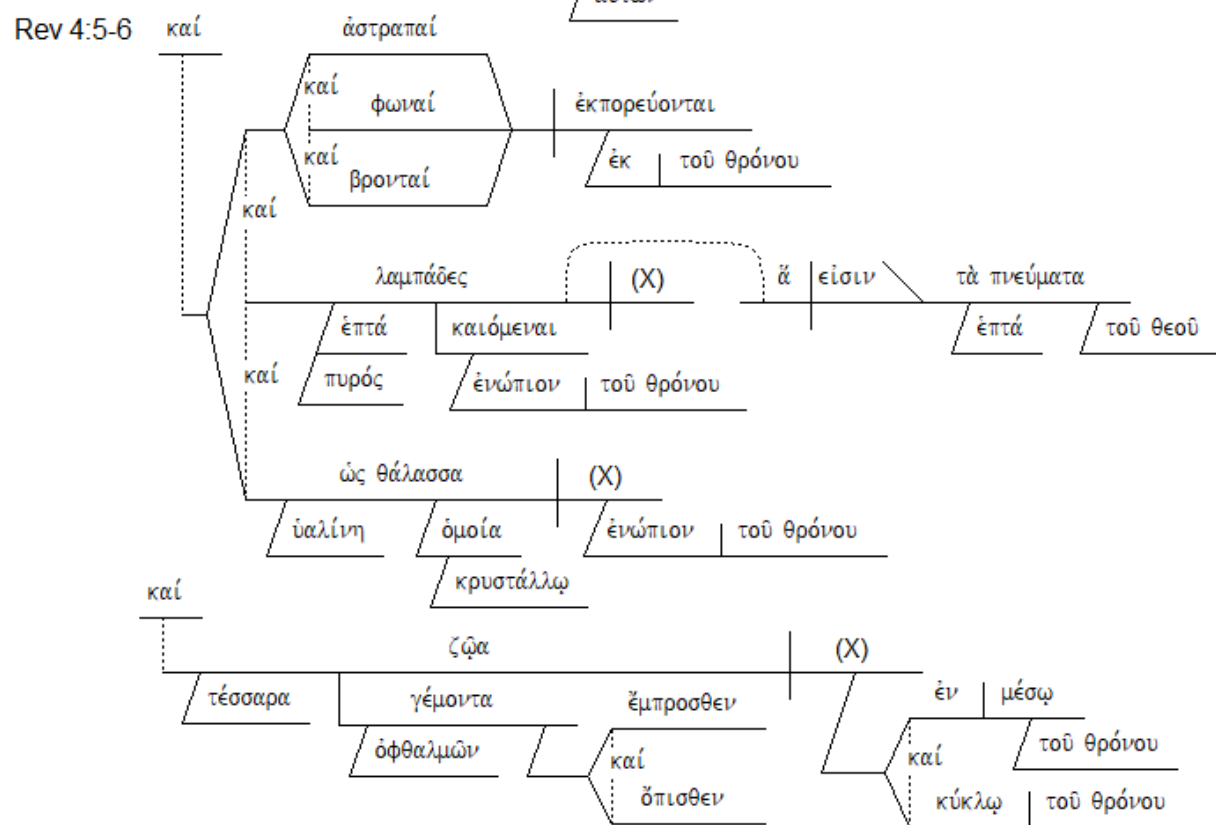
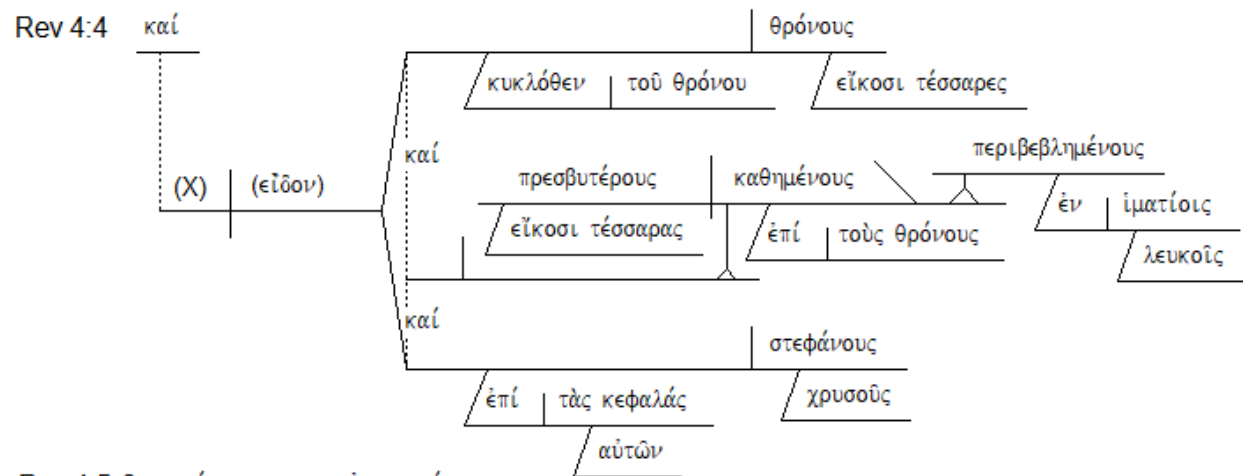
Who are we to be overwhelmed by the mortal emperor or our present trials? That God is Lord of history and has everything under control helps us view everything else in life the way we should. Praise puts persecution, poverty, and plagues into perspective; God is sovereignly bringing about his purposes, and this world's pains are merely the birth pangs of a new world (**Rev. 21–22**).

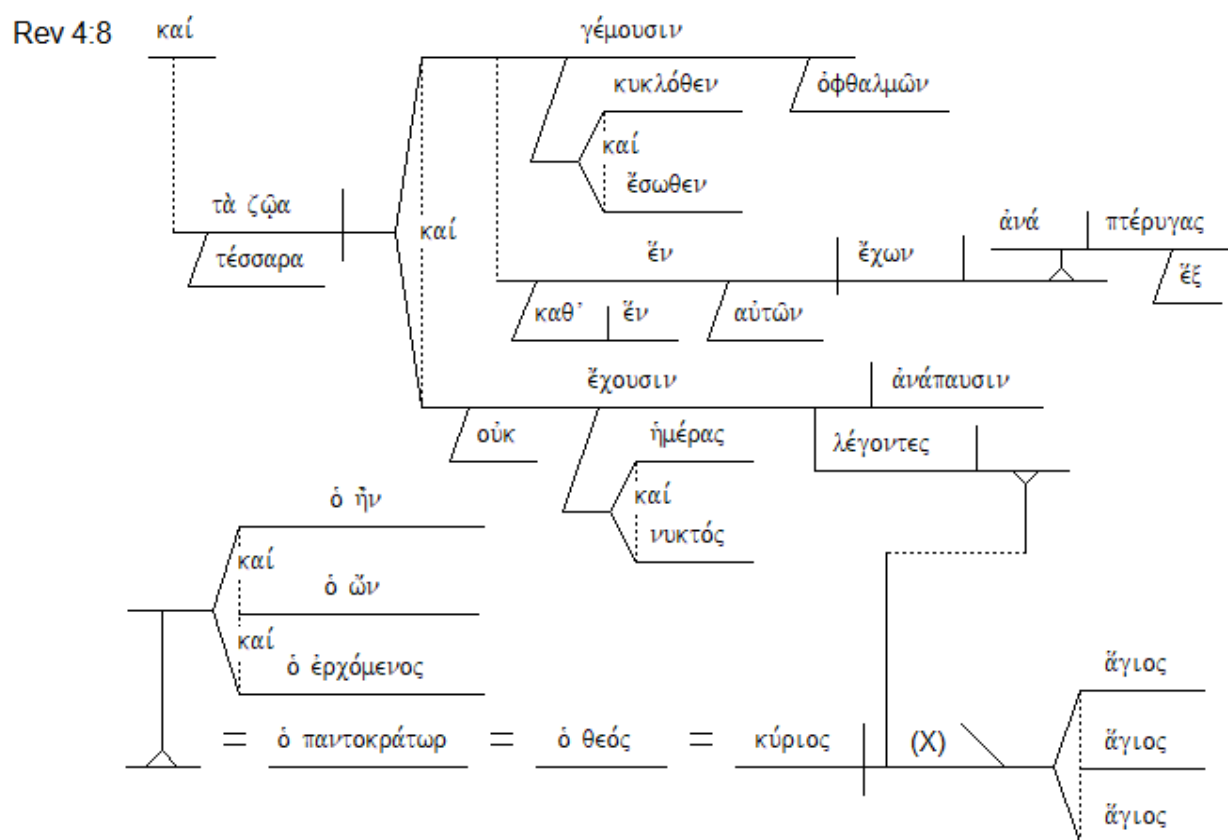
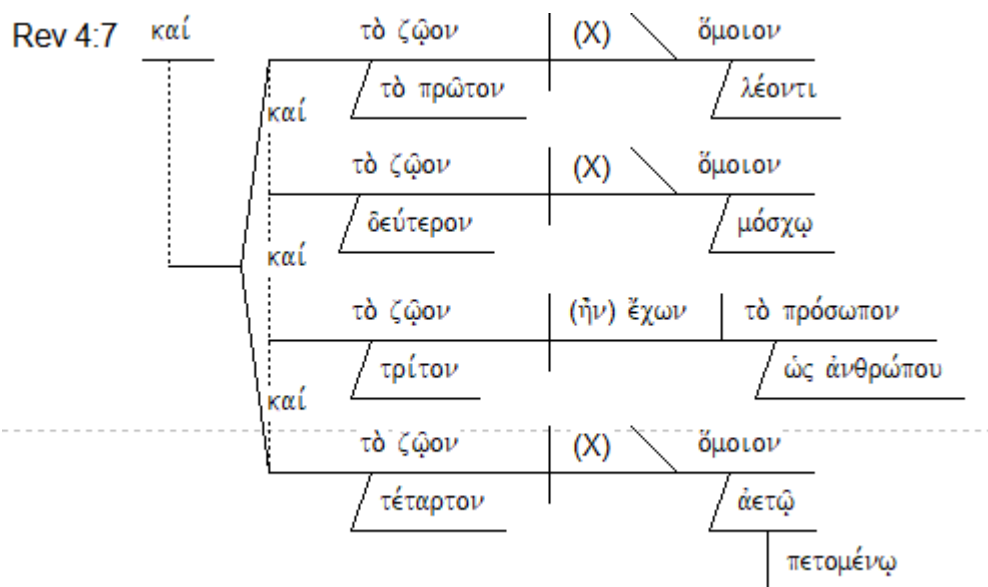
Leedy Greek Diagram:



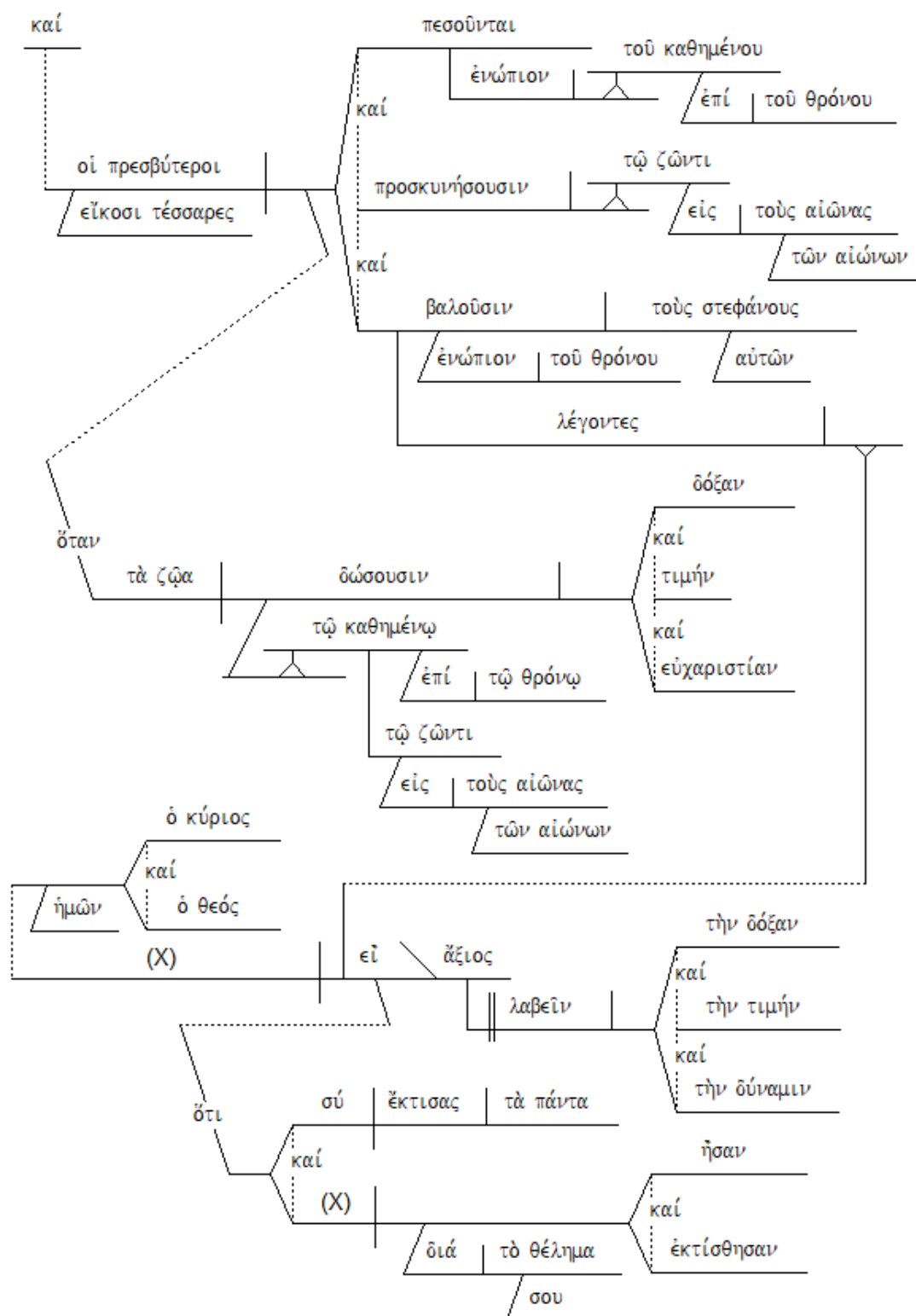
Rev 4:2-3







Rev 4:9-11



TEXT: Revelation 5:1-5

TITLE: THE END TIMES SCROLL WITH SEVEN SEALS – WHO IS WORTHY?

BIG IDEA:

ONLY JESUS IN HIS MESSIANIC ROLE AS VICTORIOUS KING CAN BE JUDGED WORTHY TO REVEAL THE DIVINE SECRETS OF END TIME JUDGMENTS AND ULTIMATE REDEMPTION

INTRODUCTION:

Van Parunak: The chapter has four sections, each introduced by καὶ εἶδον G1492 (translated “and I saw” or “and I beheld”). . .

700 years earlier, when Daniel asked for the meaning of his last vision, he was told that its interpretation was shut up and sealed until the end:

Dan. 12:4 *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. ... 8 And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? 9 And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.*

The sealed scroll may be this promised interpretation. God promised Daniel that the book would be sealed “*till the time of the end.*” That time has now come, and the book is about to be opened.

Buist Fanning: The first phase (5:1) connects the further parts of the vision to the central figure of **chapter 4** (the Lord God sitting on his heavenly throne), but sets the stage for new developments by introducing the seven-sealed scroll in God’s right hand. The second phase (5:2–5) poses **the challenge of the scroll**: Is anyone in heaven or on earth worthy to open it? The third phase (5:6–10) constitutes the dramatic high point of the chapter, the revelation of Jesus Christ as the slain Lamb who alone is qualified to open the scroll (vv. 6–7) and the heavenly worship that acknowledges his redemptive sacrifice and its cosmic significance (vv. 8–10). An ever-widening crescendo of praise, to the Lord God and to the Lamb, continues this response as the final phase of the vision (5:11–14).

John Walvoord: John is now introduced to an item of central importance: a book that contains the prophecy of impending events to be unfolded in Revelation. The book is actually a scroll that is given prominence by the fact that it is in the right hand of God. The importance and comprehensive character of the revelation contained is indicated by the fact that the book is written on both sides of the parchment. Further, the document is made impressive by seven seals, apparently fixed on the edges of the scroll in such a way that the seals must be successively broken if the scroll is to be unrolled and read. Wills in the Roman world were sometimes sealed seven times¹, although the number may also simply represent the importance and completely inviolable nature of the scroll. If this is a will, it is a reference to the inheritance that Christ will receive from His Father, which is the kingdom (cf. **Ps. 2**).

David Thompson: When one comes to Revelation 5, one comes to one of the most majestic, **Christological chapters** in the entire Bible. This is a Christ exalting chapter and a chapter in which God the Father turns all authority and judgment publicly over to God the Son.

Chapters 4-5 of Revelation are designed to show that God is on His Throne and is Sovereign over everything and He and He alone has the Righteousness and worth to be able to pour out judgment. **Revelation 5** shows that Jesus Christ is sovereign over everything and He and He alone has the Righteousness and worth to be able to pour out judgment.

Only God is worshipped at the Throne of God, and since this chapter shows that Jesus Christ is worshipped at the Throne of God and that He is the One authorized to pour out God's judgment, this is a great chapter that **proves Jesus Christ is God**.

Kendell Easley: John hears an announcement that Christ alone is worthy and able to break the seals and open the Judgment Scroll written and sealed up by God, for only Christ can enact the coming judgments. . . This is God's Judgment Scroll, his plan long ago made to condemn wickedness and reward righteousness. If God is the one who made the plan, then God's Son is the only one worthy to enact the plan.

I. (:1) THE CONCEALING OF THE CONTENTS OF THE SCROLL BY 7 SEALS

A. Sovereignty and Majesty of God the Father

“And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne”

Buist Fanning: The reference to *“the one sitting on the throne”* (cf. 4:2, 3, 9, 10) shows that the new phases of the vision are built directly on the image of the **sovereignty** and **majesty** of God just seen in **chapter 4**. This connection is important not only for the arrangement of **chapter 5** but also its theology, since it maintains the focus on God's heavenly rule over all things (e.g., God's *“throne”* mentioned 17x in **chs. 4–5**) and anticipates the establishment of his rule on the earth in full measure. . . The scroll itself represents God's **sovereign plan for his creation** (as discussed below), and the fact that God holds it in his hand suggests that he initiates and controls the events recorded in it (the detail of the *“right”* hand may reinforce the point, since the right side often represents the position of ruling, delegated authority; cf. **Rev 1:16, 17, 20; 2:1; Ps 110:1**).

Robert Thomas: The position of the scroll in God's possession indicates its divine source, the supreme authority of the revelation contained in it, and the assurance of adequate power to translate its contents into action.

B. Scroll Containing the Full Account of God's Kingdom Agenda

“a book written inside and on the back,”

Cf. **Ezek. 2:9** *And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; 10 And he spread it before me; and it was written within and without: and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.*

William Barclay: The roll was made of papyrus, manufactured in single sheets about ten inches by eight. The sheets were joined together horizontally when a great deal of writing had to be done. The writing was in narrow columns about three inches long, with margins of about two and

a half inches at the top and at the bottom, and with about three-quarters of an inch between the columns. The roll usually had a wooden roller at each end. It was held in the left hand, unrolled with the right, and, as the reading went on, the part in the left hand was rolled up again. We may get some idea of the dimensions of a roll from the following statistics. The books of 2 and 3 John, Jude and Philemon would each occupy one sheet of papyrus; Romans would require a roll 11½ feet long; Mark, 19 feet; John, 23½ feet; Matthew, 30 feet; Luke and Acts, 32 feet. Revelation itself would occupy a roll 15 feet long. . .

Papyrus was a substance made from the pith of a bulrush which grew in the delta of the Nile. The bulrush was about fifteen feet high, with six feet of it below the water; and it was as thick as someone's wrist. The pith was extracted and cut into thin strips with a very sharp knife. A row of strips was laid vertically; on the top of them another row of strips was laid horizontally; the whole was then moistened with Nile water and glue and pressed together. The resulting substance was beaten with a mallet and then smoothed with pumice stone; and a substance emerged which was not unlike brown paper.

Robert Thomas: The “spill-over” onto the back symbolizes the fullness of the contents. The decrees of God contained herein are extensive and comprehensive. They constitute the whole counsel of God regarding the future of the world. No further revelation may be anticipated (cf. **Rev. 22:18**) (**Scott**).

Buist Fanning: This indicates that it contains a full, comprehensive account of its subject matter. Scrolls were normally written only on the inside, but because writing materials were expensive, the reverse side was sometimes used if the contents extended beyond the limits that the front side could hold.

Daniel Akin: Of course the question is, what is the scroll? Many different answers have been given:

- (1) a title deed to the earth;
- (2) a last will and testament;
- (3) Ezekiel's book of lamentation, mourning, and woe (**2:9-10**);
- (4) the sealed book of the end time in **Daniel 12:4**.

I am sympathetic to both options 3 and 4. However, there may be a much simpler answer: it is the remainder of the book of Revelation (**chs. 6–22**). **Don Carson** says it is a book of “blessing and cursing” (“**Rev. 5**”). I like that but would expand it to three categories: it is a book of **judgment, salvation, and restoration**:

- Judgment—seals (**v. 6**), trumpets (**vv. 8-9**), bowls (**vv. 15-16**), lake of fire (**20:11-15**)
- Salvation—Jew and Gentile (**vv. 7,14; 19:1-10**)
- Restoration—new heaven, new earth, new Jerusalem (**vv. 21-22**).

God has a definite plan for history and its consummation. It is mapped out. It is set. It will not fail (**Johnson**, Revelation, 1983, 74–75).

John MacArthur: While Roman wills were sealed up with seven seals, this scroll is not a will but a deed or contract. **Dr. Robert L. Thomas** explains:

This kind of contract was known all over the Middle East in ancient times and was used by the Romans from the time of Nero on. The full contract would be written on the inner

pages and sealed with seven seals. Then the content of the contract would be described briefly on the outside. All kinds of transactions were consummated this way, including marriage-contracts, rental and lease agreements, release of slaves, contract-bills, and bonds. Support also comes from Hebrew practices. The Hebrew document most closely resembling this scroll was a title-deed that was folded and signed, requiring at least three witnesses. A portion of text would be written, folded over and sealed, with a different witness signing at each fold. A larger number of witnesses meant that more importance was assigned to the document. (*Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1992], 378)

The scroll John saw in God's hand is the title deed to the earth, which He will give to Christ. Unlike other such deeds, however, it does not record the descriptive detail of what Christ will inherit, but rather how He will regain His rightful inheritance. He will do so by means of the divine judgments about to be poured out on the earth (**6:1ff.**). While the scroll is a scroll of doom and judgment, it is also a scroll of redemption. It tells how Christ will redeem the world from the usurper, Satan, and those men and demons who have collaborated with him.

David Thompson: This scroll is not new to Revelation. This scroll is a critical scroll to God's prophecy and prophetic program:

- 1) Isaiah saw but did not read it (**Is. 29:11-12**).
- 2) Ezekiel saw it and did read it (**Ez. 2:9-10**).
- 3) Daniel saw it, read it and sealed it (**Dan. 12:4, 9**).
- 4) John saw it and will reveal it (**Rev. 5:1ff**).

C. Seals Protecting the Contents This Important Revelation

"sealed up with seven seals."

Grant Osborne: The purpose of the seals here is to **keep the contents secret until the time of fulfillment**, a common apocalyptic theme (**Dan. 8:26; 12:9**).

Van Parunak: The seals have at least three functions.

1. First, a seal makes the contents of the document inaccessible. We expect from **4:1** ("*I will show thee things which must be hereafter*") that the scroll has to do with future events, but God reserves for himself the knowledge of his future purposes. This was the purpose for which God told Daniel to seal the book: **Dan. 12:4; Acts 1:6; Rom. 11:33**
2. Second, a seal clearly identifies the one writer of the document, like a modern signature. **1 Kings 21:8**
3. Third, a seal warns against tampering. Anyone who breaks it must answer to the one who has sealed it. **Dan. 6:17; Matt. 27:66**

How is the scroll sealed?

1. Most commentators (e.g., **Swete, Mounce, Thomas**) understand that as each seal is broken, another portion of the scroll is read, leading to the judgments of **chapter 6**. But this would require a method of sealing unknown in the ancient world, and we will see that the judgments of **chapter 6** are not in fact sealed from knowledge, for the Lord Jesus already revealed them in Matthew 24!

2. It would be more in keeping with sealed scrolls known from the ancient world for all of the seals to be on the outside, so that nothing in the book can be read until all are opened, a position advocated by **Alford** and supported by **Bauckham, Osborne, Plummer,** and **Gundry**. The judgments reflect the breaking of the seals, not the contents of the scroll. The contents of the scroll come later, after **chapter 10**, when the scroll, now unsealed, appears again.

Robert Thomas: The manner in which the seals were affixed remains a question. The common way of sealing a scroll was to place its seal or seals on the outer edge so that they all had to be broken before any of the scroll's content could be read (**Moffatt; Beckwith**). Further, someone has observed that this is the only way John could have seen all seven (**Johnson**). Yet, is it? The seals could have been clearly visible at one end (i.e., longitudinal edge) of the scroll, though spaced at intervals throughout the inner part of the roll (**Alford**). Though contrary to known customs of the day, this is the only explanation that harmonizes with the **progressive nature of the revelation** associated with the breaking of the seals, one by one (**Walvoord; Mounce**). As each seal is broken and the next section of the scroll unrolled to permit viewing, the clear implication of the text is that the dramatization that follows represents that portion of the scroll. The beginning of the scroll's enactment does not await the opening of all seven seals fastened along the single outer extremity of the papyrus roll. It is granted that nothing is read verbatim from the scroll, but with the severing of each successive seal, part of the scroll's contents is revealed in prophetic symbolism. Picturing the seals at one end of the scroll is most probable.

II. (:2-5) THE CHALLENGE OF OPENING THE SCROLL

A. (:2) Problem: Is Anyone Worthy to Open the Scroll?

1. Angelic Dramatization

“And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice,”

John MacArthur: Some identify him as Gabriel, others as Michael, but since the text does not name him, he must remain anonymous. He spoke with a loud voice so that his proclamation would penetrate to every corner of the universe. The angel sought someone both worthy and able to open the book and to break its seals. Who, he asked, has the innate, virtuous worthiness of character and the divine right that would qualify him to break the seals? And who has the power to defeat Satan and his demon hosts, to wipe out sin and its effects, and to reverse the curse on all of creation?

2. Key Question

“Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?”

Buist Fanning: The adjective “worthy” (ἄξιός) carries the basic meaning of “fit, deserving,” but it is filled in significantly by its contextual usage, especially in **Revelation 4:11** and **5:9, 12**. This is not so much a moral or spiritual worthiness in the normal sense but a status, rank, or eminence gained by a combination of inherent being or nature and the accomplishment of actions that accord with and flow from that nature. So in **4:11**, the Lord God Almighty is proclaimed “worthy” of worship because he alone is the creator and sustainer of all things: this comes from his inherent being as God Almighty, but both his nature and his concordant actions are celebrated. In **5:9, 12** a similar status or rank is accorded to the Lamb because of his inherent nature and his redemptive accomplishment on the cross.

The order of the infinitives “*to open . . . and break*” (v. 2b) seems backward, but the “*and*” (καί) here is **explanatory**, denoting not order of occurrence but complementary parts of the same action (“*to open . . . by breaking*” or “*to open . . . , that is, to break*”).

Robert Thomas: The best resolution is to refer the **worthiness** to both Christ’s office and His moral competency. In 5:9 the explicit statement is that His worthiness is based on His redemptive death, and in 5:5 it is strongly implied that His worthiness is tied to His Messianic office. The two aspects of His Person cannot be separated.

B. (:3-4) Frustration: When Nobody Was Found Worthy

1. (:3) Unworthiness of All Created Beings

“And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it.”

Buist Fanning: The absolute failure to find anyone worthy to open the scroll (repeated in v. 4) anticipates the unique status of the Lamb recognized in vv. 5–10. Theologically this shows how futile and meaningless all of history ultimately is apart from Christ. Human destiny, and that of the universe, hinges on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

2. (:4) Unfulfilled Expectations Create Great Frustration and Sorrow

“And I began to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look into it;”

Buist Fanning: The scroll then represents the divine plan for redemption and restoration through Christ. It “symbolizes God’s salvific plan, to assert his sovereignty over a rebellious world, and to achieve his loving purposes in creation through the victory of the Lamb.” As long as it remains sealed, these purposes cannot be made known and cannot be fulfilled. But through Christ’s victory on the cross (5:9–10) and his revelation through John (cf. 1:1–2), God’s purposes are to be unveiled and accomplished. No wonder John wept when it seemed this was impossible (5:4); no wonder all creation erupted in worship and adoration when Christ’s victory was made clear (5:8–14). . .

John’s reason for crying is not just foiled curiosity, the pang of disappointment at not being privy to the scroll’s contents. In view of the cosmic significance of this scroll, his bitter grief is over the apparent frustration of God’s redemptive purpose. It is the deep lament shared by God’s people through the ages, including his readers in the first-century, when everything they have hoped and prayed for under God seems to have come to nothing. Fortunately for John, such weeping lasts only for a season, and what reassures John should give all God’s people renewed courage and faith as well.

Kendell Easley: John regretted that God’s righteous judgments against evil appeared to be postponed indefinitely.

C. (:5) Solution: Judah’s Victorious Lion Is Found Worthy

1. Turning Point

“and one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping;’”

William Barclay: We are now approaching one of the most dramatic moments in Revelation – the emergence of the Lamb in the centre of the scene. Certain things lead up to it.

John has been weeping because there is no one to whom God may reveal his secrets. One of the elders, acting as the messenger of Christ, comes to him, saying: ‘Do not weep.’ These words were more than once on the lips of Jesus in the days of his earthly life. That is what he said to the widow of Nain when she was mourning her dead son (Luke 7:13), and to Jairus and his family when they were lamenting for their little girl (Luke 8:52). The comforting voice of Christ is still speaking in the heavenly places. **H. B. Swete** makes an interesting comment on this passage. John was weeping, and yet his tears were unnecessary. Human grief often springs from insufficient knowledge. If we had patience to wait and trust, we would see that God has his own solutions for the situations which bring us tears.

The elder tells John that Jesus Christ has won such a victory that he is able to open the book and to loosen the seals. That means three things. It means that, because of his victory over death and all the powers of evil and because of his complete obedience to God, he is able to know God’s secrets; he is able to reveal God’s secrets; and it is his privilege and duty to control the things which shall be. Because of what Jesus did, he is the Lord of truth and of history.

2. Two Messianic Titles

a. Lion from Tribe of Judah

“behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah,”

David Thompson: This description is taken from **Genesis 49:8-10, 12**. Jacob is pronouncing a blessing on his 12 sons and the promised blessing to Judah is that through him One would come who would gather Israel and crush all enemies and rule over all people of the world.

The lion is the king of the beast and Jesus Christ is the King of everything, including lions. Every force against God and against Israel will go down by the judgmental hand of Jesus Christ.

S. Lewis Johnson: And so the idea of a Redeemer, a “Marshal Redeemer” one who would overcome in battle from the tribe of Judah is of course the story of biblical prophecy. The titles portray him then as a king with a universal reign, and furthermore with a reign that will touch all of the nations. A worldwide kingdom. Someone has said, “The lion is at home in a fight”, and what we have is a fight with the forces of evil and the forces of darkness, and our Lord is set forth here under the name, the lion of the tribe of Judah, to indicate that he will overcome. He’s the lion of the tribe of Judah, he is the root of David, and he has prevailed. Incidentally, when he says he is root of David, it means not simply that he is descended from David, but as a matter of fact he is the one who gives David his authority and power.

b. Root of David

“the Root of David,”

John Schultz: The expression is repeated in the last chapter of this book: *“I am the Root and the Offspring of David.”* The fruit does not carry the root, but **the root produces the fruit**. We can, therefore, say that, in a sense, David is Jesus’ offspring as *“the man after God’s own heart.”* That is implied in what is said here.

Buist Fanning: The note of **mighty victory** is clear in the two messianic titles used in the subject phrase (**v. 5c**): *“the Lion of the tribe of Judah”* and *“the Shoot of David.”* *“The Lion of the tribe of Judah”* is Jacob’s portrayal of one of Judah’s descendants with the strength and ferocity of a

lion, who will wield the scepter of rule over his enemies and to whom the nations will render obedience (**Gen 49:8–10**). “*The Shoot of David*” (ἡ ῥίζα Δαβὶδ) is a title drawn from **Isaiah 11:1–10**, where the phrase is actually “*the root of Jesse*” (ἡ ῥίζα [τοῦ] Ἰεσσαί; **vv. 1, 10**; cf. **Rom 15:12**). But the passage speaks of a coming “*shoot*” or “*branch*” (ῥάβδος) as well as a “*flower*” (ἄνθος) springing from Jesse’s stock (**v. 1**; i.e., new growth coming up from what appears to be his dead stump—clearly a restoration of David’s line), anointed and equipped by the Lord’s Spirit (**v. 2**), exerting righteous judgment and peaceful rule over the whole earth (**vv. 3–9**), including the gentile nations as well as the exiles of Israel regathered from the corners of the earth (**vv. 10–12**). Jesus’s connection with Judah and especially David is widely noted in the New Testament (**Matt 1:1, 17**; **Mark 11:10; 12:35–37**; **Luke 1:32; 2:11**; **Acts 2:22–36; 13:32–41**; **Rom 1:3**; **2 Tim 2:8**; **Heb 7:14**) and referred to elsewhere in Revelation as well (**3:7; 22:16**; cf. also **19:11–16** with further allusions to **Isa 11:4**).

Kendell Easley: The two titles of Jesus, then, point in the direction of both his **deity** (as the ultimate divine source of David) and his **humanity** (as the royal lion from Judah).

3. Triumph of the One Worthy to Open the Scroll

“has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.”

Robert Thomas: The purpose of Jesus’ victory is expressed by *anoixai* (“*that He may open*”). This is a shade different from calling the opening a result of His victorious redemptive work, because at the time of winning the victory the result was only anticipated. It is also better to see the opening as a purpose of rather than what constitutes the victory, because the significance of the opening of the seals is far-reaching, including also the implementation of what is revealed. The opening of the scroll is best seen as the object or purpose of Jesus’ conquest. The reason He won the victory was to enable Him to open this scroll of destiny and its seals and implement God’s purposes throughout the final stages of human history (**Charles**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What a privilege to live in a time when the secrets of God’s kingdom plan – His ultimate victory over all evil forces -- have been revealed for us to see and understand.
- 2) Admitting our unworthiness before our Creator and Lord is a crucial step towards acknowledging His ultimate sovereignty and majesty as King of kings and Lord of lords.
- 3) Does Jesus command us to stop weeping and expressing frustration and instead trust in the unfolding of His plan for the end times?
- 4) How do these titles of Jesus relate to His end time mission?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Craig Keener: But here the central paradox of Revelation and of Christian faith in general comes to the fore: Jesus conquered not by force but by death, not by violence but by martyrdom. **The Lion is a Lamb!** Regularly in ancient literature, lions functioned as images of great strength—the courageous, powerful rulers of the animal kingdom (cf. **Rev. 9:8, 17; 10:3**). Even Jewish texts use the image of a lion for courage and power in general more often than specifically for the Messiah. John turns, expecting to witness a powerful hero. Yet the Lamb, by contrast, provides an image of helplessness. Lambs were the most vulnerable of sheep, and sheep were among the weakest of creatures, typically contrasted with predators.

Most significantly for John, this is a slaughtered lamb, a **sacrificed lamb**. Plagues will fall on the disobedient world (**Rev. 6–16**), but just as the blood of the Passover lamb delivered Israel from the climactic plague (**Ex. 12:23**), so Jesus' blood will protect his people during God's judgments on humanity (**Rev. 7:3**). Jesus' victory is like a new exodus (**5:9–10; 15:3**), and Jesus himself is the new Lamb (cf. **1 Cor. 5:7**).

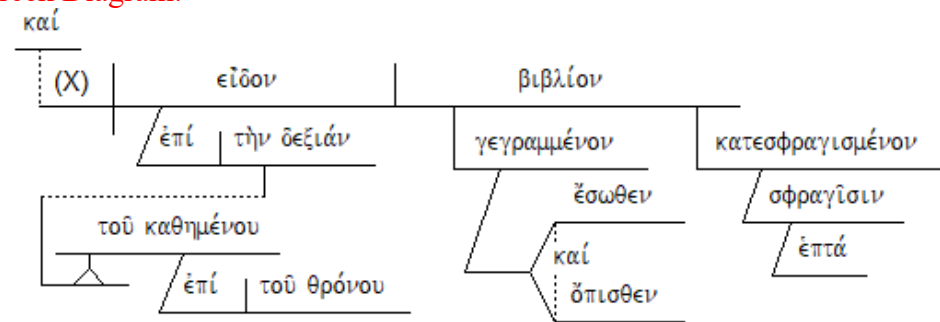
G.K. Beale: The book is thus best understood as containing God's plan of judgment and redemption, which has been set in motion by Christ's death and resurrection but has yet to be completed. The question of the angelic spokesman concerns who in the created order has sovereign authority over this plan. That the book represents authority in executing the divine plan of judgment and redemption is clear from the parallelism of the hymns in **5:9–10** and **5:12**. The former interprets Christ's worthiness to receive the book as indicating His authority to redeem His people and establish them as kings and priests. The latter hymn (**5:12**) interprets the Lamb's reception of the "*book*" mentioned in **vv. 9–10** more generally as His reception of "*power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing*," thus showing that His receiving the book has given Him sovereign power. The first hymn points to the book being a testament or will which contains an inheritance to be received, which is then interpreted as sovereign power in the hymn of **v. 12**.

Charles Swindoll: Clearly, the scroll in **Revelation 5** would reveal the events of the future Tribulation. The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel had a similar scroll presented to him, "*written on the front and back*," in which were recorded "*lamentations, mourning and woe*" (**Ezek. 2:9–10**). In light of the allusion to the legal documents of the ancient world, we may conclude that the events of coming judgment were a means to a glorious end. As the scroll is opened, Jesus Christ receives His inheritance as the Son of God (**Rom. 8:17; Jas. 2:5**). Furthermore, the scroll suggests the image of a title deed, demonstrating Christ's ownership of the world that was created by the Father through the Son (**John 1:1–3**). Taken together, Revelation 4 and 5 reveal both themes, the world's ownership by the Father and Son and the saints' inheritance and rule with Christ (**Rev. 4:11; 5:9–14**).

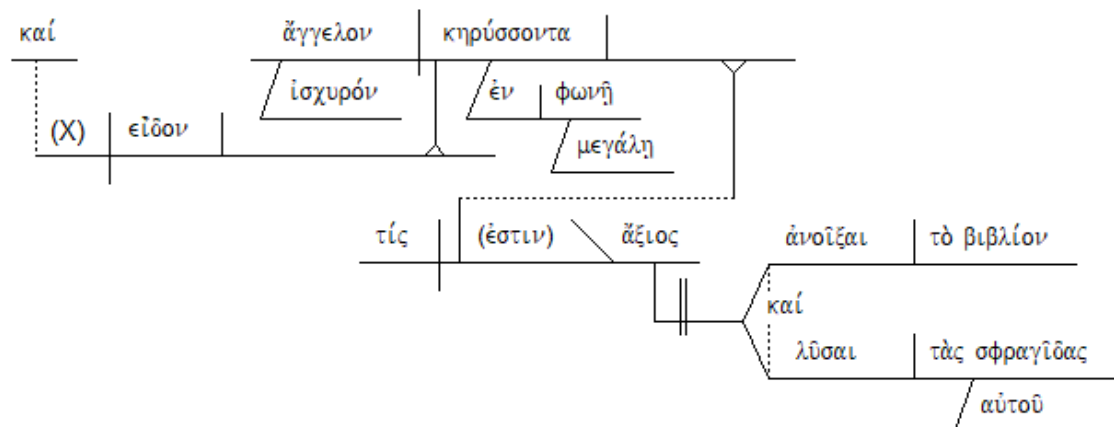
Grant Osborne: The exalted majesty of God in **chapter 4** leads to the exaltation of the Lamb, also at "*the center of the throne*" (**5:6**) and also celebrated in worship (**5:8–14**). The unity of God and the Lamb is obviously a major emphasis of these two chapters. As **Bauckham** (1993a: 58–63; 1993b: 133–40) brings out, worship throughout the Bible is completely monotheistic, intended to separate God from his creatures (the worship of whom constitutes idolatry). Even angels refuse worship (**19:10; 22:8–9**). In these two chapters the worship of God (**4:8–11**) leads to the worship of the Lamb (**5:8–12**), and this in turn leads to the worship of God and the Lamb by the whole of creation (**5:13**). **It is clear that God and the Lamb are one (John 10:30).**

Leedy Greek Diagram:

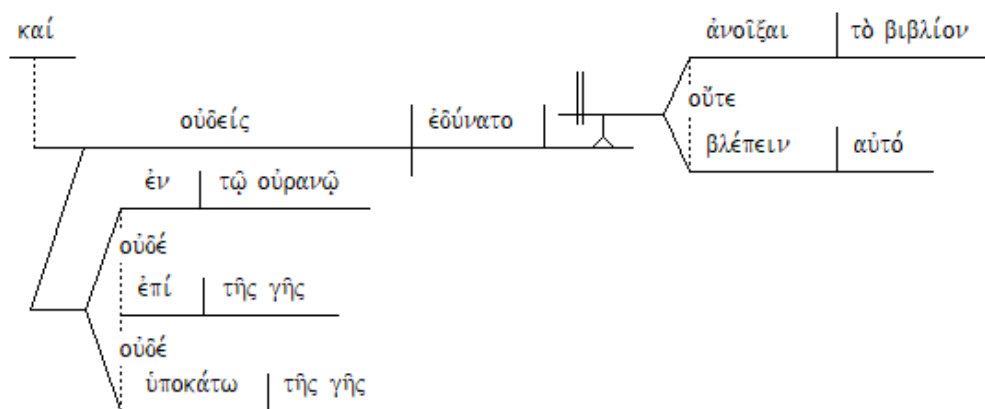
Rev 5:1



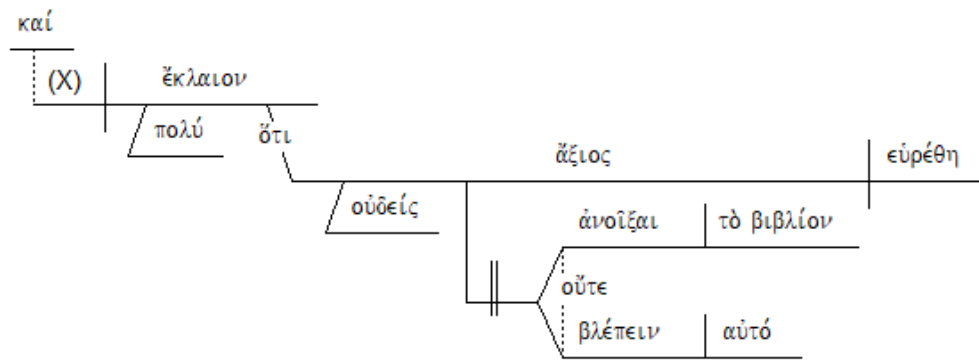
Rev 5:2



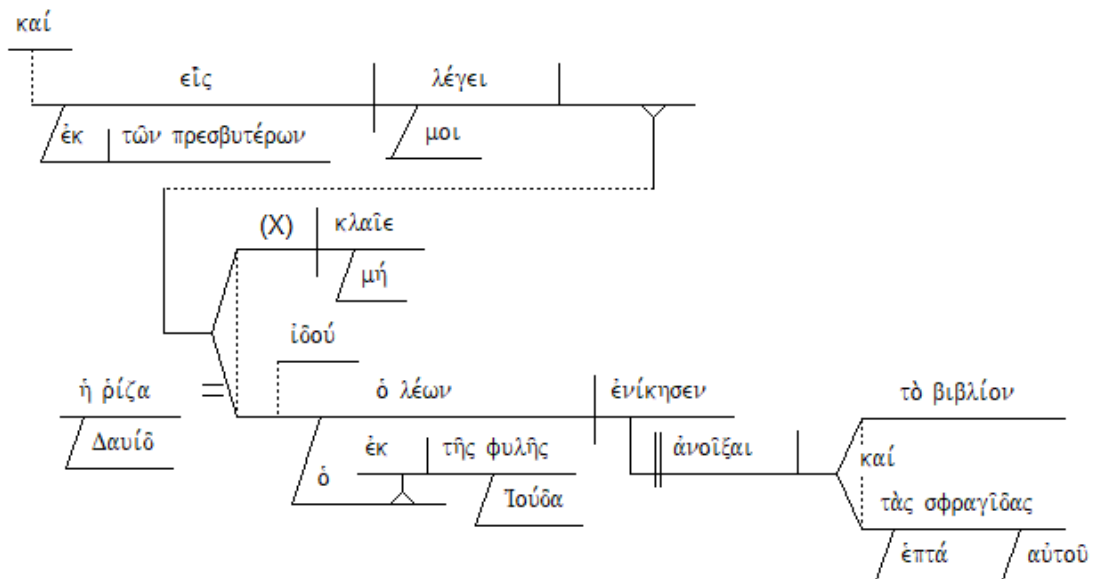
Rev 5:3



Rev 5:4



Rev 5:5



TEXT: Revelation 5:6-10

TITLE: THE SLAIN LAMB IS WORTHY

BIG IDEA:

THE SLAIN LAMB RECEIVES WORSHIP AND PRAISE FOR BEING WORTHY TO OPEN THE SCROLL OF END TIME REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The third καὶ εἶδον (*kai eidon, then I saw*) after **5:1, 2** leads into the centerpiece of the whole chapter. Because **5:5** is grammatically linked to **5:2–4**, we must place **5:6** in the next section; but in reality the two verses are inextricably linked. When John looks further, he sees ἀρνίον ἑστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον (*arnion hestēkos hōs esphagmenon, a Lamb standing as if slain*). This is one of the most beautiful mixed metaphors in all the Bible—the lion (**5:5**) is a lamb! The direction of the transformation is very important; the final stage is the lamb, not the lion. The paragraph of **5:6–10** tells how the lion of Judah has conquered, not through military power (though that will come) but through **paschal sacrifice**. . . It is impossible to overstate the magnificent transformation in **5:5–6**: the lion is transformed into a lamb that becomes the slain paschal lamb that is again transformed into the conquering ram (the seven horns)! There is even a certain chiasm: lion—lamb—slain lamb—conquering ram.

John MacArthur: The appearance of the Lamb as He moves to take the scroll causes praise to break out from everywhere in the universe. The praise accelerates in an ascending crescendo of worship as the oratorio of redemption reaches its climax. To the two majestic doxologies of **chapter 4** are added three more in **chapter 5**. The spontaneous outburst of worship results from the realization that the long-anticipated defeat of sin, death, and Satan is about to be accomplished and the Lord Jesus Christ will return to earth in triumph and establish His glorious millennial kingdom. The curse will be reversed, the believing remnant of Israel will be saved, and the church will be honored, exalted, and granted the privilege of reigning with Christ. All of the pent-up anticipation of millennia finally bursts out at the prospect of what is about to take place. . . **Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse** once observed that there are four things out of place in the universe: the church, which should be in heaven; Israel, which should be living in peace occupying all the land promised to her; Satan, who belongs in the lake of fire; and Christ, who should be seated on His throne reigning. All four of those anomalies will be set right when Christ takes the scroll from His Father's hand.

Gordon Fee: These are the kinds of moments that should give any interpreter reason for pause, since these words hardly need commentary, but rather affirmation and acclamation. Readers of this passage who themselves fail to join in with the heavenly host are listening to the text only cerebrally, and not with the exhilaration intended by John, so that his readers are themselves drawn into the heavenly scene as part of the worship. Indeed the reader who fails in the present to enter into the heavenly worship, which for them is still to come, will have missed John's purpose by several leagues. John's original readers may indeed be excused if they held back in joining the worship noted in our **chapter 4**, but they will have little excuse for holding back here. Whatever may be the present circumstances in the seven churches immediately in purview, here they are being drawn to join in the worship being described.

Daniel Akin: When we come to **verse 6**, we encounter an enigma in the drama of redemption. We are not prepared for what we see. We have been told to look for the Lion from the tribe of Judah and the Root of David. We are looking for a great and mighty King. This, however, is not what we see in the surprising story of salvation. John is slow and dramatic in his presentation. He builds suspense! We are not disappointed in what unfolds.

I. (:6-7) VISION OF THE SLAIN LAMB

A. (:6) Apparition of the Slain Lamb

1. Location of the Slain Lamb

“And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders”

Robert Thomas: the Lamb stood in the center of all the beings named (**Charles**).

Warren Wiersbe: Jesus is in heaven. He is not in the manger, in Jerusalem, on the cross, or in the tomb. He is ascended and exalted in heaven. What an encouragement this is to suffering Christians, to know that their Savior has defeated every enemy and is now controlling events from glory! He too suffered, but God turned His suffering into glory.

But where is Christ in heaven? He is *in the midst*. The Lamb is the center of all that transpires in heaven. All creation centers in Him (the four living creatures), as do all of God’s people (the elders). The angels around the throne encircle the Savior and praise Him.

2. Paradox of the Slain Lamb

“a Lamb standing, as if slain,”

Buist Fanning: This constitutes the most dramatic surprise of the vision: John hears about the victorious regal Lion, but when he turns to look, he sees a sacrificed Lamb. As noted above, this is completely contrary to expectations. It compels deeper consideration and raises the issue of how exactly Christ accomplished God’s purpose and showed himself worthy above all others.

Robert Thomas: A slain lamb is perfectly appropriate to the intended paradox. On one hand, the elder has described this Person as the lion of the tribe of Judah (**5:5**), depicting **supreme power**. On the other, His appearance is that of “*a lamb standing as having been slain*,” which speaks of **supreme self-sacrifice** (**Swete**). These figures draw attention to the unique characteristics combined in the life of Christ. His supreme self-sacrifice leads to His supreme power, so there is no contradiction between the two (**Charles**).

Richard Phillips: We know from experience that a person is usually either lionlike, strong and dominating, or lamblike, meek in servanthood. But Christ joins these virtues in perfect balance and harmony. In a sermon titled “*The Excellency of Christ*,” **Jonathan Edwards** marveled at this combination of apparent contradictions. Christ “is thus above all, yet He is lowest of all in humility. . . . In the person of Christ meet together infinite majesty and transcendent meekness.”⁸ As the Lion, Jesus wields God’s sovereign power to rule. As the Lamb, he exercises a spirit of obedience. Jesus, alone among all mankind, could declare: “*I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love*” (**John 15:10**). Jesus is thus worthy as true God and perfect Man, Lion and Lamb, Lord and Servant.

Daniel Akin: He Is Victorious Because He Is Standing (5:6)

“*Slaughtered*” speaks of His death. “*Standing*” speaks of His resurrection. This word is also in the perfect tense. There is permanence to the resurrection. There was a day when His dead body got up and left the tomb, and it will never die again! Jesus of Nazareth began to stand in resurrection life at a point and time in history, He stands today, and He will stand forever.

3. Characteristics of the Slain Lamb -- Omnipotent and Omniscient

*“having seven horns and seven eyes,
which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.”*

Grant Osborne: the Lamb is described as having “*seven horns*,” and this theme is stressed in the military function of the Lamb in **6:16; 17:14**. In short, in Revelation the Lamb of God has two aspects, the sacrificial lamb and the military ram, and they are interconnected, standing at the heart of the book and depicting the two sides of God’s activity, his mercy and his justice. As **Aune** (1997: 368–73) traces the background behind the lamb image, he argues that there are two primary motifs: the lamb as a metaphor for a leader or ruler, and the lamb as a sacrificial metaphor. It is clear that the two are combined here.

William Barclay: In the Old Testament, the horn stands for two things.

First, it stands for **sheer power**. In the blessing of Moses, the horns of Joseph are like the horns of a wild ox, and with them he will drive the people to the ends of the earth (**Deuteronomy 33:17**). Zedekiah, the prophet, made iron horns as a sign of promised triumph over the Syrians (**1 Kings 22:11**). The wicked are warned: ‘*Do not lift up your horn*’ (**Psalms 75:4**). Zechariah sees the vision of the four horns which stand for the nations who have scattered Israel (**Zechariah 1:18**).

Second, it stands for **honour**. It is the confidence of the psalmist that in the favour of God our horn shall be exalted (**Psalms 89:17**). The horn of the good shall be exalted with honour (**Psalms 112:9**). God exalts the horn of his people (**Psalms 148:14**).

We must add still another strand to this picture. In the time between the Testaments, the great heroes of Israel were the Maccabees; they were the great warriors who were the liberators of the nations; and they are represented as horned lambs (1 Enoch 90:9).

Robert Thomas: In the OT the horn is a symbol of strength or power. As a Hebrew metaphor, it occurs in **Num. 23:22** and **Deut 33:17** (cf. also **1 Sam. 2:1; 2 Sam. 22:3; 1 Kings 22:11; Ps. 75:4; 132:17; Dan. 7:20-21; 8:5**). In the later books of the OT it symbolizes dynastic force or kingly dignity and is thus used in the Apocalypse several times (cf. **Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 12**). The horns are seven in number, indicating the fullness of Christ’s power, because seven is the perfect number. The Lamb with seven horns is, then, an all-powerful warrior and king.

The interpretation of the symbol that takes the eyes as representing sight, intelligence, and wisdom in their fullness, in other words, omniscience, is preferable. This brings out more clearly the Zecharian emphasis upon the eyes of the Lord that range to and fro throughout the earth. Nothing escapes the notice of the Lamb. Not only is He **omnipotent**, as indicated by His seven horns, He is also **omniscient**.

Van Parunak: An animal with seven horns would have **all power**. No one can stand against the judgment that this Lamb will bring.

But power alone is not sufficient to judge. So is an understanding of the facts of the case, and the Lamb bears this qualification as well. . .

Kendell Easley: In **Revelation 4:5**, the seven spirits of God (the Holy Spirit) had already appeared as blazing lamps in close connection to the Lord God Almighty on his throne (God the Father). Now the same Holy Spirit appears in equally close connection to the slaughtered Lamb (God the Son). This text, along with others in the New Testament, became the basis for the Christian theological statement that **the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son**. The Holy Spirit was sent out into all the earth by the Lord Jesus beginning on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 1:8; 2:4; 10:44**).

B. (:7) Activity of the Slain Lamb = Taking the Scroll of Judgment from the Father

“And He came, and He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”

Grant Osborne: Due to his sacrifice on the cross, only the Lamb is “*worthy*” to take the scroll. The emphasis is on the shift from God to the Lamb, who will now execute the divinely mandated plan. Opening the scroll means the judgment of the world and the vindication of the saints.

Robert Thomas: By permitting the Lamb to take the scroll, the one sitting upon the throne authorizes Him in a symbolic way to execute His plan for the redemption of the world. The Lamb and only the Lamb is qualified to do this because of His victorious death on the cross and the redemption secured thereby (**Johnson**). In other words, the exchange of the scroll from the Father to the Lamb fulfills **Rev. 1:1**, “*the revelation ... which God gave Him to show*” (**Beckwith**).

G.K. Beale: The Lamb now approaches the throne and takes the book from God (He took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne), even as the Son of man came before God in **Dan. 7:13-14** and received authority to rule over all the nations of the earth. The resurrected and ascended Lamb takes His seat beside the Father (**3:21**) and begins to rule. More precisely, He exercises the Father’s reign which has now been handed over to Him, as **6:1-8** shows (and as elsewhere in the NT, e.g., **Acts 2:32-36; 1 Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:20-22; Heb. 1:1-5**).

James Hamilton: Crucified, dead, buried, raised, now he assertively takes the reins of history. That’s what this symbolizes. Jesus takes the scroll that describes the events of the end, whereby all the wrongs will be set right, all injustices accounted for, all crimes avenged. He takes it from the right hand of the Father, and the Father doesn’t resist him, the four living creatures don’t object, and the twenty-four elders do not stand in his way. This symbolic action shows that Jesus has taken control of history.

Jesus is the central figure in the history of humanity. He is without question the most important person who has ever lived. He is King. He is Lord. He is the way, the truth, and the life, and he has taken the scroll. Jesus controls your destiny. He controls the destiny of every individual on the planet.

And the response to this action that begins in **5:8** and continues through the rest of the chapter should be our response: the worship of Jesus. The four living creatures, the twenty-four elders,

and “*myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands*” (v. 11) join with every creature to declare the rightful praise of the world’s true King.

II. (:8-10) WORSHIP OF THE SLAIN LAMB

A. (:8) Physical Demonstration of Worship

1. The Normal Response of Worship Is Inward and Outward Prostration

*“And when He had taken the book,
the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb,”*

Robert Thomas: When the Lamb took the book, the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell before Him in worship (**Swete**). His taking of the scroll marks the initiation of proceedings to convert its contents into reality and eventually usher in the promised kingdom, the determined opposition of all foes notwithstanding. This is more than sufficient to evoke overflowing praise from this heavenly company (**Lenski**).

G.R. Beasley-Murray: We are evidently expected to understand that on receiving the scroll the Lamb took his seat on the throne with God (cf. **3:21**). The enthronement-ceremony, therefore, now reaches its climax. Having taken his place on the throne with God, the Lamb receives the worship of heaven.

2. Music and Prayer Are Important Elements of Worship

a. Significance of Music

“having each one a harp,

Robert Thomas: The musical instrument of the elders, *kitharan* (“a harp”), is the traditional one associated with psalmody in the OT. It, like the lyre, is associated with joy and gladness (cf. **1 Chron. 25:1, 6; 2 Chron. 29:25; Pss. 71:22; 92:3; 149:3**) (**Swete; Bullinger**). It also is regularly connected with prophecy (cf. **1 Sam. 10:5; 1 Chron. 25:3; Ps. 49:4**). More than any other musical instrument, the harp is employed in Scripture in direct praise and worship of God (**Scott**). Later in the Apocalypse, it is used to describe celestial music in **14:2** and **15:2** (**Swete; Ladd**).

Kendell Easley: The harp in ancient times was a hand-held stringed instrument, functioning in those days much like a guitar does in modern times.

David Thompson: The two praise themes for which the harp was used:

- 1) Israel’s enemies would one day be destroyed (**Ps. 33:10, 19-20**).
- 2) Israel’s prosperity and blessings would one day exist (**Ps. 33:12**).

b. Significance of Prayer

“and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”

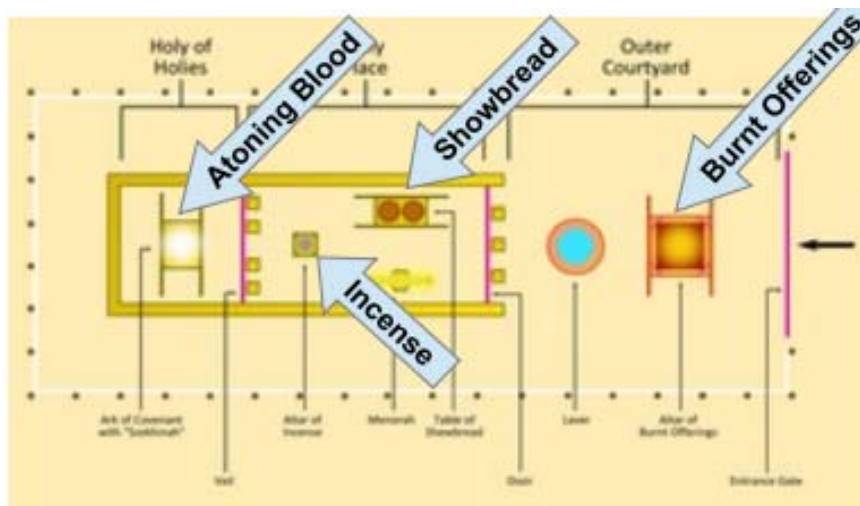
Robert Thomas: The grounds are better for seeing them as specific prayers of saints from this future time of trial—prayers that seek the sending forth of judgment and the inauguration of Christ’s kingdom (cf. **Luke 18:7-8**). The connection of similar prayers with the vindication of martyrs of this future time in **8:3-5** argues for such specificity. A reference to the coming reign of the saints in **5:10** lends support from the immediate context (**Johnson**). In **6:10**, the martyrs

petition God for His judgment on their murderers. This adds to the case for restricting these prayers to specific goals of vindication (**Johnson**).

Kendell Easley: These bowls were shallow or saucer-like. Billowing incense was offered at the Israelites' tabernacle (**Exod. 30:7**). David the psalmist compared his prayers rising to God to the smoke of incense: “*May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice*” (**Ps. 141:2**). The same symbolism is developed in **Revelation 8:3–4**. The point, of course, is that when saints on earth praise and pray to Christ, their worship is received by Christ in heaven. Scripture constantly teaches that the prayers of God's people impact the throne of heaven, but here is a vivid, visual representation of this truth.

Van Parunak: In the OT, this fragrant composition was burned on a special altar in the holy place, right before the Holy of Holies.

Diagram of the Jewish Tabernacle:



Consider how this daily offering of incense ranks in terms of proximity to the Lord.

- Most animal sacrifices were made at the brazen altar in the outer courtyard. This would include the offering of the passover lambs.
- In the holy place, the showbread on the north side, changed weekly (Lev 24:5-8) was closer than the brazen altar. • The closest piece of furniture to the ark of the covenant was the golden altar, where the priests offered incense each day (Exod 30:7, 8).
- Only the blood of the day of atonement came closer to the Lord, and that only once a year.

Thus the incense was the frequent offering that the Lord ordained to be closest to him, suggesting that it brings him **special pleasure**. . .

It is most consistent with the context to see the elders, representative of the people of God, bringing incense in the form of prayer to God—their own prayers.

Donald Barnhouse: Today, prayer consists of confession, intercession, and worship. When we confess we are occupied with our sins; when we intercede, we are occupied with human needs, ours and others' but when we worship we are occupied with Him alone. The day will come when

prayer will be emptied of its need of confession. There will be no more laver. Prayer will be emptied of its need for intercession. There will be nothing remaining but that which may be symbolized under the bowls of incense, and all our prayer shall be **praise** and **worship**.

B. (:9-10) Verbal Demonstration of Worship

1. (:9a) Singing a New Song

“And they sang a new song, saying,”

Grant Osborne: The leaders of angelic worship (the living creatures and elders) ἄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν (*adousin ōdēn kainēn, sing a new song*) in **5:9**. The idea of a “*new song*” to celebrate the sovereignty and worthiness of God is frequent in the Psalms (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1), where it expresses a new worship inspired by the mercies of God. In **Isa. 42:10**, however, the “*new song*” is eschatological and connected to the appearance of the “*servant of Yahweh*” and the “*new things*” (**Rev. 5:9**) God was about to introduce. In **14:3** the “*new song*” is linked to the coming of the final kingdom, and here the new song celebrates the basis of God’s final act, the sacrificial death of the Lamb. The use of καινός (eight times in the book) rather than νέος (not found in this book) stresses the **qualitative** rather than the temporal, that is, it is **new in kind**. This is the adjective used of the “*New Jerusalem*” and the “*new heaven and new earth*” throughout the book. For the “*new*” age soon to appear, there is a “*new*” kind of song to celebrate its coming.

Charles Swindoll: Notice that the cherubim and elders sang a “*new song*.” This was a chorus never heard before (**Rev. 5:9**): fresh lyrics, a fresh melody, a fresh experience of worship. Now look at the purposes for their praise in **5:9-10**. In **chapter 4** the four living creatures and twenty-four elders praised God for His work of creation (**4:11**). In chapter 5 they praised Christ for His work of redemption.

2. (:9b) Seranading a Worthy Savior

“Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals;”

Kendell Easley: The first line of the song answers directly the question of **verse 2**, “*Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?*”

Robert Thomas: first word of the song, *axios* (“*worthy*”), captures the theme of the whole song, the worthiness of the Lamb to receive the scroll and open its seals (cf. 5:4-5). It is significant that here Christ is addressed as worthy in the same manner as the Father was in **4:11** (*axios ei, “You are worthy”*) (cf. also **5:12**) (**Sweet**). He who takes the scroll and puts its contents into effect exercises the divine function of judgment and sovereignty. **He too is God** (**Beasley-Murray**).

3. (:9c-10) Specifying the Specific Blessings Secured by the Slain Lamb

a. (:9c) Blessing of Redemption

“for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

Richard Phillips: The Greek word (*agorazo*) has the general meaning of purchasing, but often had the specific connotation of **ransoming a prisoner or slave out of bondage**. Here we see the essence of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross: at the cost of his own blood, which evidenced his death, Jesus delivered his people from the bondage and condemnation of sin.

Many writers, especially in the early church, envisioned Jesus as paying a ransom to Satan. This is a mistaken idea, however, since the devil never had the true right to possess God's people. Rather, Jesus made payment to the justice of God, which demanded death as the penalty for sin (**Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23**). Jesus foretold that "*the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (**Matt. 20:28**). Paul therefore wrote, "*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses*" (**Eph. 1:7**).

Warren Wiersbe: The word translated *slain* means "*violently slain*" (**Rev. 5:6**). Heaven sings about the cross and the blood! I read about a denomination that revised its official hymnal and removed all songs about the blood of Christ. That hymnal could never be used in heaven, because there they glorify the Lamb slain for the sins of the world.

Craig Keener: an audience immersed in the Old Testament would be most struck by the fact that this new act of redemption encompassed **believers from all peoples**. John's fourfold formula describing all peoples ("*tribe and language and people and nation*") occurs in varying sequences seven times in Revelation and matches a threefold formula that occurs six times in Daniel (**Dan. 3:4 [cf. LXX here], 7; 4:1; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14**). Daniel announced the rule of the Son of Man over all these peoples (**7:14**), and John sees a literal fulfillment of this promise in the church.

Robert Mounce: The Lamb is worthy to open the book for three reasons:

1. he was slain (a historical fact),
2. he purchased people for God (the interpretation of that fact),
3. and he made them to be a kingdom and priests (the result of the fact).

That the same ascription of worth is directed both to the One upon the throne (**4:11**) and to the Lamb (**5:9**) indicates the exalted Christology of the Apocalypse.

The worthiness of the Lamb does not at this point stem from his essential being, but from his great act of redemption.

b. (:10) Blessing of Elevated Status of Priests and Rulers

"And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

Robert Thomas: As God's possession, the redeemed will not merely be God's people over whom He reigns, but will also share God's rule in the coming millennial kingdom (cf. **1 Cor. 4:8; 6:3**) (**Charles; Ladd**). This kingdom is the goal toward which the program of God is moving as emphasized by *basileusousin* ("*they shall reign*") later in v. 10 (cf. **Rev. 20:4**). The idea of priesthood found in *hiereis* ("*priests*") means full and immediate access into God's presence for the purpose of praise and worship (**Ladd**). It also includes the thought of priestly service to God (**Mounce**). Though believers are currently viewed as a royal priesthood (**1 Pet. 2:5, 9**; cf. **Ex. 19:6**), this is only preliminary to the fullness of the way they will function alongside Christ in the millennial kingdom.

Van Parunak: We have access to heaven, where we are now seated with Christ, but our proper domain of activity is **the earth**, first during the Millennium, and then through eternity when God creates a new heaven and a new earth.

The transition from *we* to *they*, marking the shift from the elders to the living creatures, shows how our praise as the redeemed starts a **cascade of worship** that continues through the chapter.

Richard Phillips: The elders' song teaches a salvation **theology of restoration**. Adam was placed into the garden to be king and priest in service to God, but lost this office through his fall into sin. Israel in the exodus was established by God to be "*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*" (**Ex. 19:6**). Israel's calling was to live out the rule of God in obedience to his Word and bear a priestly testimony of God to the nations. Instead, the Israelites turned from God's Word to follow the idols of the nations around them. But whereas Adam and Israel failed, Jesus Christ triumphed. Jesus succeeded not only through his own ministry as King of kings and true High Priest, but also in making his church "*a kingdom and priests to our God*" (**Rev. 5:10**). . .

Christ is enthroned, having redeemed us by his blood. We are now a kingdom of priests to serve him on earth. Knowing that the Savior who loved us reigns over all, let us get on with the work he has given us and devote ourselves to the cause of his glory. Let us not be daunted by the winds of earthly change or the vain threats of evil powers against the gospel. Christ is sovereign, reigning over all things for our good. Let us press on in faith with the priestly work of worship, witness, and prayer for the sake of his kingdom of salvation here on earth.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does our evangelism focus on **Jesus crucified** who now rules over all as the Resurrected Redeemer?
- 2) How does this passage elevate the significance of **music** and of **prayer** in our worship?
- 3) How does the Apostle John use suspense and dramatic effect to draw us in to participate in this crescendo of worship and praise?
- 4) Are we too narrowly focused on the health of our own local church to appreciate the global impact of Christ's work of redemption as it is reflected here?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Buist Fanning: The figure of a lamb along with the reference to "*slaughter*" evokes the picture of **sacrificial death**—note how **v. 9** connects the Lamb's slaying to **redemption by means of blood**. But it probably does so by drawing not on a single Old Testament precedent but several. The most important Old Testament models evoked here are the Passover Lamb of **Exodus 12:1–24** (slain so that its blood could be applied to the door to avert judgment) and the Suffering Servant of **Isaiah 53:7** (led like a lamb to the slaughter, within the larger picture of his vicarious suffering in **52:13–53:12**). John's word for "*Lamb*" in Revelation is ἀρνίον (29x, all referring to Christ except **13:11**; the word occurs outside Rev only at **John 21:15**), originally a diminutive ("*little lamb*"; cf. **Ps 114:4, 6 [113:4, 6 LXX]**; **Jer 11:19; 50:45 [27:45 LXX]**) from an older word for lamb, ἄρνης or ἀρνήν (root ἀρν-; cf. **Luke 10:3**), but the diminutive sense seems to have dropped away in the New Testament. The image of a lamb, sheep, or paschal lamb pictures Christ's redemptive sacrifice elsewhere in the New Testament, but the specific words used are

different (ἄμνός in **John 1:29, 36; 1 Pet 1:19**; πρόβατον and ἄμνός in **Acts 8:32**, quoting **Isa 53:7**; and πάσχα in **1 Cor 5:7**).

The initial glimpse of a slain Lamb certainly contrasts with that of the Lion of Judah, descendant of the great King David (**Rev 5:5**). The Lamb's sacrifice, suffering, vulnerability, and weakness even to death in the service of God are all shockingly different from what **v. 5** led us to expect. But as John describes this Lamb further, we discover he is no longer a meek and helpless victim. He is a figure with overwhelming power and divine wisdom (**v. 6c**). The "seven horns," while bizarre in visual terms, represent fullness of strength and authority (cf. "horns" in **Deut 33:17; Pss 18:2; 112:9; Dan 7:7, 20; Rev 12:3; 13:1, 11; 17:3, 7, 12, 16**). The "seven eyes" represent complete wisdom and understanding (e.g., "eye" = insight: **Mark 12:11; Luke 19:42; Eph 1:18**; esp. of divine knowledge, **2 Chr 16:9; Ps 34:15; Prov 15:3; 1 Pet 3:12; Heb 4:13**), but this image is immediately augmented by John's explanation (**v. 6d–e**), "*which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth*" (see similar parenthetical elaboration at the end of **v. 8**). We have already encountered this reference to "seven spirits" in Revelation, said to be "*before [God's] throne*" (**1:4**) and "*of God*" (**3:1; 4:5**), and held by Jesus Christ (**3:1**). There is a clear allusion to **Isaiah 11:2** (cf. **v. 5**, "*shoot of David*," from **Isa 11:1, 10**), noting that the Lord's Spirit, described by seven attributes, will rest on the ideal king from David's line to guide and empower his future rule. The phrase "*sent into all the earth*" alludes to **Zechariah 4:2, 6, 10**, where seven torches represent the seven "*eyes of the Lord that range through the whole earth*," and the Lord acts "*not by might or power but by [his] Spirit*." These seven eyes/spirits represent the fullness of the divine Spirit that rests on Christ as he carries out God's redemptive mission to all the world (cf. the Spirit in **John 1:32–33; 3:34; 14:26; 20:22**).

G.K. Beale: The theme of this chapter is that Christ, as a Lion, overcame by being slaughtered as a Lamb. This is confirmed from **5:9**, where the slaying of the Lamb, together with His redemption of people and establishing them as a "*kingdom and priests*," is a basis for His worthiness and thus also for His overcoming. The phrase *standing as slain* is two Greek perfect participles, which express an **ongoing reality or state**. The Lamb continues to exist as slain to indicate the ongoing victorious effect of His redemptive death. Christ's death — as well as the ongoing sufferings of the church — have been and are continually being turned into victory. The reason John sees the Lion conquering as a slain Lamb is to emphasize the **centrality of the cross**. Christ's overcoming began even before the resurrection through His death. His overcoming is like that of His people: He conquers in the same way in which His people conquer (**3:21**). Whereas in **chs. 1–3** a number of titles are applied more or less equally to Jesus, the predominant title for Him in **chs. 4–22** is "*Lamb*" (27×). It was in an ironic manner that Jesus began to fulfill the OT prophecies of the Messiah's kingdom: strength coming through weakness. Through this vision, believers are reminded that their victory also will only come about as they follow the way of the cross. That is why saints are described as those who "*follow the Lamb wherever He goes*" (**14:4**) and have "*washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb*" (**7:14**). As an innocent victim, He became a representative penal substitute for the sins of His people. While He was suffering the defeat of death, He was also overcoming by creating a kingdom of redeemed subjects over whom He would reign and over whom the devil would no longer have power.

Craig Koester: This scene is a good place to ask again **why Revelation communicates through word pictures** rather than in a more direct way. The Lamb will be the dominant image for Christ throughout the remainder of the book. The image of the Lamb can hardly be said to conceal Christ's identity, as if John had written in a code to keep his message from being understood. The opening lines of the book identified Jesus Christ as the faithful witness, whose blood frees

people from their sins and makes of them a kingdom of priests (**1:5–6**). John could have been as direct here if he had chosen to do so. Rather than concealing meaning, the images reveal meaning **by evoking a range of associations** in the minds of the readers.

Richard Phillips: The question is asked regarding **for whom Christ paid a ransom** with his blood. Universalists reply that Jesus died for everyone, so that all are forgiven even if they refuse to believe in him. This is so utterly contrary to the Bible that no serious Christian can accept it. Others assert that Jesus died for all people equally, offering his blood for their salvation, yet only those who receive this gift in faith benefit from the cross so as to be saved. This view is called general redemption and is associated with Arminian theology. But this also conflicts with **Revelation 5:9**, along with other Bible verses on Christ's redemption. The elders sing that Jesus actually "*ransomed*" those for whom he died, so that they no longer remain in bondage. This can describe only those who are saved. Moreover, they use a definite, not a general, term for the objects of Christ's redeeming work. He did not die for "*every tribe and language and people and nation*," but for "*people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*" (**5:9**).

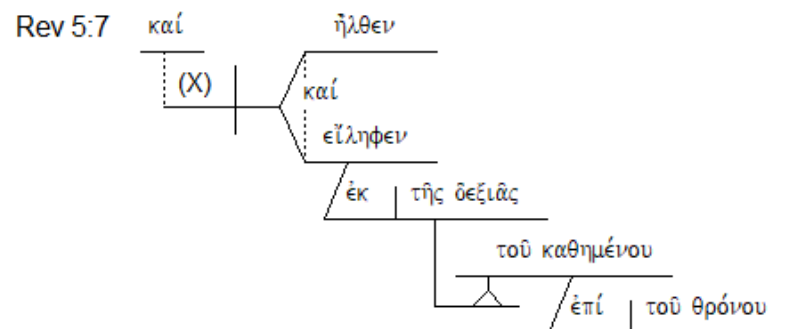
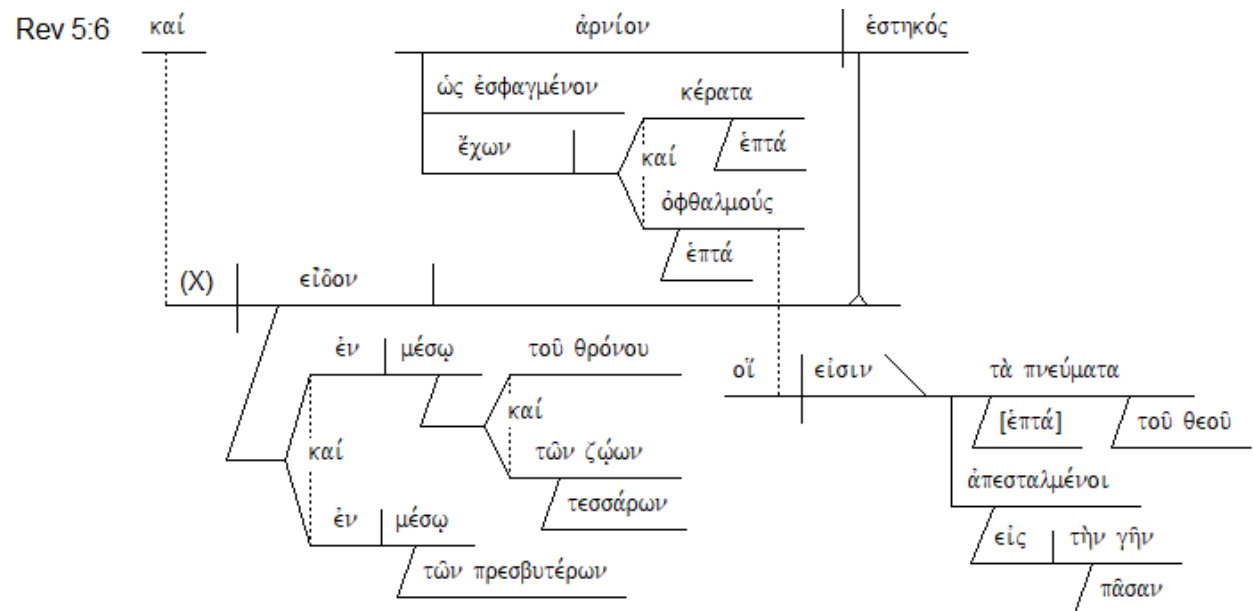
In other words, Christ redeemed particular people from all over the world, that is, the elect. This affirms the Reformed doctrine of **limited atonement**, or **particular redemption**. This doctrine does not state that Christ died to make redemption possible for everyone, if only they will believe, but rather that Christ died particularly for his own people, foreknown and given to him by the Father in eternity past (**John 17:2; Eph. 1:4**), who are actually and effectually redeemed by the blood of Christ paid as their ransom. These same persons go on to believe because the Holy Spirit applies the benefit of their redemption through the gift of saving faith (**Eph. 2:8–9**). **Revelation 5:9** teaches an **effectual redemption** and a ransom that successfully purchases people for God. This argues, therefore, not that Christians are redeemed because we have believed, but rather that we have believed in Christ because by his blood he ransomed us for God.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: It has been frequently recognized that the vision of **chapter 5** gives us a Christian prophet's version of the **enthronement ceremony** known to the ancient world, when its potentates ascended their thrones. Here the king is the Christ, his domain the universe, and his throne the throne of God [cf. **Philippians 2:6–11**]. . . . The steps of the ancient enthronement are commonly described as exaltation, presentation, enthronement. If we apply these to **chapter 5**, the exaltation must be seen in the conquest of the Lamb referred to in **Revelation 5:5**, the presentation in **Revelation 5:6**, and the bestowal of authority in **Revelation 5:7**."

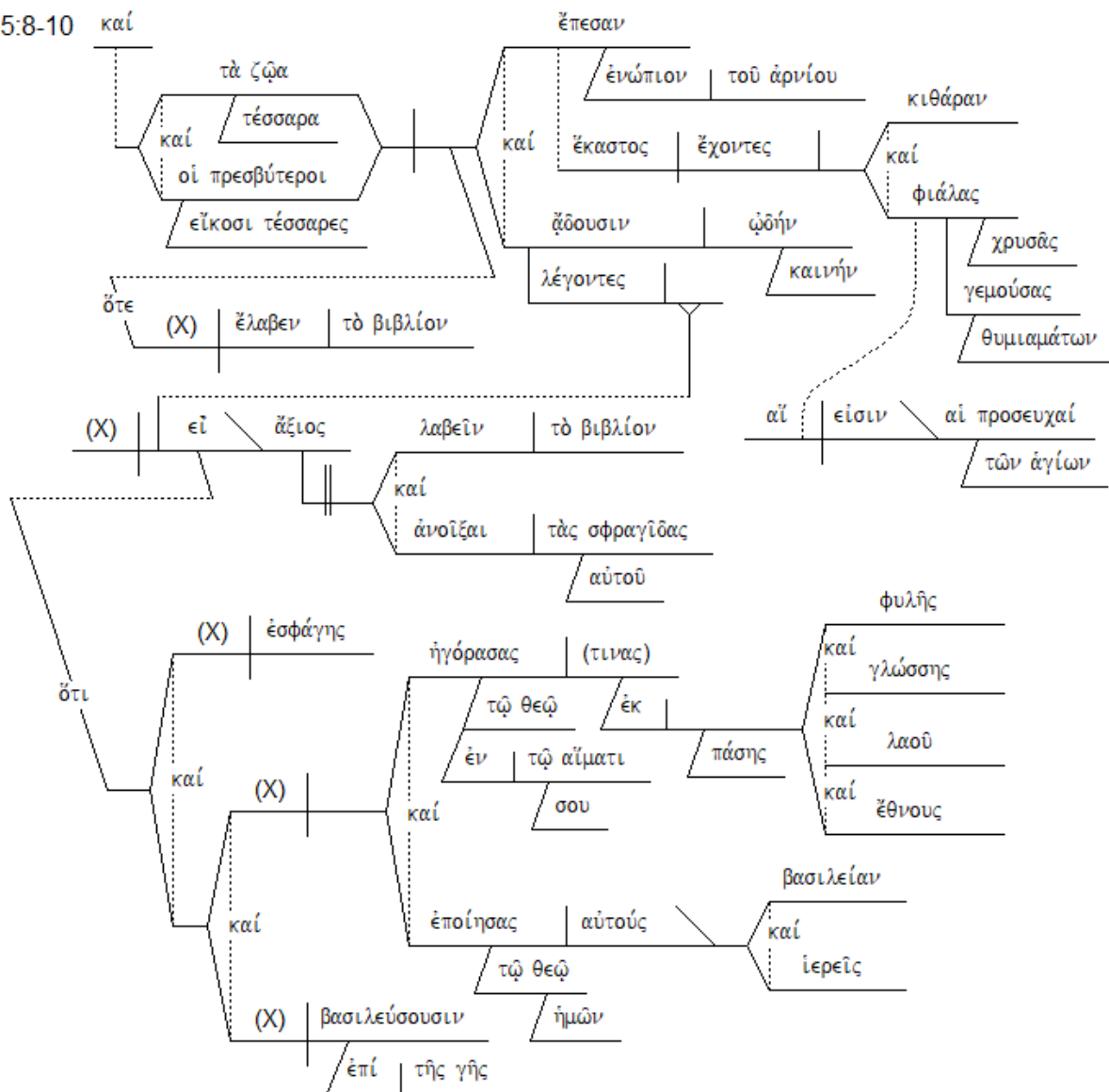
John Schultz: The writing on the scroll is, for the greater part, the content of the Book of Revelation. When Jesus gave to John the revelation of Himself, He revealed Himself, more than anywhere else, in this moment of history. He shows, not primarily, what is going to happen in this world but how it will happen. Everything hinges on the fact that he has come and taken the scroll from the right hand of Him who sits on the throne. It is God who writes down what will happen and the Lamb who makes it happen by opening the seals one by one.

The Lamb's acceptance of the scroll is immediately celebrated with the singing of a psalm or cantata, which is especially composed to celebrate this occasion. Corrie ten Boom thought that Bach would direct the choir of angels in heaven. I want to say a heartfelt "amen" to this! The four living creatures, whose task it is to sing God's glory, throw themselves before the throne in worship before Jesus. The elders, who had placed their crown before the throne of God, come here with musical instruments and incense.

Leedy Greek Diagram:



Rev 5:8-10 καί



TEXT: Revelation 5:11-14

TITLE: EXPANDING CACAPHONY OF PRAISE

BIG IDEA:

ALL OF CREATION UNITES TO WORSHIP THE ENTHRONED GOD AND THE LAMB WHO IS WORTHY TO EXECUTE THE END TIMES KINGDOM AGENDA

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: The words “*and I saw*” make the transition to the fourth phase of John’s vision, where praise to the Lamb and to the Lord God rings out in **ever-widening circles** (vv. 11–14). Here the vision (what John “*saw*”) focuses immediately on the sounds he experienced (“*and I heard*”; cf. 6:1; 8:13) as he witnessed this overwhelming heavenly scene. He heard “*the sound of many angels*” adding their praises to the Lamb (vv. 11b–12). Here a vast host of angels (not seen before in the vision of chs. 4–5) joins itself to the company of the living creatures and elders (cf. 4:8–11; 5:8–10) in giving worship to the Lamb.

Warren Wiersbe: In this closing burst of praise, all the angels and every creature in the universe joined together to worship the Redeemer. What a cascade of harmony John heard! In this hymn, they stated those things that Jesus Christ deserved to receive because of His sacrificial death on the cross. When He was on earth, people did not ascribe these things to Him, for many of these things He deliberately laid aside in His humiliation.

He was born in weakness and died in weakness, but He is the recipient of all power. He became the poorest of the poor (2 Cor. 8:9), and yet He owns all the riches of heaven and earth. Men laughed at Him and called Him a fool, yet He is the very wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24; Col. 2:3).

He shared in the sinless weaknesses of humanity as He hungered, thirsted, and became weary. Today in glory, He possesses all strength. On earth, He experienced humiliation and shame as sinners ridiculed and reviled Him. They laughed at His kingship and attired Him in a mock robe, crown, and scepter. But all of that is changed now! He has received all honor and glory!

And blessing! He became a curse for us on the cross (Gal. 3:13), so that we can never be under the curse of the broken law. (Some translations read “praise” instead of “blessing,” but the Greek word carries both meanings.) He is worthy of all praise! . . .

All of heaven’s praise came because the Lamb took the scroll from the Father’s hand. God’s great eternal plan would now be fulfilled and creation would be set free from the bondage of sin and death. One day the Lamb will break the seals and put in motion events that will eventually lead to His coming to earth and the establishment of His kingdom.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The emphasis of these verses is clearly **worship**, recognizing the worthiness of the Lamb to take the book, open its seals, and pour out its judgments. But a further emphasis is the **unified expression** of worship. No one is preoccupied with themselves or with people. All attention is on the Lamb. No one is occupied with protecting their frail egos or vying for attention or worried about his position or praise, as we see in **Luke 22** with the disciples. No one is seeking to promote their hidden agendas, for none now exist.

Richard Phillips: **Revelation 5** concludes with the entirety of creation responding to the adoration of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders by welling up in worship to God and the Lamb.

Kendell Easley: MAIN IDEA review: Worthy to open the Judgment Scroll of destiny, Christ the slaughtered Lamb receives worship from all the heavenly court.

I. (:11-12) SUMMARY OF EXPANDED WORSHIP OF THE SLAIN LAMB

A. (:11) Diverse Multitude of Worshipers

*“And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne
and the living creatures and the elders;
and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,”*

This text supports the identification of the “elders” as the representative leaders of both the Old and New Testament economies; otherwise the catalog of God’s created beings who combine in this cacophony of worship would not have any redeemed participants. If the angels and even animals are prominently represented, certainly the redeemed people of God should be as well.

Van Parunak: Two more groups imitate the living creatures in following the lead of the elders in **v. 10**: a much larger company of angels in heaven, and all creatures not only in heaven but also on earth.

Grant Osborne: a clear allusion to **Dan. 7:10** (where “thousand” precedes “myriad” in both the MT and LXX, the more usual order) describing the **infinite number** of the heavenly host that attend God. A “myriad” is the highest number known to the Greco-Roman world (about ten thousand). The mention of an innumerable host of angels occurs often in the OT (**Deut. 33:2; Job 25:3; Ps. 68:17; 89:7; Dan. 7:10**) and intertestamental literature (1 Enoch 14.22–23; 40.1; 2 Bar. 48.10; 2 Esdr. [4 Ezra] 8:21–22). This adds beauty and power to the worship scene, stressing even more the incomparable majesty and splendor of God on his throne.

B. (:12) Doxology of Praise to the Slain Lamb

“saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive’”

John MacArthur: Once again, the emphasis is on Christ’s death providing a perfect redemption, because of which He must be given worship, praise, and adoration.

Buist Fanning: This ascription of virtues (**4:9, 11; 5:12–13**) is a form of **doxology**, glorifying or honoring someone for their status by reciting various perfections they possess (the speaker does not bestow these qualities but acknowledges them). David’s acclamation of the Lord in **1 Chronicles 29:10–11** is a likely influence on the doxology in **v. 12**, since two of the key terms are repeated from the LXX wording (δύναμις and ισχύς), and two others are cognates or near synonyms (“blessed/blessing” and “pride/ glory”). It is christologically significant that ascriptions of praise in Revelation are offered to God alone (**4:9, 11; 7:12; 19:1**), to God and to the Lamb (**5:13**), or to Christ alone (**1:6; 5:12**).

Here the list of attributes and privileges (**v. 12b**) is **sevenfold** (as in **7:12**, symbolizing completeness of virtue). While the composite impression of such a list is important, the individual qualities are worth noticing briefly as well.

Grant Osborne: The seven can be further divided into a pattern of four celebrating the attributes of Christ (power, wealth, wisdom, strength) and three celebrating the worship due him as a result (honor, glory, praise).

1. “power”

Buist Fanning: A paradoxical one to ascribe to the Lamb is power, capability (δύναμις). It is frequently attributed to God and seems especially connected with sovereign rule and victory (cf. **5:5**) over all enemies (**1 Chr 29:11**; **Mark 13:26**; **1 Cor 1:24**; **Rev 4:11**; **7:12**; **19:1**; also **11:17**; **12:10**; **15:8**).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: *Power* (jdunamis) is mentioned first perhaps because the immediate situation calls for the need of great power to accomplish His purposes in the earth. He alone, as the perfect God-man Savior is worthy of such power for He alone will and can use it with perfect justice and equity (**Isa. 11**).

2. “and riches”

Buist Fanning: Wealth, riches (πλοῦτος) is a way of celebrating the vast resources of God and the benefits Christ can bestow on his followers (**1 Chr 29:11**; cf. **Eph 3:8**; **Phil 4:19**).

Grant Osborne: Πλοῦτον (*plouton, wealth*) is found only here in the book as a worship attribute. The key to its use may well lie in the only other place the term appears, **18:17**, in the funeral dirge mourning the destruction of the “wealth” of the “great city” Babylon/Rome. Throughout the OT and NT there is a general warning against the riches of this world and a call to seek “*the treasures of heaven*” rather than “*the treasures of earth*” (**Matt. 6:19–21**). The only source of true riches lies in Christ, and the incredible earthly wealth of Rome is soon to disappear.

3. “and wisdom”

Buist Fanning: Wisdom, understanding (σοφία) is a divine perfection bestowed on Christ by the Spirit’s anointing (**Rev 7:12**; cf. **Isa 11:2**; **Rom 11:33**; **1 Cor 1:24**; **Col 2:3**).

Grant Osborne: Σοφίαν (*sophian, wisdom*) is also attributed to God in **Rev. 7:12**. Christ is called “*the wisdom of God*” in **1 Cor. 1:24, 30**, and **Col. 2:3** says “*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*” are hidden in him. The term was used infrequently in the OT to describe God (e.g., **Ps. 104:24**; **Isa. 31:2**; **Jer. 10:12**) and more often to denote the wisdom he gave to chosen leaders like Joseph (**Gen. 41:39**), Joshua (**Deut. 34:9**), Solomon (**1 Kings 3:12**), or Daniel (**Dan. 5:11, 14**). In this book “*wisdom*” points to the God-given ability to interpret the symbols (**Rev. 13:18**; **17:9**). Here the Lamb’s “*wisdom*” speaks of his choice to become the God-ordained sacrifice for the sins of humankind.

William Barclay: Paul calls Jesus Christ “*the wisdom of God*” (**1 Corinthians 1:24**). He has the wisdom to know the secrets of God and the solution of the problems of life.

4. “and might”

Grant Osborne: The *ισχύς* (*ischyn, strength*) parallels “power” and frames the four essential attributes of the Lamb of God. It is found only here and in the hymn to God in **7:12** (where it is also paired with *δύναμις*). The two terms are therefore used together to heighten the sense of the “power” of God (note the use of four terms in **Eph. 1:19–20** to stress the divine power at work).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: (*iscus*) refers to working might or power in action and stresses His omnipotence to carry out God’s will.

5. “and honor”

Kendell Easley: (Greek *timé*) was ascribed to God by the elders in **Revelation 4:11**. It means to value or esteem highly. (In **Eph. 6:2**, for instance, Paul admonished children to honor their parents.) The Lamb is worthy of **supreme value**.

6. “and glory”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: (*doxa*) refers to the tribute and public display of adoration that should accrue to Christ and again, this stems from His person and work, both past, present, and future.

7. “and blessing.”

Grant Osborne: The final term, *εὐλογίαν* (*eulogian, blessing or praise*), occurs three times in Revelation, once of the “praise” of God (**7:12**), once of the Lamb (here), and once of the two together (**5:13**). It is also used in David’s doxology of **1 Chron. 29:11–13** (along with “power,” “glory,” “wealth,” and “honor”) and describes the “praiseworthiness” of the Lamb. In the OT and the Judaism of Jesus’ day, praise was the primary form of worship, as the congregation returned to God the “blessings” he had poured into their lives. The basic form of all Jewish benedictions began, “*Blessed be thou, O Lord.*” In the NT Jesus is greeted with this acclamation at his triumphal entry, “*Blessed is he . . .*” (**Matt. 21:9; Mark 11:9; John 12:13; cf. Matt. 23:39 and Luke 13:35**). Therefore, this is a fitting conclusion to this magnificent hymn, as the angels praise and glorify the Lamb of God.

II. (:13-14) EXPANDED WORSHIP DIRECTED TO BOTH THE ENTHRONED GOD AND THE SLAIN LAMB

A. (:13) Universal Worship and Unlimited Praise

1. Universal Worship

“And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them,”

Buist Fanning: In a growing and ever-widening crescendo every created being is now heard to join the chorus of praise. It is only right that every creature (*κτίσμα*) should honor God since he is the creator and sustainer of all (**4:11**, *κτίζω* used twice) and should honor the Lamb since his redemption extends to every part of humanity (**5:9**). This **universality of worship** is emphasized by the fourfold subdivision into heaven, earth, underworld, and sea (see the threefold division in **5:3** and details cited there) and also by the reinforcing “*and all that is in them*” (**v. 13a**).

Richard Phillips: Finally, the worship extends to the **entire creation** joined together in praise of God and the Lamb. . . Here we see the farthest extent of Christ's redemptive domain. As the angels comprehend the Lamb's glory in the worship of the church, so also Christ's redemption of his people undoes the curse of sin on the entire created realm. The Creator and the Redeemer together are praised by the work of their hands, the twin works of the Godhead having achieved their designed end in universal doxology.

James Hamilton: Do you know that creation exists for God's glory? Do you know that the animals exist for God's glory? The animals reflect the glory of God, and they exist to proclaim his great worth. All creation praises the skill and the worth of its maker. Imagine all the animals in the world—that's what John says here: "*every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea*"—all the birds, the fish, the cattle on a thousand hills, the bears, the lions, the whales, the dogs and cats, the mosquitoes, the eagles, the gnats, and all the animals whose names we don't know, all of them giving "*blessing and honor and glory and might . . . to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb . . . forever and ever.*"

2. Unlimited Praise

"I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever. '"

Buist Fanning: The most significant point of the entire vision is the divine status and cosmic sovereignty that God and the Lamb share. This prepares the way for the following chapters that trace the outworking of their divine plan of justice and redemption as symbolized by the seven-sealed scroll.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: While it is not explicitly stated, it is assumed that the Lamb is seated on the throne with God. In vision the end of history has been reached, the doxology anticipates the rule and the glory of God and the Lamb in the city which descends from heaven (see **21:22ff., 22:1-5**). Indirectly the song throws light on the nature of the Messiah who initiates the new order. He is the one through whom God accomplishes his will in creation, at its end as at its beginning (cf. **3:14**) and through all the ages between (cf. **22:13**), and this he does because he is one with God, to be worshipped and adored with him for ever and ever.

B. (:14) Proper Response

1. Response of the Four Living Creatures

"And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen. '"

Grant Osborne: The hymn itself is an antiphonal repetition of themes already found in **chapters 4–5**. It is delivered "*to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb.*" The worship of God in **chapter 4** and of the Lamb in **chapter 5** are now joined together in one final outpouring of praise. This hints that the actions of the rest of the book are accomplished by the Godhead acting together. Father and Son end history together, inhabit the New Jerusalem together (**21:22, 23**), and are worshiped together. This is the third of four doxologies in the book (with **1:5b–6; 4:9; 7:12**—so **Aune**) and provides a fitting ending for the worship of the throne room vision.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Here we have the **proper response** from the four living beings and the worship of the 24 elders, the effects of the above praise. The amen signifies "*truly, truly.*" This is heaven's response—the response of the angelic hosts asserting the **validity** of the praise. The falling down of the elders in worship shows the church's response (through the representation of

the twenty-four elders) to the sovereignty of God and the worthiness of the Lamb to now extend that sovereignty to earth and recover it for God and redeemed mankind.

2. Response of the Elders

“And the elders fell down and worshiped.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does it surprise you to find that every created animal and bird and fish will express praise to their creator?
- 2) How does this worship serve as preparation for what lies ahead in the book of Revelation?
- 3) Can you think of specific instances where the Lord blessed you with His **power, riches, wisdom and strength**? Meditate on these and worship the Lord.
- 4) Do you view the activity of worship in eternity as a chore that will get boring or as a delight?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: The worship of the Lamb in **chapter 5** parallels that of God in **chapter 4**, and everything said here applies to our worship of Christ. Christians are guilty of the syndrome “Your Jesus is too small.” We have made Jesus our “big brother” and “friend” to such an extent that we have lost the sense that he is also our sovereign Lord. We must recapture the realization that he too is our God and **worthy of worship at the deepest level**. Like Yahweh, he deserves our praise and gratitude for his sovereignty and for the great victory won at the cross.

Robert Mounce: **Chapter 5** has revealed a central truth that governs the entire book of Revelation. By his sacrificial death the Lamb has taken control of the course of history and guaranteed its future. He alone was worthy to break the seals and open the scroll of destiny. The hosts of heaven break out in jubilant song honoring the redemptive work of the Lion who is the Lamb. His triumphant sacrifice has transformed men and women from every part of the universe into priests in the service of God. Countless angels circle his throne and declare his power and praise. This vision of the grandeur of the triumphant Lamb prepares John to share with his readers the more solemn aspects of the judgments that lie in the future. A vivid portrayal of the one who has won the crucial battle against sin supplies the confidence that in the troubled times to come there remains a hope that is steadfast and sure.

John Walvoord: For many Christians heaven is an unreal place. Even God’s people tend to be occupied too much with the things of this world, which can be seen and touched and felt. Too often goals in life have little to do with eternity’s values. Though we have not been given the privilege of glimpsing heaven as did the apostle John, what he saw is plainly written in the Word of God, and we can see through his eyes the glorious picture of the majesty that surrounds the Lord in heaven. By comparison, earth is revealed to be temporary and transitory, and its glory and glitter are tarnished.

Revelation puts earth and heaven in proper perspective, the scenes of earth ending in the tragic denouement of the great tribulation, and the scenes of heaven fulfilled both in the millennial glory and in the eternal state. The true occupation of the child of God should be one of praise and worship of the God of glory while awaiting the fulfillment of His prophetic Word.

G.K. Beale: If the main point of this vision, and also of the heavenly worship it portrays, is the glory of God and of the Lamb, how is this to be worked out not only in our personal lives but also in our corporate worship? What is the focus of our corporate worship? Why is it that worship in our churches today sometimes degenerates into the pursuit of experiences or into a mode of entertainment? How are we affected in our understanding of worship by the culture of the world around us rather than by the culture of the kingdom of God as portrayed in this vision? How can worship convey an experience of God and hold appeal for unbelievers without being diluted from its biblical norm? How do we recover the true meaning of worship in churches where it has clearly fallen far from God's standard?

Even as the main point of **ch. 4** was the giving of glory to God, so the main feature of **ch. 5** is the same giving of glory to the Lamb, even by those who have rejected Him. The elders glorified God because He is the sovereign Creator of all things (**4:11**). This sovereign Creator is also, together with the Lamb, praised in **5:13** because of what He has done to redeem His creation. The parallels show that John intended to draw an **integral interpretative relationship between God as Creator and God as Redeemer through His work in Christ**. This suggests that the Lamb's redemption is a continuation of God's work of creation. **Chs. 4 and 5** reveal that God's sovereignty in creation also makes Him sovereign over judgment and redemption, both of which He accomplished through the work of the Lamb. The concluding hymns in **4:11** and **5:9-13** bear out that this idea is the main theme of the two chapters, since these hymns function as interpretative summaries of each chapter. **The work of Christ is a continuation of God's work in creation** in that it causes all creation to return glory to its Creator, whether willingly or by force, as the following chapters reveal. The verbal links between the hymns in **chs. 4 and 5** also mean that God's control of the whole creation mentioned in **4:11b** is specifically accomplished by Christ through His death and resurrection and through the Spirit whom He imparts to His people in order to follow in His path and to convict the world of sin. In this sense, the vision given in these chapters already sets forth the truth of what is portrayed in **chs. 21 and 22**, where the purity of the Garden is restored in the new Jerusalem. This indicates further that **chs. 4-5** portray a scene of the "already and not yet" new creation. This analysis shows that the goal of God in everything is **to glorify Himself, to enjoy that glory, and to have His creation enjoy glorifying Him forever**.

Charles Swindoll: Let me suggest a short exercise. Study **Psalms 148, 149, and 150**. Circle the attributes and actions for which God is praised. Underline the various places and ways in which He is worshiped. Then consider the "*mighty deeds*" God has done in your life. Finally, consider the ways you can respond to His work with your worship today. Anticipate your destiny, accept Christ's sovereignty, and refocus your adoration; when you do, you'll not only be reminded where you are in this world, but you'll realize where you need to be.

Van Parunak: Comparison of Doxologies in Book of Revelation

(Speaker)	1:6 John	4:9, Living Creatures	4:10-11, Elders	5:9-10, Elders: The slain Lamb is worthy to open the book ...	5:12, Angel Host	5:13, All Creation	7:10, Many People	7:11-12, Angel Host	12:10 Voice from Heaven	19:1 People in Heaven
(Recipient)	Jesus Christ	God	God		Lamb	God & Lamb	God & Lamb	God	God & Christ	Lord our God
(Form)	to ...	to ...	Worthy		Worthy	to ...	to ...	to ...	Now is come	Alleluiah; to ...
Glory	1	1	1		6	3		2		2
Honor		2	2		5	2		5		3
Thanks		3						4		
Power δύναμις G1411			3		1			6	2	4
Blessing					7	1		1		
Riches					2					
Wisdom					3			3		
Strength, might ἰσχύς G2479					4			7		
Power κράτος G2904	2					4				
Salvation							1		1	1
Kingdom									3	
Power ἐξουσία G1849									4	
(Response)	Amen					Amen	Amen →	Amen		

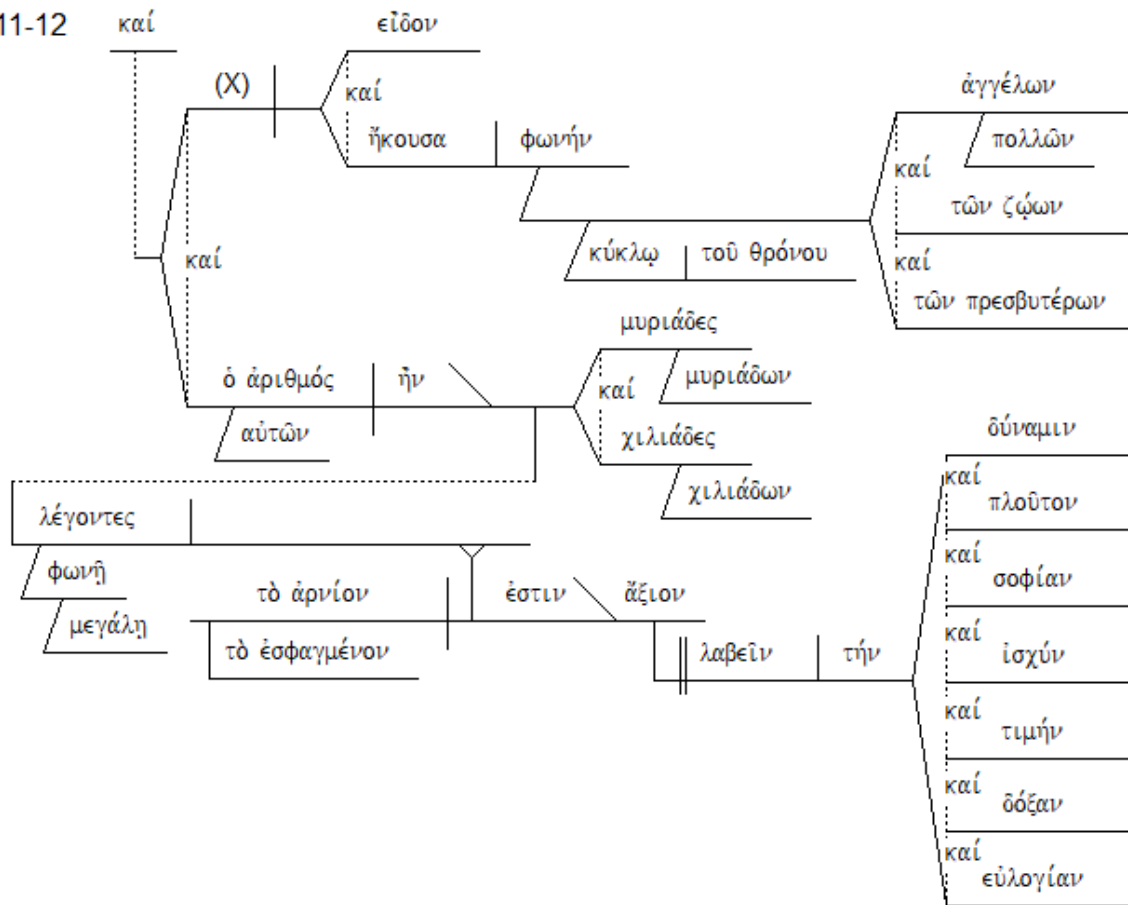
Table 9: Doxologies in the Revelation. Numbers indicate the order of the attributes.

Comparison of Daniel 7 and Revelation 4-5

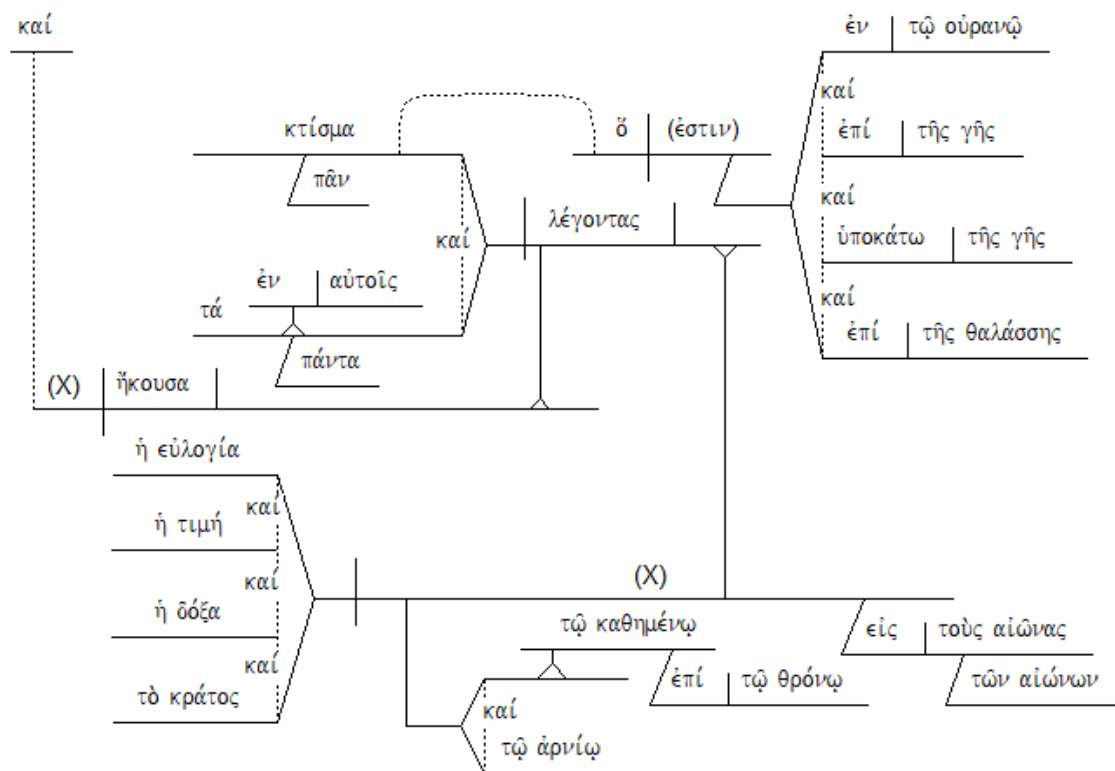
Daniel 7	Revelation 4-5
9 I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit , whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire.	4:2 And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne .
9b his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. 10 A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him :	4:5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne , which are the seven Spirits of God.
10b thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him:	5:11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands ;
10c the judgment was set, and the books were opened .	5:1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? ... 5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.
13 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days , and they brought him near before him. 14a And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom,	5:7 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.
14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages , should serve him:	5:9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation ;
15 I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.	5:4 And I wept much , because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.
16 I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me , and made me know the interpretation of the things.	5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me , Weep not:
18 But the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. ... 27 And the kingdom and dominion , and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High ,	5:10 And thou hast made them unto our God kings and priests: and they shall reign on the earth .
27b ... the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom , and all dominions shall serve and obey him.	5:13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever .

Leedy Greek Diagram:

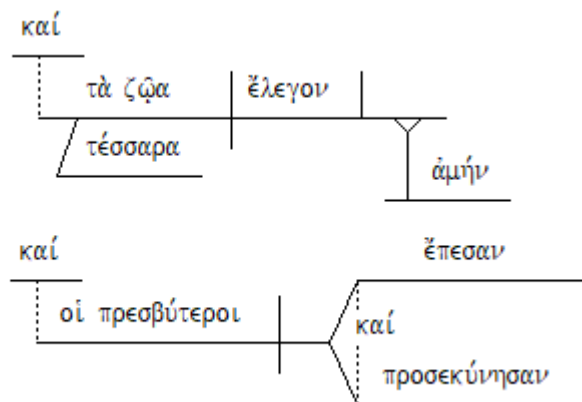
Rev 5:11-12



Rev 5:13



Rev 5:14



TEXT: Revelation 6:1-8

TITLE: *THE BREAKING OF THE FIRST FOUR SEALS AND THE FOUR HORSEMEN*

BIG IDEA:

**JESUS CHRIST BREAKS THE FIRST FOUR SEALS OF THE SCROLL --
UNLEASHING THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF COUNTERFEIT CONQUEST, WAR,
FAMINE AND DEATH AS THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PANGS IN THE END TIMES**

INTRODUCTION:

Marvin Rosenthal: [The argument of the pretribulationists is] that the second, third and fourth seals of **Revelation 6** indicate war, famine, and pestilence. War, it is suggested, is a method of God's judgment (**Lev. 26:21-28; Ezek. 14:21**); famine is a method of God's judgment (**Deut. 11:17; Ezek. 14:21**); and pestilence is a method of God's judgment (**Num. 11:33; 16:46**). And these seals are opened in the first part of the seventieth week of Daniel. Since the Scriptures indicate that these instruments of death are expressions of God's wrath (and the Day of the Lord is a time of God's wrath), the Day of the Lord must, therefore, start at the beginning of the seventieth week.

[This would refute the Pre-Wrath Rapture position.]

This is a classic illustration of erecting a straw man and then knocking it down. There is no question that God has sometimes used war, famine, and pestilence as means of judgment. That is a given – but it begs the question. The issue is not whether God has used war, famine, and pestilence as a means of judgment, but whether the war, famine, and pestilence of the seals (**Rev. 6**) originate with God or man. Men also start wars; men also cause famine; and men also generate pestilence. What is conspicuous by its absence on the part of those who advance the view that the seals are God's judgment, is any convincing explanation of the first and fifth seals. The first seal depicts a white horse and rider (**Rev. 6:1-2**). Dispensational pretribulationists have consistently and almost universally interpreted the emergence of this horse and rider to represent the **Antichrist** who will at first conquer by deception (**Matt. 24:5; Rev. 6:2**). If the second, third, and fourth seals are attributed to God, so also must the first one be. If the seals are God's wrath, then God alone must take direct responsibility for a counterfeit religious system and the emergence of the Antichrist, for that is precisely what the first seal depicts.

To attribute the emergence of the Antichrist to God is obviously preposterous. It is to have a divided house – to have God opposing Himself – and a house divided cannot stand. The emergence of the Antichrist will signal movement toward the ultimate rebellion against God: the deification of man by men at the Tribulation temple on Mount Moriah at Jerusalem. To attempt to achieve his satanic ambition, the Antichrist will plunge the world into war (the second seal, the red horse and rider); the resultant devastation of war will cause famine (the third seal, the black horse and rider); and the predictable unsanitary conditions which, like a waiting scavenger, always follow war and famine will result in pestilence (the fourth seal, the pale horse and rider). That has been the historic pretribulational, premillennial interpretation of the first four seals. To suggest that the first four seals are God's wrath is totally unfounded. It strains reason to think that once God begins His Day of the Lord wrath, the Antichrist is able to assume control of the world.

But what of the fifth seal? It cannot be omitted from this discussion. When the fifth seal is opened, it depicts the martyrdom of a believing remnant who have not bowed to the Antichrist . . . If the seals are God's wrath, then He is responsible for the martyrdom of His own faithful children, those who refuse to give their allegiance to the Antichrist and thereby forfeit their lives . . .

Even **Walvoord**, commenting on the seals, has written, "The judgments of war, famine, and death, and the martyrdom of the saints ([the fifth seal] have largely originated in human decisions and in the evil heart of men." **Leon Morris** has written, "The first four seals form a unity. They show us the self-defeating character of sin. When the spirit of self-aggrandizement and conquest is abroad all God need do is let events take their course and sinners will inevitably be punished."

The significance of the Lord Jesus Christ opening the seals is, among other things, the **assurance of eternal security** [cf. the purpose of a seal to indicate ownership and protection] for those believers who may be martyred for Christ's sake. The Antichrist, under the permissive hand of the sovereign Lord, can touch their bodies – but not their eternal souls. The seals are not God's wrath; they are God's promise of eternal protection during man's wrath, a wrath precipitated by the Antichrist who is empowered by Satan (**Rev. 13:4**). Here is the ultimate manifestation of the principle, "*Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee*" (**Ps. 76:10**). That the Lord is in sovereign control during the opening of the seals is underscored in the strongest possible way. The impact of the first four seals is restricted by Him to one-fourth of the earth (**Rev. 6:8**). . .

Permit one further word at this time concerning attempts to start the Day of the Lord at the beginning of the seventieth week. Even a cursory examination of the Day of the Lord texts indicates it is a period of unprecedented, awesome judgment from the hand of God. The arm of omnipotence is depicted unleashing righteous wrath upon an unrepentant and unrighteous world. This planet and its inhabitants will reel under its impact. The proposition that after the Day of the Lord judgment begins, the Antichrist will emerge, expand his power, erect an image of himself in Israel, ask men to bow to his authority, kill multitudes who refuse, and eventually become a world ruler (**Rev. 13:1-8**) – all of this over a period of time extending more than three and one-half years into the Day of the Lord judgment – cannot be seriously entertained in the light of biblical characteristics of the Day of the Lord. **Isaiah 2** says the Lord alone will be exalted in that day and **all** the proud brought low.

Not only does starting the Day of the Lord at the beginning of the Tribulation have its own insurmountable exegetical problems, it compounds its error by standing in opposition to the clear teaching that the Day of the Lord **starts with the opening of the seventh seal**. . . The clear and repeated teaching of the Word of God is that there must be a **cosmic disturbance** of considerable magnitude before the Day of the Lord begins.

Van Parunak: The judgments in **chapter 6** are not the contents of the scroll. It cannot be opened until all seven seals are opened. . .

John's vision is particularly close to the version of the Discourse in **Matthew 24** [see Notes below]. There, our Lord describes these events as "*the beginning of sorrows*" (**24:8**) and says explicitly, "*the end is not yet*" (**24:6**). Indeed, these events have characterized the entire era since the first century. [Ed: I disagree; These events start with the beginning of Daniel's seventieth week with the emergence of the Antichrist and his directed campaign to elevate himself.]

More likely, the sealed scroll recalls the last chapter of Daniel. Daniel's visions include many things that extend to the end of the world. At the end of his book, he records a conversation with an angel in which the full meaning of these visions is said to be "*shut up and sealed*":

Dan 12:4 *But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: ... 9 And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.*

The scroll claimed by the Lamb in **Revelation 5** appears to contain this sealed information, which pertains to the **very end of time**. We are reminded again of God's sovereign control: he has a plan (a book already written), though we do not have access to it (it is sealed). . .

Several distinct features mark off the first four seals from the last three.

Speaker: Each of the first four seals is introduced by one of the living creatures from **ch. 4-5**. At **6:9**, the speaker changes to the martyrs, marking off the first four as a set.

Invitation: Each seal begins with the **angelic invitation**, "*Come and see*". Only one other place in the book do we hear the invitation, "*Come*," in **22:17**, with a better prospect,

Rev. 22:17 *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*

Without this final invitation, these first four would be depressing. But God's judgments, as necessary as they are to vindicate his holiness, are not the last word. The final invitation, open to any who wish to receive it, is not to judgment but to life.

Pattern of Zechariah 6: The image of the four horses reflects the four chariots whom the Lord sends forth in **Zech 6:1-8**, drawn by horses of the same colors as here, to patrol the earth.

Here is a **paradox**. The four horsemen in **Revelation 6** clearly reflect wickedness and bring widespread human disaster, yet the background in Zechariah suggests that they are sent forth by the Lord, from his presence (**Zech 6:5**). We should remember that evil spirits as well as holy angels are subject to the God of heaven, as the story in **1 Kings 22** shows.

Throughout the judgments and disasters of the Revelation, we must hold fast to this insight: the **Lord is in control**, and bends evil as well as good to his purposes.

The Four Judgments: The judgments of the four horsemen reflect another OT image, summarized in **v. 8**, and in **Ezekiel 14**.

Rev 6:8b *And power was given unto them him over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.*

Eze 14:21 *For thus saith the Lord GOD; How much more when I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and the noisome beast, and the pestilence [LXX death], to cut off from it man and beast?*

Ezekiel's judgments in turn are a synopsis of the categories of blessing for obedience and punishment for apostasy in **Leviticus 26** (chart below). These are a repeated theme throughout the OT, and they will be helpful to us in understanding the judgments throughout the Revelation. In addition to the summary in **6:8**, some of them are reflected in specific seals.

Ezek 14:21	Lev 26:3 If you walk in my statutes ...	Lev 26:14 If ye will not hearken unto me ...	Horsemen of Revelation 6
Sword	6c neither shall the sword go through your land. 7 And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword .	17 And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you.	6:4, Red Horse
Famine	10 And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new.	20 And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.	6:5, Black Horse
Evil beast	6b I will rid evil beasts out of the land,	22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate.	6:2, White Horse (!)
Pestilence (LXX Death)	(Exo 15:26 I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.)	16a I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague , 25 I will send the pestilence among you;	6:8, Pale Horse

The consistency of this theme puts a positive spin on the first four seals. These are not the capricious acts of a heartless God toying with his helpless creatures, but responses to the persistent disobedience of the human race, vindicating his holiness and his justice. As we will see in the sixth seal, they are a final call to sinners to repent:

Isa 26:9 ... *when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.*

* * * * *

[Ed: It must be noted that it is possible for these OT prophecies to use similar language to describe events that are not the same. In any event, it must be admitted that these events described by the seals in **Rev. 6** are initiated by the Antichrist, reflecting the perversity of man and are not a part of the pouring out of the wrath of God in the final Day of the Lord. Yet in another sense they do serve as judgments allowed by the permissive will of the sovereign Lord as **Van Parunak** explains.]

* * * * *

Grant Osborne: The first four seals center on **the depravity of mankind**. As the commentary will show, the progression of the four seals is from lust to conquest (the first seal) to civil war (the second seal) to famine (the third seal) to pestilence and death (the fourth seal). This is the natural progression of man's inhumanity to man. In other words, God simply allows human sin to come full circle, turn in upon itself, and self-destruct. . . In this sense God is not so much pouring down judgment on the earth-dwellers as allowing their depravity to come full circle (so

O'Donovan 1986: 71–73). This is a common theme in this book, as sin turns upon itself and self-destructs.

Robert Thomas: The happenings enumerated follow the pattern of Jesus' Olivet discourse (cf. **Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21**), sometimes called the "Little Apocalypse," which He delivered on the Tuesday before His crucifixion. The similarities are so close that some venture to call that discourse the main source of the seal judgments (**Charles; Beasley-Murray**). Throughout apocalyptic literature, the sword, famine, pestilence, and earthquake recounted here as well as in the Olivet discourse, related to the last days (**Beckwith**). In Jewish and Babylonian literature, also, such an expectation of civil strife as these seals include was one of the precursors of the personal return of the Deliverer (**Charles**). In His teaching Jesus divided the time into two periods, the beginning of birth pangs (**Matt. 24:8**) and the Great Tribulation (**Matt. 24:21**). The former part closely parallels the first four seals in particular. So an important key in fixing the time period of the seals in this message was given by Christ some sixty-five years earlier when He taught about the future time of trial on earth.

Kendell Easley: The breaking of the first four seals forms a group. If the number four in Revelation often represents the world, then it is right to see these as worldwide, history-wide scourges. The four horsemen have thundered down through history and all around the globe. They will continue to wield authority only as long as Christ, who holds the key, permits.

James Hamilton: In **Matthew 24:8** Jesus said these judgments are "*the beginning of the birth pains*." Birth pains are awful. But just when they are at their worst, the baby comes. That these judgments are birth pains means that they are more than angry retribution. They are **part of a necessary process that will bring forth new life**.

Before Jesus can take his people to the new and better Eden, the new heavens and the new earth, he has to bring judgment for all the despising of God's glory and the defiling of his holiness. God is just, and Jesus has taken hold of the scroll. As he opens its seals, **Jesus sets in motion the outworking of God's justice**.

I. (:1-2) BREAKING OF THE FIRST SEAL – WHITE HORSE – COUNTERFEIT CONQUEST -- EMERGENCE OF THE ANTICHRIST ATTEMPTING TO CONQUER

A. (:1) Introduction to the First Seal

1. Breaking of the First Seal

"And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals,"

Sola Scriptura: "*Then I saw*" – is a very important **linking phrase** used thirty-three times throughout the book of Revelation. It can introduce a new vision or a major segment of a continuing vision. Here it is obviously introducing a new segment in a continuing vision. The Lamb receives the scroll in chapter five and breaks the first seal in chapter six. There is no indication of a time lapse between these two chapters.

Daniel Akin: The Lamb, King Jesus, opens the seals (**6:1**). All that unfolds is under His command. . . The command to the first rider is simple and direct: "*Come!*" **Warren Wiersbe** notes, "Events will now take place because of God's sovereign direction in heaven" (*Be Victorious*, 62). The riders come because God sends them.

2. Invitation

“and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, ‘Come.’”

John Walvoord: The noise of thunder captures John’s attention, and he witnesses the scene unfolding before him. John says he looked, and then he adds the word “*behold*” to indicate the startling character of the vision: a white horse on which a man is sitting. He is carrying a bow, has been given a crown, and his purpose is to conquer. . .

A more plausible explanation [than Christ] is that the rider of the white horse is none other than the “*prince who is to come*” of **Daniel 9:26**, who is to head up the revived Roman Empire and ultimately become the world ruler. He is Satan’s masterpiece and the counterfeit of all that Christ is or claims to be. He is therefore cast in the role of a conqueror, which seems to be the significance of the white horse. In biblical times, it was customary for a conqueror to ride in triumph on a white horse.

B. (:2) Unleashing of the Antichrist

1. White Horse

“And I looked, and behold, a white horse,”

Buist Fanning: The color **white** may be taken from **Zechariah 1:8** and **6:3** without special significance, or it can represent a satanic parody of the true king or his more general attempt to deceive Christians, just as the beast later “*conquers*” both the two witnesses (**11:7**) and the saints (**13:7**). A more likely possibility than these is the association of white horses with victory celebrations or military dominance: the warrior rides on a white horse in recognition of his overpowering conquest (cf. **Herodotus**, Hist. 9.63; Dio Cassius, Rom. Hist. 43.14.3).

Charles Swindoll: The rider on the white horse (**6:1-2**) most likely represents bloodless conquest —**false peace and security**. Notice that he carried a bow without arrows. The type of crown on his head is the *stephanos* [4735] —not a crown of regal authority but a victor’s crown.[70] The Tribulation period [Ed: 70th week of Daniel is better nomenclature] will begin with a deceptive peace accompanied by a counterfeit spirituality and false religion. Paul describes this same general condition in **1 Thessalonians 5:3**: “*While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.*” The coming of false religion is seen also in Christ’s own description of the end times in **Matthew 24:4-5**.

William Barclay: Without any doubt, the white horse and its rider stand for **conquest in war**. When a Roman general celebrated a triumph, that is, when he paraded through the streets of Rome with his armies and his captives and his booty after some great victory, his chariot was drawn by white horses, the symbol of victory.

Daniel Akin: The better view is that this is the **spirit of deception and conquest** that will be embodied in the counterfeit Christ, the antichrist (**2 Thess 2:3-4**), the beast of **13:1-10**. This deceptive, conquering rider keeps company with war, famine, and death—the next three riders. This rider fulfills the warning of Jesus in **Matthew 24:4-5** where He tells us to be on guard against deception and false christs. **Beale** provides helpful commentary: The first rider represents a satanic force attempting to defeat and oppress believers spiritually through deception, persecution, or both (so **11:7**; **13:7**). The image of the rider may include reference to

- (1) the antichrist,
- (2) governments that persecute Christians, or
- (3) the devil's servants in general. An allusion to forces symbolized by the beasts later in the book could be uppermost in mind.

2. Counterfeit Power

“and he who sat on it had a bow;”

Sola Scriptura: The *bow* is used figuratively in Scripture as a symbol of war.

Warren Wiersbe: We would expect the Antichrist to resemble the Christ, because the Antichrist is Satan's great imitation! Even the Jews (who ought to know the Scriptures) will be deceived by him (**John 5:43; 2 Thess. 2:1–12**). This great deceiver will come as a peaceful leader, holding a bow but no arrows! (Our Lord's weapon is a sword; **Rev. 19:15**.) The Antichrist will solve the world's problems and be received as the Great Liberator.

[Alternative View:]

Richard Phillips: It is probably best, however, to see the first rider as neither Christ nor the Antichrist, but as the **calamitous woe of military conquest**. The bow was a weapon of violent warfare and was the preferred weapon of Rome's chief menace, the Parthians. **Philip Hughes** summarizes: “The bow . . . is a symbol of violence, the crown he is given signifies despotic rule, and the white colour of his horse betokens conquest, while his going forth conquering and to conquer expresses his lust for power and world domination.”

Understood this way, **the first seal unleashed warlords into history**—warlords who are granted authority to achieve conquest on the earth. The Roman emperors claimed a Pax Romana in which peace had been secured by the Roman sword. Yet the Parthians who defeated their legions in A.D. 62 showed the frailty of this claim. Throughout history Christ has sovereignly unleashed men such as Attila, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, and Hitler to overthrow human claims to peace on earth while mankind was all the while at war with God. **Vern Poythress** writes: “Roman peace promised prosperity, but the reality was different. Conquest, bloodshed, famine, and death have stalked the human race throughout the church age.”

3. Counterfeit Reign

“and a crown was given to him;”

4. Goal of the Antichrist Is Worldwide Domination

“and he went out conquering, and to conquer.”

Van Parunak: On this basis, some understand this horseman to represent Christ, or the spread of his gospel throughout the world. But comparing the first five seals with **Matthew 24** suggests that the reference is rather to the **false Christs** against whom the Lord warned. The superficial similarity reflects the **counterfeit nature** of the spirit of antichrist, seeking to take the place of Christ, but two details remind us that these are after all distinct: the horseman's weapons, and his crown.

Instead of the bow carried by the horseman in **Revelation 6**, Messiah's weapons in **Revelation 19** are a sword and a rod of iron. But the bow is the weapon of Gog in **Ezek 38-39**, who is an archetype of the Antichrist:

Eze 39:3 *And I will smite thy bow out of thy left hand, and will cause thine arrows to fall out of thy right hand.*

Both riders wear crowns. But the crowns are different. The horseman of **Revelation 6** wears a single στέφανος G4735, the wreath of laurel awarded to the victor in an athletic contest, or as an award for military valor, but the rider in **Revelation 19** wears many διαδήματα G1238, royal crowns. In **chapter 6** we meet a foe with great military power but no true title to reign; in **chapter 19**, we are presented with the king of all earthly kings and lord of all earthly lords (17:14; 19:16).

Notice that the crown “*was given unto him*,” a verb that often describes the permission that God gives the wicked. We see it again in the second horseman (6:4), the summary in 6:8, and other forces of evil (7:2; 9:3, 5; 13:5, 7, 15; 16:6). John wants us to understand that whatever evil comes upon the earth, it is **completely under God’s control**, and subject to his permission.

II. (:3-4) BREAKING OF THE SECOND SEAL – RED HORSE – WAR / STRIFE

A. (:3) Introduction to the Second Seal

1. Breaking of the Second Seal

“And when He broke the second seal,”

2. Invitation

“I heard the second living creature saying, ‘Come.’”

B. (:4) Unleashing of War / Strife

1. Red Horse

“And another, a red horse, went out;”

Robert Thomas: Little disagreement exists over the general nature of the second seal. It brings war, internal strife, and international and civil strife to the world (**Swete; Charles; Beckwith; Walvoord**).

William Barclay: The function of the second horse and its rider is to take peace from the earth. They stand for that destructive strife which sets individual against individual and nation against nation in a chaos of tragic destruction. . . The vision of the end was a vision of a time when all human relationships would be destroyed and the world would become a seething cauldron of embittered hate.

Daniel Akin: The red horse of war inevitably follows the white horse of conquest. . . The color of the second horse is “fiery red” and rightly depicts his mission of bloodshed and slaughter (**Mounce**, Revelation, 143). But while he takes peace from the earth, the people slaughter one another. The idea seems to convey **civil strife** within and between peoples and nations. Assassination and civil unrest, riots in the streets, and rebellion against authority will run rampant. No one will be safe. One will live in constant fear of life not knowing whom to trust. Jesus said in **Matthew 24:10**, “*Many will take offense, betray one another, and hate one another.*” No one will be excluded. This rider takes peace from the earth. **Anarchy** and **worldwide bloodshed** are signatures of the last days.

2. Removal of Peace from the Earth

“and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one another;”

Sola Scriptura: “*it was granted*” – another indication that a third party is controlling these events.

Grant Osborne: With the sword, the lust for conquest in the first seal turns to **civil war**. First, God allows the rider to “*take peace from the earth*.” Some have connected this with **2 Thess. 2:6–7**, the removal of the “*restraining*” force that holds back “*the man of lawlessness*.” This interpretation would be viable if one sees **Rev. 6:4** as describing the final period of history.

John MacArthur: So before the terrors of the Tribulation break loose and lead to the battle of Armageddon there will come a period of world peace. But it will be a **deceptive peace**, as the world is lulled into a false sense of security followed by war, famine, and death. The world’s desperate desire for international peace will serve as the bait for the satanic trap. That longing for security and safety will play into the hands of Antichrist, Satan’s ruler, who will convince the world that he can provide them. He will particularly deceive Israel, whose people have for so long desired peace, and he “*will make a firm covenant with the many [Israel] for one week*” (**Dan. 9:27**). Antichrist’s peace pact and protection of Israel will not last, however: “*in the middle of the week [the Seventieth Week of Daniel’s prophecy; the Tribulation] he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate*” (**Dan. 9:27**). The false peace that Antichrist brings will come to an abrupt halt at the **midpoint of the Tribulation** when he desecrates the temple in Jerusalem, betrays the Jewish people, and launches deadly attacks on them (cf. **Matt. 24:4–10**). There can and will be no peace until the Prince of Peace sets up His earthly kingdom (**20:1–6**).

G.K. Beale: the second horseman seeks to take peace from the earth by stirring up strife and warfare among the world’s nations. This includes **persecution of believers**, as the allusion is to Jesus’ warning to His disciples that His coming would bring not peace but a sword to the world (**Matt. 10:34**). The point of the Matthew text is that Jesus’ followers should not be discouraged from confessing His name to the world when persecution comes, since such persecution is part of God’s sovereign will. Their faithfulness amidst oppression may result in loss of their physical lives, but it will also result in the salvation of their spiritual lives (so **Matt. 10:28–39**). The gospel itself produces peace, but the attack of Satan upon its progress leads to war. The phrase that men should slay one another points to the persecution of believers, for the word slay is used otherwise in Revelation only to refer to the deaths of Christ and His followers (**5:6, 9, 12; 6:9; 13:8; 18:24**). Even the “*slain*” head of the beast in **13:3** is a mockery or false imitation of Christ’s death. Those who are slaughtered in **6:4** are probably the believers pictured as slain in **v. 9**. The same connection between the woes of international strife and persecution is drawn in the Synoptic Gospels, where such strife is interpreted as a woe on unbelievers and testing for Jesus’ followers (**Mark 13:7–19; Matt. 24:6–21; Luke 21:9–19**).

3. Violent Bloodshed

“and a great sword was given to him.”

Robert Thomas: The sword is better seen as a symbol for a **specific period of dreadful bloodshed**. Because it has not yet occurred on the scale that it will someday, the relegation of it to “*the beginning of birth-pains*” in the future is necessary.

III. (:5-6) BREAKING OF THE THIRD SEAL – BLACK HORSE -- FAMINE

A. (:5a) Introduction to the Third Seal

1. Breaking of the Seal

“And when He broke the third seal,”

2. Invitation

“I heard the third living creature saying, ‘Come.’”

B. (:5b-6) Unleashing of Famine

1. (:5b) Black Horse

“And I looked, and behold, a black horse;”

2. (:5c) Symbol of Famine = Weighing Bread on Scales = Food Rationing

“and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.”

Sola Scriptura: “a pair of scales” – represents the dire situation some will face on the earth. A balance scale would be used for weighing bread only in a severe famine. **Leviticus 26:26** and **Ezekiel 4:16-17** both indicate that weighed bread is a condition of severe famine.

3. (:6) Devastating Famine Conditions

“And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures 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.’”

John MacArthur: God’s pronouncements reveal how **devastating** the famine conditions will be. A quart of wheat is barely enough to sustain one person for one day, while a denarius represents one day’s wages for an average worker. People’s labor will barely provide enough food for themselves and not enough to feed their families. Those with families will be able to purchase three quarts of barley for a denarius. That will provide food for their families, but barley was low in nutritional value and commonly fed to livestock. Thus, a person’s wages will barely feed three people with low quality food. Both of those scenarios represent starvation wages, and signify severe famine conditions.

In light of those extreme conditions, God cautions people not to damage (waste) the oil and the wine. Basic food staples will become priceless luxuries. Olive oil and wine, used in the preparation and cooking of food, as well as the purification of water, will need to be carefully protected.

Daniel Akin: phrase “do not harm the olive oil and the wine” is less clear as to its meaning. Some see the phrase as setting a limit on the deprivation caused by the horse of famine. Others argue that oil and wine were the commodities of the wealthy. The former understanding is more likely. Food for the poor will be scarce and in short supply. Still, there are limits, at least for now. However, once the trumpet and bowl judgments are finished, nothing will be left. Nothing.

IV. (:7-8) BREAKING OF THE FOURTH SEAL – PALE GREEN HORSE – MASS DEATH / PESTILENCE

A. (:7) Introduction to the Fourth Seal

1. Breaking of the Fourth Seal

“And when He broke the fourth seal,”

2. Invitation

“I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come.’”

B. (:8) Unleashing of Death / Pestilence

1. Ashen Horse

“And I looked, and behold, an ashen horse;”

John MacArthur: The Greek word for the horse’s color is *chlōros*—from which we derive our English word **chlorine**. *Chlōros* usually denotes a **pale green color** and is used elsewhere in Revelation to describe the color of grass and vegetation (8:7; 9:4) In **Revelation 6:8**, it pictures a decomposing corpse. **Robert Thomas** describes the grotesque color of the fourth horse as “the yellowish green of decay, the pallor of death. It is the pale ashen color that images a face bleached because of terror. It recalls a corpse in the advanced state of corruption.”

Daniel Akin: The world is fatally flawed. The pale horse of death with the grim reaper riding saddle is just around the corner with nothing less than a global agenda.

2. Identification of Death / Hades

*“and he who sat on it had the name Death;
and Hades was following with him.”*

Sola Scriptura: *Death and Hades* = is referred to here as a person. This is called “personification” and is a figure of speech. This occurs four times in the Revelation (1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14). The term death is always followed by the term Hades. Since Hades is a result of death (there would be no Hades if there was no death); death is primary.

Warren Wiersbe: John saw two personages: Death riding a pale horse and hades (the realm of the dead) following him. Christ has the keys of death and hades (**Rev. 1:18**), and both will one day be cast into hell (**Rev. 20:14**). Death claims the body while hades claims the soul of the dead (**Rev. 20:13**). John saw these enemies going forth to claim their prey, armed with weapons of the sword, hunger, pestilence (death), and wild beasts. In ancient times, hunger, pestilence, and the ravages of beasts would be expected to accompany war (note also **Jer. 15:2; 24:10; Ezek. 14:21**).

3. Comprehensive Devastation

“And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.”

Sola Scriptura: There is no grounds for the translation *wild beast* in **Revelation 6:8**. Since beast (antichrist) (**Rev 13:7**), the false prophet (**Rev 13:15**), and the image of the beast (**Rev 13:15**) all have power to put to death; and since both the beast (**Rev. 13:1**) and the false prophet (**Rev 13:11**) are of the earth, they are better referents for “beasts” in **Revelation 6:8**.

John Walvoord: There are three main views on the identity of the “wild beasts of the earth” in **Revelation 6:8**.

1. First, it's possible that this refers to actual wild animals that will become especially ferocious during the tribulation as their normal food supplies are disrupted. They will look for prey and take advantage of the defenseless as God uses them to terrorize and destroy.
2. Another view is that this term is a reference to brutal military and political leaders of the end times. This view is based on the fact that the same phrase "*wild beasts*," which in the Greek is *thēriōn*, is used thirty-eight times in Revelation, and every other time refers to the coming Antichrist or his henchman, the false prophet.
3. A third view is that this is a reference to pandemic plagues such as swine flu, bird flu, AIDS, Ebola, etc. that come from animals.

Whatever the final fulfillment, this will add to the misery of earth's darkest hour.

Robert Mounce: It may be that this fourfold plague represents an intensification of that which is represented by the first three seals. Death by wild beasts would be expected in a land decimated by war and famine.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is it wrong to identify the first horseman as Antichrist if the other 3 seals reference forces of destruction instead of individuals?
- 2) Why is there a separation between the first four seals and the remaining three?
- 3) Are these seals reflective of conditions that have persisted down through church history or is it correct to isolate the reference to the first half of Daniel's 70th week in the end times?
- 4) How can so much death and destruction be consistent with the events occurring before the Great Tribulation period even starts (at the mid-point of Daniel's 70th week)?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

J. Hampton Keathley, III: I have always felt that there are two great truths to be drawn from this phenomenon. First, what is about to take place on earth, though unknown to man and unexpected by him, is fully known to those in heaven—the ascended Lord, the angels, the twenty-four elders, the living creatures, and the others. Secondly, what is to take place on earth is under the complete control and direction of heaven, so that we may safely say, judging from this book, as well as from other prophetic books in the Scripture, that everything that takes place on this earth only fulfills the Word of God.

Buist Fanning: The woes associated with these four seals, while calamitous, are not as intense as the ones that follow in the subsequent seals, trumpets, and bowls. The first four seal judgments are not more severe as they go along but are interrelated calamities with **some sense of sequence** implied (invasion, civil strife, famine, death), since the earlier two seem to lead to the latter two.

The fifth and sixth seals (6:9–17) present events of a different character from the first four, focusing on terrifying cosmic disturbances as well as the reactions accompanying these woes, first by martyred saints in heaven and then by the earth’s inhabitants desperate to escape these manifestations of divine wrath.

G.K. Beale: The description of the first rider can be taken as a **summary statement** explained in more detail by the following three horsemen in that he introduces war in a general sense and the other three bring conditions characteristic of war — not only literal warfare but spiritual warfare. And so vv. 3-8 describe how Satan attempts to conquer the saints through suffering so that they will lose their faith.

Van Parunak: Comparison of Matthew 24 (“Beginning of Sorrows”) with Rev. 6 Seals

Matthew 24: Beginning of Sorrows (v. 8)	Revelation 6: Seals
5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ ; and shall deceive many.	1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. 2 And I saw, and behold a white horse : and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.
6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars : see that ye be not troubled: for all <i>these things</i> must come to pass, but the end is not yet.	3 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. 4 And there went out another horse <i>that was red</i> : and <i>power</i> was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth , and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.
7 ...there shall be famines ...	5 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. ...
7 For nation shall rise against nation , and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines , and pestilences , and earthquakes , in divers places. 8 All these <i>are</i> the beginning of sorrows.	7 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. 8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword , and with hunger , and with death , and with the beasts of the earth.
9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you : and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.	9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were 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, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? 11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

John Schultz: We are under the impression that the Seventh Seal actually consists of the Seven Trumpets and that the content of the Seventh Trumpet is the Seven Golden Bowls of God’s Wrath. How all these fit together, we do not profess to know. We know from other parts of Scripture that, in the last phase of world history, Satan will reveal himself in a human being called the Antichrist. The appearance and reign of this human being will mean the Great Tribulation of all who confess the Name of Jesus Christ. Jesus will overcome this Antichrist at

His coming and He will establish the Kingdom of God. This is, in brief, the outline of events as we can expect them to occur. We may disagree about some of the details but Evangelical Christians are generally in agreement concerning the main line of events. The Seals, the Trumpets, and the Bowls fit, in one way or another, in the framework of events. All this may sound vague, but it is a starting point for our interpretation.

Grant Osborne: Reviewing the various interpretations assigned to the Four Horsemen tends to rob the contemporary reader of the **dramatic nature** of the vision itself. It is good to place oneself back in one of the seven churches and listen to the visions as they are being read. Instead of discussing the probable significance of each of the four colored horses those first listeners would have recoiled in terror as war, bloodshed, famine, and death galloped furiously across the stage of their imagination.

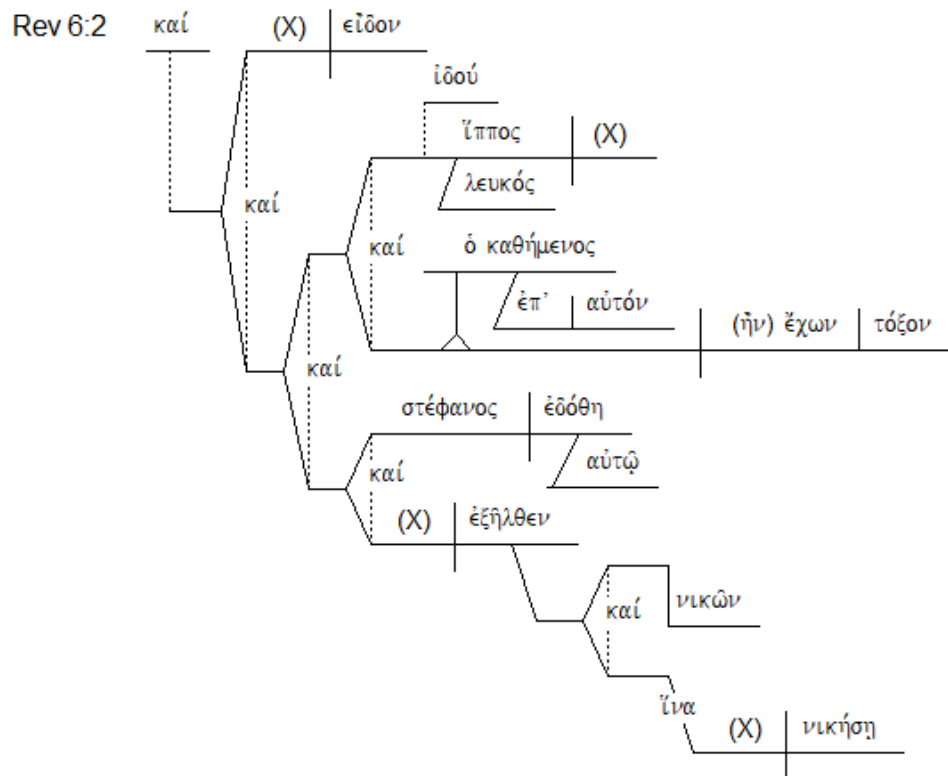
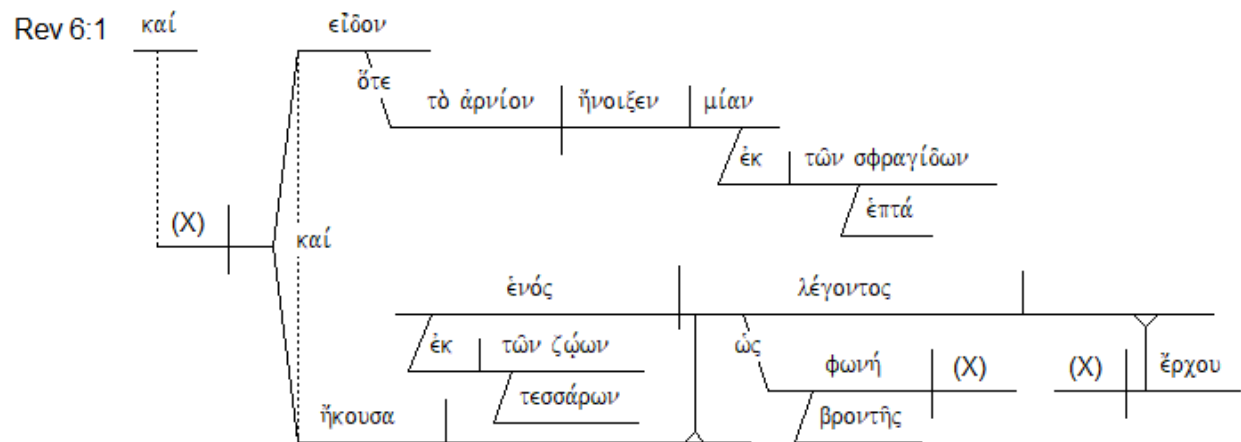
Craig Koester: The principal purpose of the visions in **Revelation 6** is to awaken a sense of uneasiness in readers by vividly **identifying threats to their well-being**. The four horsemen are designed to shatter the illusion that people can find true security in the borders of a nation or empire, in a flourishing economy, or in their own health. Subsequent visions promise that God will not allow injustice to continue forever—which is assuring to the victims but disturbing to the perpetrators—and warn that no place on earth and no position of power or wealth will protect people from the judgment of God and the Lamb. Those who grasp the way that these visions relentlessly undercut human pretensions will find themselves asking the final question in the chapter: “*Who is able to stand?*” (**6:17**). Those who have been moved to ask this question are rightly prepared for the visions that follow in **chapter 7**. . .

The visions of the four horsemen have captured the imaginations of people for centuries, but certain aspects of the imagery would have been most apparent to people in the seven churches addressed by Revelation. The first horseman, who is armed with a bow, was an apt figure to represent conquest since horses were commonly used in warfare, and various armies had bowmen, some of whom belonged to the cavalry (Judith 2:15). The most famous mounted bowmen of John’s time, however, came from **Parthia**, the region that lay beyond the Roman Empire’s eastern frontier. The Parthian forces, which featured mounted archers, repeatedly drove back the Roman army in 53 BC, 36 BC, and **AD 62, bringing Roman imperial expansion to a halt**. The Parthians were a nagging reminder about **the limits of the security that Rome—the region’s most powerful empire—could provide**. The implication was that the Christians who partook of the sacrifices offered to the deified emperors and other Roman gods (**Rev. 2:14, 20**) were compromising their convictions to placate powers that were not supreme but vulnerable to invasion by outside forces. Those who were sure that they needed nothing more than the prosperity provided by the empire (**3:17**) were deluding themselves. . .

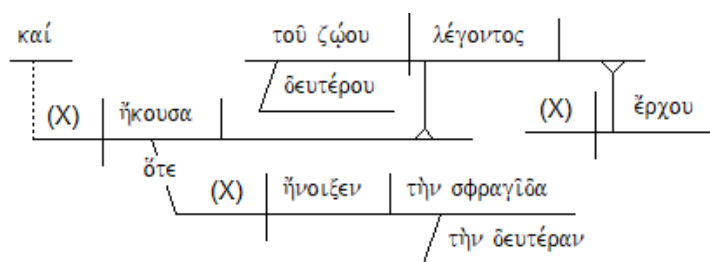
Where is God in all of this? In one sense God does not exactly inflict these plagues on the world, since the four horsemen are the powers that are directly responsible for the threat. Yet it is also clear that these threatening powers do not operate independently of God. Each horseman appears only after the Lamb has broken a seal on the scroll that he received from God and only after one of the living creatures that stand beside God’s throne has given the command: “*Come!*”

Alternative View: **Gordon Fee:** the initial set of four are not “plagues” at all, nor are they eschatological. Thus they are almost certainly not intended to relate to the final, eschatological conclusion of all things; rather they have all the markings of a prophetic word regarding the near future for John and his readers.

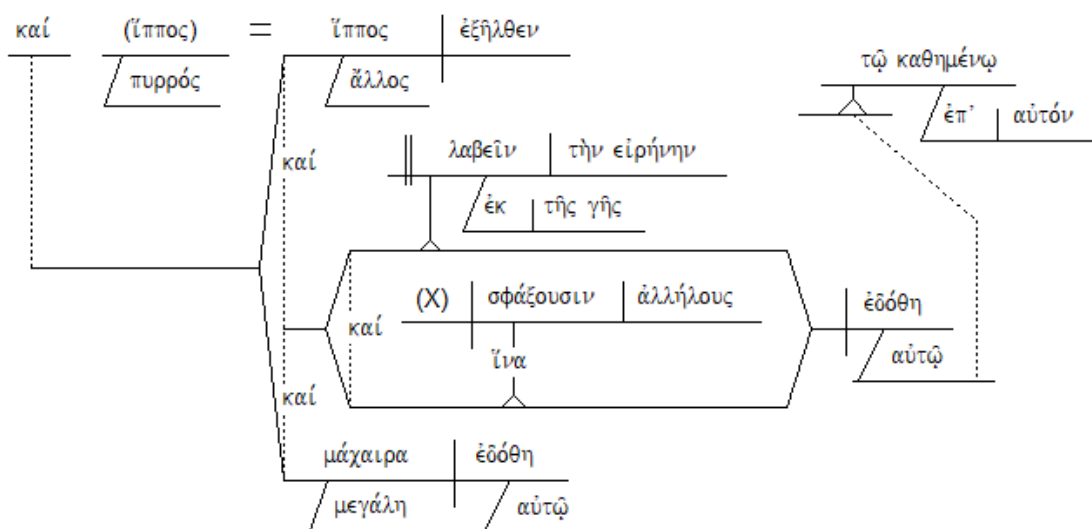
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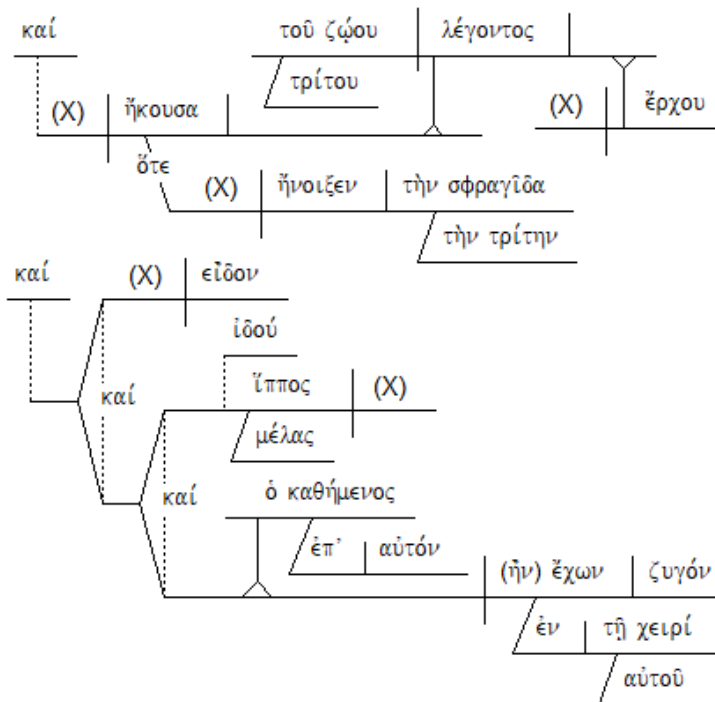
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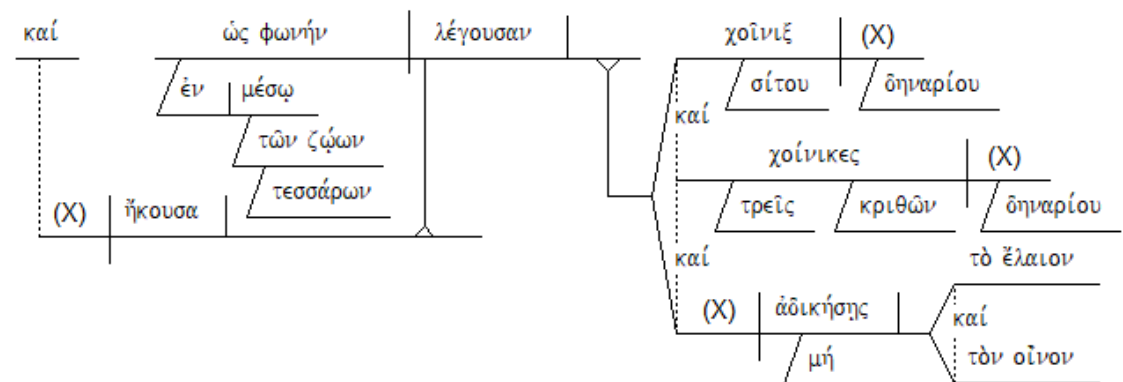
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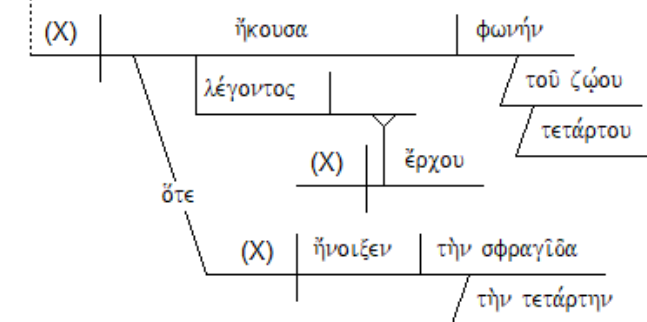
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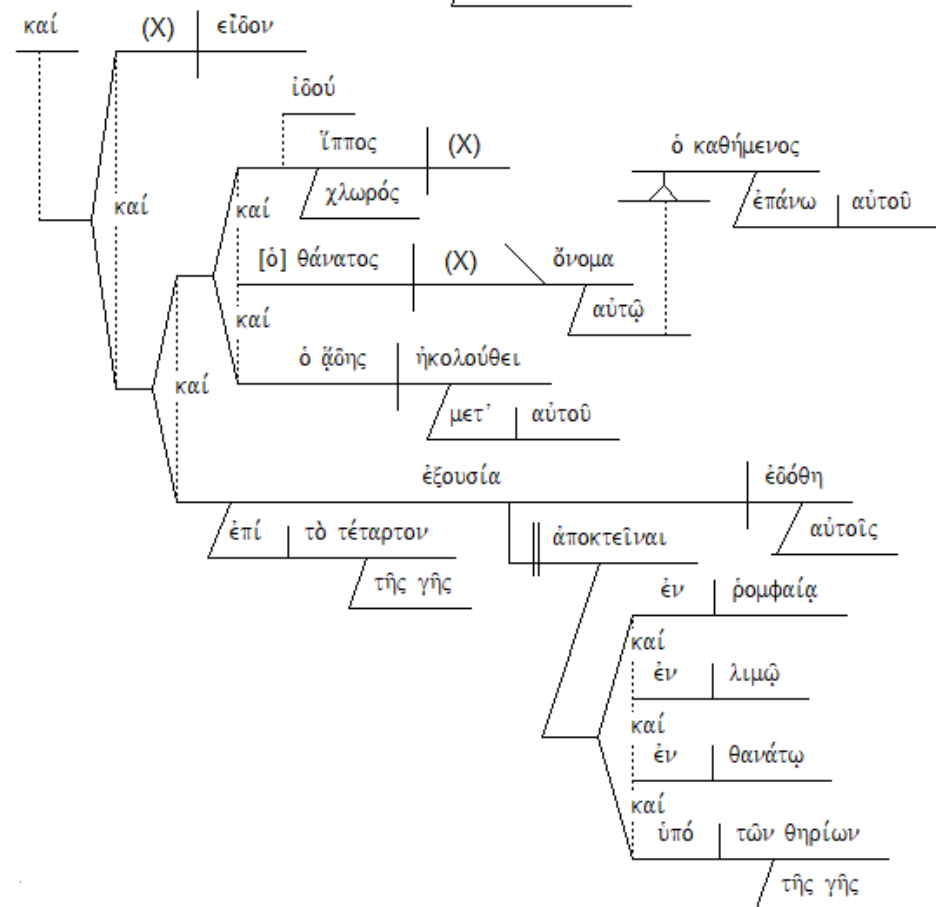
Rev 6:6



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TEXT: Revelation 6:9-11

TITLE: *BREAKING OF THE FIFTH SEAL – CRY OF THE MARTYRS – HOW LONG?*

BIG IDEA:

END TIME MARTYRS MUST PATIENTLY WAIT TO SEE THE JUDGING AND AVENGING WRATH OF GOD POURED OUT IN THE DAY OF THE LORD

INTRODUCTION:

Gordon Fee: While the preceding four seals have both similar structure and similar content, this seal and the next have only a roughly similar structure. Together they depict the two key groups of those who live on earth at the time of John's writing: the followers of the Lamb, who have been slain by "*those who dwell on the earth*" (vv. 9–11); and those who dwell on the earth themselves (vv. 12–14). The absolutely crucial matter for the rest of the present narrative, not to mention for the book as a whole, are the questions raised by the two groups. The martyrs ask, "*How long, Sovereign Lord, . . . until you avenge our blood?*" (v. 10). The rest, on their day of judgment, cry out, "*The day of their [God and the Lamb's] wrath has come, and who can withstand it?*" (v. 12). These two seals, therefore, complement each other while at the same time they prepare one for much that follows.

Sola Scriptura: The fifth seal initiates a **second series of seals** that are unlike the first four. Gone are the horses and riders who initiate events. The fact that death reigned over "*a fourth of the earth*" in the fourth seal makes the fifth seal a probable result. The relationship between seals five, six and seven is the wrath of God:

- seal 5 asks for it;
- seal 6 announces it;
- and seal 7 depicts it.

Marvin Rosenthal: Their martyrdom occurred with the opening of the fifth seal, at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. These martyrs are to be resurrected and given bodies on the first day of the Millennium (**Rev. 20:4**). The great multitude in **chapter 7** is clearly a different group from those described in **chapter 6**. The contrasting and additional truth is significant. . .

This great multitude, innumerable, universal, and suddenly appearing in heaven with white robes (purified) and palm branches (triumphant), is the raptured church. This event occurs immediately prior to the opening of the seventh seal and the outpouring of the Day of the Lord wrath (**Rev. 8:1**).

James Hamilton: **Faithfulness** to the word of God and the gospel must be more important to us than pleasure, more important to us than leisure, and more important than life itself. We must value faithfulness to God and his word more than we value the ability to go on living our peaceful, happy lives. That is what it means to be "faithful unto death." Knowing that others who have been faithful unto death before us are now in the presence of God can liberate us from any fear we may have about what comes after death. Death is not the end. This life is not the ultimate reason for your existence. You exist for the glory of God. Live in a way that testifies to that reality. Die in a way that testifies to that reality. . .

Read the Bible like you might be martyred for it. Pray like you would if you knew they were going to kill you for it one day soon. Preach the gospel like you might be martyred for it.

I. (:9-10) CRY OF THE FAITHFUL MARTYRS FOR DIVINE AVENGING WRATH

(:9a) Breaking of the Fifth Seal

“And when He broke the fifth seal,”

A. (:9b) Faithfulness of the Martyrs Now Elevated to Heaven

1. Location of the Martyrs

“I saw underneath the altar the souls”

Sola Scriptura: the altar is likely the altar of incense which may suggest why the souls *“cry out with a loud voice.”*

Why would these faithful souls be kept underneath this particular altar? No explicit reason is given. However, inasmuch as these individuals paid the ultimate sacrifice for God (physical death), they are symbolically kept at the place nearest to God, the very place from which God receives fragrant aromas, the altar of incense. We should discern that God finds great pleasure in these souls.

Robert Thomas: The problems with identifying this as the altar of burnt offering are clearcut, however. If this were the altar of burnt offering, the souls of the martyrs would more likely be “on” rather than “under” the altar (**Johnson**). In the OT, it was the blood that was beneath the altar of burnt offering, but here it is the souls. The parallelism does not fit. Another weakness of the view is that it undercuts the uniqueness of the Lamb’s sacrificial death (cf. **5:9**). Since the once-for-all death of Christ, no more sacrifices are needed for redemption. Only the altar of incense is needed in heaven (**Ladd; Morris**). In the alleged parallels cited in Paul’s writings (**Phil. 2:17; 2 Tim. 4:6**), no shedding of blood is involved because Paul uses $\sigma\pi\nu\delta\omega$ (*spendō*, “*I pour out*”), which refers to the drink offering (cf. **Gen. 35:14; Num. 15:5-7**) rather than the burnt offering. This carries no connotation of sacrificial death. Furthermore, it is not completely accurate to speak of the altar of burnt offering as the preeminent altar. The noun $\theta\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ (*thysiastērion*, “*altar*”) is used without qualification to refer to the golden altar of incense several times in this book (cf. **8:3, 5; 14:17-18**).

Buist Fanning: To locate the souls of these martyrs “*under the altar*” in heaven is a bold association with important implications. At the least it symbolizes their **nearness to God** after death: they are brought into the very presence of God (cf. **2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23**), there to await the resurrection of the body (**1 Cor 15:20–23; Phil 3:20–21; Rev 20:4**). It is likely also that it connects their “*slaughter*” (v. 9) and shedding of blood (v. 10) in loyalty to God to the faithful sacrifice that Jesus Christ, the Lamb, exemplified (cf. **5:6, 9**). The Old Testament incense altar was not the scene of actual sacrifices, but blood from those sacrifices was applied to its “*horns*” as part of the ritual (e.g., **Lev 4:6–7, 16–18**). The location of their souls “*under the altar*” represents their martyrdom as an act of worship, a costly offering of themselves to God who is worthy of all devotion.

Robert Mounce: The idea of heaven as the temple of God is common in Jewish thought. “*The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him*” (**Hab 2:20**; cf. **Ps 18:6**; T.

Levi 18:6). It is probably unnecessary to conjecture whether the altar is the altar of burnt offering or the altar of incense. The theme of sacrifice would suggest the former, but the prayers that rise (v. 10) seem to indicate the latter. There is no reason why in John's vision the two should not blend together as one. . .

Note that John knows nothing of a "rapture" of the church by which Christians are spared the tribulation that normally accompanies a godly life (cf. **2 Tim 3:12**). They "ascend to heaven through suffering and death, as Jesus did: they are not taken to heaven to escape the sufferings of earth."

2. Legacy of Faithfulness

a. Faithful to the Word of God

*of those who had been slain
because of the word of God,"*

b. Faithful to the Testimony

"and because of the testimony which they had maintained;"

J. Hampton Keathley, III: "Testimony" is the Greek word *marturia* from *marturew* which means "to bear witness, be a witness, give testimony." *Marturew* comes from *martus* meaning "a witness." But *martus* is also translated "martyr" because it is used of those who have witnessed for Christ by their death. These believers will witness for Christ by their life as they hold fast to the Word of God in the midst of a degenerate world, but they will also witness for Christ by their death. **Matthew 24:14** refers in part to their labors in addition to the labors of the 144,000 of **chapter 7**.

John MacArthur: John gives two reasons why the martyrs will be slain: *because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained*. They will correctly interpret what they see going on around them in the world in the light of Scripture. They will proclaim from the Bible God's judgment and call on people to repent and believe the gospel. Antichrist and his followers, however, will not tolerate their bold preaching and will persecute and kill them. *Because of the testimony which they had maintained* refers to their loyalty to Jesus Christ (cf. **1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4**), which was demonstrated by their proclamation of the Word of God in the face of life-threatening hatred and hostility. In a world bereft of the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit, merciless men will murder those who faithfully and courageously proclaim the message of judgment and salvation.

B. (:10) Cry for Divine Avenging Wrath

1. Loud Cry

"and they cried out with a loud voice, saying,"

2. Lobbying Cry

a. Appeal to Speed Up the Process

"How long,"

Marvin Rosenthal: When the fifth seal is opened, it depicts the martyrdom of a believing remnant who have not bowed to the Antichrist. . . If the seals are God's wrath [during the Day of the Lord], then He is responsible for the martyrdom of His own faithful children, those who refuse to give their allegiance to the Antichrist and thereby forfeit their lives. Impossible, you say. That is

correct. The very testimony of the martyrs settles the matter. They **pleaded for divine retribution** against their persecutors. That is another reason why the seals cannot be God's wrath, and the Day of the Lord cannot begin at the beginning of the Tribulation period [i.e. the 70th week of Daniel].

Sola Scriptura: The martyrs cry out for vengeance. Their question echoes the sentiment that too much time has passed between the deed and punishment. This is very similar to many Psalms which demand of God that He punish evil doers (**Pss 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 139**). King David prayed such a prayer (**2 Sam 3:28-29**). Nehemiah prayed a similar prayer (**Neh 4:4-5**). . . No clue has yet surfaced to indicate that the wrath of God has begun through **Revelation 6:10**.

b. Appeal to the Lord's Character

"O Lord, holy and true,"

Robert Mounce: Totally separate from all evil, he will vindicate with **integrity** those who have given their lives for the cause of righteousness.

John MacArthur: The martyrs base their appeal for vengeance on two of God's attributes. Because God is **holy**, He must judge sin (cf. **Ps. 5:4-5; Hab. 1:13; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 3:6; 2 Tim. 4:1**); because He is **true**, He must be faithful to His word and keep His promises (**Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Luke 21:33**). **Revelation 3:7** applies this phrase holy and true to Jesus Christ, thus affirming His deity and full equality with His Father.

Warren Wiersbe: The saints in heaven know that God will eventually judge sin and establish righteousness in the earth, but they do not know God's exact schedule. It is not personal revenge that they seek, but vindication of God's holiness and the establishment of God's justice. Every believer today who sincerely prays, "*Thy kingdom come!*" is echoing their petition.

c. Appeal to the Lord's Justice

"wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood"

Sola Scriptura: It is important to remember concerning the martyrs of **Revelation 6:9** that all believers of all the ages are not represented by this reference. Only those recently killed are in focus. This point is defended by the martyrs' own statement that God is to avenge their blood "*on those who dwell on the earth.*" Those living on the earth at this time are the only ones responsible for the death of the martyrs since they are the only ones who will receive God's judgment.

John MacArthur: God's vengeance is not to be equated with petty human vindictiveness and bitter desire for revenge. God's holiness, righteousness, and justice demand that He take vengeance on unrepentant sinners. Vengeance belongs to God alone because all sin is ultimately against Him and an offense to Him (cf. **Ps. 51:4**).

d. Appeal to the Punishment of the Wicked

"on those who dwell on the earth?"

Van Parunak: "*on them that dwell on the earth?*" -- The expression appears eight times in the Revelation (**Rev. 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:2, 8**), always describing **those who are in opposition to God**. "*Dwell*" κατοικέω G2730 means to settle down and reside, and contrasts

with παροικέω G3939 and its cognates παροικία G3940 “pilgrimage” and πάροικος G3941 “stranger, pilgrim,” which refer to transients.

II. (:11) DIVINE RESPONSE TO THE CRY OF THE MARTYRS

A. Response by Symbolic Act = Giving of White Robe

“And there was given to each of them a white robe;”

G.K. Beale: The metaphor of white robes connotes the idea of a **purity** which has resulted from persevering faith tested by the refining fire of tribulation. Robes are given not only as a reward for purity of faith but as a heavenly declaration of the saints’ purity or righteousness and an annulling of the guilty verdict rendered on them by the world. In this picture is an assurance to the saints still on earth that their vindication before God without doubt awaits them. But for the “earth-dwellers” (literally “those who dwell on the earth”) of v. 10 (the standard expression in Revelation for unbelievers: 8:13; 11:10; 13:12, 14; 17:2), there remains the terrifying prospect of judgment.

B. Response by Spoken Word = Wait Patiently for Divine Purposes to be Fulfilled

1. Patience in Waiting

“and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer,”

Sola Scriptura: Louw-Nida indicates about the verb *to rest* that “the focus of meaning seems to be upon the restorative character of rest rather than mere cessation of activity” (Louw-Nida; 23.80). This indicates that the souls were in a state that allows for refreshment from the labors of this life.

Grant Osborne: The martyrs are then called to have the same patience that characterized their life of perseverance on earth (1:9; 2:2–3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). God tells them ἵνα ἀναπαύσονται ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν (*hina anapausontai eti chronon mikron, that they should wait for a short time yet*).

Buist Fanning: The full answer to their cry for God’s justice will come after only “a little while longer” (ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν). This time indication is filled in further, however, by a temporal clause (introduced by “until,” ἕως) that explains, in part, the events in God’s plan that must occur before his full answer will be seen (v. 11c). The temporal clause specifies two groups of people (not denoting the same individuals) that have not yet reached their “full number.” The two groups are shown by a “both . . . and” (καί . . . καί) parallelism joining two noun phrases that are subjects of “be completed” (v. 11c).

- The first is “their fellow servants,” a reference to others who, in the purpose of God, will come to faith in Christ and serve him faithfully as these martyrs have done. This reflects a common eschatological theme that God’s delay in bringing his judgment is due in part to his mercy in allowing more time for the gospel to be proclaimed across the world (cf. **Matt 24:14**) and for more individuals to “come to repentance” (**2 Pet 3:9**).
- The second group is “their brothers and sisters,” but this group is specified further: those who will “be killed” for their faith, just as the heavenly martyrs were. This sad indication, that even heaven acknowledges martyrdoms yet to come, is a reminder of the heartbreaking reality of the events associated with these seal openings: these are the messianic woes, the time of intense suffering that the world and its people—even God’s

people—must endure before the full blessedness of his redemption will be experienced. But God’s full justice will come soon, as the next seal opening shows.

2. Purpose in Waiting

“until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: “*Completed*” is the verb *plerow* which means “*to fill, or fulfill, or complete, bring to fruition.*” This stresses the divine providence and purpose of God in the deaths of the martyrs. They are not without God’s knowledge or without God’s control or concern. The exact numbers are known to God and allowed by Him according to His own eternal purpose. For “*precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones*” (**Psalm 116:15**).

Robert Thomas: The word to the souls under the altar gives them reassurance that God will eventually avenge their blood, but the time for the culmination of that vengeance has not yet arrived. One feature that must yet transpire beforehand is the increase of their number through additional martyrdoms. The earth dwellers under the dawning leadership of the beast from the sea will take an even greater toll of human lives before Christ finally intervenes through His personal arrival back on earth. Until then, the already martyred are told to rest and enjoy their state of blessedness already attained.

Daniel Akin: Pastor **Adrian Rogers** used to say, “God is never early and He is never late. He is always right on time.” We know this is true. However, there are times when we struggle to believe it. This is especially the case when injustice and suffering are involved. When those occasions arise, and they will, what should we do?

Gordon Fee: Thus even though John’s ultimate concern in this book is to reassure his readers of their final destiny, despite present and anticipated increased suffering, he neither downplays nor enhances the latter reality. They are, after all, followers of the Crucified One, whose own death was at the hands of the Empire, even though it had been instigated by the fear and hatred of the very people he came to deliver.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does the doctrine of the Pre-trib Rapture fail to adequately prepare saints for the prospect of suffering and martyrdom in the Great Tribulation?
- 2) How does this passage support the doctrine of God’s sovereignty in election?
- 3) Are we patient when it comes to God’s timetable for both the events unfolding in our life as well as His end times program?
- 4) What is the difference between a righteous longing for justice and a lust for revenge?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

J. Hampton Keathley, III: That these martyrs are introduced at this point strongly suggests that they come out the Tribulation. They are Tribulation martyrs. The fifth seal, then, parallels **Matthew 24:9-14** and undoubtedly occurs during the last half of the Tribulation. My understanding of the chronology of **Matthew 24** is that **verses 4-8** refer to the first half of the Tribulation, the beginning of birth pangs, and **verses 9-28** refer to the last half. Some see the last half beginning with **verse 15** and the mention of the Abomination of Desolation, but the “*therefore*” that introduces **verse 15** links this event very closely to the preceding events marked especially by the persecution mentioned in **verse 9**. It is this blasphemous event in the temple that shows the persecution will begin and that signals the need to flee.

The persecution of **Matthew 24:9** is not just of the Jews, but is a persecution against any believer in Jesus Christ, Jew or Gentle. Note “*you will be hated ... on account of my Name.*” These will accept Christ because of the preaching mentioned in **Matthew 24:14**, and this is undoubtedly carried out in part by the 144,000 mentioned in **Revelation 7**. The period called, “*the beginning of sorrows,*” the first half of the Tribulation, is now over. The Prince of **Daniel 9:26-27** breaks his covenant with Israel, manifests his true beastly character, and begins to persecute Israel along with all believers in Christ. This will coincide with the events of **Revelation 12:7-17**.

John MacArthur: Jesus taught that identical sequence of events in His Olivet Discourse in **Matthew 24**. As noted in chapter 13 of this volume, the first seven verses of **Matthew 24** describe the events of the first four seals. Just as the fifth seal describes martyrs, so also does Jesus in **Matthew 24:9**: “*Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.*” The event that marks the midpoint of the Tribulation, the setting up of the “abomination of desolation,” does not occur until **verse 15** of **Matthew 24**. Therefore the persecution Jesus spoke of (that associated with the fifth seal) will begin in the first half of the Tribulation and escalate in the second half, after the abomination of desolation. The “*abomination of desolation*” is referred to three times in Daniel’s prophecy (**Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11**) to describe the desecration of the temple in the second century B. C. by the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes. The yet future “*abomination of desolation*” Jesus described in **Matthew 24:15** will be similar to Antiochus’s act. At that time, the final Antichrist will set himself up in the temple to be worshiped as God (**2 Thess. 2:3-4**). The removal of what now restrains him (**2 Thess. 2:6-7**) will permit Antichrist and his evil followers to run rampant. The power that will keep Antichrist from fully manifesting his evil can be none other than the power of God. He will keep Antichrist from manifesting himself before God’s appointed time. He will then remove the restraining force and allow that Satan-possessed false christ to fully manifest his apostasy.

The persecution will, even in its initial phase, be worldwide in scope. Jesus warned, “*You will be hated by all nations because of My name*” (**Matt. 24:9**). That verse also implies that the persecution will be tolerated, if not actively led, by the world’s governments. It will also be religious in nature, led by the false, worldwide, ecumenical religious system involved in worshiping the Antichrist (cf. **Rev. 17:1-6**). The world’s hatred for God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will motivate them to persecute believers (cf. **16:9, 11, 21**).

Inevitably, the persecution will sift those who outwardly identify with Jesus Christ. As has been true throughout the history of the church, there will be tares mingled with the wheat (**Matt.**

13:24–43). But the persecution, as it always does, will reveal who is truly redeemed and who is not. Jesus described this sifting process in **Matthew 24:10–12**: “*At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.*” False believers will reveal their lack of genuine saving faith by defecting. **First John 2:19** describes such people: “*They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.*” Genuine believers, on the other hand, will, as always, remain loyal to Jesus Christ, since “*the one who endures to the end, he will be saved*” (**Matt. 24:13**). The redeemed persevere through any trial, including persecution and martyrdom.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: The fifth seal introduces a very different scene, a vision of the souls of the martyrs crying out for judgment. The passage is steeped in Jewish thought, yet it is central to the author’s purpose. The theme of the martyrs crying for vengeance (cf. **Gen. 4:10**), with the assurance that God has set a definite limit on the number so to be slain and at the set time will answer the martyrs’ prayers by the revelation of the kingdom is well known in Jewish apocalyptic writings. . .

This is a plea by the martyrs not for personal revenge, but for the **vindication** of the right and truth of the cause for which they gave their lives, which is Christ’s cause. The martyrs had been condemned by those who dwell upon the earth, i.e., by the opponents of Christ and the Church (cf. **13:8**). They had been put to death as propagators of lies and enemies of mankind. Their prayer that God will put them in the right and reverse the judgment of the world can be answered finally only by the revelation of Christ in his kingdom, when it will be seen that Christ is no deceiver but the Lord of truth and the Lord of the universe, and that they are his true servant. In that event they will be vindicated, and those who put them to death be judged. Their cry is heard, but their request is not immediately granted.

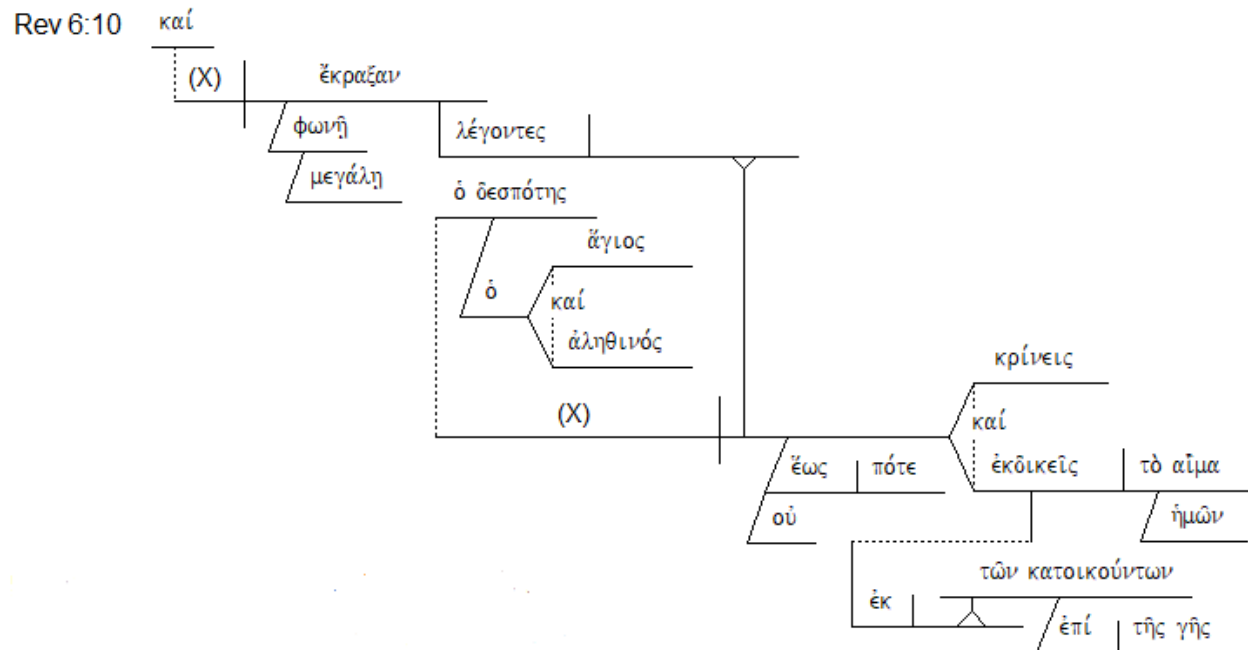
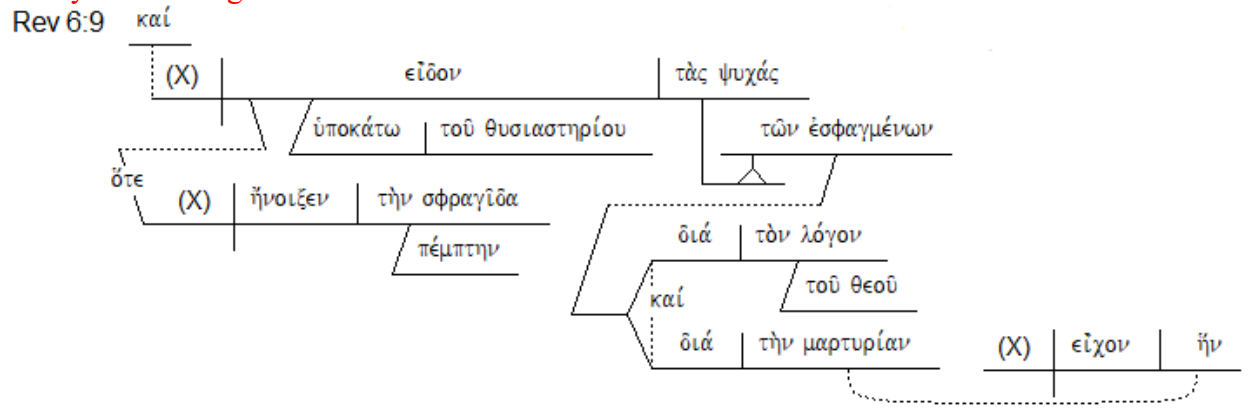
David Aune: The implication of the divine response to the petition from the martyrs indicates the necessity of suffering in the plan of God, for more Christians must yet die before the eschaton can be inaugurated. Christian suffering does not hinder the fulfillment of the eschaton but rather inevitably leads to its inauguration.

J.A. Seiss: This might seem to be but poor consolation to these resting souls; and yet, a real consolation it was. It assured them that they were not alone in the sufferings they had experienced; that theirs was but the common lot of all faithful ones in those trying times; that, though they were dead, the cause in which they died still had representatives, who would stand to it unto death, as they had done; and that, though the consummation was delayed yet for a little while, *their* sufferings were over, and there as a flood of sorrow still to deluge the earth from which *they* now were free.

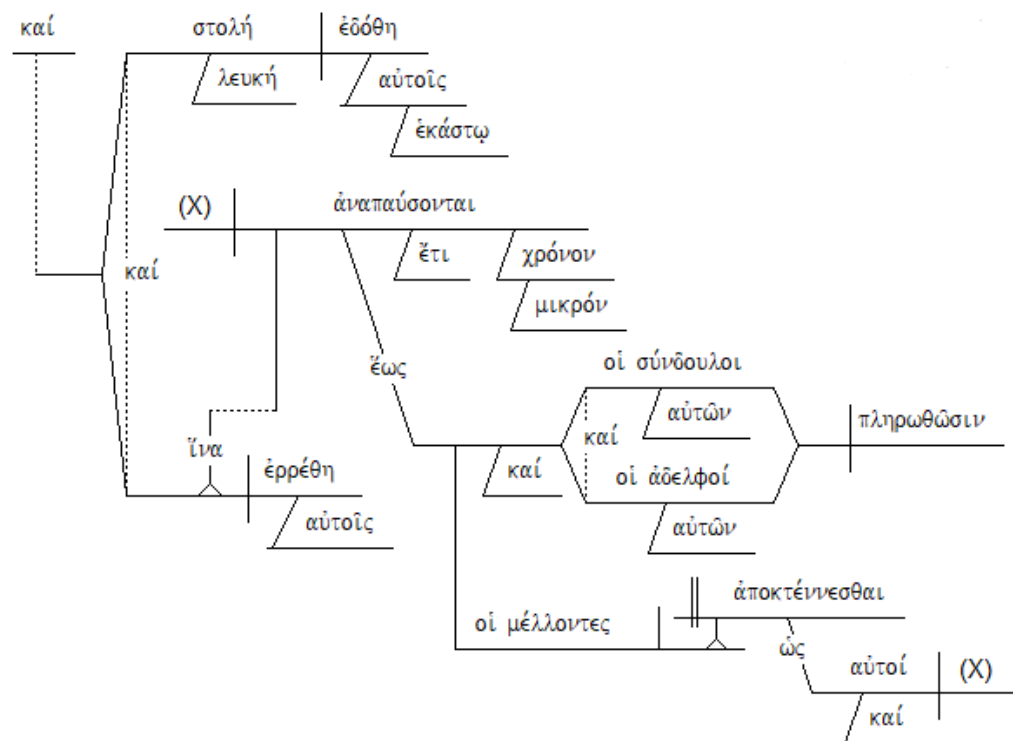
But, above all, was the assurance, pervading and implied in each particular, that what they had hoped and testified, was presently to be accomplished. Those white robes were the earnest of a sublime life. Their martyrdom for their steadfast maintenance of the truth, was duly remembered, and, in a little while, should be fully requited to them, and to the godless hosts who had inflicted it. Their blood was not long to remain unavenged from them that dwell on the earth. The years of waiting and of suffering were now on the margin of their close. Yet a little time, and the consummation should be complete. Yet a little while, and the wicked should not be; yea, they should diligently consider his place, and it should not be. The thrones were already

set; the work was really in progress; the time of the end had verily come; and, after a short space more, they would be able to say: “*I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree; yet he passed away, and lo, he was not: yet, I sought him, but he could not be found.*” (Ps. 37:35-36)

Leedy Greek Diagram:



Rev 6:11



TEXT: Revelation 6:12-17

TITLE: *BREAKING OF THE SIXTH SEAL – COSMIC SIGNS ANNOUNCING THE DAY OF THE LORD*

BIG IDEA:

THE BREAKING OF THE SIXTH SEAL DISPLAYS THE TRANSFORMATIVE COSMIC SIGNS THAT SIGNAL THE SECOND COMING AND GOD'S WRATH

INTRODUCTION:

Marvin Rosenthal: Timing of the Rapture and the Day of the Lord

Cosmic disturbance precedes the Day of the Lord. And that cosmic disturbance occurs with the opening of the sixth seal. To deny or ignore that fact is to force the Scriptures to conform to a pre-conceived pretribulation rapture mold. Two points are of great significance.

- First, the sixth seal is opened after the Great Tribulation. And the Great Tribulation is cut short and ends before the end of the seventieth week (**Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:24; Luke 21:23-25**; see also **Rev. 6:12**, where cosmic disturbance occurs after the martyrdom associated with the Great Tribulation).
- Second, the sign of the appearing of the Son of man in heaven will be manifested following the opening of the sixth seal (**Matt. 24:30; Mark 13:26; Luke 21:27**). This occurs after the Great Tribulation but long before the end of the seventieth week. The seven trumpet judgments must be poured out before the seventieth week ends (**Rev. 11:15**). The fifth trumpet judgment alone is said to last five months (**Rev. 9:1, 5**). This appearance of the Son of man in heaven before the opening of the seventh seal is related to the rapturing of the church before the Day of the Lord's wrath begins. God does not exempt His people from man's wrath; He does exempt them from His wrath (Lot was told to flee Sodom and Noah to get into the ark before God's wrath fell). God's wrath begins with the opening of the seventh seal, for out of the seventh seal the seven trumpet judgments will emerge.

The cosmic disturbance introduced with the opening of the sixth seal is the prelude of the Rapture of the church and the Day of the Lord wrath.

John MacArthur: The Old Testament prophets also spoke of frightening natural disasters in connection with the Day of the Lord. Joel wrote, "*Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness.... The earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness*" (**Joel 2:1–2, 10**; cf. **2:31; 3:16**). Ezekiel wrote of violent weather accompanying the Day of the Lord (**Ezek. 13:5–16**), and Zephaniah described it as "*a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness*" (**Zeph. 1:15**).

Richard Phillips: The sixth seal answers the prayer of the martyrs for justice and vengeance on the dwellers of earth. God told them to wait "*until the number of their fellow servants and their*

brothers should be complete” (Rev. 6:11), and the sixth seal shows that this waiting will be fulfilled in God’s timing. Just as seven is the number of completion and salvation in Revelation, six is the number of man. Thus, when Christ “*opened the sixth seal*” (6:12), the day of God’s wrath appeared. William Hendriksen writes: “It describes the one great catastrophe at the end of this age. The dread and terror, the awe and consternation of that day is pictured under the twofold symbolism of a crashing universe and a thoroughly frightened human race.”

Bruce Hurt: “It would be difficult to paint any scene more moving or more terrible than that described at the opening of the sixth seal.” Up to now, the effects of the first five seals, although unprecedented in their global impact, could still be explained away as an intensification of what history already records: conflict, war, death, famine, disease, and martyrdom. With the opening of the sixth seal, all such explanations vanish for the signs which attend this seal are unmistakable in their uniqueness and scope.

The magnitude of the earthquake and cosmic disturbances that will occur when Christ breaks the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-14+) forces the conclusion that this will be an awesome expression of the wrath of God, not the work of unregenerate mankind.

Kendell Easley: God’s wrath against sin has always been expressed through his judgments (Ps. 78:56–66). The biblical prophets, moreover, predicted a coming day in which the wrath of God would be fully and finally poured out (Isa. 13:9; Zeph. 1:14–15). This “*day of the LORD*” was inevitable, but persons and nations that repented would be spared.

Daniel Akin: Precisely what this describes we can only guess. What we do know is there is a **total cosmic meltdown**. The Day of the Lord has arrived in its climactic and eschatological reality. The wrath of the Lamb is here! On that day no one will be in doubt as to what is happening and who is bringing all of this about.

Robert Mounce: As followers of the slain Lamb, God’s people suffer persecution and martyrdom. Their cry for vindication leads to the fundamental theological point of revelation—that God will vindicate himself by vindicating his people. The faithful are to live with the assurance that God is in command of his universe. At the moment it may appear that the forces of evil have gained the edge, but the one who defeated those very forces by means of his sacrificial death on the cross will return at the end of time to claim his own people and destroy forever all that stands in opposition.

G.K. Beale: These verses express the explicit and final answer to the saints’ plea in vv. 9-11. The time must be the last judgment, because we have just been told that the judgment pictured here will not be executed until the full number of the suffering saints has been completed (v. 11). The calamitous scene of vv. 12-17 assumes that the persecution of all Christians has finally run its course, and now all that remains is to execute **final punishment on the persecutors**, which strikes the very last note of world history. Consequently, this passage cannot deal with judgments of unbelievers before the return of Christ during an extended tribulation period, since they have not yet finished persecuting the saints at that point.

(;12A) PROLOGUE

“And I looked when He broke the sixth seal,”

I. (:12b-14) TRANSFORMATIVE COSMIC DISTURBANCES IN THE EARTH AND SKY

A. (:12b) Great Earthquake

“and there was a great earthquake;”

David Aune: In biblical tradition, earthquakes are often expected to occur in the end time as one effect of the presence or coming of God (**Joel 2:10; 3:16[MT 4:16]; Isa 24:18–23; 29:6; Mic 1:4; Nah 1:5.**

B. (:12c) Sun and Moon Transformed – cf. Joel 2:31

1. Sun Became Black

“and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair,”

Cf. **Is. 50:3**

Grant Osborne: The darkening of the sun is frequent in the OT as a sign of judgment (**Exod. 10:22; Isa. 13:10; Ezek. 32:7–8**), and the turning of the moon bloodred deepens the image. A terrible judgment is about to fall on the earth-dwellers.

2. Moon Became Like Blood

“and the whole moon became like blood;”

Marvin Rosenthal: The cosmic disturbances concerning which the Lord taught (**Matt. 24:29**) and which parallel the sixth seal (**Rev. 6:12-13**) signal the coming of the Son of man in heaven. This sign will occur *after* the Great Tribulation but *before* the end of the seventieth week. The cosmic disturbance (the sun will be darkened, the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven) will result in a darkened universe. It will be the manifestation of the glory of God which will dispel that darkness. The natural light of the heavenly bodies will be shut off (darkened) and then the supernatural light (the glory of God) will be revealed. The manifestation of God’s glory was called by the Jewish people *shekinah* (*dwelling*) and indicated God’s presence. Here then is the answer to the question posed by the disciples, “*What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?*” (**Matt. 24:3**). God’s presence will be known through the universal manifestation of His glory. He will rapture the church before He begins to pour out His wrath (the trumpet and bowl judgments) on an unrepentant world.

C. (:13) Stars Falling to Earth

*“and the stars of the sky fell to the earth,
as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.”*

John MacArthur: *Asteres* (*stars*) can refer to actual stars, but can also describe any heavenly body other than the sun and the moon. Obviously, in this context it does not refer to actual stars, since they are far too large to fall to the earth and would incinerate it long before striking it. Also, the stars are still in place later when the fourth trumpet sounds (**8:12**). This is most likely a reference to asteroid or meteor showers bombarding the earth. There has been much speculation among scientists recently about the effects of a large asteroid striking the earth. Modern experts believe that the impacts of asteroids, comets, and meteors striking the earth would be devastating and cause unprecedented destruction. There will be so many such bodies hitting the earth that John, in a vivid analogy, likens the scene to a fig tree that casts its unripe figs when shaken by a

great wind. With the whole earth being pummeled by fiery balls plunging out of the blackness there will be nowhere for people to flee, nowhere for them to hide.

D. (:14a) Sky Split Apart – cf. Is. 34:4

*“And the sky was split apart
like a scroll when it is rolled up;”*

Grant Osborne: At Jesus’ baptism the heavens were “*split apart*” (**Mark 1:10** par.), also an apocalyptic symbol for the end of the age, and here the heavens will be “*rolled up*.” Jesus’ first coming began the coming of the kingdom and the end times; this act of God will culminate and finalize the end times.

Craig Keener: The rolling up of the heavens “*like a scroll*” (**6:14**) comes from day of the Lord images in **Isaiah 34:4**, referring to the cosmic judgment when God punishes the wicked nations, a text in which heaven’s hosts also wither like a leaf on a fig tree (cf. **Rev. 6:13**). For most of Revelation’s audience, the picture likely evoked the mundane image of reading a scroll, which one would typically unroll with the right hand while with the left one rolled up what one had just finished reading. But the mundane image here translates into one of terror for humanity! Earlier texts had used this image of the heavens being rolled up like a scroll (Sib. Or. 3.82) to emphasize God’s sovereignty over the heavens (3.81) and that the entire dome of heaven would collapse on the earth (3.83), as the entire universe unraveled at its seams (3.80).

E. (:14b) Mountains and Islands Displaced

“and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”

Buist Fanning: Mountains and islands are physically fixed in place; how can “every” one of them be “*moved from its place*”? But purely naturalistic readings (i.e., seeing these as essentially normal occurrences) or purely figurative readings (i.e., social or political upheaval) fail to do justice to the typological character of the descriptions or to how the Old Testament prophets and Jesus himself seemed to use such images. It is better to take these as **severe disruptions** in the visible sky, as **dramatic portents of the coming cosmic re-creation** but not the actual dissolution of the creation yet. The text itself indicates that the world does not immediately come to an end (**6:15–17**, people have time to hide and lament what is still to come; **7:3**, there is delay so that God’s servants can be sealed from judgments still to come). But these severe disruptions point forward to the ultimate escalation soon-to-come, the dissolution of the present sky and earth in connection with the arrival of the new creation of **Revelation 21–22** (cf. **20:11**, sky and earth “*fled*”; **21:1**, first sky and first earth “*passed away*”; **21:23**; **22:5**, no need of sun or moon).

John MacArthur: The devastating natural disasters accompanying the sixth seal will be the most terrifying events ever to affect the earth. Their cumulative impact will be far more destructive than any of the current doomsday scenarios about asteroids hitting the earth. And the even more intense trumpet and bowl judgments are still to come! The total flattening of all mountains will come later at the seventh bowl judgment (**16:20**).

David Aune: The metaphor of the most stable features of the world, such as mountains, islands, and coastlands, “*shaken*” and “*moved*” occurs in contexts of a divine theophany or divine judgment (**Judg 5:5**; **Pss 18:7**[**LXX 17:7**]; **46:2–3**; **Isa 5:25**; **54:10**; **64:1**; **Jer 4:24**; **Ezek 26:18**; **38:20**; **Mic 1:4**; **Nah 1:5**; **Hab 1:6**; **Zech 14:4**).

Sola Scriptura: Clearly, these six cataclysms are designed to accomplish one thing – to get man’s attention. No man on the face of the earth at this time can possibly conclude anything other than the fact that the great God of heaven is coming in wrath, particularly when the Lamb is seen descending from heaven!

II. (:15-17) TERRIFYING RESPONSES TO THE OUTBREAK OF GOD’S WRATH

Buist Fanning: In vv. 15–17 John narrates the final portion of this vision, the **response** of those who experience the cataclysmic events of the sixth seal (vv. 12–14). His portrayal captures the universal impact these woes will have, the desperation people will feel when faced with such catastrophes, and their recognition that such judgments represent God’s anger against human sin. He also masterfully connects this entire section (6:1–17) with what precedes (chs. 4–5) and follows (7:1–17). To communicate that such judgments affect the whole world of humanity (cf. 3:10), John uses a list of groups drawn from Old Testament prophecies about the day of the Lord (Isa 24:1–4, 21; 34:12), emphasizing especially that not even the privileged and powerful of the earth will be exempt (v. 15). He refers first to a series of elites in the plural: “*The kings of the earth and the nobles and the commanders and the wealthy and the powerful.*” Shifting to the generic singular and including a contrasting disadvantaged class shows that all are included: “*Everyone, slave and free.*” What they all do is try to escape God’s judgment by “*hiding themselves,*” desperately seeking protection “*in the caves and rocks of the mountains,*” another set of images from texts about the day of the Lord (Isa 2:10–21; cf. Jer 4:29; Matt 24:16; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:21, escape to the mountains).

A. (:15) Irrational Attempts at Concealment

1. No Exemptions from God’s Judgment – Universal Terror

“And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man,”

James Hamilton: Did you notice how the manifestation of the wrath of God functions as a **leveler** of humankind? Did you see how the reaction of the kings is the same as the reaction of the slaves? Did you see how the rich and the powerful are no better than the merely free?

- Status—“*kings*”—is nothing before the wrath of God.
- Human greatness—“*the great ones*”—is nothing before the wrath of God.
- An army—“*generals*”—is nothing before the wrath of God.
- Money—“*the rich*”—
- and influence—“*the powerful*”—are nothing before the wrath of God.

All these people are looking for a place to hide, but there is no place to hide.

Everything people sell their souls to gain fails them when the great day comes. Politicians sacrifice their integrity to get elected, but their office won’t help them when Jesus comes. The rich trade life for money, the powerful exchange loving relationships to gain influence, and people everywhere prefer enhancing their image to building character and learning truth. But when God knocks the mountains off their roots and yanks the earth’s surface flat, when he rolls up the scroll of the sky, nothing that people forsook him to gain will protect them from his wrath.

John MacArthur: This verse indicates that the **debilitating fear** caused by the disasters associated with the sixth seal will affect all unbelievers. These seven categories embrace all

classes of society.

2. No Safe Refuge

“hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;”

John MacArthur: The panic-stricken sinners will react **irrationally**, foolishly attempting to hide themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains (cf. **Isa. 2:17–21**)—the very places that are being shaken. They are no doubt seeking refuge from the swarms of meteors and asteroids bombarding the earth. But in light of the massive earthquake and its continuing aftershocks, the widespread volcanic eruptions, and the other disturbances to the earth’s crust, such hiding places will offer no safety. Further, it is impossible to hide from God or evade His judgment. Speaking of rebellious Israel, God said, *“Though they dig into Sheol, from there shall My hand take them; and though they ascend to heaven, from there will I bring them down. Though they hide on the summit of Carmel, I will search them out and take them from there; and though they conceal themselves from My sight on the floor of the sea, from there I will command the serpent and it will bite them”*(**Amos 9:2–3**; cf. **Ps. 139:7–12**).

Grant Osborne: All of these will also be united in their fear. Terror is a great equalizer, and all social distinctions drop away in light of the shaking of the heavens and the arrival of the terrible judgment of God. Two things demonstrate the totality of their terror. First, they *“hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains.”* The picture of hiding in caves from an irresistible force is frequent in the OT. Lot and his daughters lived in a cave in fear after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (**Gen. 19:30**); five Amorite kings hid in a cave after Joshua had destroyed their armies (**Josh. 10:16**); and David hid in a cave from the wrath of Saul (**1 Sam. 22:1**). In **1 Sam. 13:6** the armies of Israel hid in caves and rocks from the Philistines. In particular, this passage probably alludes to **Isa. 2:10, 19, 21**, which describe the effects of the day of the Lord. **Isaiah 2:10** commands Judah to *“go into the rocks, hide in the ground,”* while **verses 19 and 21** predict that *“men will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the grounds”* due to *“dread of the LORD.”* This results from the rebellion and sin of Judah (**chap. 1**) resulting in God’s judgment upon the nation in **chapters 2–4**. Therefore, this first reaction is a natural result of the desire to flee from the wrath of God. At the same time, it is **ironic**, for **Rev. 6:14** told us that at the *“great earthquake,”* *“every mountain”* was *“removed from its place.”* Therefore, these people are hiding in what is soon to disappear and leave them face to face with God.

Bruce Hurt: Here is the classic record of man’s response to his own sin—a vain attempt to hide from the omnipresent, omniscient, almighty God (**Gen. 3:8**; **Rev. 6:16+**). In the irony of God, those who persecuted God’s servants, who were *“destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy,”* who *“wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth”* (**Heb. 11:38**) now experience firsthand a similar affliction from the very hand of God.

B. (:16) Irrational Appeals of Desperation

“and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;”

Grant Osborne: Second, they are so filled with terror that they cry out to the mountains and rocks in which they are hiding, Πέσετε ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς (pesete eph’ hēmas, fall on us). In their first reaction, they hid among the caves and rocks. Now they want those caves and rocks to fall on them. These people are so filled with irrational terror that they plead for an avalanche to bury them rather than

face God and the Lamb. There are not many times in history people have begged to be smothered in an avalanche. This is an allusion to **Hos. 10:8**, which describes the destruction of Israel's idolatrous high places and altars and then predicts that Israel will "*say to the mountains, 'Cover us!' and to the hills, 'Fall on us!'*" Both in Hosea and here the enemies of God wish to perish in order to escape the divine wrath. This plea is also filled with irony, for death will not keep them from the judgment seat of God (**Rev. 20:11–14**). In short, their terror is so great that they will try anything to escape.

Richard Phillips: Coupled with humans' attempt to flee is their terror in God's judgment. This is why they find death preferable to "*the face of him who is seated on the throne*" (**Rev. 6:16**). Like Adam and Eve fleeing from God in the garden after they had sinned (**Gen. 3:8**), the human race is unified in desiring above all to avoid the face of their Creator, against whom they had so viciously rebelled, and whose countenance is now revealed in wrath. Here, we are shown that "what sinners dread most is not death, but the revealed Presence of God." God is revealed to condemned humanity as the enthroned Creator and as the Lamb whose offered salvation was spurned and despised. How total will their alarm be when "*the great day of their wrath has come*" (**Rev. 6:17**)!

Warren Wiersbe: The phrase "*wrath of the Lamb*" seems a paradox. "Wrath of the lion" would be more consistent. We are so accustomed to emphasizing the meekness and gentleness of Christ (**Matt. 11:28–30**) that we forget His holiness and justice. The same Christ who welcomed the children also drove the merchants from the temple. God's wrath is not like a child's temper tantrum or punishment meted out by an impatient parent. God's wrath is the evidence of His holy love for all that is right and His holy hatred for all that is evil. Only a soft and sentimental person would want to worship a God who did not deal justly with evil in the world.

C. (:17) Intense Awareness of the Outbreak of Divine Wrath = the Day of the Lord

1. Divine Wrath about to be Unleashed

"for the great day of their wrath has come;"

This timing statement supports the position that the first 4 seals of the first half of Daniel's 70th week were not part of the outpouring of divine wrath.

John MacArthur: Even those alive during the Tribulation will not know the precise time that the Day of the Lord will begin. They will be duped by false prophets, who will reassure them that judgment is not near; rather "*peace and safety*" are at hand—just as their predecessors falsely reassured rebellious Israel (**Mic. 3:5**; cf. **Jer. 6:14**; **8:11**). These lying deceivers will scoff at the idea that Christ will return, demanding mockingly, "*Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation*" (**2 Pet. 3:4**). Deceived by the false prophets, the world will plunge blindly into the Day of the Lord and face disastrous, hopeless ruin.

2. Day of the Lord Cannot Be Endured

"and who is able to stand?"

Buist Fanning: None can resist or withstand his judgment when it arrives at last. All attempts at protection or escape are futile. The question is left unanswered in chapter 6. However, John skillfully uses this question to lead the reader into the interlude (**7:1–17**) that he has inserted between the sixth seal (**6:12–17**) and the seventh (**8:1**). Some humans in fact will be able to stand

in that day because God himself will protect and enable them to do so.

Daniel Akin: The **time of Jacob's trouble** is here (**Jer 30:7**). Daniel's seventieth week is on us (**Dan 9:24-27**). The great tribulation has come (**Rev 7:14**). **The Day of the Lord** has arrived. The great day of the wrath of the Lamb visits planet Earth. Only one question remains: "*Who can stand?*" The answer, of course, is, "No one!" No one can stand! Rather than turn to Christ in faith, **they hide in fear**. And according to **verse 16**, they know from whom they are hiding! They know who has come and what has come. Knowing it is the Lord and His judgment, they run rather than repent. They flee rather than turn to Christ in faith. The great and awesome Day of the Lord is here. The end has finally arrived. What will men do? What can they do? No one can stand before divine judgment. No one. **Craig Keener** is right:

The impact on the reader is . . . complete: There is no security, no firm ground to stand on, nothing in the universe to depend on except God himself. The rest of creation will collapse. (*Revelation*, 225)

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can believers tell that they are not already in the day of the Lord?
- 2) How does the timing of these cosmic events as a precursor to Christ's Second Coming preclude a pretrib rapture?
- 3) Why don't people finally repent instead of seeking to hide or flee from God's presence?
- 4) What is your natural response when confronted with accountability before God for your sins?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Phillips: Are these descriptions to be taken symbolically or more or less literally, and second, what is the event they describe? There are *two main answers*. Those who hold the preterist position (the name is derived from a Latin word meaning "past") hold that this cataclysmic language is symbolic of societal upheaval and collapse rather than describing a physical dissolution. Under this view, which is coupled with an early dating of Revelation, the calamity described here is not the final judgment but the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The alternative view holds that while symbolic language is used, the sixth seal depicts literal calamities at the end of the world in the final judgment. . .

There are reasons, however, to take the differing view that the sixth seal foretells the literal dissolution of creation in the final judgment of God. First, while we agree that this symbolism is often used in the Old Testament for falling empires and the conquest of cities, there are other passages showing that **these temporal judgments anticipate the great and final day of judgment** when the earth itself will be destroyed. **Isaiah 24** uses the imagery of the sixth seal in saying that "*the LORD will empty the earth and make it desolate . . . The LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth*" (**Isa. 24:1, 21**). Most

significant is the prophecy of **Isaiah 34:4**, which John seems to be directly quoting in **Revelation 6:12–14**. Here, God is addressing the entire earth: “*Let the earth hear, and all that fills it . . . For the LORD is enraged against all the nations*” (**Isa. 34:1–2**). Isaiah continues with language virtually repeated by John: “*All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall fall, as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree*” (**34:4**). Isaiah is describing universal judgment in which creation itself is dissolved. This fits **Revelation 6:17**’s description of this event as “*the great day*” of God’s wrath. Additionally, the sixth seal answers the prayers of the fifth seal, which call for judgment on the entire world (**6:10**). Moreover, the language used here occurs elsewhere in Revelation to describe the final judgment of all mankind (**11:13; 16:18–20; 20:11**).

Finally, a literal reading of the sixth seal fits Jesus’ depiction in the Olivet Discourse. Jesus spoke of the sun being darkened, the moon not giving light, the stars falling, and the powers of heaven being shaken in tandem with his second coming and the end of the age (**Matt. 24:29–32**). There, Jesus used the metaphor of the fig tree in the same sense as **Isaiah 34:4** and **Revelation 6:13**, as a lesson of the need to be ready for the end. This literal teaching is confirmed in Peter’s second letter: “*The heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed*” (**2 Peter 3:10**).

Even in depicting the literal disruption of creation, there is probably symbolism in these verses. Still, a mainly literal reading is possible. A great earthquake of unprecedented violence could spew up lava and ash to darken the sky, and the falling of stars could refer to asteroids’ smashing the earth. **George Eldon Ladd** summarizes: “The language is not merely poetical or symbolic of spiritual realities but describes a real cosmic catastrophe whose actual character we cannot conceive.”

John Walvoord: There are a number of reasons for preferring to take this passage in its **literal meaning**. While this is not the final breakup of the world as described later in Revelation, when a further period of terrible judgments will be poured on the world, it does seem to indicate that beginning with the sixth seal God is undertaking a direct intervention into human affairs. The judgments of war, famine, and death, and the martyrdom of the saints have largely originated in human decision and evil. The judgment described here, however, originates in God as a divine punishment inflicted upon a blasphemous world.

In view of the catastrophic and climactic character of the period, there is no good reason that there should not be precisely the disturbances in the heavens and earthquakes mentioned here. This is borne out by the response of the world’s people, both the great and mighty and the ordinary. In terror they hide themselves in dens and in the mountains to escape the wrath of God. Note that these people realize the nature and the source of their judgment, that it is God who is wreaking this destruction on the earth. . .

The day of wrath is in contrast to our present day of grace. Though God in every dispensation deals with believers and saves them by grace, the present age is supremely designed to manifest grace not only as the way of salvation but as the way of life. Today God is not attempting to bring divine judgment to bear upon sin. Though there may be some forms of immediate retribution, **for the most part God is not settling accounts now**. The righteous are not rewarded nor are the wicked judged in a final sense today. This day of grace will be followed by the day of the Lord that features early in its progress the day of wrath.

William Barclay: This passage has two significant things to say about this fear.

(1) It is universal. **Verse 15** speaks of the kings, the captains, the great ones, the rich, the strong, the slave and the free. It has been pointed out that these seven words include ‘the whole fabric of human society’. **No one is exempt from the judgment of God.** The great ones may well be the Roman governors who persecute the Church; the captains are the military authorities. However great governors might be and however much power they wield, they are still subject to the judgment of God. However rich people may be, however strong, however free they may consider themselves, however insignificant, they do not escape the judgment of God.

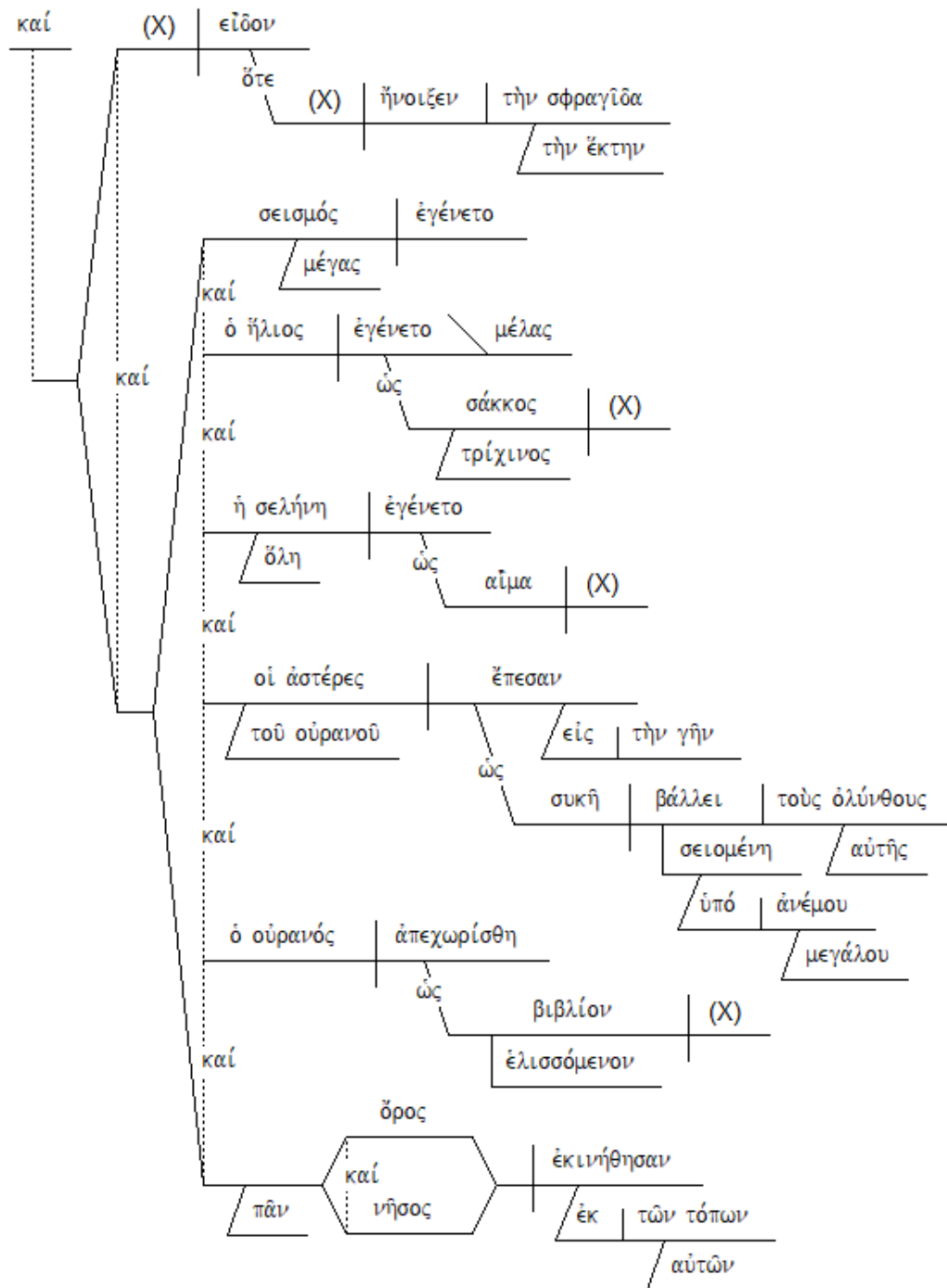
(2) When the day of the Lord comes, John sees people seeking somewhere to hide. Here is the great truth that the first instinct of sin is to hide. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve sought to hide themselves (**Genesis 3:8**). In *The Apocalypse of John*, **H. B. Swete** says: ‘What sinners dread most is not death, but the **revealed presence of God.**’ The terrible thing about sin is that it makes people fugitives from God; and the supreme thing about the work of Jesus Christ is that it puts people into a relationship with God in which they no longer need to hide, knowing that they can throw themselves on the love and the mercy of God.

(3) We note one last thing. It is from the **wrath of the Lamb** that people flee. Here is paradox; we do not readily associate wrath with the Lamb but rather gentleness and kindness. But the wrath of God is the wrath of love, which is not out to destroy but, even in anger, is out to save those whom it loves.

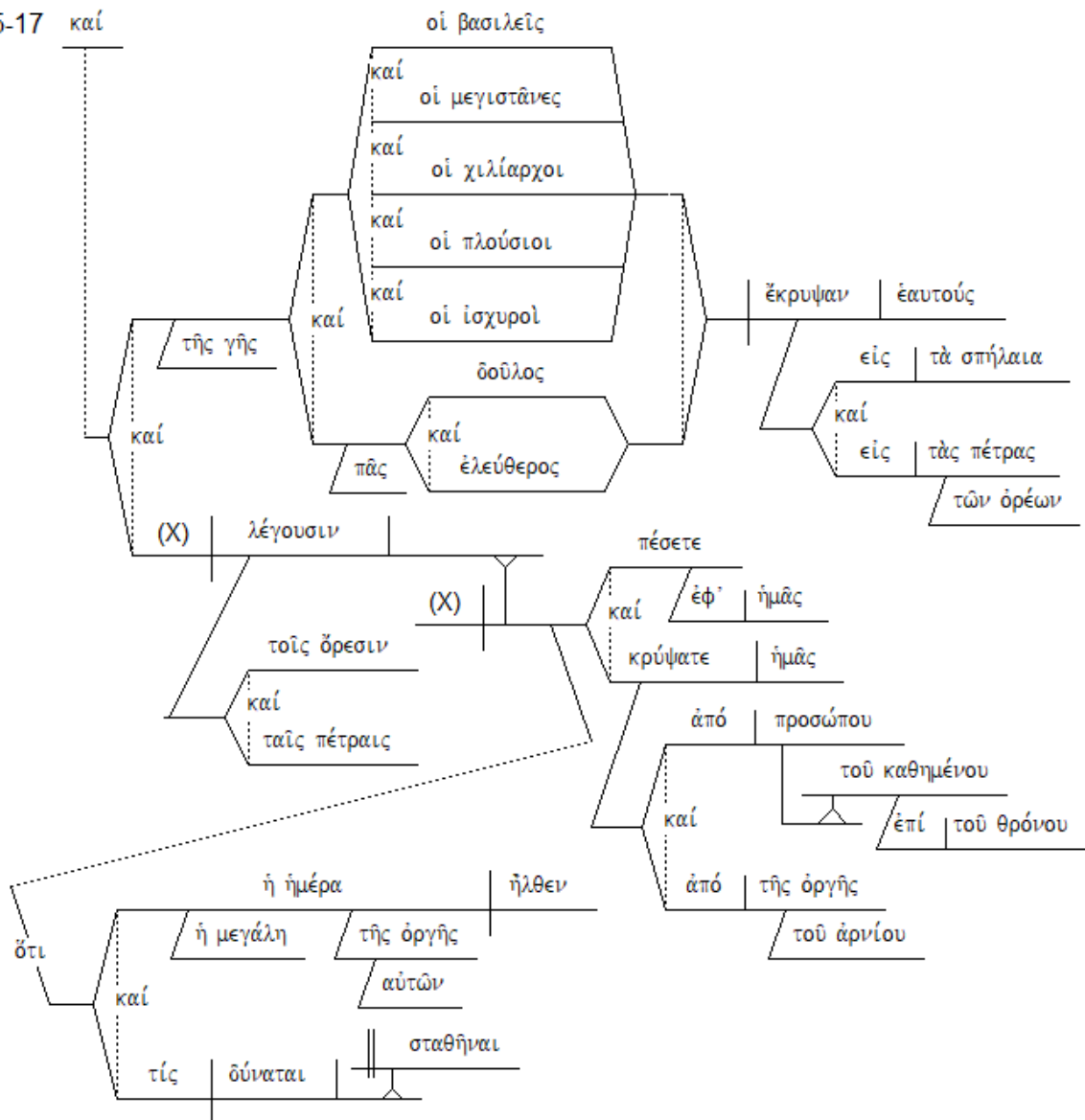
G.K. Beale: The basic sin of men is still **idolatry**. Their idolatry is focused on the very things which are to be removed — the dimensions of the physical world in which they live. Those being judged in **6:15-17** are “*those who dwell on the earth*” in **6:10**, who are the ungodly deserving judgment. Christians are only **pilgrims** on earth, whereas the earth-dwellers are at home in this world, with its material wealth, injustice, false religion, and moral pollution, some or all of which they have made their god. In contrast to pilgrim Christians, the ungodly earth-dwellers are at home in the present world order and trust in earthly security. The significance of these OT allusions is to emphasize not only the fact of judgment but also that the apparently secure home of the earth-dwellers will be destroyed. In the remainder of the book the phrase “*earth-dwellers*” or “*ones who dwell upon the earth*” continues to refer to those who rebel against God and are thus defined as idol worshipers because they fail to bow the knee before the one true God (**8:13** [cf. **9:20**]; **13:8, 12, 14**; **14:6-11**; **17:2, 8**). Humanity has become perverted and worshiped the creation (cf. **Rom. 1:21-25**; **Rev. 9:20**) instead of the Creator. . .

[Implications for] **a biblical understanding of ecology**. How do we balance the fact that God created a world we are to be stewards of with the realization that ultimately it will be destroyed in the fire of His judgment? Is the tension resolved with the realization that God’s intention is the creation of a new heavens and earth? Should our focus on ecology be motivated not by reverence for the environment in itself, but the consequences of environmental degradation for other people? Should we now act as good stewards of this creation in order to point toward and be a witness of our greater stewardship of a greater new creation that is coming? What is the dividing line which, if crossed, leads to environmentalism becoming idolatrous? Is environmentalism an example of how a seemingly good cause can itself become a source of idolatry? Is this because people define themselves as virtuous for their apparent care for the environment regardless of their attitude toward the One who is its Creator?

Rev 6:12-14



Rev 6:15-17



TEXT: Revelation 7:1-8

TITLE: THE SEALING OF THE 144,000 FROM THE 12 TRIBES OF ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

THE UNLEASHING OF GOD’S WRATH IS DELAYED UNTIL 144,000 FROM THE 12 TRIBES OF ISRAEL CAN BE SEALED TO GUARANTEE THEIR PROTECTION

INTRODUCTION:

Marvin Rosenthal: **Sealing** has two basic concepts associated with it. In the Roman world, things were sealed to indicate ownership and to guarantee protection. Commenting on the sealing of believers in **Ephesians 1:13**, **Ryrie** wrote, “A seal indicates possession and security.” Here in **Revelation 7** the 144,000 are sealed in their foreheads as an indication that they belong to God (possession) and will experience His security (protection). Their sealing will be for the purpose of exempting them from God’s wrath, which had just been announced and then delayed until they were sealed. Since their sealing occurs after the opening of the sixth seal, they could not possibly have been protected from God’s wrath if it had begun earlier. Contextually, therefore, once again God’s wrath cannot be understood to include the first six seals. . .

Angels are God’s servants. Since it is God’s wrath which is about to be poured out, angels will be employed (**2 Thess. 1:7-8**). Again, the first five seals represent the ultimate rebellion of man under the Antichrist, who is empowered by Satan. Thus, no angelic beings were involved. Now John beholds another angel ascending from the East. He probably is to be identified as the archangel Michael, who has a specific guardian relationship to Israel (**Dan. 12:1**), and the 144,000 are Jews.

Buist Fanning: After the breathtaking pace of judgments associated with the first six seals, John pauses before continuing with the seventh seal, which will unfold in further judgments heralded by seven trumpets (**8:1ff**). This respite is similar to the interlude that will come between the sixth and seventh trumpets (**10:1–11:14**). Such interludes give time to add background and related details, but they also increase the **dramatic tension** of the narrative, since it is clear that further judgments are impending and cannot be put off for long. The pause here in **chapter 7** consists of two separate visions, each of which responds in some way to the plaintive question of **6:17**: “*Who is able to stand?*” (cf. “*standing*” in **vv. 1, 9**).

Main Idea: Further calamities are delayed until a large company of God’s servants from all of Israel is marked for protection from the coming judgments on earth while an innumerable multitude from every nation joins in the heavenly worship of God.

Robert Thomas: The two visions of **chapter 7** separate the sixth and seventh seals. The obvious purpose of this pair of visions is to contrast the preparedness of God’s people to face the emergency with the panic of the world that is completely unprepared. They answer the question, “*Who shall be able to stand?*” (**6:17**), and act as a stimulus for **hope for the believing remnant** during this future period. Though the world around is apparently falling apart, God’s restraining and protecting hand is outstretched to undertake the cause of the faithful. They need not share the despair of the earth-dwellers.

Because the visions constitute a pause in the chronological progression represented by the opening of the seals, they have been called a parenthesis between the sixth and seventh seals, but there is some objection to this because the visions are an integral part of the book's movement. Regardless of terminology, the function of the visions is agreed upon. They reflect that **the status of believers at this point in the series is radically different from that of the world's rebels.**

I. (:1-3) RESTRAINT OF GOD'S WRATH UNTIL A SPECIAL GROUP OF GOD'S BOND-SERVANTS HAVE BEEN SEALED FOR PROTECTION

A. (:1) Role of Angels in Restraining God's Wrath

1. Universal Activity

"After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth,"

Buist Fanning: A common way of conceiving of the world in its entirety is by reference to "*the four corners of the earth*" in relation to "*the four winds of the earth*" (v. 1a–b) oriented along the cardinal points of the compass (cf. 1 Chr 9:24; Isa 11:12; Ezek 7:2; Dan 8:8; 11:4; Zech 2:6; 6:5; Mark 13:27; Rev 20:8). These winds are understood to be ultimately under the control of angels who, as God's servants, direct their force toward the accomplishment of his purposes on earth (e.g., the angel of the waters, Rev 16:5; cf. 1 En. 60:11–22; 66:2; 69:22; Jub. 2:2). The winds are often seen as destructive, as part of God's judgment against evil (Jer 49:36; Dan 7:2–3; Hos 13:15; cf. Sir 39:28–29; 1 En. 76:1–14). In John's vision, however, the four angels are "*standing*" (ἐστῶτας; same word as in 6:17, "*Who is able to stand?*") at the four corners and "*holding back*" the four winds, which by implication are ready to be unleashed in further widespread punishment from God. But the purpose of their current restraint (v. 1c) is to prevent the winds of judgment (as representative of wider calamities about to come; e.g., hail, fire; 8:7ff.) from bringing their destructive effects against the earth and its inhabitants until the time is right.

Robert Thomas: Though sometimes taken as reflecting the ancient cosmology of a square earth, this is an accommodative term used to designate the four directions of the compass, the whole earth (cf. Isa. 11:12; Rev. 20:8). The earth is not a flat square with four corners (**Lenski**). The language is figurative to indicate the worldwide nature of these angels' responsibility. These four points of the compass are points of origination from which the four winds proceed (cf. Jer. 49:36; Matt. 24:31). The threefold repetition of the numeral *tessaras* ("four") is a means of marking the **universality** of this angelic action. In light of this emphasis, *gēs* ("earth") should not be limited to the land of Palestine or to the Roman world of the time in any of its three uses in v. 1. It is the earth in its largest sense (**Scott**).

Richard Phillips: These angels are closely related to the four horsemen of **chapter 6**. Not only are there four of both, but in the book of Zechariah, where these images originate, God's horsemen are closely related to the four winds (**Zech. 6:5**). Winds present another image of **judgment and disaster**, as anyone who has endured a hurricane can tell you, and the four winds are a metaphor for the **entirety of the earth**. Here, the four angels are "*holding back*" the winds, that is, **restraining God's judgments from utterly destroying the earth**.

2. Restraining Activity

"holding back the four winds of the earth,"

John MacArthur: *Holding back* is from *krateō*, a strong word that suggests that the winds are

struggling to break free from their restraint. The angelic restraining of the wind also symbolizes the withholding of the plagues associated with the imminent trumpet judgments (8:5ff.). So the next phase of God's wrath is restrained for the moment. The winds of judgment are gathering force, soon to be released.

Van Parunak: In the OT, the four winds are **agents of God's destructive power** (e.g., Jer 49:36). In particular, in **Daniel 7**, they are the agency that brings forth the four beasts representing the different stages of world empire. The seven heads of the beast in **Revelation 13** reflects the total number of heads of the individual beasts in **Daniel 7**.

In Daniel, these beasts, like the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in **Daniel 2**, represent four successive world empires. The terrible beast that emerges from the sea in **Revelation 13** combines the features of Daniel's four beasts to represent the **final Satanic empire**.

Robert Thomas: see the winds as a picturesque apocalyptic way of referring to the plagues that are shortly to happen to mankind. Because of the fluidity of apocalyptic language, the release of the winds is not mentioned later, being replaced by the seven angels with trumpets, at whose sounding the plagues fall upon the earth (**Johnson**). The first two trumpet judgments affect the same parts of creation as the winds, i.e., the earth, the trees, and the sea (cf. 8:6-9), so the angelic restraint here is in essence a **delaying of the initiation of the trumpet series**. Further confirmation of the connection between the four winds and the coming trumpet judgments comes in the sealing that must precede the release of the winds (cf. 7:2-4). As reflected in **Rev. 9:4**, this protects the servants of God from the effects of the trumpets as the sealing of **Ezek. 9:4-8** protected the righteous remnant from the ministers of slaughter in Jerusalem. Such a mark set on certain people protects them from the harm inflicted on the rest (**Beckwith**). The regular use of winds to depict **destructive forces from God** coincides with this interpretation.

3. Purposeful Activity

"so that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree."

B. (:2-3) Restraint Commanded for the Purpose of Sealing

1. (:2a) Administration of the Seal of the Living God

a. Procession of the Angel Administering the Seal

"And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun,"

Buist Fanning: This angel is said to "*com[e] up from the rising of the sun*" (v. 2b), that is, "*from the east*" (CSB, KJV, NET, NIV),⁸ which in a context like this is associated with God's deliverance (**Ezek 43:1-5; Luke 1:78; Rev 2:28; 22:16**; cf. Sib. Or. 3:652). A second description is that he "*ha[s] the seal of the living God*" (v. 2c), a detail directly relevant to the purpose of the delay.

John MacArthur: That is a poetic way of saying **from the east**, the point of the compass in which the sun rises. From John's perspective on the isle of Patmos, the east would be toward the land of Israel, the land where God's promised salvation came through Jesus the Messiah, and from where the twelve tribes of Israel came—members of which are about to be sealed.

b. Possession of the Seal of the Living God

"having the seal of the living God;"

Marvin Rosenthal: They are sealed to indicate ownership and protection. This is in contrast to those who receive the mark of the beast “*in their right hand, or in their forehead*” (**Rev. 13:16**), an indication of ownership and protection by one (the Antichrist) who himself will one day be defeated. The 144,000 are said to have been “*redeemed from the earth*” (**Rev. 14:3**). They are “*not defiled with women; for they are virgins*” (**Rev. 14:4**). This reference to their being virgins may mean that they never married or perhaps that they purposely remained celibate in their separation unto God (**2 Cor. 11:2**). Perhaps, however, it reflects the fact that they did not submit to the spiritual seduction of the Antichrist and his enticements (**Rev. 13:15**; cf. **Isa. 57:3, 4, 8**).

The 144,000 are also said to be “*the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb*” (**Rev. 14:4**). They are the forerunner of a host of Jewish people who will survive the Day of the Lord and come to the Savior at the end of the seventieth week.

G.K. Beale: The picture of the seal here is the same as what was seen by Ezekiel when the Lord commands the angel to put a mark on the foreheads of those who hate sin before He strikes the city in judgment (**Ezek. 9:4-6**). This mark protects them spiritually and likely also physically from the coming judgment. This is comparable to the mark of blood on the doors of the Israelites so that they would be protected from God’s judgment on Egypt (**Exod. 12:7, 13, 22-28**). This becomes significant when we note that this mark protects believers during the period of the trumpet and bowl plagues, which, as we shall see, are closely modeled on the plagues of Egypt.

Robert Thomas: This text does not explicitly say what this seal is, but **Rev. 14:1** suggests that it is the name of the Lamb and that of His Father (cf. **Isa. 44:5**) (**Beckwith; Mounce**).

William Barclay: *The living God* is a phrase in which the writers of Scripture delight; and, when they use it, there are certain things in their minds.

(a) They are thinking of the living God **in contrast to the dead gods of the Gentiles**. Isaiah has a tremendous passage of sublime mockery of the Gentiles and their dead gods made with their own hands (**Isaiah 44:9-17**). The smith takes a mass of metal and works at it with the hammer and the tongs and the coals, sweating and parched at the task of manufacturing a god. The carpenter goes out and cuts down a tree and works at it with line and compass and plane. Part of it is used to make a fire for warmth; part of it is used to make a fire to bake bread and roast meat; and part of it is used to make a god. The Gentile gods are dead and created by human efforts; our God is alive and the creator of all things.

(b) The idea of the living God is used as an **encouragement**. In the middle of their struggles, Joshua reminds the people that with them there is the living God and that he will show his strength in their conflicts with their enemies (**Joshua 3:10**). When we are up against it, the living God is with us.

(c) Only in the living God is there **satisfaction**. It is the living God for whom the soul of the psalmist longs and thirsts (**Psalms 42:2**). Human beings can never find satisfaction in things but only in fellowship with other people; and they find their highest satisfaction in the fellowship of the living God.

(d) The biblical writers stress the privilege of knowing and belonging to the living God. Hosea reminds the people of Israel that once they were not a people, but in mercy they have become

children of the living God (**Hosea 1:10**). Our privilege is that the friendship, the fellowship, the help, the power and the presence of the living God are all open to us.

(e) In the idea of the living God, there is at one and the same time a promise and a threat. The story is vividly told in **2 Kings** of how the great king Sennacherib sent his messenger Rabshakeh to tell Hezekiah that he proposed to wipe out the nation of Israel. Humanly speaking, the little kingdom of Judah had no hope of survival if the forces of Assyria were launched against it. But, with Israel, there was the living God, and he was a threat to the godlessness of Assyria and a promise to the faithful of Israel (**2 Kings 18:17–37**).

2. (:2b) Attention of the Angels Charged with Unleashing Divine Wrath

*“and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels
to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea,”*

3. (:3) Activity of Sealing Requires Restraint of Divine Wrath

*“saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees,
until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.’”*

Marvin Rosenthal: It cannot be demonstrated that this is a parenthesis looking back to an earlier event for it is not the seals which hurt the earth, sea, and trees, but the trumpet judgments which follow (**Rev. 8:7-11**).

Van Parunak: The angels who control the destructive power of the four winds are to restrain them until God’s servants receive a seal. This seal is nowhere said to protect them from persecution, but from the **locust demons** of the fifth trumpet (**9:4**).

William Barclay: Note what the text specifically says: those sealed are already **God's servants** (Greek *doulos*, “bond-slave”). The first verse of Revelation uses this as a term for believers in general. Thus, the mark is not the same as the “*seal, the promised Holy Spirit*” (**Eph. 1:13**) which all believers receive at the time of conversion.

The present sealing of God's servants **protects them from yet-to-be-seen judgments**. This verifies our view of **chapter 6** that none of the events described there (conquest, warfare, famine, death, nature in upheaval) are in fact final end-time judgments. Land and sea will be harmed by God's judgment winds, but the sealed servants will not be so harmed, implying that **humans not sealed with God's mark will be hurt by the divine judgments**. This is consistent with the teaching of Scripture as a whole: God's people go through the trials caused by “the world, the flesh, and the devil” (thus there are many martyrs), but **they are spared the experience of God's wrath because of Christ**.

II. (:4-8) IDENTIFICATION OF THE SEALED BOND-SERVANTS OF GOD

A. (:4) Nationality of the Sealed 144,000

“And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel.”

This passage at this point in end times prophecy should put to rest the false replacement theology of amillennialism that sees the church as replacing the nation of Israel and fulfilling the OT prophecies in some type of spiritual sense. God obviously still has a program for national Israel

that He is executing in the end times. Israel still exists as a defined entity with specific tribes of people.

This is a special group of Jewish believers that are sealed to protect them from God's wrath as they serve a special role during the Day of the Lord. All other believers will have been raptured just before the Day of the Lord and thus appear as a great multitude in heaven before God's throne and the Lamb in **7:9-17**.

Van Parunak: These people are identified as **Israelites**, further reinforced by the enumeration by tribe in **vv. 5-8**. Many commentators view the use of the term "*Israelite*" here as figurative, denoting the people of God, in line with Paul's observations that "*they are not all Israel, which are of Israel*" (**Rom 9:6**), but "*they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham*" (**Gal 3:9**). It is true that Israel, as the people of God, in some passages anticipates the church. That image is possible because we are in Christ, who is the perfect Israelite. But in this passage, such a usage is highly unlikely, for two reasons.

1. The two paragraphs explicitly contrast "*the tribes of Israel*" with "*all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues*."
2. It's one thing to suggest that Israel may symbolize the people of God. But what symbolic meaning should one assign to the **individual tribes** that are here called out?

Some object that these people cannot be ethnic Israelites because since the Assyrian captivity, ten tribes have been lost. But Paul, in his defense before Agrippa, didn't think any were missing:

Act 26:6 *And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: 7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come.*

A useful way to look at the question is to ask: If a writer who usually uses "*Israel*" symbolically, as an image of the church, wanted to refer unambiguously to national Israel, how would he make this clear? The details given here, together with the contrast with **v. 9**, would be just what one would expect. If these details do not identify Israel in this place as national, it's doubtful that anything could, and our exegesis has been overtaken by a theological precommitment to denying any distinct role for national Israel in the last days.

The OT contains many texts that clearly do **promise a future for Israel as a nation**, not just as a symbol fulfilled in the church. The Lord promised Zechariah that at his return, he would bring the nation again to himself:

Zec 12:9 *And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. 10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. ... 13:1 In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.*

We will take the list in **Revelation 7** at face value: the Lord is showing John that the answer to the question of **6:17** consists of two groups of believers, one ethnically Jewish and the other from all nations. At this point in history (just before the appearance of Antichrist), the mass conversion of Israel has not yet happened, but these 144,000 represent the faithful Jewish remnant that maintain their witness on earth during Antichrist's reign.

Buist Fanning: The number of those sealed totals “*a hundred and forty-four thousand*” (v. 4a–b). There is debate over whether this number should be understood literally. Contrary to what is often said, not all numbers in Revelation are figurative. For example, the referents of “*the seven churches in the province of Asia*” (**1:4**) are literally the seven churches that are listed specifically in **1:11** and **chapters 2–3**. However, the significance in that case is not merely or only literal, since the number seven can connote **completeness** or **totality** and so the seven churches represent in some sense “God’s church” more broadly. The number here in **7:4** is contrasted with “*a great multitude that no one could count*” (v. 9), so it is hard to conclude that 144,000 is symbolic for “a very large number” and hard also to take the two groups as identical when John explicitly portrays one as numbering a certain amount (even a large round number) and the other as innumerable (whether the two groups are the same is discussed further below). On the other hand, multiples of the number twelve clearly resonate with significance for redemptive history and prophecy (e.g., features of the New Jerusalem symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles in **Rev 21:12, 14**; cf. Jesus’s selection of the twelve as representative of Israel in **Matt 19:28; Mark 3:16–19; Luke 22:30**). It is likely that 144,000 represents ideas of fullness and completeness whether or not it intends to give an actual or approximate count of these “servants”. . .

On the face of it, the meaning of this description is quite straightforward: they are **ethnic Israelites, physical descendants of the sons of Jacob**. The parallel in **14:1–5** narrows the scope by showing that they are **followers of the Lamb**, thus Jewish Christians, not Israelites from the days prior to Christ’s coming or Jews who refuse Christ. Some of the earliest patristic commentators understood **vv. 4–8** in this way, either of Jewish believers in Christ who were preserved from destruction in AD 70 (Oecumenius) or of a final turning of Jews to Christ at the end times (Andrew of Caesarea, Irenaeus, Jerome, Victorinus). Given the explicit contextual contrasts between this group (**vv. 4–8**) and the multitude described in **vv. 9–17**, taking these servants as ethnic Israelites appears to be the most straightforward reading of the text, and this interpretation is taken by a number of recent commentators. . .

Instead of taking Israel as the church in these verses, a strong case can be made that John affirms the widespread ancient Jewish expectation of the **regathering in the end-times** of all the tribes of ethnic Israel from their exile among the nations. This is God’s pledge throughout the Old Testament (**Deut 30:1–5; Isa 11:10–16; 27:12–13; 49:5–6; Jer 3:18; 23:5–8; 31:7–10; Ezek 11:13–21; 37:15–28; 47:13–14; 48:30–35; Mic 2:12; Zech 10:8–10**), and it reverberates through early Jewish literature as well (Tob 13:3–5; Sir 36:11–17; 48:10; 4 Ezra 13:39–50; 2 Bar. 62:5–6; 77:19–78:7; T. Jos. 19:1–4; T. Benj. 9:2; 10:5–9; 1QM 2:1–3; 3:13–14; 5:1–2; 11QTem-ple 57:5–6; m. Sanh. 10.3; Shemoneh Esreh 10). Jesus’s choosing of twelve disciples to be with him represents this intent also (**Mark 3:13–19**), and his declaration that in the coming renewal, when he sits on “*his glorious throne*,” they will likewise “*sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*” (**Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30**) speaks to this **promise of national restoration in the end times**. John’s emphasis here in **7:4–8** on all twelve tribes captures the same anticipation that God has not abandoned Israel, but in his judgment and renewal of all

things he will restore them through his Messiah, the promised king of David's line (**Rev 5:5; 22:16**).

That John would record a vision of the preservation of Israel as a whole at this juncture in Revelation relates to a particular purpose that the future time of tribulation will serve in regard to ethnic Israel. In addition to its function to embody God's climactic judgment against his (and Israel's) enemies in the wider gentile world, the tribulation was intended to discipline his people Israel in preparation for their restoration in the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob under a renewed Davidic rule (**Deut 4:29–30; 28:58–59; Isa 10:20; 26:16–21; 27:5–13; Jer 30:4–11; Zeph 3:11–20; Zech 13:7–9; Dan 12:1–3, 10**).

Charles Swindoll: These 144,000 Hebrews will serve as faithful, courageous, and diligent witnesses for Christ during the darkest period of the earth's history. God will miraculously preserve them from harm during the Tribulation [Ed: actually: **the Day of the Lord**] and will use them to fulfill the ancient Old Testament calling of the Hebrew people to be God's witnesses among the nations (**Isa. 43:1–12**). God's plan for Israel was always for the people to serve as the light of truth for the Gentiles. During the Tribulation they will serve as Christ's servants who finally fulfill this mission. This believing remnant from ethnic Israel not only will be sealed for power and protection but also will survive the Tribulation period and become the first fruits of the nation of Israel when it is restored to the land during the coming millennial kingdom.

B. (:5-8) Numbering of the 144,000 by Israelite Tribe

Van Parunak: This enumeration of the tribes calls to mind the censuses that Moses performed at the beginning (**Numbers 1**) and end (**Numbers 26**) of Israel's wilderness wanderings. We will see a group of 144,000 again in **14:1**. This may be the same group, showing that at the end of the judgments we are about to see, they have been preserved, just as Israel was preserved during the 40 years it wandered in Sinai. The coming great tribulation under the Antichrist is thus anticipated by Israel's years in the desert.

John Walvoord: Israel's tribes are still in existence, and God certainly knows who they are. The genealogical records of the nation were lost in the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in A.D. 70, but today there are a number of groups from India to South Africa to South America claiming to be remnants of the "lost tribes" of Israel, and with modern DNA identification techniques those claims may yet be established.

James Hamilton: The way this list is presented in **chapter 7** is similar to the militaristic arrangement of Israel's camp in **Numbers 2.3** The list in Numbers follows the exodus from Egypt as God's people are about to make their way toward the promised land to conquer it. So also here in Revelation God seals his servants, who are arranged in these legion-like battalions 144,000 strong. Then God brings the plague-like judgments of the trumpets and bowls to liberate his people before Christ conquers and brings the new heavens and the new earth.

1. (:5a) Judah

"from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed,"

2. (:5b) Reuben

"from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand,"

3. (:5c) Gad

“from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,”

4. (:6a) Asher

“from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand,”

5. (:6b) Naphtali

“from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand,”

6. (:6c) Manasseh

“from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,”

7. (:7a) Simeon

“from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand,”

8. (:7b) Levi

“from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand,”

9. (:7c) Issachar

“from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,”

10. (:8a) Zebulun

“from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand,”

11. (:8b) Joseph

“from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand,”

12. (:8c) Benjamin

“from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why are the angels so involved in both the unleashing of God’s wrath and the sealing of God’s bond-servants?
- 2) How does the timing of this event relate to the beginning of the Day of the Lord?
- 3) What is going to be the role of these 144,000 Jews during the Day of the Lord (when all other believers will have been raptured just before the outpouring of God’s wrath and appear in heaven per 7:9-17)?
- 4) How will membership in these specific tribes of Israel be determined?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson: Who are the ones who are sealed? 7:4-8

It boggles my mind why this question seems so difficult for people to answer because the answer is so crystal clear.

- 1) Jehovah's Witness say they are the 144,000.
- 2) Some Mormons say they are the 144,000.
- 3) Amillennialists say the church is the 144,000.
- 4) One minister said we really can't know the number or who they are.

There are four simple facts to observe here that give specific identification to John and to us:

(Fact #1) - The 144,000 are from the direction of the east. **7:2**

(Fact #2) - The 144,000 are identified as "*sons of Israel*." **7:4**

(Fact #3) - The 144,000 are from the twelve tribes of Israel. **7:4**

(Fact #4) - The 144,000 are identified as being 12,000 from each named tribe. **7:5-8**

We do not need to be a brilliant theologian or exegete to clearly see who these 144,000 actually are. They are 144,000 Jewish bondservants of God who come from all twelve tribes of Israel and there are 12,000 from each tribe.

Van Parunak: While the list as a whole is in line with other censuses of the tribes, two details deserve comment, in view of the Lord's criticisms of "*them which say they are Jews, but are not*" in Smyrna (**2:9**) and Philadelphia (**3:9**). These are the omission of Dan, and the substitution of the name "Joseph" for "Ephraim." Both of these changes may have in mind the story in **Judges 17-18**. That story, which occurs soon after Israel enters the land, begins in Mount Ephraim, in the home of Micah, who set up a house of gods that included images of Yahweh and also of other gods. Archaeological evidence suggests that these would include Asherah, the great mother god of the Canaanites, usually associated with Baal. Micah recruited a Levite to be his priest, thus operating a corrupt sanctuary in Ephraim. This mixture of idolatry with the worship of Yahweh is an Old Testament parallel to the corruption of Christianity attested in Pergamos (**2:14**) and Thyatira (**2:20**). Those churches tolerated people ("*Balaam*" and "*Jezebel*") with the same attitude as the Ephraimite Micah: they encouraged the believers to compromise with the idolatrous culture of the trade guilds and emperor worship. **Ephraim is thus the home of the compromised religion** that characterized Israel throughout her history. It was the tribe that led the rebellion against the house of David, and Jeroboam, the northern kingdom's first king, was an Ephraimite (**1 Ki 11:26**). Hosea warns against "*the whoredom of Ephraim*" (**6:10**) and "*the iniquity of Ephraim*" (**7:1; 13:12**). So the tribe's name does not appear among the believing Israelites in **Revelation 7**, but is replaced with the name of Ephraim's godly father, Joseph.

The same account in Judges that documents the corruption in Ephraim may also explain the omission of Dan, which is also missing in the detailed genealogies of the tribes with which **1 Chronicles** begins (**1 Chronicles 2-7**). **Judges 18** tells how the tribe abandoned its assigned territory near the Mediterranean and migrated northward, in the process adopting the corrupted Ephraimite religion that attempted to include idols in the worship of Yahweh. **Dan abandoned both its territorial heritage and its spiritual roots.** Though it was "*of Israel*," it is not part of true Israel, and it is omitted from the company here (as well as from the list in **1 Chronicles 2-7**).

Gary Cohen: 3 main reasons for the interludes in the book of Revelation:

1. Reason #1 - To show that God's grace and mercy are still operative even during the worst

times of Tribulation judgment.

2. Reason #2 - To show the wickedness of the Satanic Empire and its defiance against God.
3. Reason #3 - To show there will be a final, righteous judgment before the coming of Jesus Christ.

Daniel Akin: Their hand of judgment is stayed, or at least delayed. In this apocalyptic vision John sees “*another angel . . . rise up from the east*” (7:2). A number of Bible teachers have pointed out that some good things in Scripture come from or are in the east (**Gen 2:8; Ezek 43:2; Matt 2:1; Luke 1:78; Rev 22:16**). This angel is not a messenger of destruction and death but one of grace and mercy. He has with him “*the seal of the living God*” (7:2), a seal with which he will mark “*the slaves of our God on their foreheads.*” **Revelation 14:1** informs us this seal is the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father (see **22:4**). This sealing—with Old Testament roots in **Ezekiel 9:4**—is a sign, a promise of divine possession and protection. **Gordon Fee** notes,

The “*seal*” in this case is the stamp of divine ownership and authenticity; thus it functions as a divine commitment that God’s own people will not experience the divine wrath when it is poured out. . . . At the same time . . . this marking of the foreheads of God’s servants stands in deliberate contrast to the later marking on the foreheads of followers of the “*beast out of the earth*” in **chapter 13:16-17**. (*Revelation*, 107)

In wrath our God shows mercy.

What about the peculiarities in the list, specifically

(1) Judah appearing first, (2) Levi being included, and (3) the absence of Dan and Ephraim? To these I would simply respond as follows:

- There are 19 different arrangements of the names of the tribes in the Old Testament, and this list is different from all of them.
- Judah is listed first because Messiah, our Lord Jesus, comes from Judah (see **Gen 49:9-10; Rev 5:5**).
- Levi, though not allotted a portion of land, is rightly involved in this sealing for security and service.
- Ephraim is replaced by Joseph possibly because of its history of idolatry and its allying with the enemies of Judah (**Isa 7:2,5; Hos 5:3**). Yet the inclusion of Joseph allows for the inclusion of Ephraim but without the mention of his name.
- Dan is omitted, replaced by Levi, because of its practice of **gross idolatry**. Further, **Irenaeus** (a second-century church father) noted the pre-Christian Jewish tradition that antichrist would come from Dan, and **Hippolytus** wrote, “As the Christ was born from the tribe of Judah, so will the Antichrist be born from the tribe of Dan” (**Mounce**, *Revelation*, 159–60). And **Genesis 49:17** says, “*Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that bites the horse’s heels, so that his rider falls backward.*” Finally, the Testament of Dan (5:6) says Satan is the prince of Dan.

Rev 7:1

(X)

ὁ ἀγγέλος ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὰς γωνίας τέσσαρας τῆς γῆς κρατοῦντας τοὺς ἀνέμους τέσσαρας τῆς γῆς ἵνα ἅνεμος πνέῃ μὴ μῆτε ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης μῆτε ἐπὶ δένδρον πᾶν

Rev 7:2-3

καί

(X) εἶδον

καί

(X) ἔκραξεν

φωνῇ

μεγάλῃ

τοῖς ἀγγέλοις

τέσσαρσιν

λέγων

τὴν γῆν

ἀδικήσαι

καί

τὴν θάλασσαν

ἐδόθη

οἷς = αὐτοῖς

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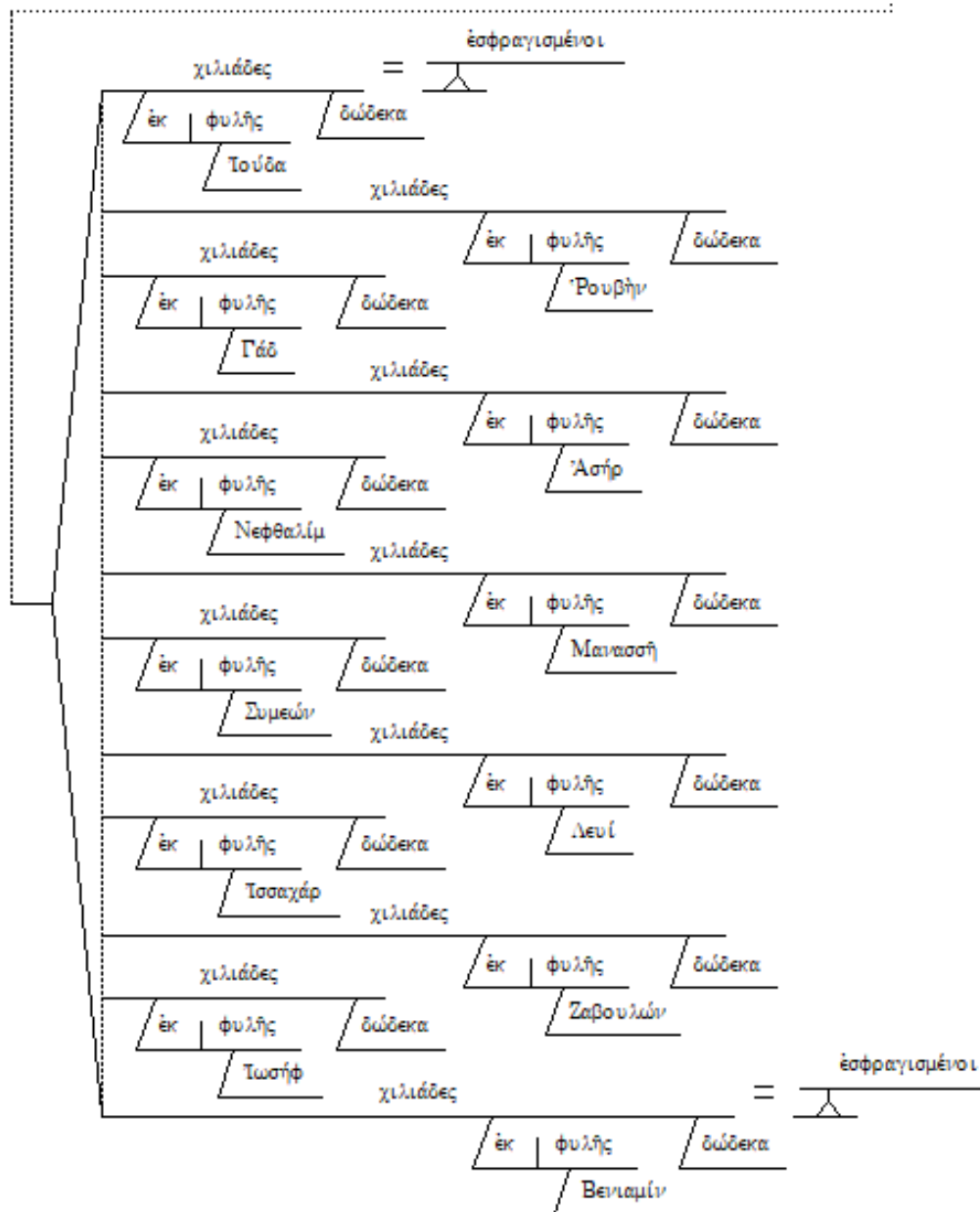
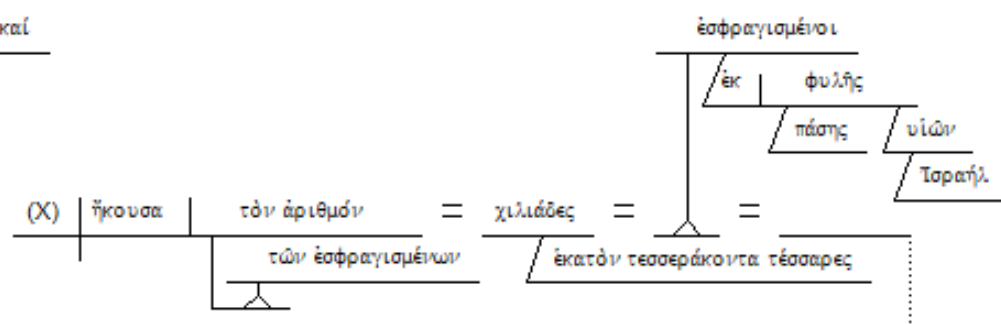
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TEXT: Revelation 7:9-17

TITLE: GREAT MULTITUDE OF RAPTURED SAINTS WORSHIPPING GOD AND THE LAMB

BIG IDEA:

SAINTS FROM EVERY NATION, RAPTURED RIGHT BEFORE THE DAY OF THE LORD, SURROUND GOD'S THRONE IN HEAVEN IN WORSHIP AND PRAISE

INTRODUCTION:

Marvin Rosenthal: Nowhere in the considerable description of this group (**Rev. 7:9-17**) is it ever said they are martyred. In the previous chapter, a group of martyrs is seen. Their martyrdom occurred with the opening of the fifth seal, at the beginning of the Great Tribulation (**6:9**). . . These martyrs are to be resurrected and given bodies on the first day of the Millennium (**Rev. 20:4**).

This great multitude in **chapter 7** is clearly a **different group** from those described in **chapter 6**. The contrasting and additional truth is significant.

First, they are so numerous that John is told no man could number them. This is in marked and direct contrast to the immediately previous group who are said to number 144,000; therefore, this has to be a tremendously large number. Further, this great multitude of **chapter 7** is international in scope, representing all nations, kindreds, peoples, and tongues (**v. 9**). Those mentioned after the fifth seal are clearly said to be martyrs. This new group is seen after the opening of the sixth seal, of necessity only a short time later. If they are also martyrs, then one must postulate that a universal multitude, of such great magnitude that they could not be numbered, were saved, became witnesses (for that is what a martyr is), were slain, and are now seen before the throne of God – all of this in a very brief time span (probably a matter of months and during the sixth seal when men are fleeing to the caves and dens to escape the impending wrath of God). . .

Second, the martyrs in **Revelation 6** are souls under the altar asking God to avenge their blood (**Rev. 6:9-10**). The great multitude in **Revelation 7**, in contrast, are before the throne proclaiming with a loud voice, “*Salvation to our God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb*” (**Rev. 7:10**).

Third, in **Revelation 6** the multitude is said to be souls “*under the altar*” (**Rev. 6:9**). In **Revelation 7** the multitude is said to be standing “*before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands*” (**Rev. 7:9**). The former group are *souls* – the latter group have *bodies*.

Fourth, in **Revelation 6** John immediately recognizes the martyrs as those who “*were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held*” (**v. 9**). In **Revelation 7** it is clear that John does not recognize who this great multitude is. To the question directly proposed to John, “*Who are these . . . ?*” (**v. 13**), he gives this response: “*Sir, thou knowest*” (**v. 14**), a clear admission that he did not recognize them.

If this great multitude – which suddenly appears in heaven, which no man can number, and which has universal representation – are not martyrs, **who are they?**

This great multitude, innumerable, universal, and suddenly appearing in heaven with white robes (**purified**) and palm branches (**triumphant**), is the **raptured church**. This event occurs immediately prior to the opening of the seventh seal and the outpouring of the **Day of the Lord** wrath (**Rev. 8:1**): “*For God has not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation* [this is precisely what the multitude was proclaiming] *by our Lord Jesus Christ*” (**1 Thess. 5:9**). . .

This great multitude represents the true church which goes into the seventieth week of Daniel. They are raptured at the end of the Great Tribulation but before the Day of the Lord begins. They are raptured before God’s wrath is poured out but are not exempt from the ultimate rebellion of unregenerate men.

The symmetry, balance, and timing of **Revelation 7** should not be missed. With **chapter 8**, the Day of the Lord will begin. Therefore, in **chapter 7** the church is raptured. But immediately prior to the Rapture of the church, the 144,000 Jews are sealed. It is almost like a baton being passed between runners. The 144,000 must be sealed for protection to go through the Day of the Lord before the church can be caught up to the throne in heaven. God will not leave Himself without a people on the earth.

[Ed: Those who hold to a Pre-trib Rapture position must identify this group as believers who were saved during the Great Tribulation (because all other believers would have already been raptured) and then subsequently martyred and resurrected (because they cannot have a rapture occurring between the sixth and seventh seals. However, this group is described as distinct from those resurrected martyrs described in the fifth seal.)]

Buist Fanning: John describes this scene (v. 9d–e) in terms that connect it back to the grounding vision for all of **chapters 6–16**, the vision of God and the Lamb in the heavenly throne room (**chs. 4–5**). The innumerable multitude is “*standing before the throne and before the Lamb*” (v. 9d; cf. 4:2; 5:6; 6:17), no longer facing tribulation but now in the very presence of the Lord God (4:10–11) and of the Lamb who redeemed them (5:9), joined by God’s angelic court in worshiping him (4:4, 6; 5:8, 11; 7:11). Christ’s sacrifice has made them pure from sin, as symbolized by their “*white robes*” (v. 9e; cf. v. 14). The “*palm branches in their hands*” represent their **festive celebration** before God as they cry out in praise to him.

I. (:9-12) BOTH RAPTURED SAINTS AND HEAVENLY ANGELS SURROUND GOD’S THRONE IN WORSHIP AND PRAISE

A. (:9-10) Raptured Saints Surround God’s Throne in Worship and Praise

1. (:9) Praise Participants = Great Multitude of Raptured Saints

a. Timeframe for the Appearance of the Great Multitude

“After these things I looked,”

Sola Scriptura: this is the second occurrence of this phrase in the Revelation to mark the beginning of a new vision sequence. How much time elapses between these two visions is not known. This vision sequence begins at **Revelation 7:9** and will continue through **Revelation 15:4**.

b. Composition of the Great Multitude

*“and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count,
from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues,”*

Gordon Fee: the reality that what constitutes God’s people now goes far beyond Israel is one of John’s repeated concerns throughout this narrative.

c. Location of the Great Multitude

1) *“standing before the throne”*

2) *“and before the Lamb,”*

d. Accessories of the Great Multitude

1) White Robes

“clothed in white robes,”

2) Palm Branches

“and palm branches were in their hands;”

Sola Scriptura: immediately reminds us of the Lord’s entrance into Jerusalem days before His death. The palm frond is an ancient symbol of victory. That these individuals are no doubt waving them before God the Father and God the Son suggests a celebration is taking place.

John 12:13 records a similar event. The multitude waved palm fronds before the Lord as He rode into Jerusalem. They said, *“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (God the Father), even the King of Israel.”*

John MacArthur: The saints also held *palm branches ... in their hands*. Palm branches are associated in Scripture with celebration, deliverance, and joy. They were especially prominent during the Feast of Tabernacles, the Old Testament commemorative celebration of God’s provision for Israel during their wilderness wandering (**Lev. 23:40**), being employed in the construction of the booths the people lived in during that feast (**Neh. 8:15–17**). During Jesus’ triumphal entry the joyous crowd waved palm branches as they welcomed Him into Jerusalem, shouting, *“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel”* (**John 12:13**). The palm branches in the hands of these redeemed saints are a fitting celebrative symbol of the unequalled provision of salvation from the world, Satan, Antichrist, sin, death, and hell provided for them by the Lord Jesus Christ

2. (:10) Praise Anthem

“and they cry out with a loud voice, saying,

‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”

Gordon Fee: this *“great multitude”* cried out in a loud voice (the redeemed will be a truly noisy lot!), and the content of their shout brings the reader back to the reality noted at the beginning in **1:4–6**, that the Father and Son share all of the divine privileges that historically had belonged to the One God of Israel. Also, as in **1:5**, the emphasis on their **shared equality** has primarily to do with human “salvation.” Thus their song at this point is singular and is directed altogether toward the one thing the great multitude have in common.

B. (:11-12) Heavenly Angels Surround God's Throne in Worship and Praise

1. (:11) Praise Participants = Heavenly Angels

a. Observers of the Angels' Worship

*"And all the angels were standing around the throne
and around the elders and the four living creatures;"*

John MacArthur: That the angels joined the spirits of heavenly saints in praising God is not surprising, since they were created for the purpose of worshiping and serving Him (**Ps. 103:20; Col. 1:16**).

b. Posture of the Angels' Worship

"and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,"

2. (:12) Praise Anthem

"saying, 'Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.'"

Buist Fanning: What they express is a sevenfold ascription of sterling attributes (symbolizing perfection in virtue; as also in **5:12**) for which God deserves praise (**v. 12**). These are bracketed at the beginning and end by the strong affirmation "*amen, let it be so,*" but the first affirms what was said by others in **v. 10** (as in **5:14; 19:4; 22:20**), while the last "*amen*" reinforces what the angelic host themselves declare in **v. 12** (as in **1:6, 7**). As discussed in **4:9** and **5:12**, such an ascription of attributes is an **honorific recitation of perfections that the person possesses**. The speakers do not bestow these qualities but declare and celebrate his possession and display of such worthy traits. Even the mention of items like "*blessing*" (εὐλογία) and "*thanks*" (εὐχαριστία) used in conjunction with the other traits do not denote simply the creature's offering of blessing or thanks to God. Instead it acknowledges that God is "praiseworthy" and "deserving of gratitude" for benefits he has bestowed. As in **5:12**, the composite impression of the sevenfold list is valuable to note, but the individual qualities nevertheless carry their own importance.

William Barclay: They ascribe **blessing** to God; and God's creation must always be offering blessing to him for his goodness in creation and in redemption and in providence to all that he has created. As a great saint put it: 'You have made us and we are yours; you have redeemed us and we are doubly yours.'

They ascribe **glory** to God. God is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords; therefore, to him must be given glory. God is love; but that love must never be cheaply sentimentalized; we must never forget the majesty of God.

They ascribe **wisdom** to God. God is the source of all truth, the giver of all knowledge. If people seek wisdom, they can find it by only two paths – by intellectual searching and by waiting upon God – and the one is as important as the other.

They offer **thanksgiving** to God. God is the giver of salvation and the constant provider of grace; he is the Creator of the world and the constant sustainer of all that is in it. It was the cry of the psalmist: '*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits*' (**Psalms 103:2**). In *King Lear*, Shakespeare said that it was sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child. We must see to it that we are never guilty of the ugliest and the most graceless of sins, that of ingratitude.

They ascribe **honour** to God. God is to be worshipped. It may be that sometimes we come to think of him as someone to be used; but we ought not to forget the claims of worship, so that we not only ask things from him but also offer ourselves and all we have to him.

They ascribe **power** to God. God's power never grows less; and the wonder is that it is used in love for us. God works his purposes out throughout the ages, and in the end his kingdom will come.

They ascribe **strength** to God. The problem of life is to find strength for its tasks, responsibilities and demands. Every Christian can say: 'I will go in the strength of the Lord.'

Daniel Akin: And in their sevenfold blessing they affirm what the saints have said and then add their own words of adoration, praise, and worship:

- *blessing (eulogia)*—a good word, a praise
- *glory (doxa)*—honor derived from one's character and a good reputation; it is the radiance or outshining of the divine person
- *wisdom (sophia)*—divine knowledge and perspective on all things, especially in the outworking of God's plan of salvation
- *thanksgiving (eucharistia)*—we get our word eucharist from it
- *honor (time)*—esteem; public and deserved recognition (see 4:11; 5:12-13)
- *power (dunamis)*—God's omnipotence; His ability to act as He wills
- *strength (ischus)*—often related to God's mighty acts in salvation history

II. (:13-17) IDENTIFICATION AND ACTIVITY OF THE GREAT MULTITUDE OF RAPTURED SAINTS UNDER PASTORAL PROTECTION

A. (:13-14) Identity of Great Multitude of Raptured Saints

1. (:13) Question of Identity

"And one of the elders answered, saying to me, 'These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?'"

2. (:14a) Question Deferred

"And I said to him, 'My lord, you know.'"

3. (:14b) Question Answered

a. Raptured Saints at the End of the Great Tribulation

*"And he said to me,
'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation,'"*

Sola Scriptura: *Out of* suggests that this universally innumerable multitude come out of the midst of the great tribulation. The phrase, *the ones who come* translates a Greek substantival participle. In the context, the universally innumerable multitude is composed of "*the ones who come*." The participle in and of itself does not speak to the issue of the **timing** of their arrival. However, this group is not in the process of coming one by one, but **they come as a group**.

Buist Fanning: Some understand this to denote a **single act of deliverance** [Ed: i.e. Rapture] in which Christians are taken to heaven before the worst outpourings of judgment. This approach takes “*the great tribulation*” (coextensive also with “*wrath*” and “*the day of the Lord*”) to designate only the cataclysmic judgments that come later in the (seven-year) tribulation or at the very end just prior to Christ’s second coming to earth in severe judgment (**Rev 19:10–21**). [Ed: That would be my view. **Fanning** takes a different view: “various ‘exits’ from the earthly scene due to repeated individual deaths (whether by martyrdom or natural death) during the entire seven-year period of great suffering and persecution of God’s people.”]

Daniel Akin: I am in basic agreement with **Mounce**:

The use of the definite article in the phrase “*the great tribulation*” indicated that the angel is referring primarily to that **final series of woes** which will immediately precede the end. It is the hour of trial that is to come upon the whole world (**3:10**). It is not “the awesome totality of tribulation which from century to century has been the experience of the people of God” nor does it correspond to “the entire history of the church—past, present, and future.” It is that specific period of distress and cruel persecution which will take place prior to the return of Christ. Prophesied by Daniel (12:1) and reflected on the screen of history at the fall of Jerusalem (**Mark 13:19** and parallels), it finds its fulfillment in that final persecution which supplies the full complement of Christian martyrs (**6:11**).

- b. Purified Saints by the Blood of the Lamb
 *“and they have washed their robes
 and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”*

William Barclay: This passage speaks of *the blood of the Lamb*. The New Testament has much to say about the blood of Jesus Christ. We must be careful to give this phrase its full meaning. To us, blood indicates death; and certainly the blood of Jesus Christ speaks of his death. But, to the Jews, the blood stood for the **life**. That was why orthodox Jews never would – and still will not – eat anything which had blood in it (**Genesis 9:4**). The blood is the life, and the life belongs to God; and the blood must always be sacrificed to him. The identification of blood and life is not unnatural. When a person’s blood ebbs away, so does life. When the New Testament speaks about the blood of Jesus Christ, it means not only his death but **his life and death**. The blood of Christ stands for all Christ did for us and means for us in his life and in his death. With that in our minds, let us see what the New Testament says about that blood.

It is the blood of Jesus Christ which is cleansing us from all sin (**1 John 1:7**). It is the blood of Jesus Christ which makes atonement for us (**Romans 3:24**), and it is through his blood that we are justified (**Romans 5:9**). It is through his blood that we have redemption (**Ephesians 1:7**), and we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish and without spot (**1 Peter 1:19**). It is through his blood that we have peace with God (**Colossians 1:20**). His blood purges our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (**Hebrews 9:14**).

There are four ideas here, the first being the main idea from which the others spring.

(1) The main idea is based on **sacrifice**. Sacrifice is essentially something designed to restore a lost relationship with God. God gives human beings his law; human beings break that law; that breach of the law interrupts the relationship between God and his people; and sacrifice is

designed to atone for the breach and to restore the lost relationship. The great work of Jesus Christ in his life and in his death is to restore the lost relationship between God and his people.

(2) This work of Christ has something to do with the **past**. It wins for men and women forgiveness for past sins and liberates them from their slavery to sin.

(3) This work of Christ has something to do with the **present**. It gives people here and now, upon earth, in spite of failure and of sin, a new and intimate relationship with God, in which fear has gone and in which love is the bond.

(4) This work of Christ has something to do with the **future**. It frees people from the power of evil and enables them to live a new life in the time to come.

B. (:15-17) Activity of Great Multitude of Raptured Saints under Pastoral Protection

1. (:15a) Praise and Worship Continually before God's Throne

a. Worship Before God's Throne

"For this reason, they are before the throne of God;"

b. Worship Continually

"and they serve Him day and night in His temple;"

John MacArthur: The location of that service is in His temple (cf. **11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-8; 16:1, 17**). There is currently a temple in heaven, and there will be one on earth during the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth (cf. **Ezek. 40-48**). In the eternal state, however, there will no longer be a need for a temple, *"for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple"* (**Rev. 21:22**). The heavenly temple currently is the holy domain where God's presence dwells outside the fallen universe, but that will be unnecessary in the new heavens and new earth where sin has been forever done away with. There will no longer be a temple building, because God will occupy all places, and all believers everywhere throughout the eternal state will continue to worship and serve Him forever.

2. (:15b) Protective Presence Providing Security

"and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them."

Daniel Akin: He Gives Us His Presence

Literally, *"He will spread His tent [tabernacle] over them."* This calls to mind the tabernacle in the wilderness (**Exod 26-30**), the pillar of cloud and of fire (**Exod 13:21-22**), the shekinah glory of God's radiant presence in the midst of His people (**Exod 40:34-38**), and the incarnation of the Son (**John 1:14**). **God is with them, right there in their midst**. Never again will they feel forsaken; never again will they be tortured and tormented. They will enjoy the supreme presence and protection of the Lord God Himself forever and ever.

Grant Osborne: This is a fantastic image that brings together several key biblical themes. It is the omnipotent enthroned God (see **7:9, 11, 15a** above) who will *"tabernacle"* over them. The idea of God *"tabernacling"* over his people brings up all the imagery of the **Shekinah** in the OT. Both the Hebrew (שָׁכַן, *šākan*) and Greek terms (σκηνώω) derive from the basic term meaning *"tent"* and thus mean to *"dwell."* The tabernacle was a *"tent,"* and in **Exod. 25:8** God said, *"Then let them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them."* This idea of God *"dwelling"* among his people became the basis for the concept of *"Shekinah"* (from Hebrew שָׁכַן, cf. **Exod.**

29:45; Lev. 26:11–12; Deut. 12:5, 11; Zech. 2:10; 8:3). The two main symbols for this were the “pillar of cloud” by day and the “pillar of fire” by night as “*the LORD went ahead of them . . . to guide them on their way*” (Exod. 13:21) in the wilderness. These signified the glory of God dwelling among his people for guidance and protection. After the construction of the tabernacle and then the temple, God dwelt in the Holy of Holies at the midpoint between the cherubim on the ark (1 Sam. 4:4), and indeed a cloud descended on both the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34–38) and the temple (1 Kings 8:10–13), and “*the glory of Yahweh filled the temple*” (2 Chron. 7:1–3).

3. (:16-17) Pastoral Shepherding

a. (:16) Protection

*“They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;”*

Gordon Fee: John follows the preceding imagery of **divine protection** with language of **divine provision**, in this case borrowing to the point of citing much of **Isaiah 49:10**. This passage belongs to the “Servant of Yahweh” songs in **Isaiah 40–53**, where the prophet speaks of the Lord’s Servant in language reflecting the theme of the New Exodus.

b. (:17a) Provision / Guidance

*“for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd,
and shall guide them to springs of the water of life;”*

Kendell Easley: What a strange and wonderful picture: the Lamb who is also a Shepherd. Three other times in Revelation the verb for shepherding appears, but the picture is of Christ subduing the nations with his iron rod-scepter (2:27; 12:5; 19:15). Here is the only mention in Revelation of Jesus as gentle Shepherd-Pastor of his flock. Other New Testament texts develop this theme beautifully (**John 10:14; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25**).

c. (:17b) Peace – Removal of All Suffering

“and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”

Kendell Easley: In summary the first three of these blessings mean that the redeemed will be in the direct presence of God. The next four describe an end to the negative effects of sin. The final three blessings focus on the eternal joys of the redeemed.

John Walvoord: The point is that the grief and tears of the past, speaking of their trials in the tribulation, will be over when they get to heaven. The saints in glory will be occupied with the beauty and wonder of heaven and the worship of the Savior. They will not have time for repentance of that which can no longer be changed. Instead, God will wipe away all tears resulting from their suffering on earth.

Gordon Fee: At the end of the scene John then adds, *And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*, thereby both echoing **Isaiah 25:8** and anticipating the final eschatological scene of **chapters 21 and 22**. This, of course, is striking imagery indicating that all reasons for human sorrow will be banished forever. Thus the picture ends on the double notes of **eternal refreshment** (“*springs of living water*”) and **eternal peace and rest** (no more tears).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Here there is **perfect sufficiency** and **perfect satisfaction**. All the elements which can bring pain, suffering and sadness are absent like the sinful nature, the hostile

world system, and the attacks of Satan. In addition, they will experience all that is needed for relief, joy and satisfaction. Namely, the Lamb Himself who will shepherd, guide and wipe away the tears, every single one with the understanding and comfort which He alone can give.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is this passage such strong support for the Pre-Wrath Rapture position?
- 2) How is this group distinct from the martyrs described in the fifth seal and the 144,000 sealed Jews of **7:1-8**?
- 3) What correspondences do you see between the worship offered up by heavenly angels and that offered up by the raptured saints?
- 4) Is your “*blessed hope*” characterized by a longing for the removal of all suffering that is described here?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: John gave a beautiful description of these people.

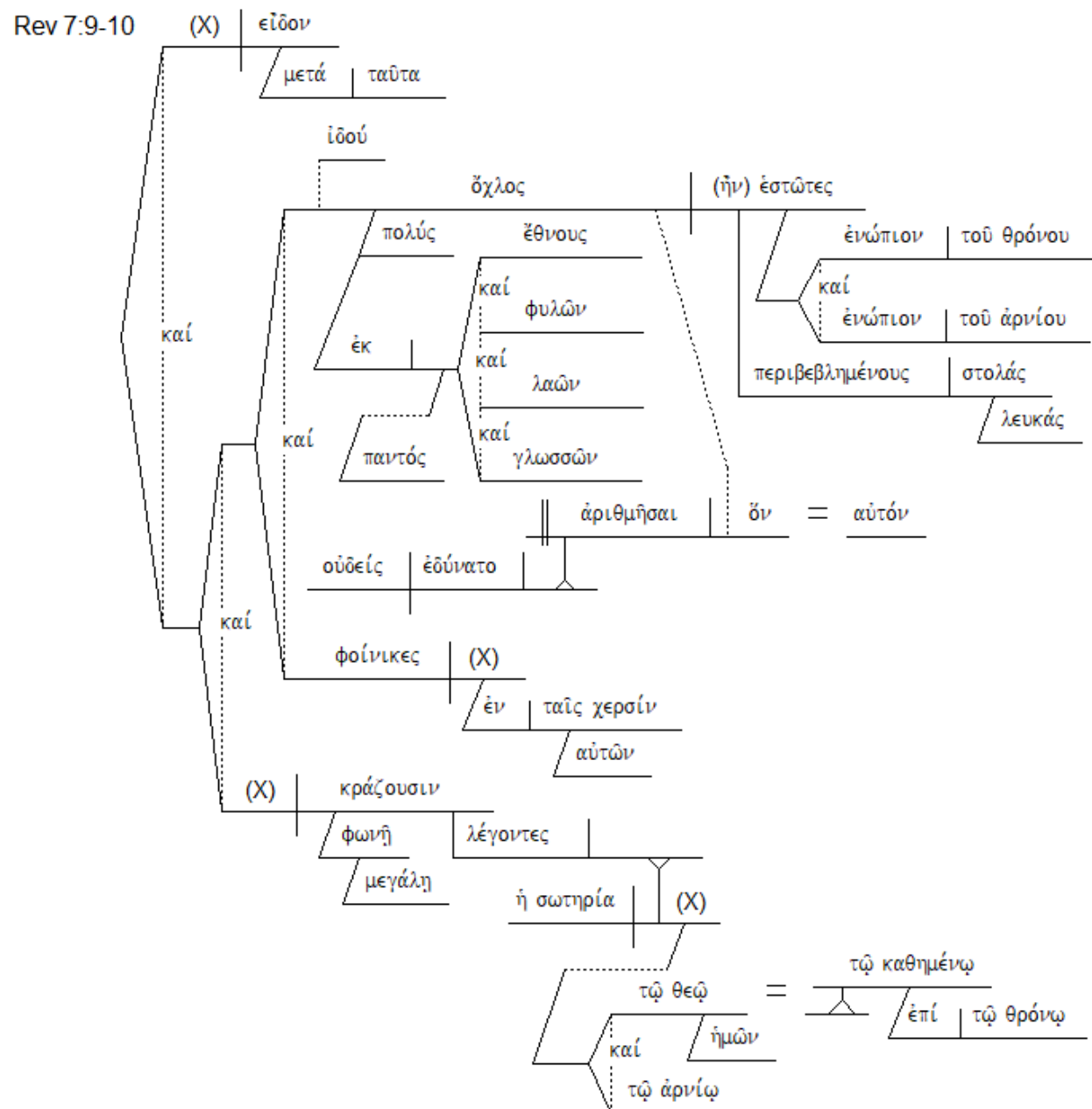
- First, they were **accepted**, for they stood before God’s throne and the Lamb. No doubt they had been rejected on earth, for they stood for truth at a time when lies were popular and Satan was in charge. Their white robes and palms symbolize victory: They were true overcomers! The Jews used palm branches at their Feast of Tabernacles (**Lev. 23:40–43**), which was a special time of national rejoicing.
- Then, they were **joyful**. They sang praises to the Father and to the Lamb, and their worship was joined by all those who surrounded the throne.
- Third, they were **rewarded**. They had the privilege of being before God’s throne and of serving Him. When God’s people get to heaven, there will be work to do! We shall be able to serve Him perfectly! The Lamb will shepherd us and satisfy us with every good thing (see **Isa. 49:10; Rev. 21:4**).

John MacArthur: In this age when Christianity is under siege on all sides, seemingly losing its grip on divine truth and apparently headed for defeat, it is comforting to be reassured of the ultimate triumph of God’s saving grace. In the midst of an even worse situation in the future before Christ’s return, God will redeem His people. That thought should bring present-day believers great comfort, and motivate all to praise God for the greatness of His redemptive plan. And ultimately, in the eternal state, all these promises will come true for all believers.

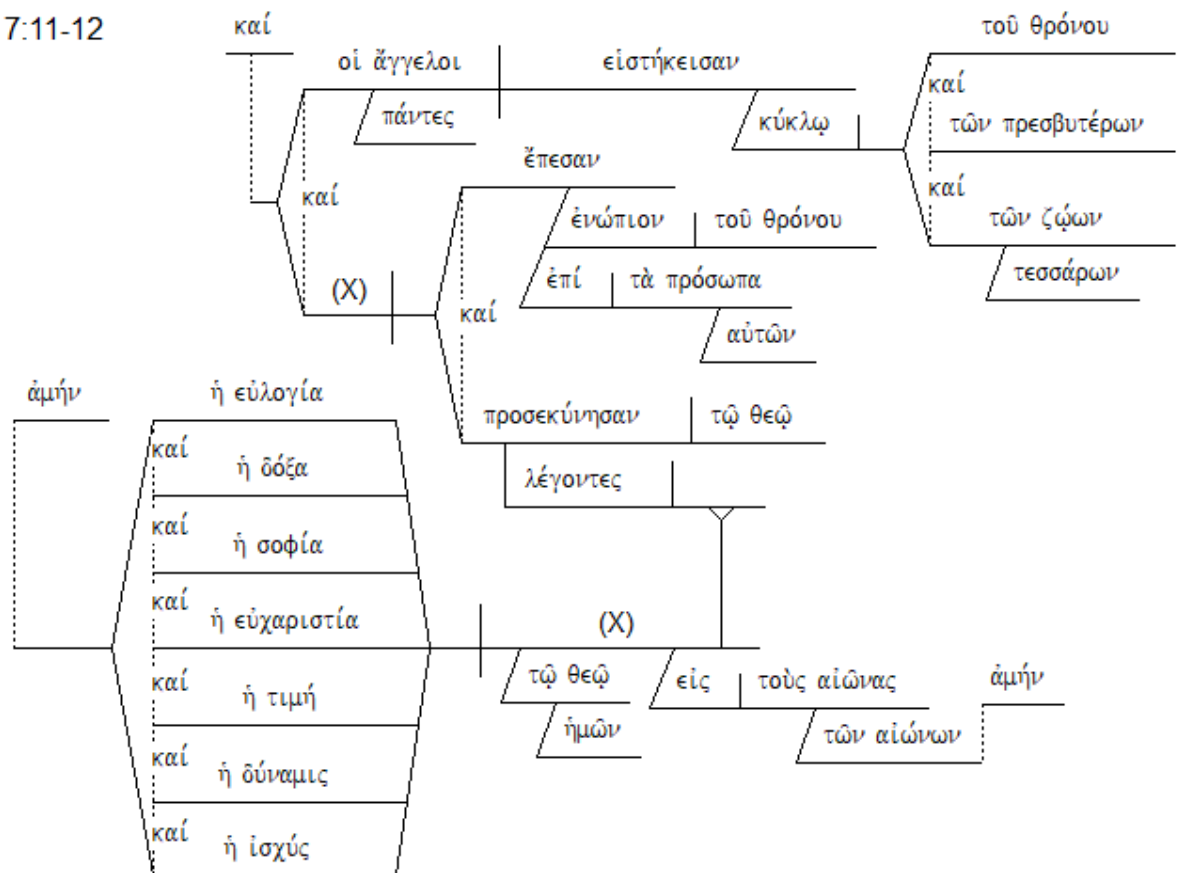
J.A. Seiss: It is doubtful, even, whether there are any resurrected people at all among this multitude. There may be such, but there is no proof to that effect. There is nothing said about resurrection, and nothing which necessarily involves it. A **rapture or translation**, like that of Enoch or Elijah, is implied; for these people are in heaven, and have received their places and rewards; but it is not intimated that any of them had ever died. They are to hunger and thirst no

more; but it is not added that they shall die no more. To those under the fifth seal, who had lost their lives for Christ, the word was that they must rest as disembodied souls under the altar, until others of their brethren should be slain as they had been. But we read of no more such slaying of witnesses for the truth before the opening of the seventh seal. This would seem to imply that no resurrection occurs between the fifth and the seventh seals. It is but a remote implication, and cannot be regarded as conclusive; but if correct, it **precludes the possibility of any resurrected ones being among this palm-bearing multitude.**

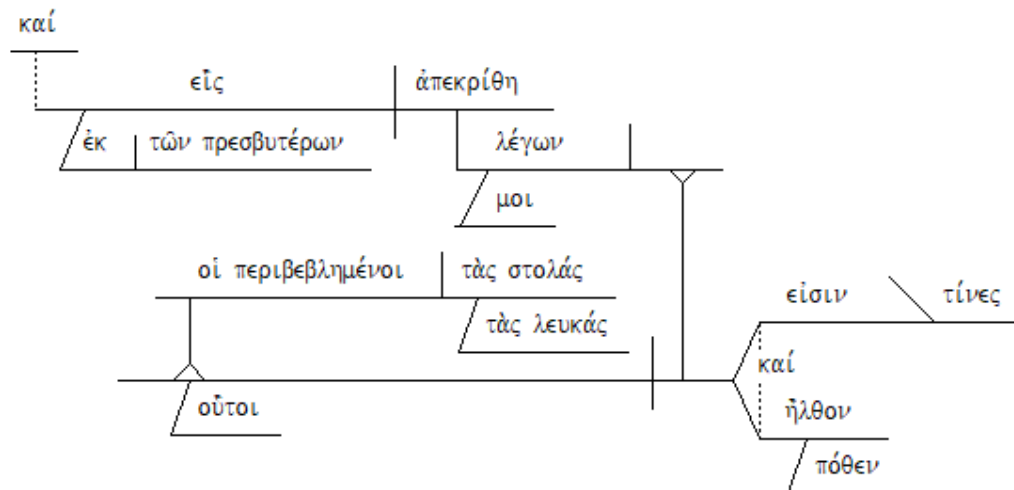
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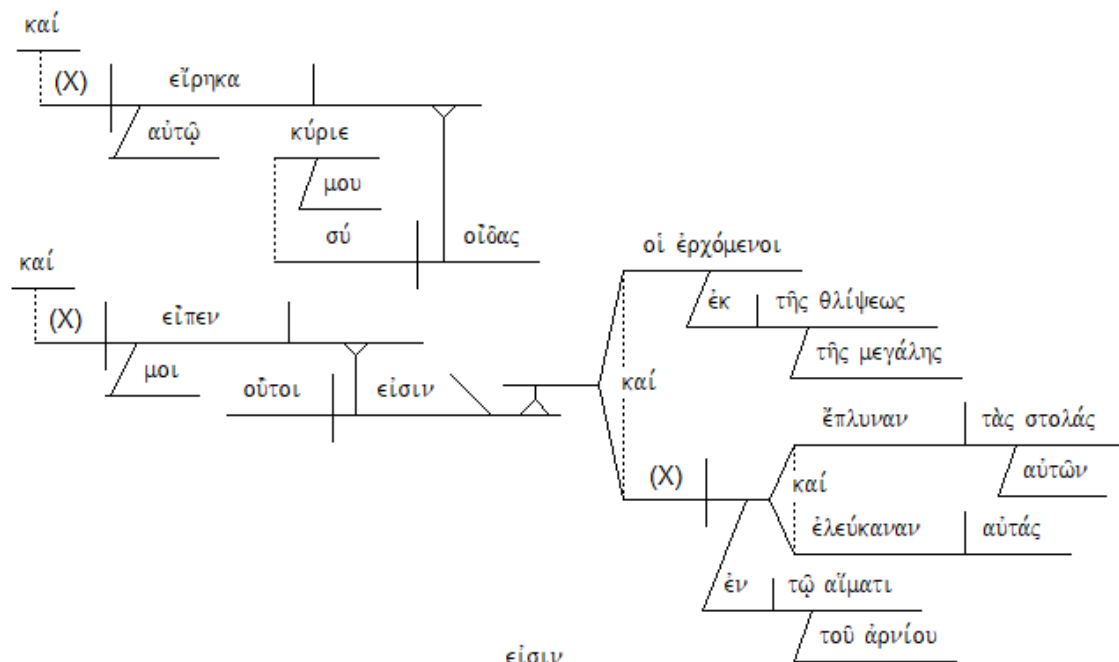
Rev 7:11-12



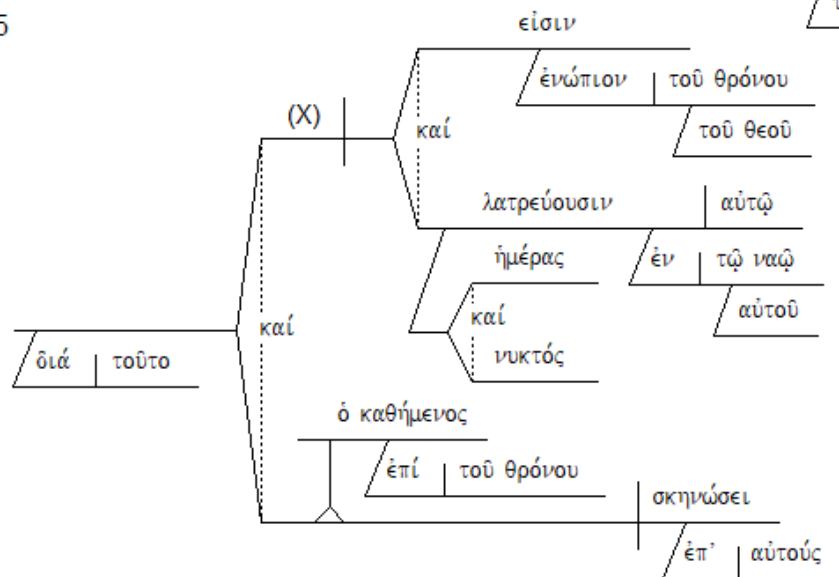
Rev 7:13



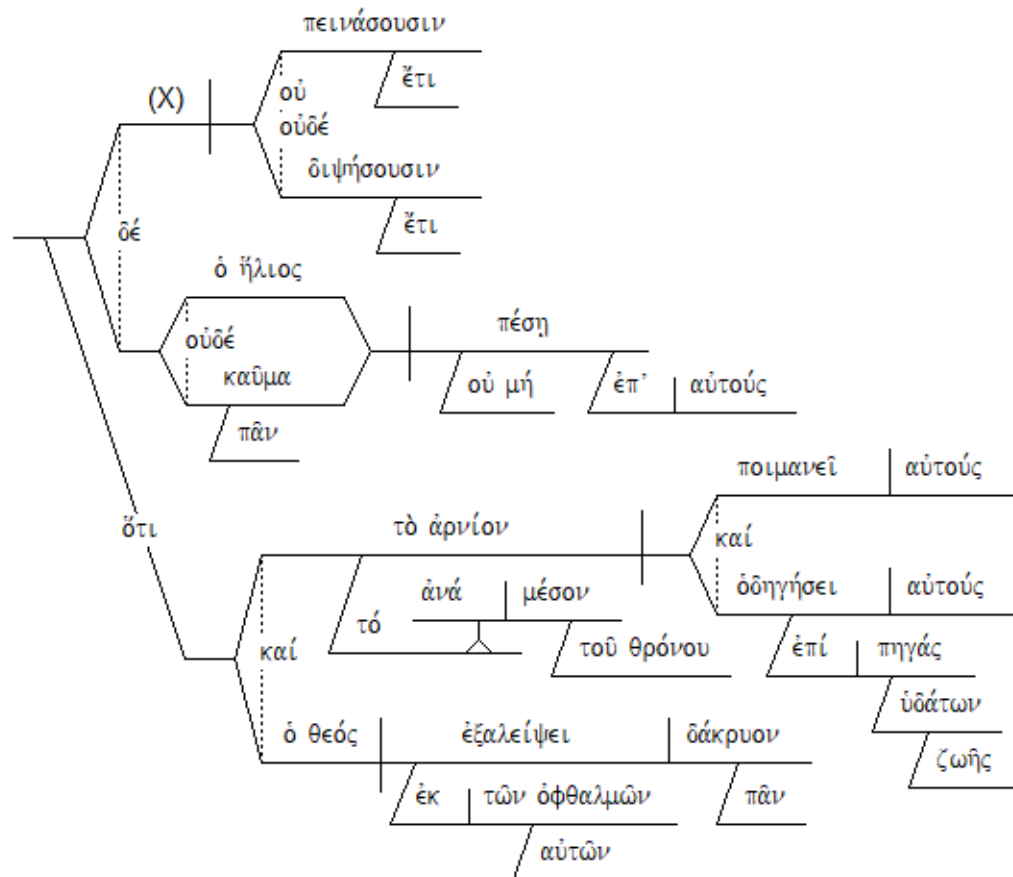
Rev 7:14



Rev 7:15



Rev 7:16-17



TEXT: Revelation 8:1

TITLE: *BREAKING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL -- SOLEMN SILENCE BEFORE THE UNLEASHING OF GOD'S WRATH*

BIG IDEA:

SOLEMN SILENCE IN HEAVEN PRECEDES THE UNLEASHING OF GOD'S WRATH AS THE DAY OF THE LORD BEGINS

INTRODUCTION:

"It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Marvin Rosenthal: The objective of [Rosenthal's book] is to demonstrate that the Day of the Lord is the time of divine wrath. It will be recognized as about to begin by the cosmic disturbances associated with the sixth seal (**Joel 2:10-11, 30-31; Rev. 6:12-17**; cf. **Matt. 24:29**) and will begin with the opening of the seventh seal (**Rev. 8:1**). The Rapture of the church will immediately precede the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord will begin sometime within the second half of Daniel's seventieth week. . .

The reason for the "*silence*" in heaven at the opening of the seventh seal is most **solemn**. It signals the **start of the Day of the Lord's wrath on the earth**. It will be so awesome that heaven can only observe in silence. Again, hear the prophet Zephaniah speak to this point:

*Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand; for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bidden his guests . . . The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteneth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord; the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of waste and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. (**Zeph. 1:7, 14-15**)*

The prophet speaks of silence because the Day of the Lord is at hand and because He has prepared a sacrifice. Concerning what that sacrifice is, men are not left in doubt. The Word of God is precise. It is God's judgment on the nations. In a clear Day of the Lord text, the prophet Isaiah wrote,

*Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye peoples: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and things that come forth from it. For the indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies; he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter [for sacrifice] . . . The sword of the Lord is filled with blood; it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams; for the Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom . . . For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompenses for the controversy of Zion. (**Isa. 34:1-2, 6, 8**; cf. **Rom. 2:3-10**)*

Here then are two irrefutable parameters. In **Revelation 6**, with the opening of the sixth seal and the attendant cosmic disturbance, God's wrath "*is come*" – it is about to occur. In **Revelation 8**, with the opening of the seventh seal, the trumpet judgments of God's wrath are beginning to be

poured out. Between the warning that God's wrath is about to be poured out in **chapter 6** and the actual pouring out of that wrath in **chapter 8** lies **Revelation 7**.

In that chapter, two events of paramount importance occur. The first is the sealing of 144,000 Jews, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel (**Rev. 7:1-8**). The second is the appearing in heaven of a great multitude which no man could number (**Rev. 7:9-17**). Who are these two distinct groups? What do they represent? And why do they appear at this precise time? . . .

1. (**7:1-8**) The message is clear, urgent, precise, and given as a command: Do not begin pouring out God's wrath until the remnant of 144,000 Jews are first sealed for protection from that wrath. . . .
2. (**7:9-17**) This great multitude, innumerable, universal, and suddenly appearing in heaven with white robes (**purified**) and palm branches (**triumphant**), is the raptured church. This event occurs immediately prior to the opening of the seventh seal and the outpouring of the Day of the Lord wrath (**Rev. 8:1**).

Sola Scriptura: The seventh seal is the last of the seven seals which keeps the content of the scroll hidden. Only now can the content of the scroll be known. The seventh seal is of the nature of the last three seals. That is, the wrath of God is in focus. The fifth seal requests the pouring out of the wrath of God. The sixth seal announces the imminent outbreak of the wrath of God. Now the seventh and final seal depicts the actual beginning of God's wrath in the form of seven trumpet judgments.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The first parenthesis or **interlude** dealing with salvation in the Tribulation is now over and the narrative sequence begins again with **chapter 8**. Remember that the seven seals ultimately contain all the judgments needed to usher in the rule of the Lamb and the kingdom of God. This includes both the trumpet and bowl judgments. With the opening of the seventh seal, the seven-sealed scroll is completely opened and immediately there is silence in heaven. Everything becomes deathly still in heaven. In place of the choruses of the elders, the cries of the angels and the multitudes, all is quiet.

The stillness is so intense that it can be felt. This is a **silence of expectancy**, for this is the last seal. It is also a **silence of foreboding** that precedes the onslaught of judgments. It lasts for half an hour (which may be understood just as literally as the other time designations in the book). Silence at this point, after all the vocal expressions of worship previously noted, would be an awesome thing.

Here, then, is a **dramatic pause** caused by the significance of this final seal, by the intensity of its judgments to follow, and by their final result. The seventh seal contains within its scope all the rest of the judgments of the Tribulation (the trumpets and the bowls) which will restore the kingdom of God to earth.

I. BREAKING OF THE SEVENTH SEAL

"And when He broke the seventh seal,"

Remember that the seventh seal contains all of the seven trumpet judgments. And the seventh trumpet includes all of the seven bowl (vial) judgments. Thus the events of the Day of the Lord

and the outpouring of God's wrath are in view. With the breaking of the seventh seal, the contents of the scroll of end time judgments can now be executed.

II. SILENCE IN HEAVEN

A. Location of the Silence = In Heaven

"there was silence in heaven"

We have just seen in **Chap. 7** that heaven is a very noisy place – especially as you draw near to the throne of God with all of the worship and praise that is offered continually. So this period of silence is especially unique and dramatic.

Sola Scriptura: Lacking explicit explanation wild speculation has abounded about the significance of this period of silence. The fact that the silence occurs in heaven is important. Since the creation of the angelic host, the adorers of heaven have continually praised and worshiped the great God of glory. That stops! There is only one event at this point in human history that could possibly render heaven silent – the wrath of God. Restrained since the Flood and promised since Adam, the eschatological wrath of God is about to finally begin. So dramatic is God's wrath that all the eternal activities of heaven – praise and worship of the Magnificent – stop!

John Schultz: John gives us no explanation as to the meaning of the silence. A perfect silence of one half hour is a marvelous experience. Even a one-minute silence seems long to us; a half-hour silence must be like an eternity. Lots of emotions can only be expressed in silence. Silence is sometimes more eloquent than sound. The effect of silence lies in combination and contrast. Silence in itself does not express anything. . .

Thomas Constable: It is the lull before the storm, as a few moments of calm normally precede the most devastating destruction of a tornado or hurricane.

John MacArthur: But after all that loudness, as the full fury of the final judgments is about to be released, silence falls on the heavenly scene. The implication is that when the judgment about to happen becomes visible as the seventh seal is broken and the scroll unrolled, both the redeemed and the angels are reduced to silence in anticipation of the grim reality of the destruction they see written on the scroll. The half an hour of silence is the calm before the storm. It is the silence of foreboding, of intense expectation, of awe at what God is about to do.

And silence is the only proper response to such divine judgment. In **Psalm 76:8–9** the psalmist wrote, *"The earth feared and was still when God arose to judgment."* Habakkuk declared, *"The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him"* (**Hab. 2:20**). *"Be silent before the Lord God!"* exhorted Zephaniah, *"for the day of the Lord is near"* (**Zeph. 1:7**). **Zechariah 2:13** commands, *"Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord; for He is aroused from His holy habitation."*

Robert Mounce: The silence is neither a symbol of eternal rest nor a necessary precaution so God can hear the prayers of the suffering saints. It is a **dramatic pause** that makes even more impressive the judgments about to fall upon the earth. We are reminded of the prophetic injunction, *"The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him"* (**Hab 2:20**; cf. **Zeph 1:7–8**; **Zech 2:13**). Although thirty minutes is a relatively short period, it would be an

impressive break in such a rapidly moving drama. Apparently the angelic activity of vv. 2–5 takes place during this interval of silence. Trumpets are given to the seven angels before the throne. An angel standing over the altar mingles incense with the prayers of the saints, and taking fire from the golden altar fills his censer and casts it upon the earth. **The intensity of the scene is heightened incredibly by the complete absence of any sound.**

[Alternate View]

Buist Fanning: After a period of heaven’s silent attention to the prayers of God’s people, seven angels prepare themselves and pour out fiery and destructive judgment onto the earth in connection with the sounding of the first four trumpets. . .

This silence may be associated with Jewish traditions about **incense offering** in the heavenly temple as the time when the angels of heaven fall silent and God gives special attention to the prayers of his people on earth. These traditions are found in various rabbinic works as well as in Testament of Adam 1:12 and can be traced back to before AD 70. The silence is not due to God’s inability to hear human prayers while angelic worship is going on⁶ but represents instead his **attentiveness to his people who cry out to him in prayer**. This view fits more naturally into the context of this prelude to the trumpet judgments, since **Revelation 8:3–5** connect the judgments to the heavenly incense offering as well as the prayers of the saints.

B. Duration of the Silence = 30 Minutes

“for about half an hour.”

John Walvoord: In recognition of the seventh seal’s importance, John says its opening is followed by a half hour of silence in heaven. Though thirty minutes is not ordinarily considered a long time, in this case it indicates that something tremendous is about to take place. It may be compared to the silence before the foreman of a jury reports a verdict; for a moment there is perfect silence and everyone awaits that which will follow.

John MacArthur: The hour of God’s final judgment had come—the hour when the saints will be vindicated, sin punished, Satan vanquished, and Christ exalted.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How significant a transition is marked by this breaking of the seventh seal?
- 2) What causes the angels and the innumerable multitude to pause their verbal praise and worship?
- 3) What is the significance of the length of the silent period being about 30 minutes?
- 4) What activities are taking place during this half hour of silence?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

G.K. Beale: The OT associates silence with **divine judgment**. In **Hab. 2:20–3:15** and **Zech. 2:13–3:2**, God is pictured (as in **Rev. 8:1**) as being in His temple and about to bring judgment on the earth. That the temple is in heaven is to be assumed from texts such as **Ezekiel 1**. At the moment this judgment is to be delivered, God commands the earth to be silent. In **Zeph. 1:7-18**, silence is likewise commanded in connection with the “*great day*” of the Lord and of His judgment (**Zeph. 1:14, 18** forming part of the OT background to the phrase “*the great day of their wrath*” in **Rev. 6:17**). These announcements of judgment from the Minor Prophets express cosmic end-time expectations (as implied by the pregnant word “*all*”), which is explicitly expressed in a universal sense in **Rev. 8:1**. The thought is that this final judgment of God is so awful that the whole world falls utterly silent in its presence.

John MacArthur: When the Lamb opens the seventh and last seal on the little scroll that was the title deed to the earth (**5:1**), the judgments of the Day of the Lord will intensify and expand dramatically. This final seal contains within it the full sweep of the remaining divine judgments of the time of the Great Tribulation, including the trumpet and bowl judgments. Though some believe the events of the trumpet and bowl judgments happen simultaneously with those of the sixth seal, it seems better to understand them as **telescoping out of each other sequentially**. That the seventh seal contains the seven trumpet judgments seems clear, since there is no description of judgment in the seventh seal, but an anticipation of severe judgment followed immediately in the text by the seven trumpet judgments. In a similar manner, the seventh trumpet does not describe a judgment (**10:7; 11:15–17**), but rather contains the anticipation of heavenly rejoicing over the judgment to come, which will lead to the final destruction of Satan and establishment of the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. As **10:7** indicates, the seventh trumpet is the “*finish*.” **Chapter 15 verse 1** makes clear that the seventh trumpet, which finishes the work of judgment, contains the final fury of God’s wrath, which the pouring out of seven plague judgments pictures: “*Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.*” **Chapter 16, verse 1**, identifies these seven plagues as “*seven bowls of the wrath of God.*” They are then described in detail in the remainder of **chapter 16 (vv. 2–21)**.

Grant Osborne: The reason for this silence has been much discussed, with several differing interpretations offered:

- (1) silence in heaven so the prayers of God’s people (**8:3–5**) may be heard (**R. Charles, Caird, Bauckham**);
- (2) a temporary cessation of revelation, with the silence in heaven rather than on earth (**Swete**);
- (3) a dramatic pause signifying the awe and dread as the heavenly hosts await the coming events (**Beckwith, Mounce, Thomas, Giesen**);
- (4) repeating the primeval silence that greeted the first creation at this final re-creation of the world (**Rissi, Roloff, Sweet**);
- (5) an indication that the seal visions are now complete (**Krodel** 1989: 189);
- (6) a liturgical silence that in both Greco-Roman and Jewish ritual provides a prelude to prayer (**Malina, Aune**);
- (7) the silence of the condemned (from the sixth seal), as they await divine judgment (cf. **Isa. 47:5; Amos 8:2–3; 2 Esdr. [4 Ezra] 6:39; 7:30; 2 Bar. 3.7**; so **Prigent, Beale**);

(8) an intense expectation of God's intervention, forming a brief interruption between the first cycle (the seals, dealing with promise) and the other two cycles (the action that results; so **Biguzzi** in Lambrecht 1998: 204).

As is so often the case, these are **not mutually exclusive**. It is difficult to deny that it is a dramatic pause, but that hardly exhausts its meaning. It also completes the seal visions, but again has more meaning than this. It liturgically prepares for the incense and prayer in **7:3–5**, as it did in the Jewish synagogue service, but that too provides only part of its purpose here. The silence at creation in **Gen. 1:2–3** is at best implicit and is not found in the text itself, but later Jewish speculation did stress creation's primeval silence (2 Esdr. [4 Ezra] 6:39; 7:10) as a prelude to the final silence preceding the eschaton (2 Esdr. [4 Ezra] 7:30, where it is a seven-day silence). Thus this is at least a valid possibility but cannot be finally proven. The OT writers take "*silence*" as an **anticipation of God's imminent action** (**Exod. 14:14; 1 Sam. 12:16**), as the natural **response to God's omnipotence** (**Isa. 41:1; Hab. 2:20**), or as a **fearsome awe in light of his coming judgment** (**Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13**; so **Prigent** 1981: 130). This provides a more natural background for the silence here. All in heaven are in breathless anticipation as they await God's final actions in bringing history to a close, and the sinners are silent in the face of imminent judgment. The scroll is being opened, and they cannot wait for the final events to unfold. **Wick** (1998: 512–13) adds a viable theory: Since the priestly sacrifices were made in silence, this could explain the silence here. This silence contrasts with the noise of the worship in **chapter 7** and of the trumpets in **8:6–7**. But why only here in the book? It is because **8:1–6** provides an actual sacrifice with the incense and the prayers of the martyrs. This is an interesting, even likely, hypothesis. . .

In short, there are two primary reasons for this dramatic pause:

1. the hushed expectancy of God's judgment about to unfold,
2. and the liturgical silence of heaven in light of the incense and the prayers of the saints in **5:8; 6:9–11**; and **7:3–4**.

Richard Phillips: The famous English journalist Bernard Levin was noted for his passion for classical music, especially opera and choral music. He reported hearing a recital of songs by Schubert that was particularly moving. Great performances are usually met with loud applause, but Levin said that on this occasion the audience sat in silence. Finally, still awed by the music, they rose and quietly departed. Silence is rare in our sound-soaked culture. At its most powerful, silence is not merely the absence of noise but, as **N. T. Wright** notes, "a profound, still, deep experience in which one can sense aspects of reality which are normally drowned out by chatter and babble."

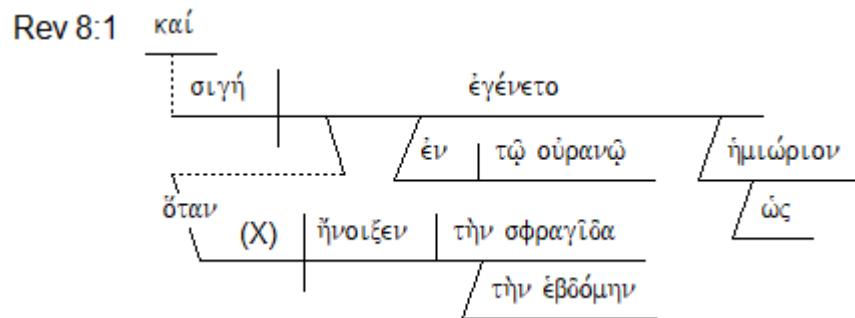
We should understand the **silence of heaven** at the opening of the seventh seal in two ways.

First, it reflects awe at the glory and majesty of the Sovereign Lord who comes in splendor and might. In the Old Testament, awed silence is commanded before the coming of God to judge: "*Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near*" (**Zeph. 1:7**). **William Hendriksen** writes that the coming of God's final wrath is "so fearful and awful . . . that the inhabitants of heaven stand spell-bound, lost for a time—half an hour—in breathless, in silent amazement."

In addition to expressing awe, the silent pause of the seventh seal serves the literary purpose of John in writing the book of Revelation. If we were listening to it being read

for the first time, we might think that the book was concluding with the opening of the seventh seal. Yet there is more to reveal: more contours of history and more details of God's plan to save his people. Therefore, just when Christ is about to step out from the clouds of glory onto the earth, Revelation pauses with only the silence that attends his coming.

Leedy Greek Diagram:



TEXT: Revelation 8:2-6

TITLE: PREPARATION FOR THE SEVEN TRUMPET JUDGMENTS

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S ANGELS ANNOUNCE HIS WRATH IN RESPONSE TO THE IMPRECATORY PRAYERS OFFERED UP IN WORSHIP BY SUFFERING SAINTS

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The content of the scroll is now unveiled in the trumpets and bowls. The trumpet judgments form the middle of the three septets but are more closely related in style and substance to the bowl judgments. The seals are preliminary judgments that explore the depravity of humankind and demonstrate the necessity of judgment. The saints are sealed from the wrath of God and the judgments themselves but face the wrath of the earth-dwellers. The silence in heaven is an expectant hush awaiting the action of God, but that is not to be just an outpouring of wrath but God's answer to the imprecatory prayers of the saints (6:9–11 recapitulated in 8:3–4). **Thus there is worship (the golden censer with incense) behind the justice. . .**

As some have noted (Talbert 1994: 38), there is a **chiastic pattern** in verses 2–6:

- A The seven angels are given trumpets
- B Another angel carries the censers with the prayers of the saints to God
- B' The angel hurls the censer with fire to the earth
- A' The seven angels prepare to sound the trumpets

Talbert (1994: 38) notes that in Jewish apocalyptic two metaphors of heaven predominate, the **throne room** and the **heavenly temple with its altar**. Both are utilized in Revelation, and both are combined in this scene, with the altar before the throne (8:3). Moreover, worship throughout this book produces judgment as well as joy. This is because God is characterized by both love and justice, and these are not separate but interdependent aspects of his being. Therefore judgment against God's enemies occasions the same worship as does the vindication and salvation of his people. Here the prayers of the saints for justice are brought before God and produce the judgments. God assures his people that he does hear their prayers and act on them, albeit in his own time, not theirs (6:11).

James Hamilton: Revelation 8 meets at least four needs that we have, but these are needs that we often overlook.

- First, we need **encouragement to keep praying**. We need to understand the relationship between our prayers and God's plan.
- Second, we often fail to make the **connection between God's wrath against sin and the ravages of nature**. The fact that the world is broken is evidence of God's righteous indignation against sin, and we need to understand this.
- Third, these judgments shout the **glory of God**. The severity of the judgments in **chapter 8** are in direct proportion to the glory of the God avenged by these demonstrations of his righteousness and power.

- And fourth, we need to hear that our question, “*how long?*” is being answered by this book of Revelation with the answer, “*a little longer*,” and we need to be encouraged to **endure**.

So the main point of this study is this: the trumpet blasts in **chapter 8** depict God hallowing his name in response to the prayers of his people as the holiness of God is visited upon the created order.

Or more simply, **God answers the prayers of his people by hallowing his name and judging the world.**

Warren Wiersbe: For centuries, God’s people have been praying, “*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done!*” and now those prayers are about to be answered. Likewise, the tribulation martyrs prayed for God to vindicate them (**Rev. 6:9–11**), a common plea of David in the Psalms (see **Ps. 7; 26; 35; 52; 55; and 58**, for example). These “**imprecatory psalms**” are not expressions of selfish personal vengeance, but rather **cries for God to uphold His holy law and vindicate His people**.

On the great day of Atonement, the high priest would put incense on the coals in the censer and, with the blood of the sacrifice, he would enter the Holy of Holies (**Lev. 16:11–14**). But in this scene, the angel put the incense on the altar (presented the prayers before God) and then cast the coals from the altar to the earth! The parallel in **Ezekiel 10** indicates that this symbolized God’s judgment, and the effects described in **Revelation 8:5** substantiate this view. **A storm is about to begin** (see **Rev. 4:5; 11:19; 16:18**)!

Like it or not, the prayers of God’s people are involved in the judgments that He sends. The throne and the altar are related. The purpose of prayer, it has often been said, is not to get man’s will done in heaven, but to get God’s will done on earth—even if that will involves judgment. True prayer is serious business, so we had better not move the altar too far from the throne!

G.K. Beale: The placement of **v. 2** before **vv. 3–5** allows the latter to act as a **parenthetical transition**, both concluding the seals and introducing the trumpets. The transition functions on both a literary and thematic level. The narration of the trumpet series resumes in **v. 6**. John sees seven angels holding seven trumpets. The seven angels could be identified with the seven guardian angels of the seven churches in **chs. 2–3**.

The primary thematic function of the parenthesis in **vv. 3–5** is to pick up and conclude the description of final judgment begun in **6:12–17** and **8:1**. As already suggested, the temple atmosphere of this section is part of the OT judgment imagery, which includes the element of silence. Therefore, this parenthesis continues the imagery of the last judgment from **v. 1**.

(;2) PROLOGUE – TRUMPET JUDGMENTS ADMINISTERED BY SEVEN ANGELS

A. Vision of 7 Angels

“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God;”

Buist Fanning: In his vision John “*saw*” (εἶδον; used 14x in **chs. 4–7**) “*seven angels*” standing ready to serve God, whom John assumes were familiar to his readers since he uses the article:

“*The seven angels.*” Jewish tradition at the time of the New Testament knew of **seven archangels** (cf. Tob 12:15; 4 Ezra 4:36; they are all named in 1 En. 20:1–8), two of whom are named in the Old Testament or New Testament (Gabriel; Michael). Perhaps it is these seven who are in view here. The mission of divine judgment that will follow is important enough to be entrusted to God’s chief angels.

John MacArthur: The verb translated *stand* is in the perfect tense, which indicates that they were in the presence of God and had been there for a time.

Robert Mounce: In I Enoch 20:2–8 the names of these seven archangels are listed as Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraqâel, Gabriel, and Remiel. . . . Whatever the connection may be between the seven trumpet-angels of John’s vision and the seven archangels of Jewish apocalyptic, their role in the book of Revelation is to announce a series of plagues that is to fall upon the earth and its inhabitants. It is possible that they are also the seven angels who later pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God (**15:1, 6–8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9**).

William Barclay: That they were called *the angels of the presence* means two things.

- First, they enjoyed a **special honour**. In a middle-eastern court, it was only the most favoured courtiers who had the right at all times to be in the presence of the king; to be a courtier of the presence was a special honour.
- Second, although to be in the presence of the king meant special honour, even more it meant **immediate readiness to be dispatched on service**. Both Elijah and Elisha repeatedly spoke of ‘*the Lord God of Israel ... before whom I stand*’ (**1 Kings 17:1, 18:15; 2 Kings 3:14, 5:16**); and the phrase really means, ‘*the Lord God of Israel whose servant I am*’.

B. Vision of 7 Trumpets

“and seven trumpets were given to them.”

Buist Fanning: There appears to be a close relationship between the seventh seal of **v. 1** and the seven trumpets introduced in **v. 2**, suggesting that the seven trumpets constitute the actual content of the seventh seal. A similar telescoping or nesting together of the series of judgments is likely also in **11:15** where the seventh trumpet has no separate content but consists of the seven bowls that come in **chapters 15–16**.

Robert Mounce: The trumpets in Revelation, however, are **eschatological trumpets**. They herald the day of God’s wrath. **Zeph 1:14–16** describes the great day of the Lord as “*a day of wrath ... a day of distress and anguish ... a day of trumpet and battle cry.*” In 2 Esdr 6:23 the sounding of a trumpet announces the day of judgment, striking sudden terror to the hearts of people. In the Apocalypse of Abraham (31) the trumpet heralds the coming of the Elect One to burn the wicked (cf. Sib. Or. 4:174). John’s trumpet-angels call forth four great calamities upon the physical universe (**8:7–12**), two demonic plagues upon unrepentant humankind (**9:1–21**), and the great proclamation that this world has fallen to the sovereignty of God (**11:15ff.**).

William Barclay: In the visions of the Old and the New Testaments, the trumpet is always the symbol of the **intervention of God in history**. All these pictures, and there are many of them, go back to the scene at Mount Sinai, when the law was given to the people. On the mountain there were thunders and lightnings and thick cloud, and a very loud trumpet-blast (**Exodus 19:16**,

19:19). This trumpet-blast became an unchanging feature of the day of the Lord. On that day, the great trumpet will be blown and it will summon back the exiles from every land (**Isaiah 27:13**). On the day of the Lord, the trumpet will be blown in Zion and the alarm sounded in the holy mountain (**Joel 2:1**). That day will be a day of trumpet and alarm (**Zephaniah 1:16**). The Lord will blow the trumpet and go out with the whirlwind (**Zechariah 9:14**).

This picture passed into the New Testament visions of the last day. Paul speaks of the day when the trumpet shall sound and the perishable will put on imperishability (**1 Corinthians 15:52–3**). He speaks of the trumpet of God, which is to sound when Christ comes again (**1 Thessalonians 4:16**). Matthew speaks of the great sound of a trumpet when the elect are gathered from one end of the heavens to the other (**Matthew 24:31**).

A trumpet-blast can be three things.

- (1) It can sound the alarm. It can waken from sleep or warn of danger; and God is always sounding his warnings in our ears.
- (2) It can be the fanfare which announces the arrival of royalty. It is a fitting symbol to express the invasion of time by the King of eternity.
- (3) It can be the summons to battle. God is always summoning us to take sides in the battle between truth and falsehood and to become soldiers of the King of Kings.

I. (:3) TRUMPET JUDGMENTS ALIGNED WITH THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS

A. Vision of Another Angel

1. Standing at the Altar

“And another angel came and stood at the altar,”

John MacArthur: Because of his priestly work, some identify him as the Lord Jesus Christ. That identification is **unlikely**, however, for several reasons. First, Christ is already identified in the heavenly scene as the Lamb (**5:6; 6:1; 7:17**), distinguishing Him from this angel. Second, while the pre-incarnate Christ appeared as the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament, Jesus is nowhere identified as an angel in the New Testament. Third, the reference in **verse 2** to the seven actual angels defines the meaning of the term in this context. The angel in **verse 3** is described as *another* (*alios; another of the same kind*; cf. **7:2**) angel like those in **verse 2**. Finally, everywhere He appears in Revelation, Jesus is clearly identified. He is called “*the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth*”(**1:5**), the son of man (**1:13**), the first and the last (**1:17**), the living One (**1:18**), the Son of God (**2:18**), “*He who is holy, who is true*” (**3:7**), “*the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God*” (**3:14**), “*the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David*”(**5:5**), the Lamb (**6:1, 16; 7:17; 8:1**), Faithful and True (**19:11**), the Word of God (**19:13**), and “*King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*” (**19:16**). If He were the One at the altar, it is reasonable to assume that He would be specifically identified. . .

That **altar** is the heavenly counterpart to the **altar of incense in the temple**, which also was made with gold (**Ex. 30:3**). It was the same golden incense altar seen by Isaiah in his vision (**Isa. 6:6**) and by Ezekiel (cf. **Ezek. 10:2**). The further description of this altar as *before the throne* assures John’s readers that the altar of incense was the earthly counterpart to this heavenly incense altar. That is evident because the altar of incense in the tabernacle and the temple was the

nearest thing to the Holy of Holies where God's glory dwelt (**Ex. 30:6**). Consistent with that identification is that fact that the angel held in his hand a golden censer, or firepan. In the Old Testament era, the priests would twice daily (morning and evening) take hot, fiery coals from the brazen altar (where sacrifices were offered) and transport them into the Holy Place to the incense altar (**Ex. 30:7, 8; 2 Chron. 29:11**; cf. **1 Kings 7:50; 2 Kings 25:15; Jer. 52:18–19**). They then ignited the incense, which rose toward heaven, emblematic of the prayers of the saints (cf. **5:8**).

2. Holding a Golden Censer

“holding a golden censer;”

Buist Fanning: The angel is poised to carry out the ritual of incense offering (cf. **Exod 30:7–8; Lev 16:12–13; Luke 1:9–10**; m. Tamid 5–6) because he has with him “*a golden censer*” (λιβανωτὸν χρυσοῦν) or fire pan (**Exod 27:3; 1 Kgs 7:50**) in which to carry coals to the altar of incense to make the offering (**Rev 8:3b**).

B. Significance of the Incense

1. Much Incense

“and much incense was given to him,”

John Walvoord: Though nothing is said about the nature of the **incense**, it is reasonable to suppose that it fulfills the same function as incense used in Old Testament worship, composed of the four spices mentioned in **Exodus 30:34–38** and regarded as so holy that the people of Israel were forbidden to use it for any common purpose. The incense, speaking of the perfections of Christ, is inseparably bound up with any ministry of intercession, and the believers' petitions are coupled with the worthiness of Christ in their presentation at the heavenly altar. This points to the necessity of praying in the name of Christ and to the effectiveness of such prayer when faithfully ministered on earth.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: In **Revelation 8:3–4** much incense is given to the angel which is added to the prayers of all the saints upon the altar of incense. The point is that the incense gives efficacy, meaning, and acceptance to the prayers of the saints because it represents the sweet savor of Christ's person and work. Thus their prayers ascend upward into God's presence, gaining His ear and answer.

2. Mingled with the Prayers of the Saints

“that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints”

Buist Fanning: Judging from how the events of **vv. 3–6** flow together, however, it seems correct to understand these as prayers for relief and vindication similar to those of **6:10**.

Robert Mounce: To the angel is given much incense “*that he should add it unto the prayers of all the saints*” (ASV). The clause has been variously understood, but the major options are two. **Either the incense is mingled with the prayers of the saints or the incense is the prayers.** The majority of commentators and English translations favor the former alternative. The RSV translates, “*and [the angel] was given much incense to mingle with the prayers of all the saints ... and the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints.*” It is preferable, however, to follow the second option, which is to take the dative case in **vv. 3** and **4** (translated by the preposition “*with*”) as equivalent to the Hebrew *le* of definition and to translate, “*he was given much incense to offer, consisting of the prayers of all the saints.*” This interpretation

harmonizes with **5:8**, where the bowls of incense are definitely identified with the prayers of the saints.

Van Parunak: In **7:10**, the multitude in heaven declare that salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb, and in **7:11-12** the angels say “*Amen*” to this declaration and burst into praise. Similarly, we should understand the incense as the angelic endorsement of the prayers of the saints that we have already heard in the fifth seal. The saints have been crying out for God’s righteous judgment, and now the angel is **endorsing that request**. We are assured that God is aware of both the prayers and the endorsing incense, and what follows may be understood as his response to those prayers.

3. Ministered upon the Golden Altar before the Throne
“upon the golden altar which was before the throne.”

II. (:4) TRUMPET JUDGMENTS APPROVED BY GOD

A. Enhancement of the Prayers – Commingled with the Smoke of Incense

1. Offering of Incense
“And the smoke of the incense,”

2. Offering of the Prayers
“with the prayers of the saints,”

Grant Osborne: The prayers here most likely refer specifically to the imprecatory prayers for vengeance and justice in **Rev. 6:9–11**, although the presence of “*all the saints*” here specifically may refer to all prayers in general. Most likely, the language emphasizes the imprecatory prayers within the general category of all the prayers of the saints. “*All the saints*” refers to the “*great multitude*” of **7:9**, and within that category the martyrs of **6:9–11** are especially highlighted. As stated above, one of the themes of the seals, trumpets, and bowls is that the outpouring of God’s judgment is his response to the prayers of the saints. Here we see God accepting those prayers as a “*sweet-smelling savor*” (the meaning of the imagery of incense here). The mention of the throne of God stresses **God’s sovereignty and power**, thus leading naturally into the judgment theme of **8:5**.

B. Efficacy of the Prayers

1. Received by God
“went up before God”

Kendell Easley: The effectiveness of incense is measured by its smoke. This incense is potent and acceptable, for it went up before God from the angel's hand. Once more we see that what the saints do on earth has a direct effect in the very presence of God. . . The prayers that had ascended before God are transformed and hurled back to earth. The mood changes from **intercession** to **judgment**.

2. Released from the Angel’s Hand
“out of the angel's hand.”

III. (:5) TRUMPET JUDGMENTS ANNOUNCED BY TERRIFYING SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

A. Telltale Sign of Judgment

1. Taking the Censer

“And the angel took the censer;”

Buist Fanning: In dramatic and unexpected fashion, the angel follows his act of worship with a gesture of judgment that foreshadows the outpouring of punishment on the earth accompanying the seven trumpets that follow. In particular, the angel’s action of “*throwing fire*” from the heavenly altar anticipates the character of the first four trumpet judgments especially: they visit destruction on earth but originate directly from heaven. His three rapid actions in the heavenly throne room (“*took*,” “*filled*,” “*threw*”; v. 5a–c) are followed by omens of God’s appearance to judge the whole cosmos (v. 5d)

2. Filling It with the Fire of the Altar

“and he filled it with the fire of the altar”

3. Casting It Down to the Earth

“and threw it to the earth;”

Daniel Akin: The angel priest casts fire onto the earth followed by harbingers of impending storm and disaster. The cosmos trembles before the presence and power of its Creator. A day of reckoning has arrived: “*The seven angels are prepared to blow*” (8:7).

John MacArthur: Heaven’s half hour of silence is abruptly shattered and judgment resumes as a divine firestorm bursts upon this planet. The angel standing before the golden incense altar took his censer and, removing the coals from the altar, filled it with the fire of the altar. Then, in an act that must have stunned John and the assembled multitude in heaven, the angel threw it to the earth. The results are catastrophic, as God’s judgment falls upon the earth like a massive fireball out of the sky.

B. Terrifying Sights and Sounds

1. Thunder

“and there followed peals of thunder”

2. Lightning

“and sounds and flashes of lightning”

3. Earthquake

“and an earthquake.”

Kendell Easley: These four phenomena are also recorded as occurring on the earth when God revealed himself on Mount Sinai to Moses and the people of Israel (Exod. 19:16–19). They will all happen again twice more in Revelation (11:19; 16:18).

Gordon Fee: What this means seems clear enough, and serves as the source of the title of **Eugene Peterson**’s meditative commentary on the Revelation, *Reversed Thunder*, language borrowed from **George Herbert**. Earlier in 6:9–10, the souls of the “*saints*” are under the altar, where they cry out, “*How long, Sovereign Lord, until you . . . avenge our blood?*” Now, in another great

moment in this book, this initial picture of warnings about soon-coming judgment is seen as in direct response to the prayers of the saints. Thus, as the prayers go up, great displays of a fierce storm come down, which conclude with a rumbling of the earth itself.

David Thompson: Keep in mind that things have been quiet for about ½ hour, but when this happens the people on earth will know serious things are about to happen.

Sola Scriptura: Because thunder, sounds, lightning and an earthquake occur in connection with the seventh bowl, some argue that the trumpets and bowls are synonymous. However, this is a result of ignoring the textual details and focusing on generalities. At this point, in the chronology of the Revelation, God’s wrath has not begun. Only the sign of its imminent outbreak has occurred.

(:6) EPILOGUE – TRUMPET JUDGMENTS ABOUT TO BE SOUNDED

“And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.”

Buist Fanning: Resuming the scene from v. 2 after the intervening events of vv. 3–5, v. 6 sets the stage again for the series of seven trumpet judgments. Once again we see “*the seven angels*,” and here “*the seven trumpets*” carries an anaphoric article (referring back to v. 2 where the phrase was anarthrous to introduce them to the scene). But the activity of this verse is purely **anticipatory**: they “*prepare themselves*” for what will come next, the actual sounding of the first four trumpets one by one in vv. 7–12.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Is it ever appropriate for believers today to pray **imprecatory prayers** after the pattern of the Psalms?
- 2) Are these 7 angels the same as the guardian angels of the seven churches from **chaps. 2-3** or is this another group of angels? Have we failed to appreciate the diversity of the created orders of angels and their designated functions?
- 3) What does this passage teach about the **efficacy** of the prayers of the saints?
- 4) How does the imagery of **thunder** and **lightning** and **earthquake** reinforce the severity of God’s judgment?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Richard Phillips: Prayer and the Purposes of God

The **emphasis on prayer** in this passage makes a number of important points. First and foremost, we see that **prayer is the means by which God accomplishes his purpose in history**. This is the point that we are to notice in **Revelation 8:3–5**, a point so important that the seven

archangels are interrupted from blowing their trumpets. In the apocalyptic visions of the Bible, an interrupting angel appears to make a point that is not to be overlooked (see **Zech. 2:3–5; Rev. 7:2–3**). Here, God reveals the strength of his covenant bond with his people and his attention to their prayers by first sending the angel to offer up the prayers of the saints and only then using their container to cast fiery judgments on the world.

One reason that this needs to be emphasized is that Christians tend to rely on our own activity and to focus on what we can do against sin and evil, while we often neglect the far more important resource of prayer. In contrast, the biblical idea of holy warfare places prayer first and our own activity second. An example is provided by Judah's King Hezekiah during Sennacherib's invasion in 701 B.C. Hezekiah's army had tried to defend his kingdom, but the Assyrian host overwhelmed them, just as Christians will often be overwhelmed by worldly powers. Finally, the king and his supporters were besieged behind Jerusalem's walls. Sennacherib's herald came, mocking their defense and blaspheming Israel's God (**Isa. 36**). Hezekiah responded by taking the enemy's demand into the temple and spreading it before the Lord in prayer. In language reflecting the imagery of Revelation, Hezekiah prayed: "*O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. . . . O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD*" (**Isa. 37:16–20**). In the morning, Hezekiah found that God had answered by completely destroying the enemy: "*The angel of the LORD went out and struck down a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians*" (**37:36**).

Hezekiah's prayer is not merely a heartening story from the Old Testament but a statement of how God's people are to serve God's purposes in the world. God's sovereignty and prayer are never at odds, since God is sovereign over both the praying of his people and the answering of their prayers. **Prayer is, in fact, an appeal to the sovereignty of God in accordance with the will of God.**

The history of the church in recent years has provided numerous examples of how prayer is key to God's purposes. . .

For this reason, the neglect of prayer is one of the great calamities and chief failings of the Western church today. Christians are more eager to engage in activities that have a visible effect. We think more is accomplished by talking to one another or by taking actions that seem more beneficial. This is why it is hard to get Christians to attend prayer meetings, and why most evangelical churches today no longer have them, because you pray for half an hour, go home, and cannot be sure that anything was accomplished. But the vision of the seventh seal makes it clear not only that our prayers go up to God, but that they make the decisive difference in history according to his will.

Grant Osborne: In the introduction to this section (**8:2–5**) **worship** and **justice** are intertwined. The prayers of the saints are those of **6:9–11**, a call to God for justice and vengeance on those who took their lives. This is mixed with incense in the golden censer, showing that these prayers are acceptable to God and please him. When they ascend to God, he responds through the angel, as the censer is filled with fire from the heavenly altar and hurled to earth, initiating the trumpet judgments. This tells us that such imprecatory prayers are not only in keeping with his will (see **Rom. 12:19**) but also have a place in the life of the believer. Such prayers allow us to place our deep hurts before God and know that he will deal justly with those who have mistreated us. Thus

we can overcome these deep hurts and love the unlovely (**Rom. 12:14–21**). In Revelation this becomes true in the ultimate sense. The judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls are God’s response to the imprecatory prayers of the martyred saints.

Charles Swindoll: Insurance companies call storms like these “acts of God.” Technically, they’re right. Nothing happens in this world without our Sovereign’s permission. Yet there’s nothing divinely special about the natural disasters we all experience. The storms that intrude on so many people’s lives are a part of the natural deterioration of the fallen world, a result of the curse on creation first mentioned in **Genesis 3:17-19**. **Romans 8:21** calls it creation’s “slavery to corruption.” So everybody in the world —the righteous and the wicked —is subject to the brutal effects of the Fall.

We need to distinguish this condition of judgment upon creation in general from the specific judgments that God pours out on particular people at particular times. We may all experience hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and fires; but when judgment comes directly from God, it is always purposeful in its severity. Throughout history, God has unleashed His righteous wrath upon sinful, rebellious people. The people of Noah’s time, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Egyptians, the Babylonians —the list could go on. Yet these biblical examples of God’s judgment all foreshadow the ultimate judgment that will engulf the entire globe in the future Tribulation.

In the unfolding drama of Revelation, I’ve titled this episode “**Judgments of the Righteous Redeemer**” (**Rev. 8:1–10:11**). In this section we will observe a sudden **increase in the severity** of end-times judgments. Nonetheless, God intersperses needed reminders of His mercy and grace along the way. Following a half-hour respite after the breaking of the seventh seal, the second series of seven judgments commences —the seven trumpets (**8:1-5**). These trumpet blasts announce the next stage in divine wrath, a more intense display of God’s righteous judgments against stubborn, unrepentant sinners (**8:6–9:21**). Just as the trumpet blasts approach a deafening crescendo, the soundings cease and John experiences another hiatus in which God’s mercy is affirmed. During that brief interlude, John is recommissioned to prophesy concerning “*peoples and nations and tongues and kings*” (**10:1-11**).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: the argument for this view, that the seventh seal contains the seven trumpets and the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowls is simply this:

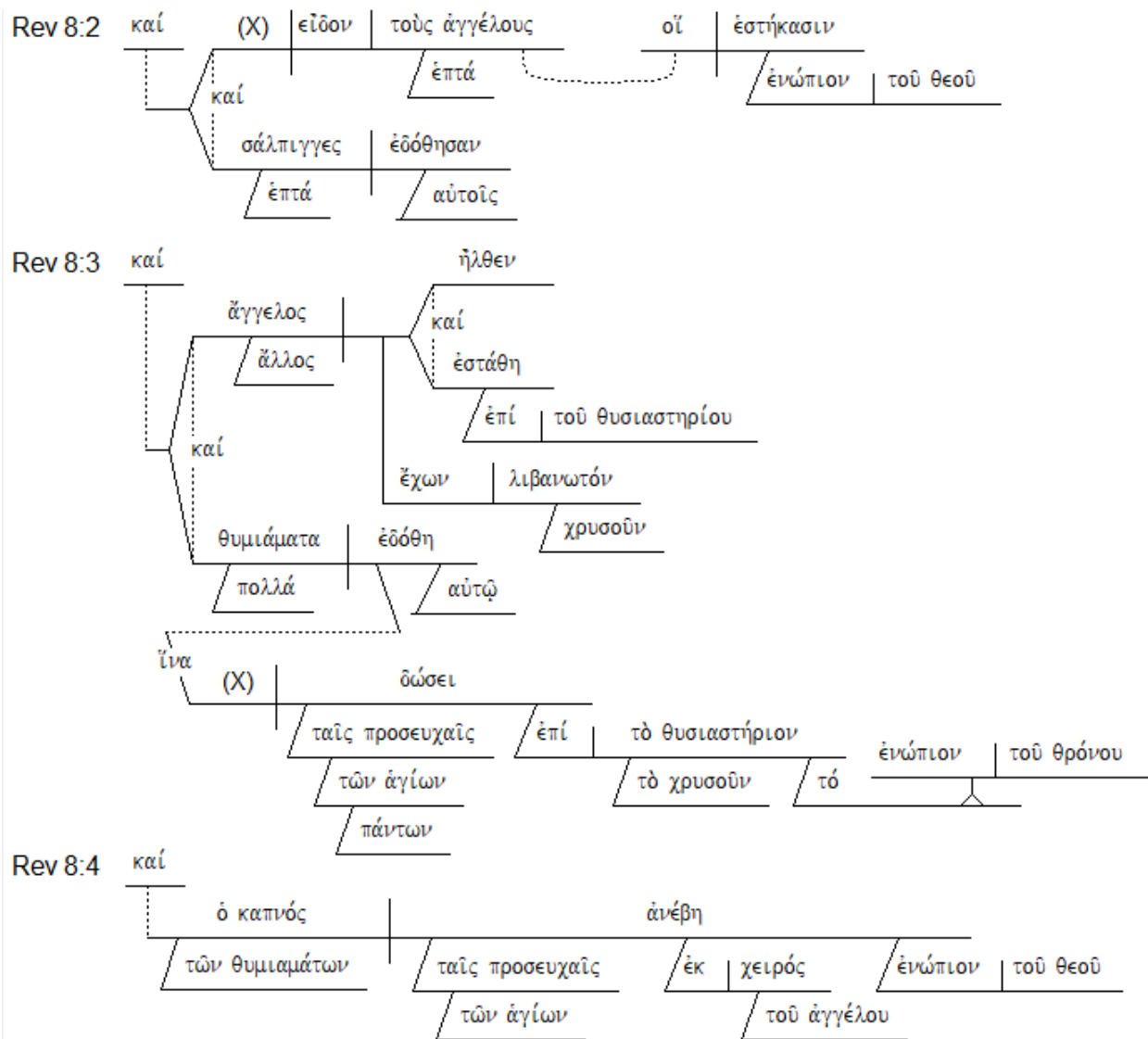
(1) There is no precise explanation of the content of the seventh seal as with the preceding six, instead, the seven trumpet angels are immediately introduced following the announcement of the seventh seal (cf. **8:1** with **8:2f**).

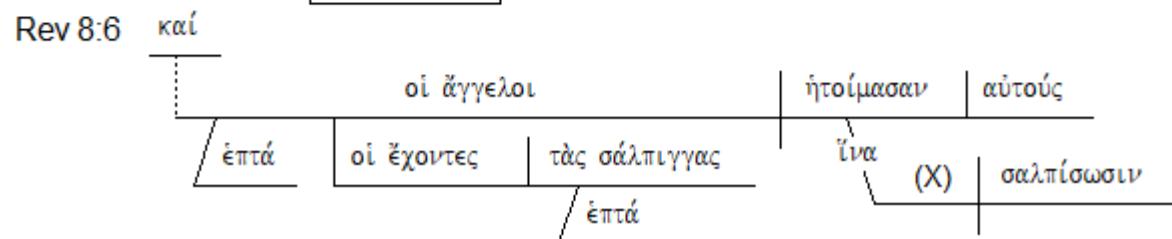
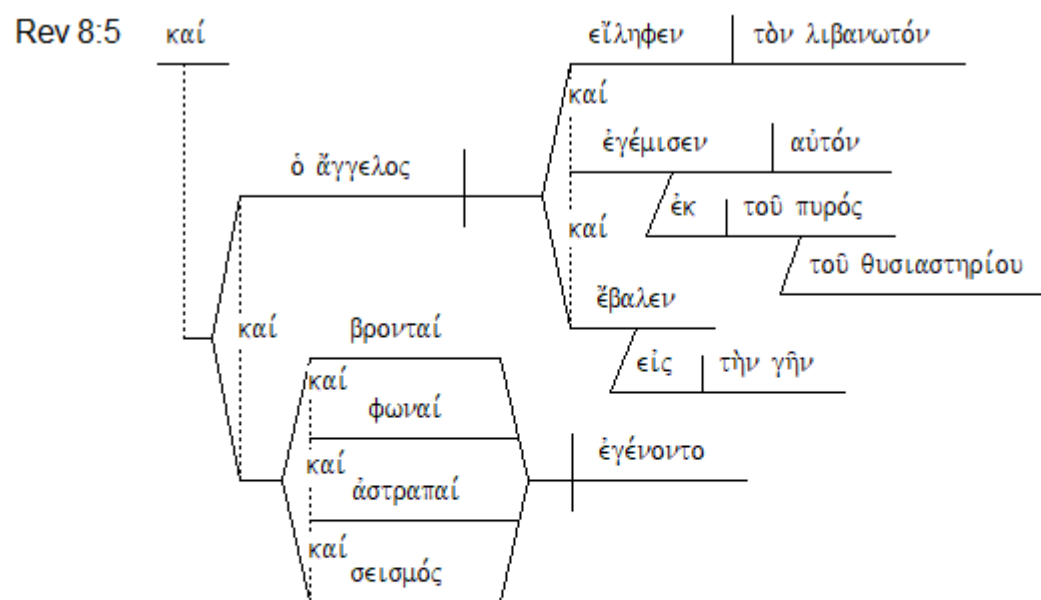
(2) When we come to the seventh trumpet we again find no precise definition as with the preceding six. Instead, heaven’s response is seen and heard in anticipation of what the seventh trumpet and its judgments will bring, specifically “... *the kingdom of the world becoming the kingdom of our Lord ...*” **Revelation 11:18** summarizes the activities and results, though the details of this are given in **Revelation 15** and **16** in the bowl judgments.

(3) **Chapter 5** gives the story of the seven-sealed book which contains all that is needed to restore God’s kingdom to earth. Here there is no mention of the trumpets or bowls. Why? Because each is ultimately contained in the seventh seal.

Thus we can see why there is silence when the seventh seal is opened: it is a display of awesome reverence for what God is doing.

Leedy Greek Diagram:





TEXT: Revelation 8:7-13

TITLE: FIRST FOUR TRUMPET JUDGMENTS – GLOBAL CATASTROPHES IMPACTING THE EARTH'S ECOSYSTEM

BIG IDEA:

THE INITIAL FOUR TRUMPET JUDGMENTS IMPACT THE EARTH'S ECOSYSTEM WITH GLOBAL CATASTROPHES IN PREPARATION FOR THE FINAL THREE MORE SEVERE WOES

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: The first four trumpets sound in **rapid staccato blasts**, taking up only six verses. In contrast, the events surrounding the fifth through seventh trumpet judgments will extend from **chapter 9** to **chapter 11**. The first four trumpet blasts will affect the earth's ecosystem and atmosphere, drastically altering living conditions on the planet. The latter judgments will involve spiritual warfare that affects people directly.

Note that all of the trumpet judgments will be **limited in their scope**. The first four plagues affect only one-third of the planet (**8:7-12**). The demonic torment of the fifth trumpet is limited to only five months (**9:5**). The deadly spiritual attack of the sixth trumpet affects only one-third of the world's population (**9:15**). The limits placed on these judgments remind us that God will still be **exercising restraint** in the early stages of the Tribulation [Day of the Lord], allowing room for repentance and salvation even in the midst of wrath. . .

The first four trumpet judgments, like the first four seals of **Revelation 6**, form a distinct cluster. They are loud, rapid-fire blasts that **seize the attention of the entire world**. Following these, however, three additional judgments will transpire. These will be slower, longer, and even more excruciating than the previous four. Before God unleashes these, He will make a bold pronouncement while He has the world's attention. John described the vision as follows: "*Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven saying with a loud voice, 'Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!'*" (**8:13**).

In other words, the worst is yet to come.

Grant Osborne: The purpose of the first four trumpet judgments is primarily to disprove the earthly gods and to show that Yahweh alone is on the throne. By recapitulating the Egyptian plagues, God wants to make his omnipotence known to the world and to show the futility of turning against him. Each of these judgments addresses a different aspect of life in the ancient world and in the modern world as well. The first shows that the material world is no answer, the second and third address the sea trade, including food supplies, and the fourth focuses on life itself in the heat and light of the celestial bodies. The four together prove that those who live only for this world have chosen foolishly, for only in God is there true life. Earthly things turn on us, and we dare not depend on them.

John Walvoord: The interpreter of these and later judgments is constantly faced with the problem of how far to take the literal and the symbolic. The point of view adopted here is that these

judgments should be interpreted literally as far as the literal interpretation can be reasonably followed. Though all questions cannot be answered, the unmistakable implication of these judgments is that God is dealing in righteous wrath with the wicked earth. . .

These very tokens of blessing and revelation of the glory of God are affected by the fourth trumpet. So dramatic are the judgments and so unmistakably an evidence of the power and sovereignty of God that even blasphemers on earth can no longer ignore the fact that God is dealing with them. Fearful as these judgments are, they are only the beginning of God's dealing with the earth, and as indicated in a special announcement, **three great woes are still to fall**. Though it is difficult in this day of grace to imagine such catastrophic judgments, the Word of God is clear, and people are called everywhere to avail themselves of grace before it is too late.

Derek Thomas: The seals view the unfolding of the redemptive purposes of God from the point of view of the Lord's own people, those who are sealed; the trumpets view this same reality from the point of view of the unsealed, those who are not the people of God. The opening of the seals brings great consolation to the people of God. The sounding of the trumpets brings great woes upon those who are not the people of God.

G.K. Beale: The first four trumpets: God deprives the ungodly of earthly security because of their persecution and idolatry in order to indicate their separation from Him (**8:6-12**).

Kendell Easley: The blowing of the first four trumpets devastates the world of nature as a warning for people to repent of their sins.

J.A. Seiss: We have reached a point in the history of the Apocalypse, at which everything stands in solemn readiness for those final blasts of judgment which bring the grand consummation. The last seal is broken. Heaven is in suspense to see the result. The prayers of all the saints have come up with acceptance before God, who has promised to avenge them. The coals and ashes of holy indignation have dropped from the golden censer to lodge upon the doomed world. In short, the time has come for the action of the great day to be hurried to its completion. May the Lord Almighty give us grace to contemplate the awful scenes foreshown, as becomes both the subject and ourselves!

I. (:7) FIRST TRUMPET JUDGMENT – HAIL AND FIRE MIXED WITH BLOOD – GOD IS SOVEREIGN IN JUDGMENT OVER THE EARTH'S VEGETATION

A. Sounding of the Trumpet

“And the first sounded,”

B. Specific Judgment

*“and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood,
and they were thrown to the earth;”*

Grant Osborne: Hail is a frequent judgment in the OT but, interestingly, in the NT occurs only in Revelation. In **Josh. 10:11** God casts “huge hailstones” on the Amorite army, and in **Job 38:22–23** God tells Job that he reserves “storehouses of hail” for his enemies. Several psalms celebrate God's use of hail in the plagues (**Ps. 78:47; 105:32–33**) and his control of “lightning and hail” (**148:8**). In summary, hailstorms are a common element in the judgment theme in the OT.

C. Severe Devastation

1. On the Earth

“and a third of the earth was burned up,”

Sola Scriptura: “*a third of the earth*” – is clearly a defining trait of the trumpet judgments which should not be overlooked or generalized. This point clearly distinguishes the trumpet judgments from the seals and bowls. Only those who wish to ignore textual details while overly pressing generalities would equate the seals, trumpets and bowls.

2. On the Trees

“and a third of the trees were burned up,”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: As has often been pointed out, it would be very **inconsistent** to understand these judgments symbolically and interpret the plagues in Egypt plainly and actually. The judgment of the first trumpet presents a grim picture of devastation on the vegetation of the world.

3. On the Green Grass

“and all the green grass was burned up.”

Buist Fanning: The trumpet blast signals the onslaught of a preternatural barrage of “*hail and fire mixed with blood*” that was “*thrown onto the earth.*” This judgment follows the pattern of the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah (**Gen 19:24**, fire and sulfur), the seventh plague on Egypt (**Exod 9:23–24**, hail and fire), and Ezekiel’s visions of Jerusalem’s destruction (**Ezek 10:2**, fire) and of God’s defeat of Gog and Magog (**Ezek 38:22**, pestilence, blood, hail, fire, sulfur). The earlier Old Testament judgments from God were destructive but localized. The pattern will be intensified in this end-time replication by being more widespread, as the final clauses of **v. 7** indicate (one-third of the earth, trees, all the grass). This proportion perhaps mirrors Old Testament prophetic models as well, and while it represents an escalation over the “*one-fourth*” of the earth affected by the fourth seal (**6:8**), it is nonetheless an indication that the final, greatest cataclysm is still to come (e.g., **16:3**). The verb phrase “*burned up*” (κατεκάνη) used three times in the final clause of **v. 7** carries the strong sense of “consume by fire, destroy by burning,” and the Old Testament parallels cited earlier (Sodom and Gomorrah, Jerusalem) make it difficult to minimize the catastrophic damage described in this verse. The burning of “*all the green grass*” adds to the severity of this blow to the earth and its inhabitants.

II. (:8-9) SECOND TRUMPET JUDGMENT – BURNING MOUNTAIN THROWN INTO THE SEA --

GOD IS SOVEREIGN IN JUDGMENT OVER THE SEAS AND COMMERCE

A. (:8a) Sounding of the Trumpet

“And the second angel sounded,”

B. (:8b) Specific Judgment

“and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea;”

John MacArthur: This is evidently a **giant meteorite** or asteroid, surrounded by flaming gases set ablaze by the friction of the earth’s atmosphere, on a collision course with the earth. The current doomsday scenarios about an asteroid hitting the earth will come true with a vengeance.

Everyone will see it, either live or on television, and as the world's telescopes see it coming, many predictions will no doubt be made about whether it will hit the earth or not. It will hit, striking somewhere in the world's oceans with an explosive power far greater than that of an atomic bomb. Because all the world's oceans are connected, the devastation from that hit will spread across one-third of the ocean waters, causing a third of the sea to become blood. . .

The impact will also generate unimaginably huge tsunamis (tidal waves). Those giant waves will destroy a third of the ships on the world's oceans, capsizing huge ocean-going vessels and completely swamping ports. The resulting disruption of commerce and transportation will cause economic chaos.

Grant Osborne: It might picture a **meteorite** with the imagery of a burning mountain falling into the sea. The image of the goddess Diana (Artemis) in the great temple at Ephesus (one of the seven wonders of the world) was apparently a meteorite (cf. **Acts 19:35**), and it was thought that meteors were a sign of direct action on the part of the gods.

Kendell Easley: People in John's day were familiar with **volcanoes**. (Mount Vesuvius had erupted in A.D. 79, destroying Pompeii and other cities.) But what kind of volcano begins in the sky and is thrown into the sea? Only something directly from the hand of God. **We aren't meant to know the mechanism of this destruction.** It is enough that he who created sea life on the fifth day of Creation now destroys a third of that life (**Gen. 1:20–23**).

C. (:8c-9) Severe Devastation

1. (:8c) On the Sea

“and a third of the sea became blood;”

Warren Wiersbe: Considering that the oceans occupy about three-fourths of the earth's surface, you can imagine the extent of this judgment. The pollution of the water and the death of so many creatures would greatly affect the balance of life in the oceans, and this would undoubtedly lead to further insoluble problems.

2. (:9a) On the Creatures in the Sea

“and a third of the creatures, which were in the sea and had life, died;”

3. (:9b) On the Ships Sailing the Sea

“and a third of the ships were destroyed.”

Buist Fanning: It does seem that this judgment, which so drastically affects the sea and its commerce (fishing, ship-born trade, etc.), foreshadows the destruction of “*Babylon*” and its commercial empire as described in **chapters 17–18** (especially **18:21**). It would be a mistake, however, to take this resonance with **chapters 17–18** as the sole symbolic significance of this judgment (i.e., evil commercial empires suffering collapse at various times in history). The pattern of judgments like those that fell on Egypt—but in the end-times escalated to extreme and cosmic proportions—strongly suggests that the trumpet judgments will be **supernatural plagues from God that have horrific natural effects**.

III. (:10-11) THIRD TRUMPET JUDGMENT – FALLING BURNING STAR -- GOD IS SOVEREIGN IN JUDGMENT OVER THE FRESH WATER SOURCES

A. (:10a) Sounding of the Trumpet

“And the third angel sounded,”

B. (:10b-11a) Specific Judgment

1. (:10b) Graphic Image of the Burning Star

“and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch,”

Grant Osborne: The blazing star falls on a third of the rivers and “*springs of water*,” a phrase used often in the OT (**Lev. 11:36; Ps. 104:10; 107:33**) due to the fact that much of Judah’s water stems from natural springs. Water was scarce there, and so springs, both natural and human-made, were essential. Thus springs were viewed as a source of life, and that is the metaphorical meaning in several places, for instance in the “*fountain of life*” (**Prov. 10:11; 13:14; 14:27**) and God as “*the spring of living water*” (**Jer. 2:13; 17:13**). **Isaiah 35:7** gives an eschatological promise that God would turn “*the thirsty ground [into] bubbling springs*” (cf. **Isa. 41:18; 58:11; Joel 3:18**). In Revelation the Lamb leads the saints to “*springs of living water*” in **7:17**, and he gives drink to the thirsty from “*the spring of the water of life*” in **21:6**. Thus its place here may be to heighten the great reversal of water as life to water as death in this judgment. In **Exod. 7:21** the first Egyptian plague also turned the water bad, so this is a further replication of that disaster.

2. (:10c) Targeted Destination of the Burning Star

“and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters;”

Warren Wiersbe: The National Geographic Society lists about 100 principal rivers in the world, ranging in length from the Amazon (4,000 miles long) to the Rio de la Plata (150 miles long). The U.S. Geological Survey reports thirty large rivers in the United States, beginning with the mighty Mississippi (3,710 miles long). One third of these rivers, and their sources, will become so bitterly polluted that drinking their water could produce death.

3. (:11a) Identification of the Burning Star

“and the name of the star is called Wormwood;”

C. (:11b) Severe Devastation

1. On the Waters

“and a third of the waters became wormwood;”

Buist Fanning: The (middle) English term “*wormwood*” is the name for a shrub or herb whose leaves are used in making a bitter-tasting medicine to treat intestinal parasites and other ailments. It contains a compound that is safe yet quite bitter in low concentrations, but can cause fatal seizures in higher amounts. That so much of the fresh water supply is contaminated in this way inevitably produces disastrous results for humans. John records that “*many people died*” because of the water. The added clause “*because it [i.e., the water] became poisonous*” (**v. 11d**) literally reads “*because it was made bitter*” (ἐπικράνθησαν), but the bitterness here is toxic. The Old Testament associates punishment for sin with bitter drink or bitterness that often leads to death (**Num 5:24, 27; Deut 29:18; Prov 5:4; Jer 9:15; 23:15; Lam 3:19**), and in this case the death-dealing effect is made clear in **Revelation 8:11c**.

Grant Osborne: As in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, poisonous water is divine judgment for sin and rebellion. It is also common to see here a reversal of the miracle of Marah (**Exod. 15:23**) when Moses threw a piece of wood into the bitter water, turning it sweet. The parallel is obvious,

though it is difficult to prove that John had this in mind. Again, this depicts a judgment that would shatter civilization. None of us could imagine a third of all the rivers and lakes turning poisonous. All the scares about polluted waters due to industrial waste in recent years seem quite pallid next to this terrible disaster.

Van Parunak: The Greek word translated “wormwood” appears only here in the Greek Bible, but there is good reason to associate it with the Hebrew word translated “wormwood” in our OT. Both the Greek and the Hebrew word describe a bitter-tasting plant extract that was used to treat intestinal worms, leading to the name “wormwood.” This word first appears in Moses’ renewal of the covenant with Israel in **Deuteronomy 29**,

Deut. 29:14 *Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; 15 But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day: ... 18 Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood;*

Here, and consistently throughout the OT, wormwood describes the **bitter result of infidelity to the Lord, as Israel turns to idols**. We have seen the pervasive temptation to idolatry that the society of Asia Minor posed to the early churches, and it is appropriate that God’s judgment on the earth include one specific to the sin of turning aside after other gods.

2. On Mankind

“and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.”

IV. (:12) FOURTH TRUMPET JUDGMENT – DARKNESS -- GOD IS SOVEREIGN IN JUDGMENT OVER THE HEAVENLY BODIES

A. Sounding of the Trumpet

“And the fourth angel sounded,”

B. Specific Judgment

*“and a third of the sun
and a third of the moon
and a third of the stars were smitten,”*

G.K. Beale: The allusion is to the plague of darkness in **Exod. 10:21-29**. The Jews interpreted the Exodus plague in a symbolic sense, as a spiritual, cultural, or mental darkness. The darkness here may refer to a series of divine judgments which plunge men into despair as it causes them to realize the futility of their idolatry and that disaster is rapidly coming upon them. Fear, terror, hopelessness, and depression may be their response.

Marvin Rosenthal: Don’t confuse the heavenly disturbance of the fourth trumpet (**8:12**) with the the specific cosmic disturbance that occurs inside of the Tribulation period with the opening of the sixth seal (**6:12-13**). There is no parallel of thought or language.

C. Severe Devastation

“so that a third of them might be darkened

*and the day might not shine for a third of it,
and the night in the same way.”*

Buist Fanning: This punishment is broadly reminiscent of the ninth plague on Egypt (**Exod 10:21–23**, a **palpable darkness** over all of Egypt for three days), but it also incorporates details from certain day-of-the-Lord passages that speak of the day’s darkness and gloom by citing its effects on the sun, moon, and stars (e.g., Joel 2:10, 31; 3:14–15; Amos 5:18–20; 8:9; cf. Ezek 32:7–8).⁴⁶ The further effect described here (v. 12d–e) is similar to Amos 8:9 (darkness for a portion of the day) and different from Exodus 10:22 (darkness for three entire days). The blows result in complete darkness for a third of the daytime and of the nighttime: “The day did not shine for a third of it, and the night likewise.”

Charles Swindoll: Places in the area hit hardest by these plagues will have already lost power and deteriorated into desperation and despair. Add natural darkness to this situation and the result would be anarchy and chaos. Rioting, looting, and crime would exacerbate the horrors experienced around the globe.

Robert Mounce: the NT darkness is often connected with the **demonic**. Unbelieving Israel is to be cast outside into the darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (**Matt 8:12**). In **2 Cor 6:14–15** light and darkness stand parallel to Christ and Belial. According to **Col 1:13** the saints are those who have been rescued from the dominion of darkness (cf. **Col 2:13–15**). The darkness of the fourth plague anticipates the **transition from divine warnings to demonic woes**. It previews that ultimate excommunication of unrepentant people to the punishment prepared for the devil and his angels (**Matt 25:41**).

(;13) EPILOGUE – WARNING OF INCREASE IN SEVERITY OF JUDGMENTS

A. Vision Continued

“And I looked,”

William Barclay: Here we have one of the **pauses** in the story which Revelation uses so effectively. Three fearful woes are to come on the earth when the three angels sound the last blasts on the trumpets; but, for the moment, there is a pause.

In this pause, the seer sees an eagle – not an angel as the Authorized Version has it. It is quite possible that the Greek could mean ‘one solitary eagle’. The expression ‘*mid-heaven*’ means the highest point of the sky, that part where the sun is at midday. Here we have a dramatic and eerie picture of an empty sky and a solitary eagle winging its way across its highest point, forewarning of the doom to come.

Again, John is using an idea which is not new. We have the same picture in 2 Baruch. When the writer of that book has seen his vision and wants to send it to the Jews exiled in Babylon by the waters of the Euphrates, he goes on: ‘And I called the eagle and spake these words unto it: “The Most High hath made you that you should be higher than all birds. Now go, and tarry not in any place, nor enter a nest, nor settle on any tree, till you have passed over the breadth of the many waters of the river Euphrates, and have gone to the people that dwell there, and cast down to them this letter” ‘ (2 Baruch 77:21–2).

B. Verbal Woes Proclaimed by Flying Eagle

1. Eagle Appears

“and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven,”

2. Eagle Loudly Proclaims 3 Remaining Woes

*“saying with a loud voice,
‘Woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth,
because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels
who are about to sound!’”*

James Hamilton: The angel pronounces one woe for each of the three trumpets, and notice that the woes are directed at *“those who dwell on the earth,”* the earth-dwellers. These are people who live for this world. These are people who are not concerned with God and his purposes. God will judge them for their refusal to honor him as God and give thanks to him.

Buist Fanning: Most prominent in this part of the vision is what John *“heard”* (as in **5:11**), *“an eagle”* heralding the impending distress that will accompany the final three trumpets. The eagle is a common image for swift, overwhelming destruction (e.g., **Deut 28:49; Jer 4:13; Lam 4:19; Hos 8:1; Hab 1:8**), and an eagle *“flying high in the sky”* implies its ability to swoop down at will on unsuspecting and vulnerable targets. The eagle here, however, gives loud warning of the intense distress that will come soon with the threefold exclamation, *“woe, woe, woe.”* Such *“woes”* are pronounced also in the Old Testament (e.g., **1 Sam 4:7–8; Isa 1:4, 24; Jer 4:13; Zeph 2:5**; see the double *“woe, woe”* in **Ezek 16:23; Amos 5:16**) and frequently by Jesus as well (e.g., **Luke 6:24–26**). Here the **triple lament** is pronounced regarding *“those who live on the earth,”* a frequent description in Revelation referring to the world of humanity opposed to God, whom God will judge by these woes. The threefold exclamation intensifies the emotional expression, but it also provides the structure for grouping the final three trumpet judgments together. The threefold structure is introduced here and reiterated in **9:12** and **11:14**. The *“trumpet blasts”* by the three remaining angels are the reason for these cries of lament.

John MacArthur: *Woe* is used throughout Scripture, as an expression of judgment, destruction, and condemnation (cf. **Num. 21:29; 1 Sam. 4:7–8; Job 10:15; Ps. 120:5; Eccl. 10:16; Isa. 3:9; Jer. 4:13; Lam. 5:16; Ezek. 13:3; Hos. 7:13; Amos 6:1; Mic. 2:1; Nah. 3:1; Hab. 2:6; Zeph. 2:5; Matt. 11:21; Jude 11**).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: *“Woe”* is the Greek *ouai*, an onomatopoetic term and a strong interjection of grief or denunciation. By onomatopoetic is meant the formation or use of words such as buzz or murmur because the sound of the word imitates the sounds associated with the objects or actions they refer to. So this is a **very graphic warning** of the nature of what is coming.

Sola Scriptura: The final three trumpets are characterized as three *“woes.”* These represent the worst expression of God’s wrath the wicked will ever experience on earth.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How do the trumpets differ from the seals?

- 2) Why is God's outpouring of wrath specifically limited in each of these 4 trumpet judgments?
- 3) Why should we interpret this passage as literally as possible?
- 4) Why is there no escaping the severity of God's judgments?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

James Hamilton: How serious do you think God is about his glory? Does God's glory matter this much to you? Do you think it is a serious crime that all the humans whom God made to know him and glorify him have used God's gifts to rebel against him? Do you find it heinous and deplorable that humanity has turned the world God made as a theater for his glory into a theater of idolatry and rebellion and sin? Do you think human sin warrants the kind of judgment that we see in this chapter?

If you think that God is overreacting, your view of God is too small. The scope of this devastation is meant to show us how great God is. The fury of this wrath is meant to declare how serious God is about his word. . .

It is interesting to observe that the blowing of the trumpets in **chapters 8, 9** is matched by the outpouring of the bowls in **chapter 16**.

1. The first trumpet affects the land, and the first bowl is poured out on the land.
2. The second trumpet affects the sea, and the second bowl is poured out on the sea.
3. The third trumpet affects the rivers and springs of water, and the third bowl is poured out on the rivers and springs of water.
4. The fourth trumpet affects sun, moon, and stars, and the fourth bowl is poured out on the sun.

The Chiastic Structure of Revelation 7—14

7:1–9:21, The Sealing of the Saints and the Seven Trumpets

10:1–11, The Angel and John (a True Prophet)

11:1–14, The Church: Two Witnesses Prophesy for 1,260 Days, Then Opposition from the Beast

11:15–19, the Seventh Trumpet: "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.*" Worship!

12:1–13:10, The Church: The Woman Nourished for 1,260 Days, Then Opposition from the Dragon and the Second Beast

13:11–18, The Deceiving Beast (False Prophet)

14:1–19:10, The Redemption of the Saints and the Bowls of Wrath

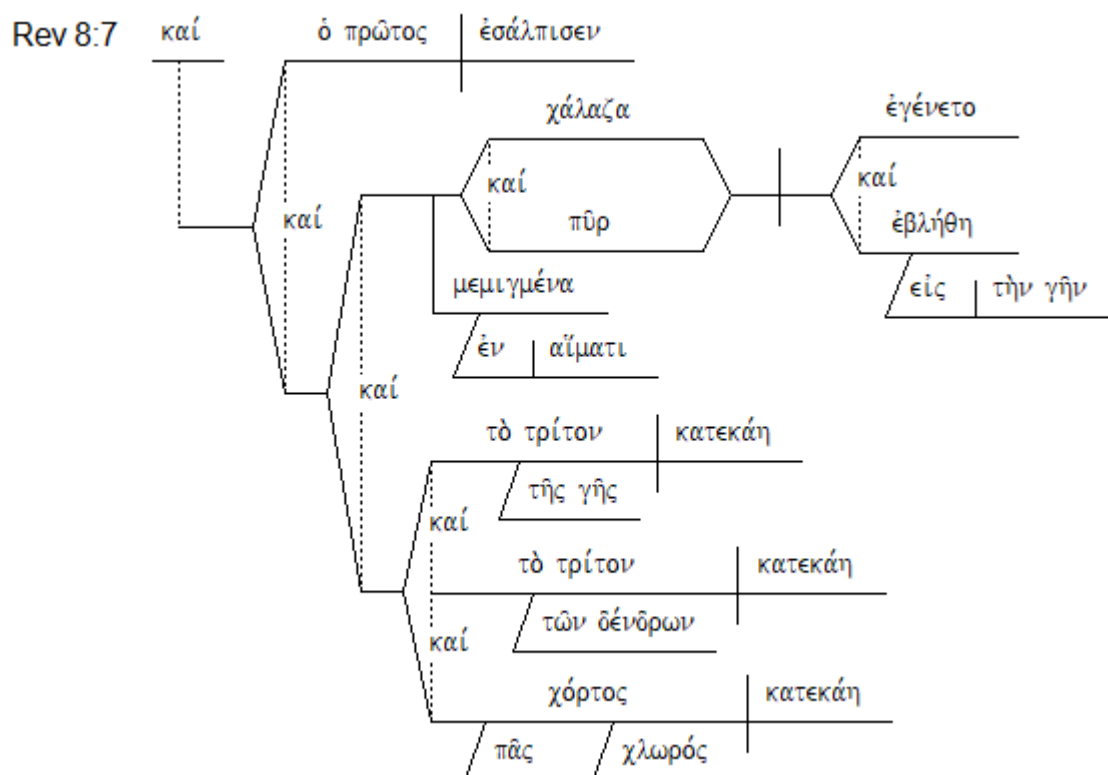
Charles Swindoll: We need to remember that **God won't stop until His plan is accomplished**. This is a hard lesson to accept—and an even harder one to live through. The sad reality of the first four trumpet judgments is that they are only the beginning. In our own lives, we can choose to heed the warnings of God's Word, or we can harden our hearts. Either way, God will eventually work out His plan, which is our sanctification (**1 Thes. 4:3**). Have you been resisting

a plan that God has impressed upon you? Stop! Instead, ask the Lord to soften the stubbornness of your heart toward His purposes and to conform you to His will. Only when God's purpose is accomplished will you receive His peace and experience a reprieve.

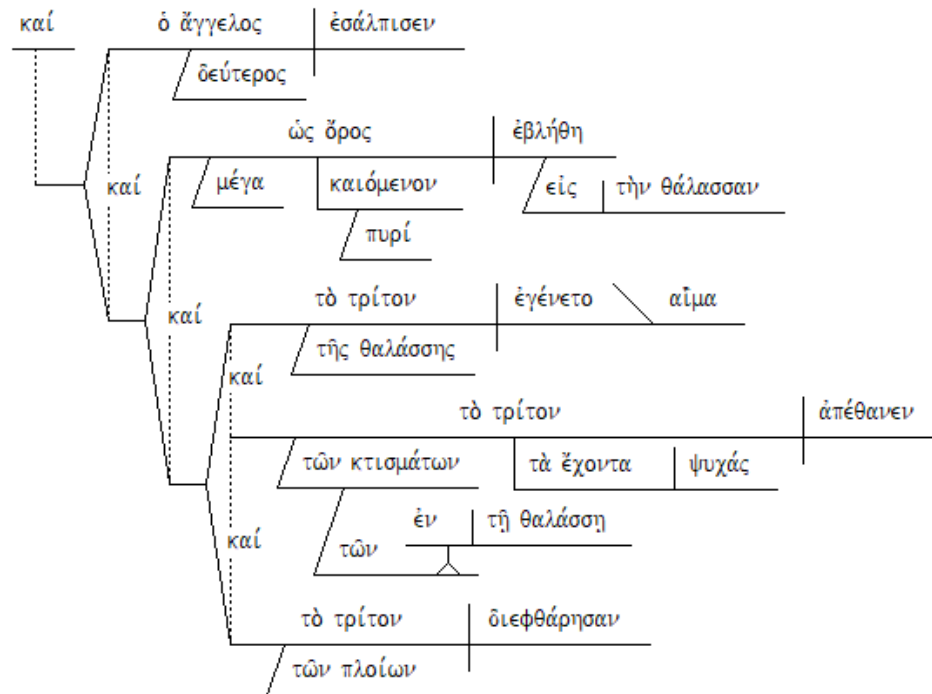
Richard Phillips: We remember that Revelation is not a puzzle book but a **picture book**. The general impression is therefore most important. Here, the four trumpets bring plagues on the created order—the earth, the seas, the streams, and the stars and moon—to signify God's judgment on the nations that rise up in idolatry throughout history. These woes are inflicted not by "nature" but by God, and mankind is completely unable to manage them. This is precisely what a sober view of history shows, with vast portions of the human race suffering and dying at any one time because of tragedies originating from every part of creation.

J.A. Seiss: I must, therefore, take these descriptions in the only really ascertainable sense of them, and insist that a mighty storm of hail and fire mingled with blood means a storm of hail and fire mingled with blood; that earth, trees and all green grass means earth, trees, and green grass; and that the burning, and scorching, and destruction means burning, scorching, and destruction. And, after wading through piles of volumes intended to prove and demonstrate the contrary, I come back to this, as fully persuaded, as I am convinced that the Bible is of God, that there can be no interpretation of the Apocalypse, as an intelligible revelation, on any other principle. There are, indeed, symbols and figures in it, as in all other portions of the Scriptures. But when they occur here, as in every other place, the distinct intimations to that effect are given; and, in all other instances, we are to interpret precisely the same as in any other piece of serious writing intended for the instruction and enlightenment of men.

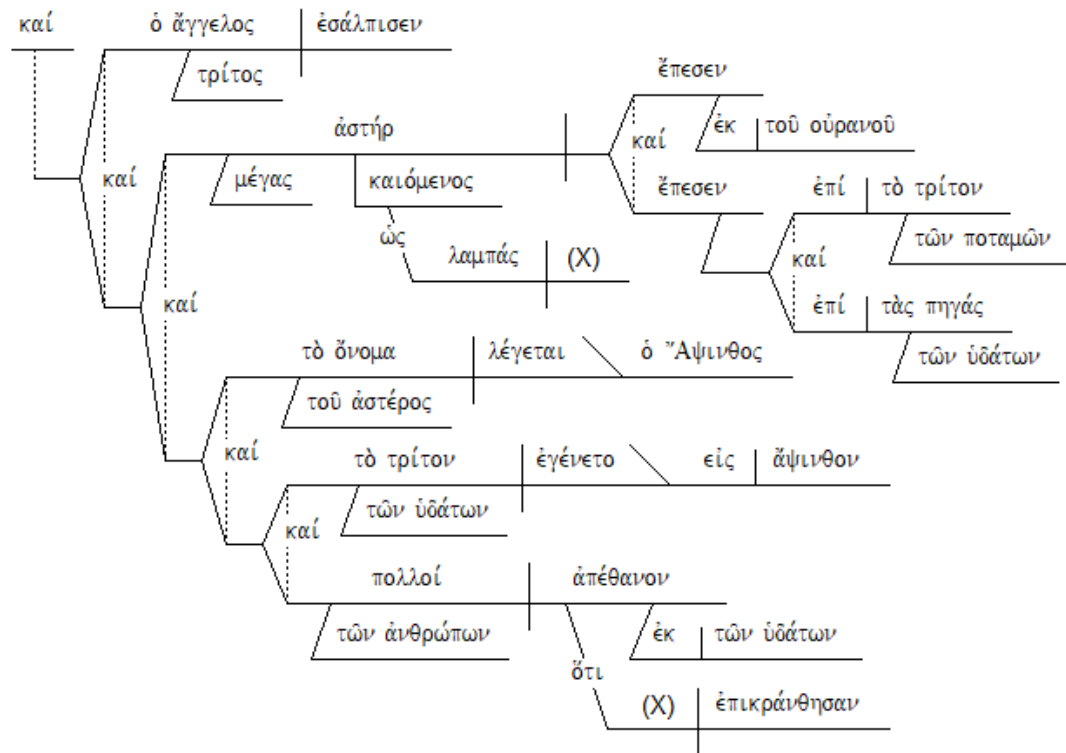
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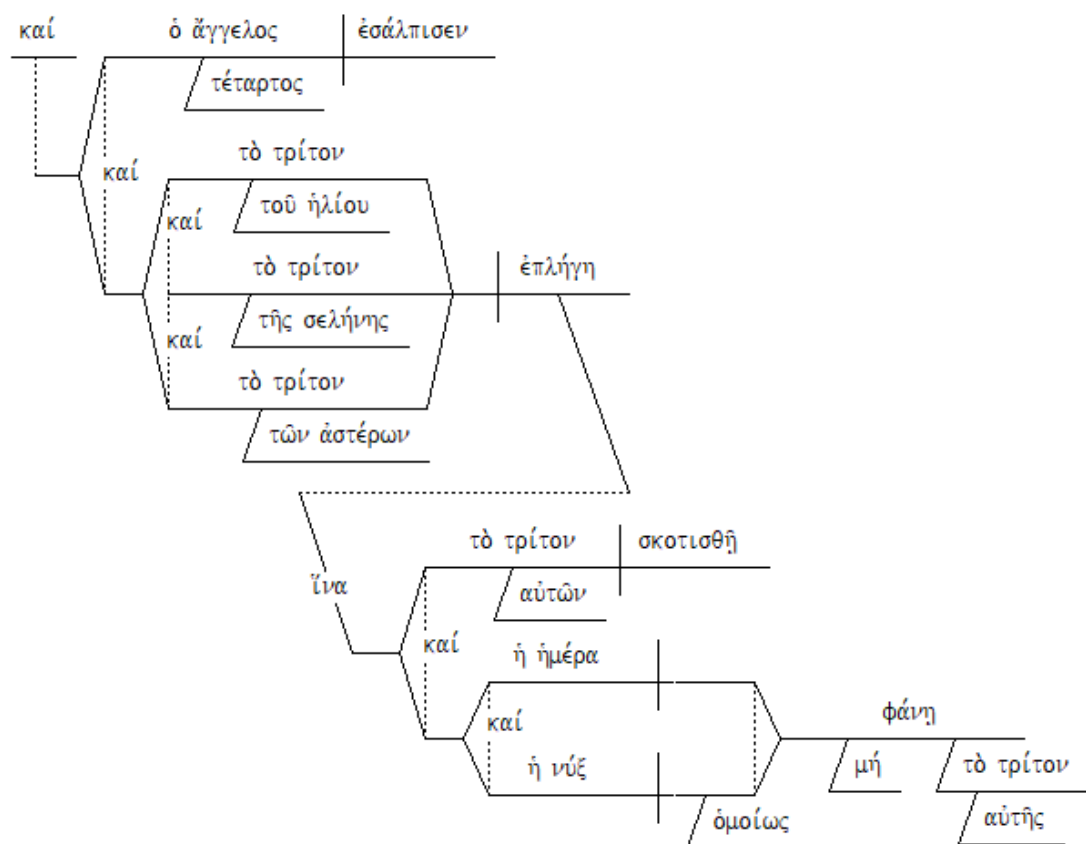
Rev 8:8-9



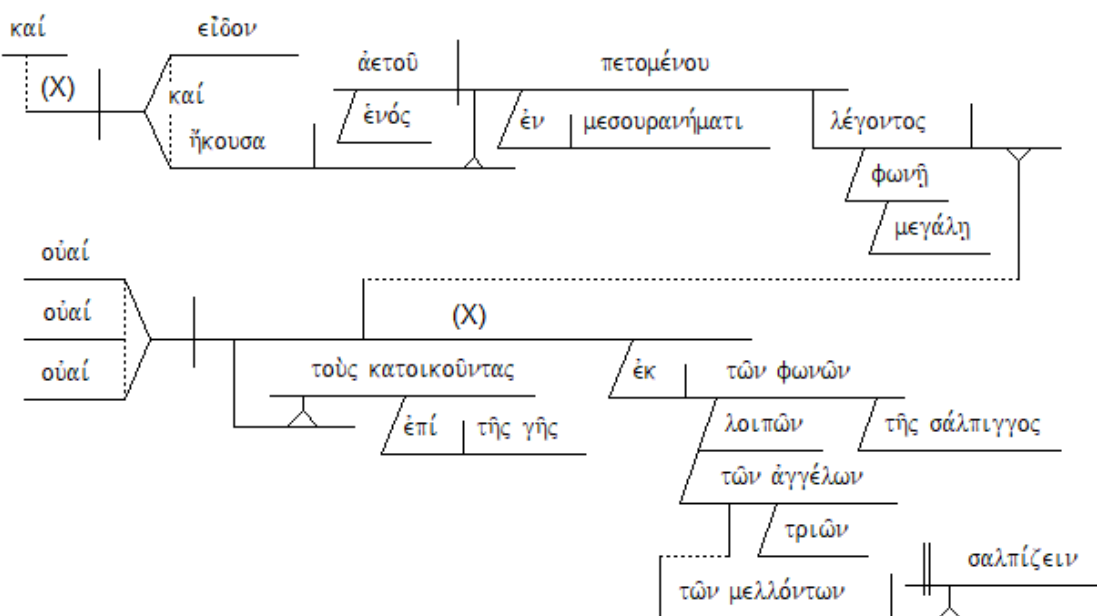
Rev 8:10-11



Rev 8:12



Rev 8:13



TEXT: Revelation 9:1-12

TITLE: *FIFTH TRUMPET – DEMONIC LOCUSTS OF SWARMING TORMENT*

BIG IDEA:

THE FIFTH TRUMPET RELEASES FEARSOME DEMONIC LOCUSTS THAT TORMENT UNBELIEVERS FOR FIVE MONTHS

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The two trumpet judgments of **chapter 9** are three times as long as the first four trumpets (**8:6–12**) put together. Part of the reason is that they add an important clarification to the themes of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. They prove to the earth-dwellers that the false “gods” they have followed are demonic forces and that these evil powers are not their friends. Indeed, they hate the very ones who worship them. In the Gospels demons possess people for one basic reason, to torture and kill all who are made in the image of God (note the Gadarene demoniac [**Mark 5:1–20**] or the demon-possessed child [**Mark 9:14–29**]). This is exactly the pattern with the locust plague (**Rev. 9:1–11**) and the demonic cavalry (**9:12–19**). The locusts torture the earth-dwellers for five months so terribly that people long for death. Then the horsemen give them the death they have sought, and one-third of humankind dies. Yet the tragedy of sin continues. In spite of absolute proof of both the omnipotence of God and the hatred of the false gods for their own followers, evil people do not repent but reject God’s offer and return again to worship the very evil powers that had just tortured and killed so many of them (**9:20–21**). . .

There are two emphases [in **9:1–11**]:

- (1) the demons turn on the very people who follow them and show their utter contempt and incomparable cruelty by torturing their worshipers;
- (2) God is in control and directs the entire event.

David Thompson: As bad as this judgment is, this is only the first of the three “woe” judgments and these judgments, like all judgment in the book of Revelation, go from bad to worse.

By identifying these as “woe” (ὠναι) judgments we know that these final three judgments will be especially severe. It seems that one reason why it is called a “woe” judgment is because it brings terrible calamity at an unusual level **against people**. In other words, people become the specific targets or objects of the wrath of God.

As **Kiddle** (1940: 158) says, “by exhausting every attempt to bring them [the nations] to a better mind, God demonstrates His sovereignty, vindicates His holiness, and justifies His final sentence of doom.”

William Barclay: These things are not to be taken literally. The point is that, in this terrible time of devastation which the seer sees coming to the earth, the terrors are not natural but demonic; the powers of evil are being given their last chance to work their dreadful work.

Daniel Akin: In carrying out judgment on unrepentant humanity, the sovereign Lord will use Satan and his forces, but He will always remain in control over them.

I. (:1-2) ORIGIN OF DEMONIC LOCUSTS -- THE BOTTOMLESS PIT

A. (:1a) Sounding of the Trumpet

“And the fifth angel sounded,”

B. (:1b) Star from Heaven

“and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth;”

Buist Fanning: A parallel that supports taking this “star” as an angel is **20:1–3**, where a being John explicitly calls “an angel” comes down from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit so that he can lock Satan away in it for a thousand years. This parallel provides evidence also that the angel in **9:1** is not “fallen” in a spiritual sense despite possible parallels with the “fall” of Satan or his demons from heaven (e.g., **Luke 10:18**, “fall”; **Rev 12:8–9**, “was thrown”; possibly **Isa 14:12**; cf. also **Jude 13**, “erring stars”). In this verse, “fall” (πίπτω) denotes **movement to a lower level** (as in **6:13, 16; 8:10**), not spiritual ruin or lapse into sin or rebellion (e.g., **2:5**). Likewise the “star” (angel) in v. 1 should not be identified with the angel named in v. 11 as king over the creatures of the bottomless pit.

Charles Swindoll: The star is often used symbolically in Scripture to refer to a prominent person (**Num. 24:17**), to Satan (**Isa. 14:12–17**), to angelic beings (**Job 38:7**), to human leaders of churches (**Rev. 1:20**), or even to Christ, the “*bright morning star*” (**22:16**). Some understand the star in this passage to be Satan falling from heaven. However, it could simply be a **high-ranking angel given authority over the abyss**.

Scott Duvall: although falling stars can represent demons or even Satan (e.g., **Jude 13; Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:9**), here the descending star is an **angelic messenger** sent from God as an agent of judgment (See for example, the parallel figure in **Revelation 20:1**). God stands in sovereign control over the entire universe, the underworld included, and he gives this angel-star the key to the opening of the prison called the “Abyss.”

C. (:1c-2a) Opening of the Bottomless Pit

1. (:1c) Authority to Open the Bottomless Pit

“and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.”

Richard Phillips: The term “abyss” or “bottomless pit” is used throughout the Bible for the dark prison where demons are held. Jesus once found a man who was inhabited by a host of demons who called themselves “*Legion*.” Before Jesus cast them out, the demons “*begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss*” (**Luke 8:31**). This suggests the torment of demons in the pit as they await final judgment. This idea is reinforced by the smoke that came forth from the pit, “*like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft*” (**Rev. 9:2**). **Hendriksen** comments: “It is the smoke of deception and delusion, of sin and sorrow, of moral darkness and degradation that is constantly belching up out of hell.”

2. (:2a) Action of Opening the Bottomless Pit

“And he opened the bottomless pit;”

John MacArthur: Scripture teaches that God has sovereignly chosen to incarcerate certain demons in that pit of punishment. **Second Peter 2:4** says that “*God did not spare angels when*

they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.” The phrase “*cast them into hell*” is a participle derived from the Greek noun **Tartarus**. Just as Jesus used a term for hell derived from the Jewish vernacular (**Gehenna**; cf. **Matt. 5:22**), so Peter chose a term from Greek mythology with which his readers would be familiar. Tartarus was the name used in Greek literature for the place where the worst sinners, those who had offended the gods personally, went after death and were punished. The place where God keeps demons imprisoned is actually different from the imaginary place of Greek mythology. Yet the use of the term Tartarus does seem to convey the idea that because of the heinousness of their sin, God has imprisoned certain fallen angels in such a place of severest torment and isolation. They remain in that place, awaiting their sentencing to final punishment in the eternal lake of fire (**Rev. 20:10, 13–14**).

D. (:2b) Smoke Released from the Bottomless Pit

1. Picture of the Released Smoke

“and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace;”

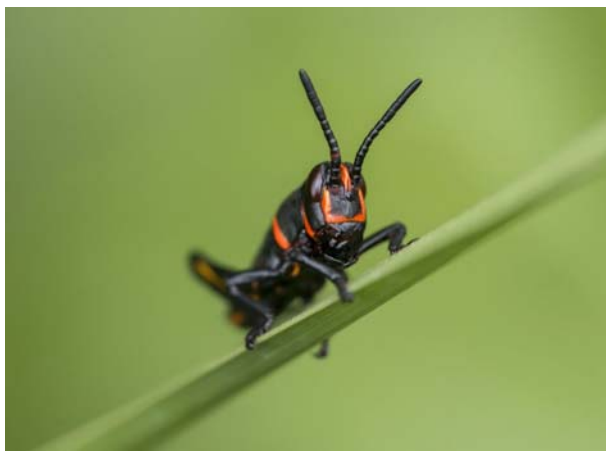
Kendell Easley: To follow John's imagery, you must imagine the Abyss as something like a huge underground cavern, perhaps like an old California gold mine. Then imagine a narrow shaft going up to the surface, with a locked door at the top. Finally, picture the cavern filled with choking blue smoke created by a sulfurous, crude-oil burning furnace. What would be the first thing to happen when the angel opened the Abyss with his key? Obviously, smoke would belch up from the shaft, like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. In this instance, the sun and sky were darkened by the smoke, an ominous precursor of the real terrors that come from the pit.

John MacArthur: The smoke polluting the sky symbolizes the corruption of hell belched forth from the abyss to pollute the world.

2. Pollution of the Released Smoke

“and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.”

II. (:3-6) MISSION OF THE DEMONIC LOCUSTS -- OPPRESSIVE TORMENT



A. (:3) Destructive Power – Compared to Scorpions

1. Pervasiveness of Locusts on the Earth

“And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth;”

Robert Mounce: Throughout the OT the locust is a symbol of destruction (**Deut 28:42; 1 Kgs 8:37; Ps 78:46**). Bred in the desert, they invade cultivated areas in search of food. They may travel in a column a hundred feet deep and up to four miles in length, leaving the land stripped bare of all vegetation. The cloud of smoke is not the swarm of locusts, for the locusts come out of the smoke.

John MacArthur: But these were not ordinary locusts, but demons, who, like locusts, bring **swarming destruction**. Describing them in the form of locusts symbolizes their uncountable numbers and massive destructive capabilities. The fact that three times in the passage (**vv. 3, 5, 10**) their power to inflict pain is compared to that of scorpions indicates they are not actual locusts, since locusts have no stinging tail as scorpions do. Scorpions are a species of arachnid, inhabiting warm, dry regions, and having an erect tail tipped with a venomous stinger. The stings of many species of scorpions are excruciatingly painful, and about two dozen species are capable of killing humans. The symptoms of a sting from one of the deadly species, including severe convulsions and paralysis, resemble those of demon-possessed individuals (cf. **Mark 1:23–27; 9:20, 26**). Combining in the description of the demons both locusts and scorpions emphasizes the deadliness of the demon invasion. But the devastating pain inflicted by these demons will be far worse than that of actual scorpions. In this judgment God brings demons into direct contact with the unrepentant people with whom they will spend forever in the lake of fire. The fact that these locust and scorpion-like creatures come from the pit and that their leader is the “*angel of the abyss*” (**9:11**) indicates that demons must be in view in this scene.

S. Lewis Johnson: They were malicious, they are mysterious, they are malignant and evidently embodied spirits, what we might call infernal cherubim in the form of supernatural locusts to torment for five months. . . they are not normal locusts, they are super insects. They are locusts that have complete immunity from any of the insecticides of that particular time. And incidentally, John the Baptist, of course, thought that locusts were delicacies. John would not find these so tasty, you can be sure of that. They are locusts then that represent demonic beings. They have powerful scorpion-like stings.

2. Power of Locusts Compared to Scorpions

“and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.”

Grant Osborne: “*Scorpions*” were widespread in the Mediterranean world. They look like lobsters but belong to the spider family, and their sting is quite severe, fatal to some children. The OT links them with snakes as dangerous denizens of the desert (**Deut. 8:15**), and the scorpion became a metaphor for terrible punishment (**1 Kings 12:11, 14**). In Luke 10:19 Jesus uses “*snakes and scorpions*” as symbols of demonic forces. Thus the scorpion like the locust was a natural symbol for the demonic “*powers*.” Here the “*power*” of a scorpion to cause intense pain is given to the locusts. As some have pointed out (Aune 1998a: 527; **Beale** 1999: 495), the purpose here is to use the locusts/scorpions to intimidate, demoralize, and terrorize the earth-dwellers (so **v. 5**).

B. (:4-5) Delegated Limitations

1. Restricted from Normal Function of Harming Vegetation

*“And they were told that they should not hurt the grass of the earth,
nor any green thing,
nor any tree,”*

James Hamilton: Note that these locusts “*were told*” what they could and could not harm. That’s another divine passive, and it tells us that God is in absolute control of what or who gets judged and how severe the judgment will be. The agents of God’s judgment will not go farther than God allows and intends for them to go. Furthermore, the only people protected from these scorpion-like locusts are those with the seal of God on their foreheads, which itself tells us that people cannot by their own power avoid these locusts—only God can shield you from this pain.

2. Repurposed to Target Unbelievers

“but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”

3. Restricted from Killing

“And they were not permitted to kill anyone,”

4. Redirected to Inflict Torment

a. Limited to Five Months

“but to torment for five months;”

Robert Mounce: Their torment is limited to a period of five months. This period has been variously explained. It may have been determined by the life cycle of the locust, which is of five months’ duration. It corresponds as well to the dry season (spring through late summer) in which the danger of a locust invasion is always present. Whatever the source of the number, it represents a limited period of time (not necessarily a short period of time) during which people in torment may yet turn from their wickedness and repent (cf. **vv. 20–21**). The plague is not an act of wanton cruelty but a stark indication that wickedness cannot continue indefinitely without divine requital.

b. Like that of a Scorpion

*“and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion
when it stings a man.”*

Buist Fanning: But these “*locusts*,” like Joel’s, are even worse than the scourge from a natural plague of locusts who strip the land of everything green but are unable to harm the human population directly. They are more fearful, first of all, because they are equipped (by God) with scorpion-like “*power*” to inflict excruciating pain (**v. 3b–c**). Humans seem to have a natural phobia regarding scorpions (as with snakes) wherever they are found because of their punishing stings and ability to hide and then strike from unexpected places (cf. **Deut 8:15; 1 Kgs 12:11, 14; Luke 10:19**; cf. Sir 39:28–31)—how much worse to have such creatures swarming everywhere.

Grant Osborne: The rest of the verse describes the βασανισμός (*basanismos*, *torment*, *agony*) of the earth-dwellers. This cognate of the verb above is stressed, appearing twice in **9:5b**. **Louw and Nida** (1988: 1.287) see it as one of the strongest terms for pain or suffering, defining it as “severe pain associated with torture and torment.” The term is used in **14:10–11** for “*the smoke of the torment*” of the unsaved. Thus the pain here is a harbinger of the pain to be experienced in the eternal torment of the lake of fire (cf. **20:10**, “*tormented day and night forever and ever*”). This

“intense pain” is caused by the scorpionlike “sting” (actually “torment”; cf. 9:10 below) of the locusts. John here uses the graphic παίω (*paiō*, *strike*, *sting*) that pictures the scorpion “striking” the person with its deadly tail. The pain is intense, but a scorpion sting is rarely deadly to any human except a small infant. This fits the picture of 9:4–6 well, although it is difficult to imagine being stung multiple times over a five-month period and surviving.

David Thompson: Those who are stung by a scorpion experience the following:

- 1) The place of the sting becomes inflamed;
- 2) The skin hardens and becomes red;
- 3) Intense pain follows;
- 4) People experience chills, a burning sensation that includes sweating and shivering;
- 5) A sensation of being pricked by needles.

C. (:6) Desperate Desire for Escape Via Death

*“And in those days men will seek death and will not find it;
and they will long to die and death flees from them.”*

Kendell Easley: Who can imagine the nightmare of the world's peoples all full of unspeakable physical agony, longing to die, yet remaining alive to experience even worse? Even more terrible, they refuse to repent of sin and turn to God (9:21), just like Pharaoh in the days of Moses.

John MacArthur: So intense will be the torment inflicted on unbelievers that in those days (the five months of v. 5) men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them. All hope is gone; there will be no tomorrow. The earth people have loved and worshiped will have been utterly devastated, the land ravaged by earthquakes, fires, and volcanoes, the sea filled with the putrefying bodies of billions of dead creatures, much of the fresh water supply turned into bitter poison, the atmosphere polluted with gases and showers of heavenly debris. Then, worst of all, will come foul smoke from the pit of hell as the demons are released to spiritually and physically torment wicked people. The dream of a worldwide utopia under the leadership of Antichrist (the beast of 13:1ff.) will have died. Driven mad by the filth and vileness of the demon infestation, people will seek relief in death—only to find that death has taken a holiday. There will be no escape from the agony inflicted by the demons, no escape from divine judgment. All attempts at suicide, whether by gunshot, poison, drowning or leaping from buildings will fail.

III. (:7-10) APPEARANCE OF THE DEMONIC LOCUSTS – WAR-LIKE

Buist Fanning: These descriptions continue to show how fearsome and diabolical these future invaders from the pit will be.

Robert Mounce: The total impact is one of unnatural and awesome cruelty. . . Human and bestial qualities are combined in a figure both unnatural and diabolical.

Richard Phillips: We know that John is not describing literal features because he uses the word *like* eight times. These are **analogies** presenting a “frightful and horrible and true picture of the operation of the powers of darkness in the souls of the wicked.”

Grant Osborne: This is certainly one of the more bizarre descriptions of the book, and one dare not take the details too far. It seems that John is combining the locust, the scorpion, and the warriors of an invading army (the Romans were particularly paranoid about the dangers of invasion). These go far beyond a locust or a scorpion in the sense that they seem to be supernaturally large and incredibly fearsome.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: In their description John lists eight things about their appearance. He begins with the head and moves backward to their tails, the source of their power to inflict torment for the five months. Torment is their sole purpose. The description here defies imagination, but remember, these are demonic creatures that have come from the abyss. They are the worst of the demons of Satan. Whether they take on this form as a demonic-like apparition, or just what happens here we are not told. But they will be real and will inflict terrible torment upon mankind. It will be a literal hell on earth.

A. (:7a) Battle Horses

“And the appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle;”

Kendell Easley: Battle horses are bred for strength and equipped with bridle and saddle. This was no slipshod host but was well prepared.

David Thompson: A battle horse is one who charges into war and knows no fear (**Job 39:19-25**). This demonic force is fearless and well-organized and well-fitted (**Proverbs 21:31**).

B. (:7b) Crowned Heads

“and on their heads, as it were, crowns like gold,”

Richard Phillips: The crowns foretell victory, and the human faces show that they are guided by a rational cunning.

Kendell Easley: These symbolize victory. They will succeed completely in their appointed mission.

John MacArthur: the demon host will be invincible, unstoppable, and all-conquering. Men will have no weapon that can harm them and no cure for the terrible torment they inflict.

C. (:7c) Human Faces

“and their faces were like the faces of men.”

Buist Fanning: human-like, perhaps representing evil intelligence along with their brute power

D. (:8a) Long Hair

“And they had hair like the hair of women,”

Kendell Easley: This may be their antennae waving in the wind. Some ancient warriors, particularly Parthians, wore long flowing hair as a symbol of fierceness (not effeminacy).

Tony Garland: the hair that John sees appears to be long, like that of a woman.

E. (:8b) Savage Teeth

“and their teeth were like the teeth of lions.

Kendell Easley: Such teeth tear apart their prey. Again, fierceness and strength come to mind with such an image.

David Thompson: they have teeth that are vicious, ready to devour and rip to shreds.

F. (:9a) Impenetrable Breastplates

“And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron;”

Robert Mounce: The locusts were protected with breastplates of iron, indicating that there was no possible way of striking back in a vulnerable spot. The scaly exterior of the locust resembled a coat of mail. In flight they sounded like a great phalanx of horses and chariots rushing into war.

G. (:9b) Intimidating Presence

*“and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots,
of many horses rushing to battle.”*

Richard Phillips: the sound of wings depicts the speed of their assault.

Daniel Akin: They are intimidating in their coming. The sound of their attack and approach would strike fear in the heart of any opponent who attempted to face them.

Grant Osborne: Many felt that the larger the chariot force, the better—the Ammonites hired 32,000 chariots against Joab’s army (**1 Chron. 19:7**). The Romans also made chariots an important part of their military. Therefore, this was a particularly fearsome sound, especially since these chariots were “*running into battle*,” continuing the emphasis on the demonic locusts going to war against the earth-dwellers.

Greg Allen: The sound of their wings was deafening—like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. What a dreadful sound! Imagine the terror—to both the eye and the ear—that they would inspire! Imagine the panic they would provoke at their coming!

H. (:10) Venomous Tails

1. Sting Like a Scorpion

“And they have tails like scorpions, and stings;”

2. Sting for Five Months

“and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.”

Grant Osborne: The real message is that the demonic forces are organized, powerful, terrifying, and filled with hatred and contempt for their followers. As soon as God grants them permission, they torture and kill all who have rejected God in order to worship them.

IV. (:11) GOVERNANCE OF THE DEMONIC LOCUSTS = ABADDON / APOLLYON

A. Chief Ruler = the Angel of the Abyss

“They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss;”

Joe Beard: Unlike real locusts, the demons described here have a king over them. John calls him, “*the angel of the abyss.*” Some say that this is Satan, but Satan is not associated with the abyss until later and up until the point that he was thrown down to the earth he was call the prince of the power of the air (**Ephesians 2:2**). This angel that John is describing I believe is a **high-ranking demon in Satan’s hierarchy of power**. John gives us the name of this king of the abyss in both Hebrew and Greek. In Hebrew he is called “*Abaddon*” which means destruction or place of destruction; in Greek he is called “*Apollyon*” which means destroyer. John uses both of these names to emphasize his impact on both ungodly Jews and Gentiles. The fact that his names mean destruction and destroyer are fitting names for the head of this devastating army of demons that arise from the abyss.

<https://www.mcclearycommunitychurch.com/sermons/fifth-trumpet-judgment-revelation-91-12>

B. Chief Characteristic = Destroyer

1. Abaddon

“his name in Hebrew is Abaddon,”

2. Apollyon

“and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.”

Sola Scriptura: attests to the fact that John also intends a Greek audience among his readers. . . This is the destroyer. Not Satan, but an angelic lieutenant committed to the task of destruction of God’s armies.

Robert Mounce: In the OT Abaddon refers to **destruction (Job 31:12)** or the place of destruction. The personification of destruction in **Job 28:22** could give rise quite naturally to the idea of a **prince of the underworld**, appropriately named Abaddon. In case the reader did not grasp the significance of the Hebrew name, John adds its Greek equivalent—Apollyon, **Destroyer**. Many commentators feel that the verse contains a derogatory reference to the Greek god Apollo and those emperors who claimed a special relationship to him. To name the king of the underworld Apollyon would be a cryptic way of saying that an emperor such as Domitian who liked to be regarded as Apollo incarnate was in reality a manifestation of the powers of the underworld. As early as the fifth century B.C., the Greeks had derived the name of Apollo from the same Greek verb as the root of Apollyon. The allusion is strengthened by the observation that the locust was one of the symbols of the god Apollo.

Charles Swindoll: Though some scholars identify this demonic ruler of the abyss as Satan himself, this doesn’t seem likely. Satan’s abode is not in the abyss—at least not until he is cast down into that bottomless pit at the end of the Tribulation (**20:1-3**). In contrast, this king’s authority seems to be limited to the demonic horde that comes from the abyss itself. So who is this “*angel of the abyss*”? We can’t be dogmatic, but he’s probably a **high-ranking lieutenant of Satan** who will do his dark lord’s bidding.

(:12) EPILOGUE – TWO WOES STILL TO COME

“The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.”

Robert Mounce: As the end draws near, there is a marked increase in the intensity and severity of the trumpet-plagues.

Sola Scriptura: designates an essential structural indicator for the whole book of Revelation. That John places this structural indicator at this point and introduces what follows as the result of the sixth trumpet should settle any debate that the fifth and sixth trumpets are two different events. This critical structural mark should settle the debate about the structure of the book of Revelation. Chronology and sequence are mandated.

Tony Garland: John writes behold because, as terrible as this first woe has been, the two remaining woes are still worse. This woe brought torment, but the second woe—the judgment of the sixth trumpet—brings the release of a demonic army the likes of which the earth has never seen (**Rev. 9:13-19+, 11:14+**) and the third woe—the judgments of the seventh trumpet—brings the seven bowls of God’s wrath (**Rev. 11:15+; 15:7+; 16:2-4+, 8+, 10+, 12+, 17+**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the benefit of being sealed by God?
- 2) How is it possible for torment in hell to be a continuing process?
- 3) How is God sovereign even over suicide?
- 4) What type of authority structure exists in the angelic world (both for good angels and demonic angels)?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: I can think of four important ways in which **Revelation 9:1-12** informs our situation.

First, we must remember that, although they are invisible, demons are real and aggressive. Not all demons are confined to the abyss (see **Luke 8:31**). Countless spirits of wickedness roam freely, and as long as they do, they are in search-and-destroy mode. They’ll pounce at any opportunity to strike both believers and unbelievers. Sometimes we’d rather pretend these beings don’t exist—or that they are so limited in power that we don’t need to worry about them. Not true! Ignorance of our enemies gives them an advantage over us. Don’t be naive!

Second, we are reminded that demons are organized and committed to our destruction. Like a battle-hardened army, Satan’s forces know how to wage an efficient war to conquer the hearts and minds of all people. From subtle tricks to a full-blown spiritual blitzkrieg, they are ready to use whatever means necessary to win. Take a close look at **1 Peter 5:8**: “*Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*” How can you be more “sober” and “alert” in light of this warning? Peter gives us some hints in **1 Peter 1:13-16**:

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.”

In light of this passage, are you prepared for inevitable spiritual attacks?

Third, we should be encouraged that, although these demons are powerful, they have **limitations**. We see that even during the Tribulation these wicked angels can only do what they are allowed to do. Today—in the age of the Spirit’s restraining power through the church—their abilities are even more limited (**2 Thes. 2:6-8**). But don’t underestimate the deceptive and destructive powers of the enemy (**Jude 1:8-10**). As soon as we drop our guard, we’re liable to crumble under his attacks. We can’t neglect our spiritual lives, forsake our assembling with other believers, or trust in our own strength.

Finally, we must never forget that these aggressive and insidious creatures flee at the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. At His matchless name they cower in fear, run for cover, and scramble for survival. With a single syllable of rebuke, Jesus Christ can flatten Satan’s entire army. They are no match for Him (**Luke 8:26-31**). Let Christ handle your spiritual battles for you. Submit to Him. Release all your anxieties to Him through prayer (**1 Pet. 5:6-7**). Resist the devil in faith, resting in Christ and trusting that He alone can shut the mouth of the roaring lion and quench the flaming arrows of the evil one.

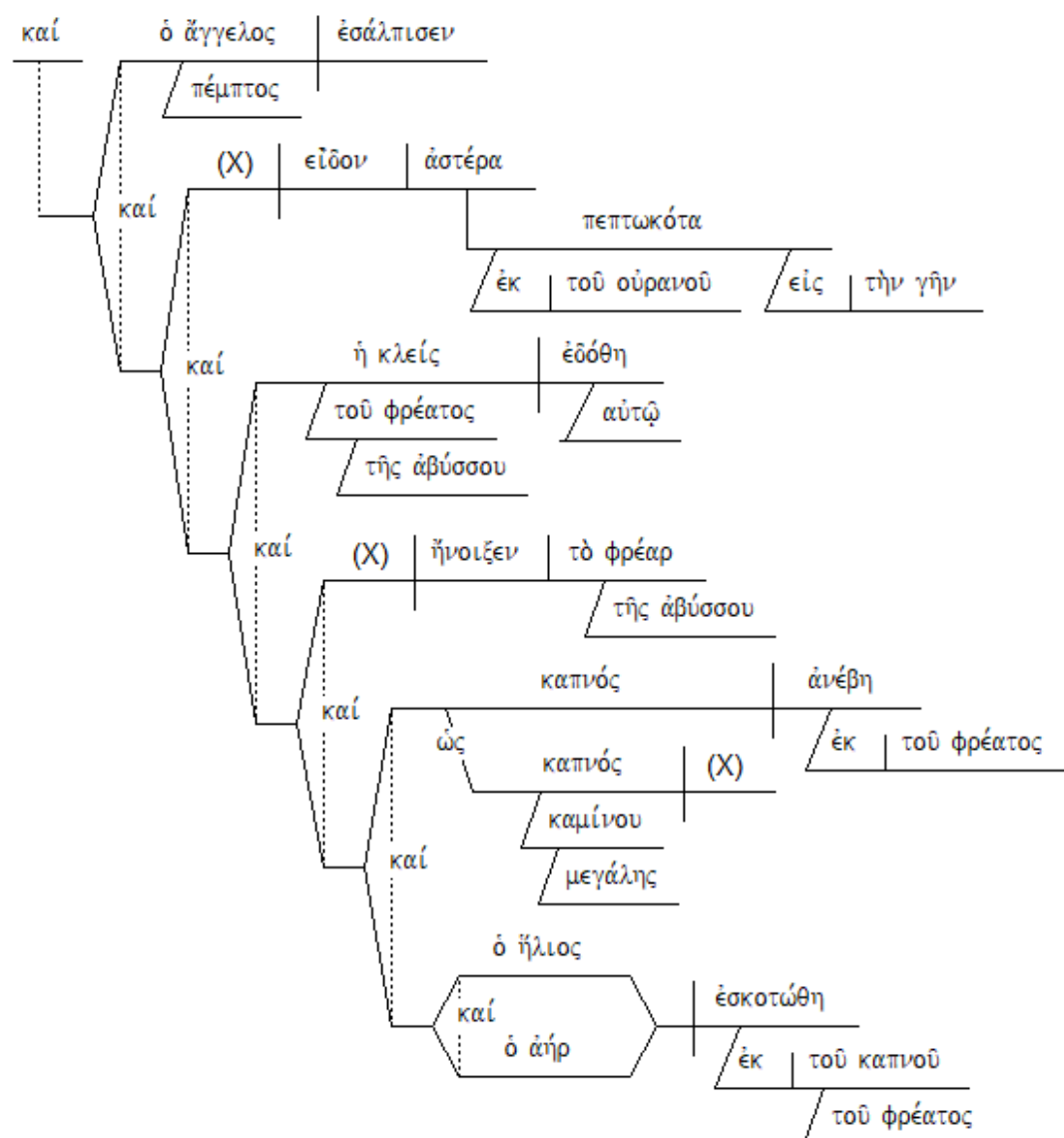
Be encouraged! Through Christ we can be victors over the forces of darkness—not victims of their evil schemes.

David Guzik: The idea of **death as an escape** is a demonic deception. The infamous murderers of Littleton, Colorado made chilling home movies before their killing spree. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold left behind a videotaped document spelling out their motivation. In the last segment of tape, shot the morning of the murders, Harris and Klebold were dressed and said they were ready for “our little Judgement Day.” Then Klebold, looking tense, said goodbye to his parents. He concluded, “I didn’t like life too much. Just know I am going to a better place than here.” It is a great and tragic deception to think – on the day you will murder many – that you will go to a better place. There was no escape in death for Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Now is the time of repentance, to escape from sin, and to be restored.

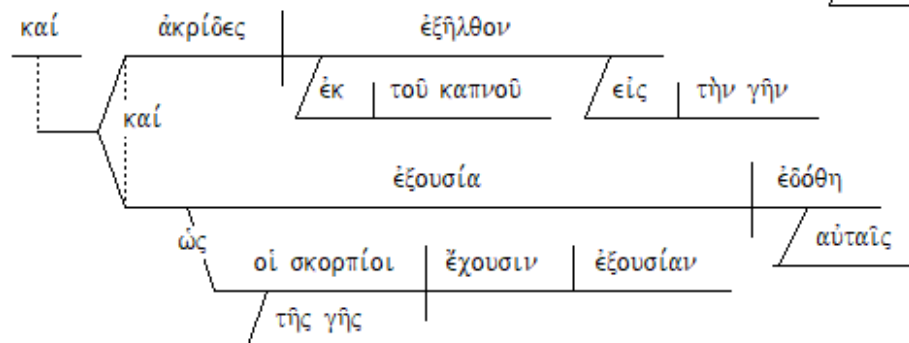
Ligonier.org: As horrible as these locusts may be, believers should not be afraid. They have authority to harm only those who have not been sealed by God. In other words, they cannot hurt believers. Instead, they can hurt only those who are not sealed, that is, the enemies of God’s people (**vv. 4–6**; see **ch. 7**). The Lord is promising that those who persecute His people will not escape judgment, and that He will even allow the forces of evil, human or demonic, to punish those who war against His church.

Leedy Greek Diagram:

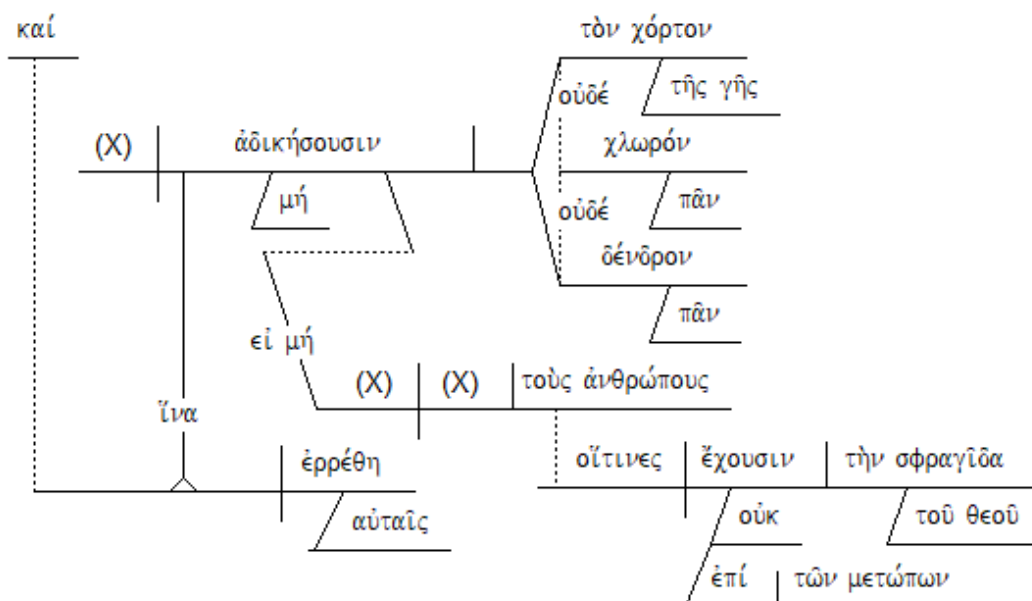
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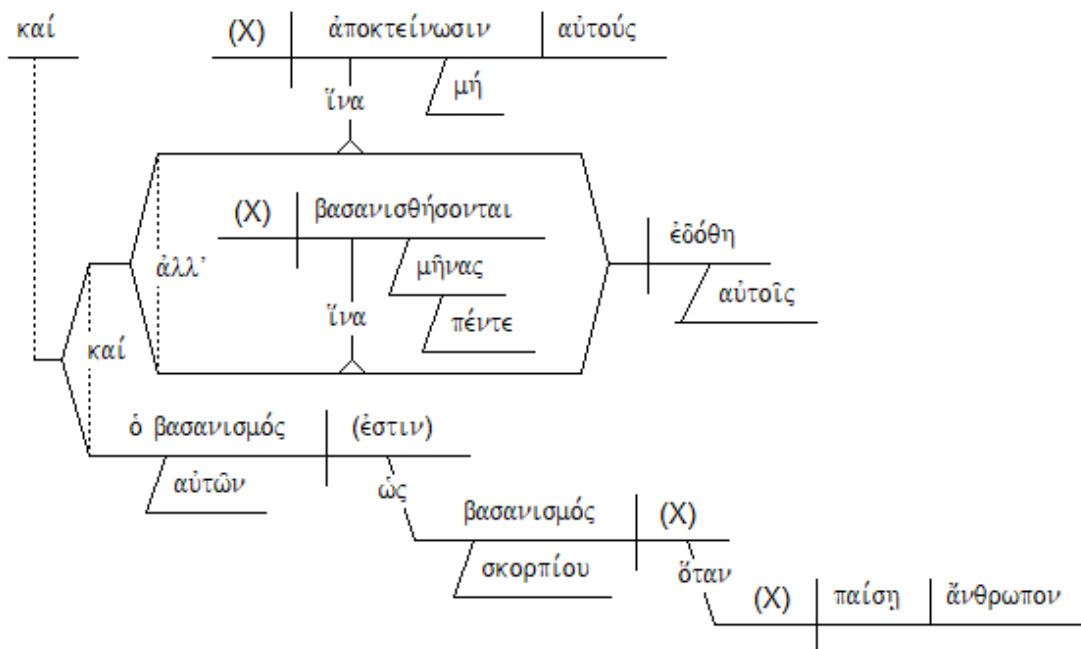
Rev 9:3

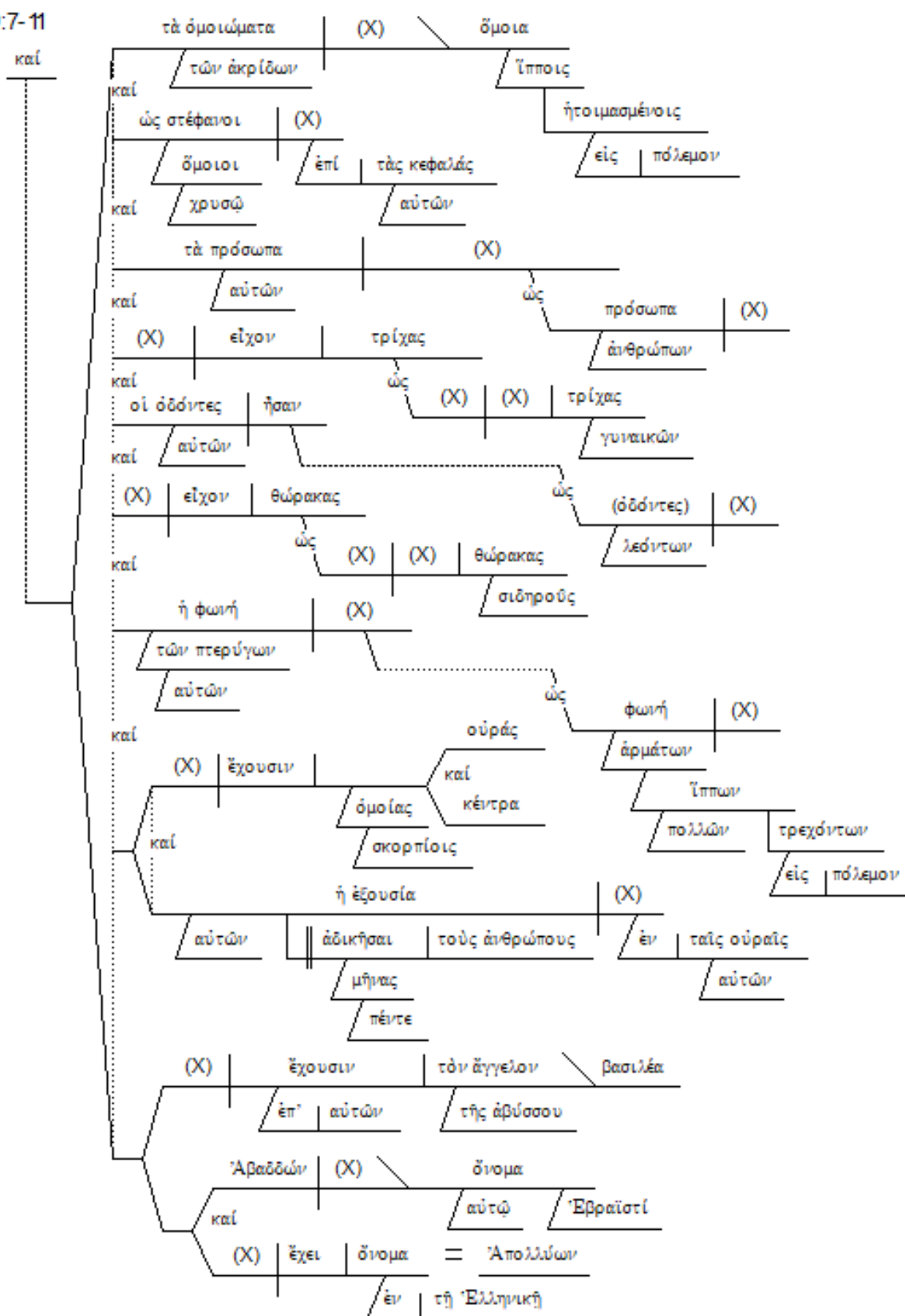


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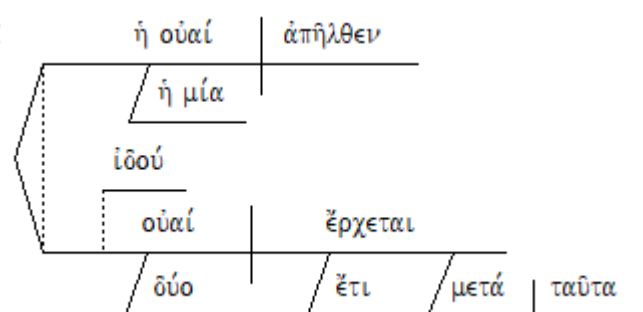


Rev 9:5





Rev 9:12



TEXT: Revelation 9:13-21

TITLE: THE SIXTH TRUMPET – FOUR ANGELS OF DEATH

BIG IDEA:

HUMAN DEPRAVITY REMAINS DEFIANT DESPITE THE DEMONIC ASSAULT OF THE SIXTH TRUMPET WIPING OUT ONE THIRD OF THE POPULATION

INTRODUCTION:

Charles Swindoll: When the angels of death are released, their goal will be to kill a third of humanity (**Rev. 9:15**). **Verse 18** reveals that they will be successful in their endeavor. Don't run past this figure too quickly. A third of humanity today is over two billion people! No wonder God has actively restrained these wicked angels for so many centuries. **Second Peter 3:9** declares, "*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*" God's gracious disposition toward the world staves off the relentless wrath of the forces of evil, but when this present window of opportunity for repentance is shut, a dark cloud of wrath will quickly close in. The next several verses fill in the details of how this hideous holocaust will be accomplished.

Robert Mounce: **The intensity of the trumpet sequence continues to mount.** From plagues of hail, and fire mixed with blood that scorched the earth (**8:7**), a burning mountain that fell into sea turning it to blood and leaving death in its wake (**8:8**), a blazing star from heaven falling into inland waters and causing bitterness and death (**8:10–11**), and a darkening of the sun and moon that plunged the world into darkness (**8:12**), we move to a swarm of demonic locusts released from the netherworld to torment unbelievers (**9:1–11**). The sixth trumpet-plague (the second Woe) is even worse. Now **demonic cavalry**, two hundred million strong, come charging across the scene of history. From their lionlike heads come fire, smoke, and sulfur, and with their tails they inflict lethal damage. A third of the unbelieving world falls before their murderous assault. Those who remain do not repent of their idolatry and immoral lifestyle but continue their idolatrous worship of gods made by their own hands.

Nowhere will you find a more accurate picture of sinful humanity pressed to the extreme. One would think that the terrors of God's wrath would bring rebels to their knees. Not so. Past the point of no return, they respond to greater punishment with increased rebellion. Such is sinful nature untouched and unmoved by the mercies of God.

Van Parunak: The judgments of the Revelation emphasize God's truth, but his mercy is never far away. Even at the end of this sixth trumpet (**9:20, 21**), we are reminded that those who are destroyed suffer their fate because they "*repented not.*" God does not pour out his wrath all at once, but **slowly turns up the heat**, to lead people to recognize that they cannot resist him, and to urge them to repent. As our redeemer, he recognizes that we sin, and offers himself to bear our sin. But if we reject that offering, he as a righteous judge will deal truly with our sin as it deserves.

Kendell Easley: A second multitude of demons will slaughter a third of the human race during the Great Tribulation, but even so the survivors will refuse to repent of their wickedness. . .

The comparison of the fifth and sixth trumpets shows that clearly these are distinct from each other. They are not natural disasters but demon disasters. Nothing humanity has yet experienced can compare to the onslaught of terror that these calamities will bring. Certainly all people will want to have God's seal on their foreheads.

I. (:13-19) DEMONIC ASSAULT WIPING OUT ONE THIRD OF HUMANITY

(:13a) Sounding of the Sixth Trumpet

“And the sixth angel sounded,”

A. (:13b-16) Release of the Demon Angels

1. (:13b-14) Command to Release the Four Bound Angels

a. (:13b) Voice from Heaven

“and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,”

John MacArthur: The voice is not identified, but it is possibly that of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. He was pictured earlier standing near the throne (**5:6**), when He took the seven-sealed scroll from the Father's hand (**5:7**) and broke its seals (**6:1**), thus unleashing the series of judgments of which the sixth trumpet is a part. Or this could be the voice of the angel whom John had seen standing near the golden altar of incense (**8:3**).

John Walvoord: If the horns have significance, they refer to the sovereignty and judicial government of God.

b. (:14) Violence Unleashed

*“one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet,
‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’”*

John MacArthur: That the four angels are **bound** indicates that they are demons (cf. **20:1ff.**; **2 Pet. 2:4**; **Jude 6**), since holy angels are nowhere in Scripture said to be bound. Because holy angels always perfectly carry out God's will, there is no need for Him to restrain them from opposing His will. God's control over demonic forces is complete—they are bound or loosed at His command. The perfect tense of the participle translated *bound* implies that these four angels were bound in the past with continuing results; they were in a state or condition of bondage until God's determined time came for them to be released to execute their function as instruments of divine judgment. . .

Rising from sources near Mount Ararat in Turkey, the **Euphrates** flows more than seventeen-hundred miles before emptying into the Persian Gulf. It is the longest and most important river in the Middle East, and figures prominently in the Old Testament. It was one of the four rivers into which the river that flowed out of the Garden of Eden divided (**Gen. 2:14**). It was near the Euphrates that sin began, the first lie was told, the first murder was committed, and the tower of Babel (the origin of an entire complex of false religions that spread across the world) was built. The Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the Promised Land (**Gen. 15:18**; **Ex. 23:31**; **Deut. 11:24**), and Israel's influence extended to the Euphrates during the reigns of David (**1 Chron. 18:3**) and Solomon (**2 Chron. 9:26**). The region near the Euphrates was the central location of three world powers that oppressed Israel: Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia. It was on the banks of the Euphrates that Israel endured seventy long, bitter, wearisome years of captivity (cf.

Ps. 137:1–4). It is the river over which the enemies of God will cross to engage in the battle of Armageddon (**16:12–16**). . .

Whoever they are, these four powerful fallen angels control a huge demonic army set to wage war against fallen mankind when God releases them to do so. Satanic forces, imagining they are doing the work of their leader the devil and aggressively thwarting the purposes of God, are actually God's servants doing exactly what He wants done.

[Alternative View – taking the four angels to be holy angels]

Buist Fanning: The voice commands him to “*release*” those four angels because they are currently “*bound*,” held back from their task of destruction until God's time for it arrives (cf. v. **15**), in the same way that the four angels in **7:1–3** restrained the earth's destructive winds until the time was right. These are “*bound*” not because they are fallen, evil angels (i.e., not as Satan will be “*bound*,” **20:2**; cf. **Mark 3:27**); they are holy angels who visit God's punishments on the objects of his judgment (cf. **Ps 78:49** [*“angels who bring calamity,”* not “*evil angels*” as KJV has it]; **Ezek 9:1–7**; **Matt 13:41**). . .

John's assumption is that his readers would associate the Euphrates River with past invasions by vast armies across Israel's borders as a manifestation of God's judgment. With that allusion in mind, a reader could understand what “the armies” are: they are the armies of God's judgment conventionally associated with invasion across the great river. The role of the overseeing angels is to set these attacking hordes in motion, and so their destructive effects can be attributed to the armies (v. **18a**) or to the angels themselves (v. **15c**).

Grant Osborne: Many of the terrible invasions of Palestine—by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians—**came across the Euphrates**. Thus it became not only the eastern boundary first of Israel and then of Rome but also a **symbol of foreign invasion**. This judgment also prepares for the sixth bowl (**16:12**), in which the Euphrates is dried up “*to prepare the way for the kings of the east*,” again built upon the Parthians. As **Caird** (1966: 122) notes, “All the scriptural warnings about a foe from the north, therefore, find their echo in John's bloodcurdling vision” (**Isa. 14:31**; **Jer. 1:14–15**; **6:1, 22**; **10:22**; **13:20**; **25:9, 26**; **46:20, 24**; **47:2**; **Ezek. 26:7**; **38:6, 15**; **39:2**).

2. (:15-16) Carnage from the Demonic Assault

a. (:15) Death to One Third of Mankind

“And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they might kill a third of mankind.”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The expression “*For the hour and day and month and year*” refers not to the duration of their activity, but to the fact this **occurs exactly on the hour of God's appointment**, i.e., the exact hour of the day, month, and year that God ordained it. God raises up both men and demons as His instruments to accomplish His purposes in history. Each acts out of their own volition, according to their schemes and nature, but God, knowing them from eternity past, raises them up in history to carry out His purpose even at the exact hour (cf. **Isa. 10:5f**; **Rom. 9:11-18**).

John MacArthur: The judgment of the fourth seal killed one quarter of the earth's population (**6:8**); this additional third brings the death toll from these two judgments alone to more than half the earth's pretribulation population. That staggering total does not include those who perished in the other seal and trumpet judgments. The repeated emphasis throughout the trumpet judgments

on one-third (cf. **8:7–12**) demonstrates convincingly that these are controlled, precise divine judgments and not mere natural disasters.

The terrible slaughter will completely disrupt human society. The problem of disposing of the dead bodies alone will be inconceivable. The sickly stench of decaying corpses will permeate the world, and it will take an enormous effort on the part of the survivors to bury them in mass graves or burn them. How these demons inflict death is specifically revealed in **v. 18**.

Van Parunak: We are reminded constantly that this book’s judgments, as terrible as they are, are **all under God’s control**. When the verb ἐτοιμάζω (G2090) appears in the perfect tense, as here (**Matt. 20:23; 25:34, 41; Mark 10:40; 2 Tim. 2:21; Rev. 9:7, 15; 12:6; 21:2**), the agent, where identified, is always the Lord.

b. (:16) Demonic Forces Numbering Two Hundred Million

“And the number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.”

John MacArthur: The figurative language used to describe this army’s horses suggests that this is **a supernatural rather than human force**, as does the fact that it is commanded by the four newly released demons.

[Alternate View: Human warriors]

John Walvoord: The most staggering statistic is the fact that the number of the army is declared to be two hundred thousand thousands, or **two hundred million**. Because the number “*ten thousand times ten thousand*” is often used of an innumerable company (cf. **5:11**), some believe this should not be understood as a literal number, especially since never in the history of the human race has there been an army of this size. The total number of men under arms in World War II on both sides of the conflict was never more than fifty million.

Therefore, many have been tempted to spiritualize the number or to regard the army as demonic rather than human. An army of two hundred million horsemen must have been especially astounding to John, for at that time the total world population did not exceed this number. But John seems to emphasize the accuracy of the number, for he says he heard it, showing that this incredible number was a part of his vision, not something he invented.

And with the advent of the twenty-first century, an army of two hundred million from the East is increasingly possible. If such an army is to be raised up, it would be natural to conclude that it would come from China and possibly India, the great population centers of the world, accounting for over two billion of the earth’s six billion people. It is fascinating that China alone is reported to have over 314,000,000 men ages 16 to 49 who are “fit for military service,” along with over 298,000,000 women in this category!

These staggering numbers make it very feasible that the number revealed in **verse 16** should be taken literally. If so, this is an imposing statistic of the power and influence of the armies opposing God in the final world war.

B. (:17-19) Violence of the Mounted Troops

“And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them.”

Robert Mounce: It should be noted that the riders play no active part in carrying out the plague. This is accomplished by the horses. Their description in the following verses is grotesque, to say the least.

1. (:17b) Graphic Image of Violence

a. Fearsome Breastplates

*“the riders had breastplates the color of fire
and of hyacinth
and of brimstone;”*

Charles Swindoll:

BREASTPLATE COLORS	THREE PLAGUES
Fiery red or orange	Fire
Deep hyacinth blue	Smoke
Sulfuric yellow	Brimstone

Van Parunak: It’s not clear whether the breastplates are only on the riders, or on the horses as well. The colors anticipate what comes from the mouths of the horses. The horses bring two kinds of judgment: death from their heads, and torment from their tails.

b. Ferocious Heads

“and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions;”

Grant Osborne: While the teeth of the locusts were “*like lions’ teeth*,” it is the “*heads*” of the horses that “*resembled the heads of lions*.” The reason is probably that in **9:19** their “*power*” is in their “*mouths*” as well as their “*tails*,” and it is the mouth of the lion that allows it to tear apart its prey. The majestic and terrible visage of a lion is a natural image for this incredible army, since it was the most vicious beast known to the ancient people of the Mediterranean. The “*head*” here seems to combine the other metaphoric uses in this central section: their teeth (**9:8**), their roar (**10:3**), and their mouth (**13:2**). All of these produce **terror**, and that seems to be the emphasis here.

c. Fiery Mouths

“and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.”

Buist Fanning: John adds one more peculiar element to his description of these horses by clarifying (“*for*”) where their phenomenal power lies (**v. 19a**). Their destructive “*power*” (ἐξουσία) is “*in their mouths*” from which they breathe out deadly fire, smoke, and sulfur as **vv. 17–18** indicated. But to this he adds “*and in their tails*,” with a further explanation (another “*for*” [γάρ] clause) quite unexpected from the image of horses and horsemen given previously. These “*horses*” are like mythical dragons not only because they breathe out fire (**v. 17e**) but also because they have serpent-like, multiheaded tails. With these “*heads*” they are able to “*inflict harm*” (ἀδικοῦσιν), so presumably the heads are snake-like and deadly to humans just like the fire-breathing mouths of the horses are. This verse reveals the similarities of this cavalry troop to

the locusts of vv. 1–11, since they also have “power” (vv. 3, 10) to inflict “harm” (vv. 4, 10) with tails that have a punishing sting (v. 10).

2. (:18-19) Gruesome Results of Their Carnage

a. (:18) Devastation from Their Killing Plagues

*“A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues,
by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone,
which proceeded out of their mouths.”*

Charles Swindoll: This is now the second demon-inspired attack on the human race. The first was by means of a swarm of locusts, but they were not permitted to kill anyone during the five months of their torment (9:5). In contrast, this next wave of demonic attack will be much worse. These attackers will be allowed to kill (9:15). These demons may inflict their plagues directly and supernaturally, or they may use earthly means to do so. They may inspire the military divisions of certain nations. We can’t be absolutely certain about the meaning of these visions. Yet the big picture remains clear: As the Tribulation proceeds, the judgments will increase in severity.

b. (:19) Devastation from Their Fearsome Power

*“For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails;
for their tails are like serpents and have heads;
and with them they do harm.”*

II. (:20-21) NO REPENTANCE BY THE SURVIVORS

A. (:20) Persistence in Devil Worship (Idolatry) Instead of Repentance

1. Spurned Opportunity

“And the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues,”

2. Stubborn Defiance

“did not repent of the works of their hands,”

3. Spiritual Folly

“so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk;”

Charles Swindoll: As difficult as it is to believe, most people living during this awful time of judgment will become even more hardened against God. They will stubbornly hold onto their demon worship and idolatry (9:20). They will refuse to repent from murder, sorcery, immorality, and theft (9:21). In short, the survivors of the first several judgments will close their ears to God’s message of mercy and grace, choosing instead to accept the wrath that will continue to increase in severity. Hard to believe, isn’t it? The great preacher **Donald Barnhouse** puts **Revelation 9:13-21** into painful perspective:

There is no evidence in the Bible; there is no evidence in history; and there is no evidence in prophecy which would indicate that men have ever been brought to God in great numbers through tribulation. One-third of the race may die, but the other two-thirds do not for that reason move toward God. Reluctantly we are forced to accept the verdict, *“There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom. 3:11).*

Clearly, the idolatrous addictions to the world's treasures and pleasures can harden people's hearts to such a degree that the most extreme judgments will be unable to capture their attention.

Warren Wiersbe: **Demon worship**, which goes hand-in-hand with idolatry (see **1 Cor. 10:19–21**), will be the leading sin. Satan will be at work (always under the permissive will of God), and Satan has always wanted to be worshipped (**Isa. 14:12–15; Matt. 4:8–10**). A great deal of “religion” will be practiced at this time, but it will be false religion. People will worship the works of their own hands, which could well include the buildings they construct, the machines they make, and the cities they build, as well as their idols.

Here are dead sinners worshipping dead gods (see **Ps. 115**)! Their gods will not be able to protect or deliver them, yet these people will continue to reject the true God and worship Satan and idols!

B. (:21) Persistence in Degenerate Wickedness Instead of Repentance

Daniel Akin: Four particular sins are additionally noted in **verse 21**. These sins, like those in **verse 20**, have afflicted humanity throughout history. It is possible they will be especially prevalent in the last days. “*Murders*” is the wanton taking of innocent human life. “*Sorceries*” is witchcraft, magic arts, occultic activity. It is the Greek word *pharmakon* and could indicate the use of drugs in divination practices. “*Sexual immorality*” is the Greek word *porneia* and refers to all forms of sexual sin that occurs outside the marriage relationship between a man and woman. “*Thefts*” is simply another word for stealing, taking what is not yours. The sins of **verses 20–21** involve a basic violation of the Ten Commandments (**Exod 20; Deut 5**). Idolatry violates commandments one and two. Murder violates the sixth, immorality the seventh, and theft the eighth. As it was in the days of the judges, it will be a time of unbridled and unrepentant evil, when “*everyone did whatever he wanted*” (**Judg 21:25**). **Mounce** makes a remarkable observation: “Once the heart is set in its hostility toward God, not even the scourge of death will lead people to repentance” (*Revelation*, 198). Amazingly, it appears it will only spur sinful humanity to sin even more. What an indictment of the depraved human heart!

1. “and they did not repent of their murders”

John MacArthur: At that future point in world history, idolatry, mysticism, spiritism, satanism, and all other forms of false religion will become pandemic, as demons lead people into more wicked and vicious behavior. Unbridled, unrestrained, escalating wickedness will run amuck as never before in human history (cf. **1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1–5, 13**). As a result, in addition to idolatry, violent crimes like murders will be rampant. Bereft of any sense of morality, evil, unrepentant people will imitate the demon horde's murderous blood lust. Believers in the true God will no doubt be their prime targets, as they lash out seeking revenge for the disasters God has brought on them.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Murder will be rampant. No one will think anything of killing another human being. The ‘law of the jungle’ will prevail. Unfortunately, we can see the nature of this in our own country today since we have left the absolutes of the Word of God.

2. “nor of their sorceries”

Grant Osborne: Φάρμακον (*pharmakon, magic*) can mean “medicine” or even “poison” in certain contexts but here refers to the use of “magic potions” in religious rites in the Greco-Roman world. It is interesting that John did not use the more general term φαρμακεία (*pharmakeia*) for “sorcery” or “magic” but rather chose the term that describes the potions used in the rites. John wants to condemn not just the general practice of magic but everything involved in it (i.e., the paraphernalia as well as the rite itself). **Magic was a major problem for early Christianity.** One of the signs of victory over paganism occurred when the sorcerers at Ephesus burned their magic scrolls in public (**Acts 19:19**). Paul listed “*idolatry and witchcraft*” together as “*acts of the sinful nature*” (**Gal. 5:19–20**), for most acts of “*sorcery*” occurred in the atmosphere of idolatrous worship (note again the connection of idolatry and demonic activity). In the Apocalypse, using magic is how Babylon “*led the nations astray*” (**18:23**), and all who practice it will be cast into the lake of fire (**21:8**; cf. **22:15**). In the first century magic was based on the belief that both good and evil spirits (called gods) involved themselves in the affairs of people. Using religious rituals involving incantations and “commands” given to the spirit-gods, people would try to get the “gods” to work on their behalf, such as for success in business or athletics, sexual liaisons, or healing (see **Arnold**, DLNT 701–4). **Aune** (1987: 481–501) argues that one of the major purposes of John in this book is to counter the prevalence of magic at Ephesus and the province of Asia and to present Jesus as the answer to all such demonic acts.

3. “nor of their immorality”

4. “nor of their thefts.”

Buist Fanning: The widespread Jewish-Christian conviction was that departure from worship of the true God inevitably leads to false worship and moral debauchery (**2 Kgs 17:15–17**; **Jer 13:22–27**; **Acts 7:42**; **Rom 1:21–32**; cf. 2 Bar. 54:17–18; 1 En. 99:6–16; Wis 14:22–31). Clinging to sinful acts in the face of such judgment reveals the irresistible power of evil that holds humankind in its grip. But the sure judgment of God will come on all such human evil when the third woe (the seventh trumpet) comes to pass (portrayed after two interludes in **11:14**).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: What a horrible and grim picture the Spirit of God has painted for us of these final days!!! Men will hold nothing sacred anymore. Not life, not marriage or the family or sex, not one’s health, nor the property and rights of others. Man will be given over completely to sensual indulgence and he will do anything to satisfy his cravings. Is not this in itself the greatest judgment he will face? It demonstrates the total ruin of all meaning to life.

G.K. Beale: On the perniciousness of idolatry.

John links idolatry here with murders, sorceries, immorality, and thefts. If the OT observation is to be taken seriously, idolaters become as blind and dumb as what they worship. They thus become anesthetized, in the words of the commentary, to all that is good and of God, even as they fall deeper and deeper into the clutches of the forces of darkness, as John portrays so vividly. Is this how idolatry leads to these awful forms of sin and rebellion? How has Satan used idolatry to lead people into further darkness? Is there a point beyond which repentance is impossible? How can we guard ourselves against even the beginnings of idolatrous practices, since we know where these practices inevitably lead?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What will hell be like if God's wrath poured out on earth is so devastating?
- 2) Why do preachers today avoid the mention of God's judgment of fire, smoke and brimstone?
- 3) What do you learn about the depravity of man from the stubborn refusal to repent and submit in the face of such awesome judgment?
- 4) Where do you see idolatry creeping into the Christian church and presenting a threat?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

G.K. Beale: The theological purpose of the warning is that God, by providing sufficient opportunities for spiritual reform, should demonstrate His sovereignty and especially His justice in finally judging the entire host of "unsealed" people at the seventh trumpet. The pastoral purpose is to remind the readers that antagonism to their faithful witness will continue to the end of history and that they should not be disheartened because it is part of God's plan in which they can trust.

Gordon Fee: That **denunciation** and **caricature** are John's ultimate intent is to be found in the threefold description with which he concludes. First, quite in keeping with Paul in **1 Corinthians 10:20**, he first describes the unrepentant pagan world as **worshipping demons**. In so doing John is thus reflecting a view that can be found earlier in the Septuagint of **Psalms 96:5** (LXX 95:5), where the translator turned the Hebrew "*all the gods of the nations are idols*" into "*all the gods of the nations are demons*." This translation is an acknowledgement that the false gods did indeed have power, but it is demonic/satanic power, not that of the living God. Then, in keeping with the entire biblical tradition, their objects of worship are further described with scathing satire; what they worship are *idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk*. With this echo of **Deuteronomy 4:28** John pretty well sums it up from his Jewish, and now Christian, perspective. The "*gods*" are created by human hands out of earthly materials, and as such they are not living beings, but mere idols, characterized by their inability to do what even mere human beings can do: "*see . . . hear . . . walk*," thus giving the briefest kind of expression to the traditional Jewish loathing of idolatry.

But that is not all. What the Israelite prophets came to recognize clearly is that people become like the "*gods*" they worship, a perspective that is especially carried on by Paul and John in the New Testament. Thus those who are being warned by the six preceding plagues continue in their pagan ways, here summarized by three of the Ten Commandments (*their murders, . . . their sexual immorality or their thefts*), and including their magic arts, an allusion to witchcraft, which is also thoroughly denounced by the Prophets. Enamored by such evils, "*the rest of the people who were not killed by these plagues . . . did not repent*" of these kinds of evils, not to mention all other kinds of evils.

Richard Phillips: **Revelation 9:15** reveals that the four angels at the Euphrates "*had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year*." This suggests definite, foreordained times when God unleashes conquest on the pride of secular powers. . . As the sixth seal focuses

on the final judgment, however, this sixth trumpet vision may show that great and terribly violent warfare is reserved for the end of history at a time prepared by God.

This idea **undercuts the theory of postmillennial Christians**, who believe that Christian influence will increase until history ends in a crowning age of worldwide faith and godliness. The fifth and sixth trumpets suggest the opposite, that throughout history and especially at the end God will unleash plagues from the pit of hell to judge a rebellious world. Like the Roman Empire of John's day, the secular powers in every age seek security and blessing not in the God who made them but in gods of their own making. God therefore sends torments to announce the victory of his coming judgment. **Hendriksen** writes: "Our exalted Lord Jesus Christ . . . will again and again punish the persecutors of the Church by inflicting upon them disasters in every sphere of life." The visions of **Revelation 9** therefore **do not promote postmillennial confidence about the world's progress** but remind us instead to put our confidence only in the gospel's power to save sinners out of a world that is destined for judgment.

Van Parunak: We should take two lessons from these judgments.

First, they are directed to those who reject the Lord. Our Lord's promise exempts his children from the hurt imposed by the scorpion tails of the locusts and the serpent tails of the horses. We should expect tribulation from jealous unbelievers, as we will see in **Revelation 11**, but we will never be the target of God's judgments.

Second, they are God's call to the whole world to repent. "*Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?*" He slays only some, to give those who remain opportunity to turn. The one who will come in irresistible power to destroy his enemies (**Revelation 19**) is first revealed as the slain lamb (**Revelation 5**) who offers salvation to "*whosoever will*" (**22:17**). While his patience so far has not borne fruit, we will see at the end of the interlude (**11:13**) that ultimately it does.

Charles Swindoll: **Idolatry** of various forms stands at the heart of humanity's rebellion against God. It leads to greater sin and stronger defiance, even in the midst of God's obvious judgments and His merciful calls to repentance and salvation. Idolatry blinds fallen humanity to the Word of God. And we must keep in mind that modern forms of idolatry can negatively affect the lives of believers as well. Dead idols can distract us from the living God. Let's take some time to work through **practical questions** regarding our own struggles with the powerful temptations in our world today.

Read **Ephesians 5:5-6** and **Colossians 3:5-6**. What types of behavior are associated with idolatry in these passages? What are the ultimate effects of idolatry?

What idols are enshrined in your own life? Complete the following chart to identify some potential or present "*idols*" that may be wooing you away from single-minded devotion to the one true God. Remember that some of these things may not be sinful in themselves; however, if they drive a wedge between us and our Savior, they become destructive to our spiritual growth. Think prayerfully and honestly about these five areas.

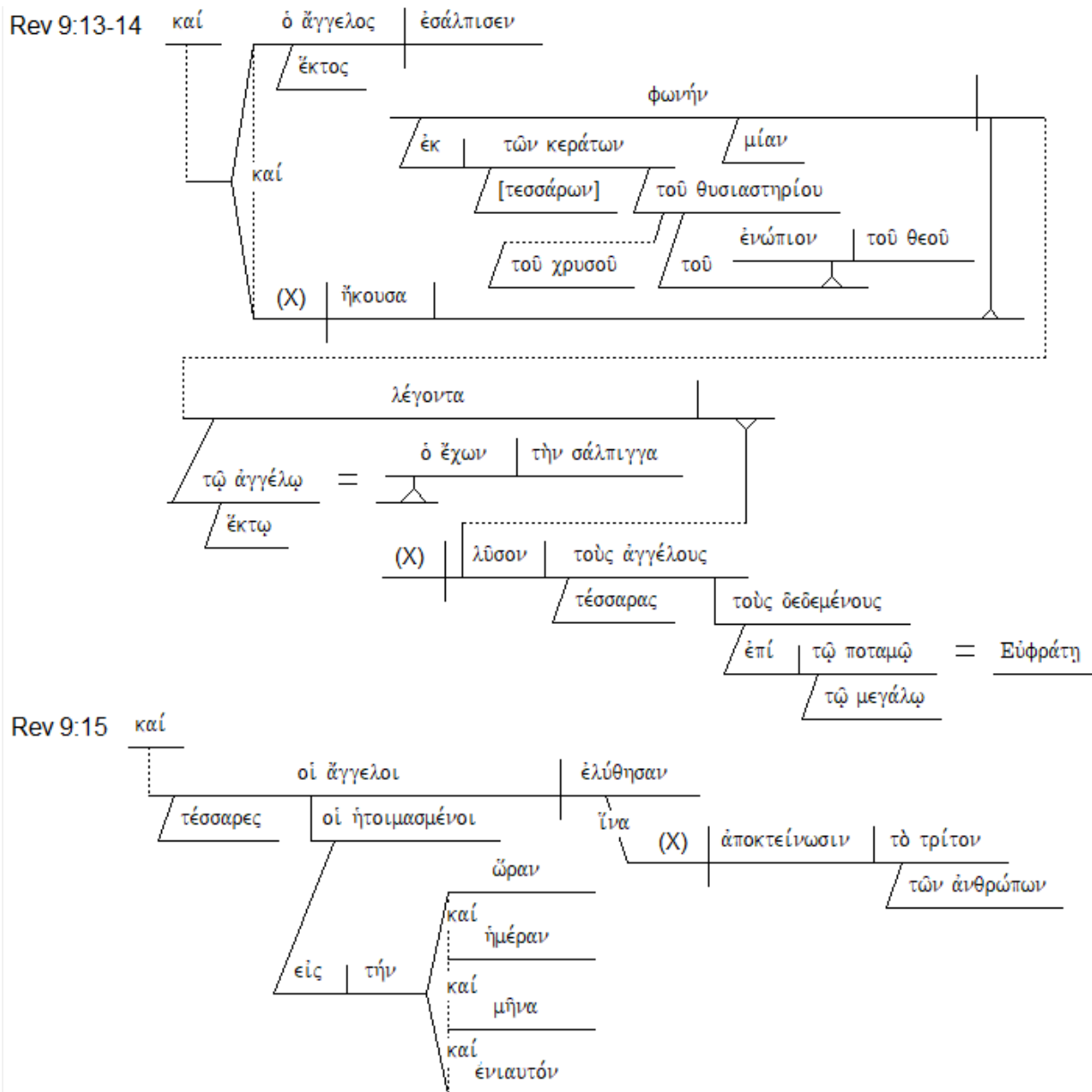
- Material Possessions
- Important People

- Worldly Positions
- Uncontrolled Passions
- Selfish Pursuits

Consider what specific steps you can take to loosen the stranglehold that these idols have on your life. What cherished things do you need to remove from your life? What relationships do you need to reconsider? What positions do you need to release? What passions need to be restrained? What pursuits need to be abandoned?

Finally, write a prayer of repentance. Ask your heavenly Father to forgive you and to free you from any idols that threaten to distract your attention from Him.

Leedy Greek Diagram:

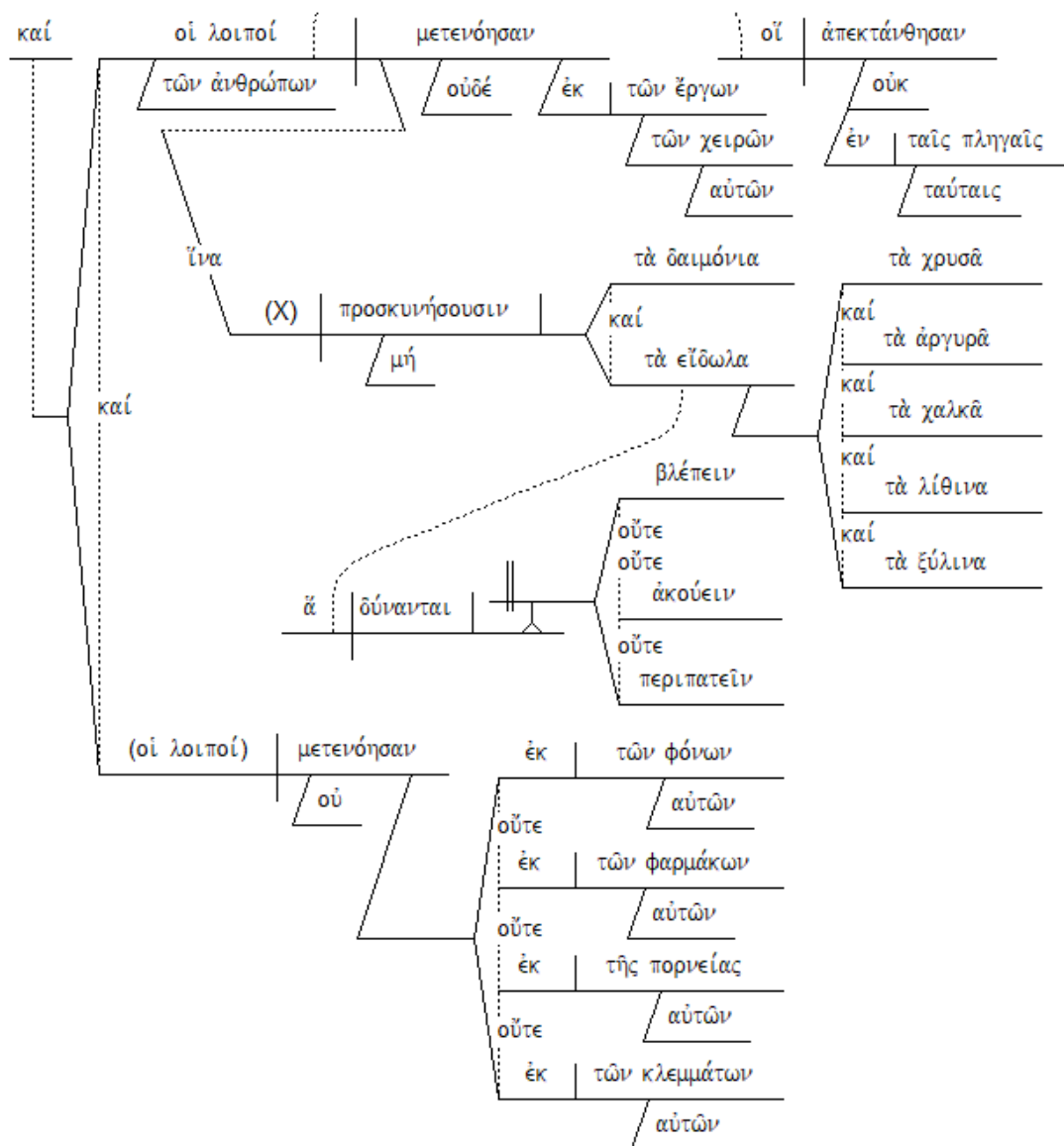


Rev 9:16 καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς (X) δισμυριάδες
 τῶν στρατευμάτων
 τοῦ ἱππικοῦ
 (X) ἤκουσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν
 αὐτῶν

Rev 9:17 καὶ τοὺς ἵππους
 (X) εἶδον καὶ τοὺς καθημένους
 οὕτως ἐν τῇ ὁράσει
 καὶ αἱ κεφαλαὶ (X)
 τῶν ἵππων ὡς κεφαλαὶ (X)
 πύρ
 καὶ καπνὸς
 καὶ θεῖον
 ἐκπορεύεται
 ἐκ τῶν στομάτων
 αὐτῶν
 πυρίνους
 θώρακας
 καὶ ὑακινθίνους
 καὶ θειώδεις

Rev 9:18 τὸ τρίτον ἀπεκτάνθησαν
 τῶν ἀνθρώπων
 ἀπὸ τῶν πληγῶν
 τριῶν
 τούτων
 ἐκ τοῦ πυρός
 καὶ τοῦ καπνοῦ
 καὶ τοῦ θεῖου
 τοῦ ἐκπορευομένου
 ἐκ τῶν στομάτων
 αὐτῶν

Rev 9:19 γάρ ἡ ἐξουσία ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ στόματι
 τῶν ἵππων
 καὶ αὐτῶν
 ἐν ταῖς οὐραῖς
 αὐτῶν
 γάρ αἱ οὐραὶ (X) ὅμοιαι
 καὶ αὐτῶν ἔχουσαι κεφαλὰς ὀφθαλμοὺς
 (X) ἀδικοῦσιν
 ἐν αὐταῖς



TEXT: Revelation 10:1-11

TITLE: INTERLUDE: THE MIGHTY ANGEL WITH THE LITTLE SCROLL

BIG IDEA:

GOD CONTROLS THE DISSEMINATION OF HIS REVELATION OF END TIME EVENTS AND GUARANTEES FULFILLMENT AS IT IS ASSIMILATED AND PROCLAIMED

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: The initial vision (10:1–11) of this interlude before the seventh trumpet comes in two related sections. First, in vv. 1–7 John sees and hears a powerful angel holding a little scroll, whose roar in heaven finds a response from “*seven peals of thunder*.” As in 5:4 John reacts to the events of the vision, in this case by starting to record what he has heard, but he is distinctly forbidden to do so (vv. 1–4). Then the mighty angel solemnly affirms that the events of the seventh trumpet will bring without delay the completion of what God has revealed through his prophets (vv. 5–7). In the second section, John is pulled into the vision even more directly by being told to take the little scroll from the mighty angel’s hand and eat it (vv. 8–9). He finds it a mixed experience and is told that it represents his divine commission to prophesy further about the peoples of the world (vv. 10–11).

Main Idea: The series of judgments seen in John’s visions signal the imminent fulfillment of what God has revealed about the world’s future through prophets like John whom he has commissioned.

Robert Mounce: With the close of **chapter 9** six of the seven trumpets have sounded. Once again we encounter an **interlude** of two related visions—the angel with the little book (10:1–11) and the two witnesses (11:1–13). These interludes are not so much pauses in a sequence of events as they are literary devices by which the church is instructed concerning its role and destiny during the final period of world history. There will be no corresponding interlude between the sixth and seventh bowl judgments (the final series yet to come) because at that time all warning and preliminary judgment will be over. When the bowls of divine wrath are poured out, the consummation moves quickly to its climax.

Kendell Easley: Although God has hidden some of the future from us, a mighty angel reveals that the sounding of the seventh trumpet will bring about the full completion of his plan. God’s word is both sweet and bitter to those for whom he gives it.

Daniel Akin: God’s hidden plan will be completed (10:8). You can trust Him to finish things in His time and in His way. You can be confident in His purposes, so keep on proclaiming the gospel among “*many peoples, nations, languages, and kings*” (10:11).

S. Lewis Johnson: Now in **chapter 10** . . . we are in another **interlude**. This interlude, between the sixth and seventh trumpet, perhaps to introduce the heralds of the Second Advent, the two witnesses of whom we shall study and read in our next study. It’s rather interesting, I think, that when the Lord Jesus came, John the Baptist began his ministry as the ambassador of the king. It was his duty to announce the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And of course, our

Lord came and John was his ambassador. Now in the Second Advent of our Lord, it appears that there will also be ambassadors. In this case, two ambassadors, and those witnesses of our Lord's ministry to come, are called in the very next chapter, part of this particular chapter incidentally, the two witnesses. So, we are in an interlude. We are leading up to the testimony of the two witnesses who shall testify before our Lord's Second Advent. . .

Well, the preparation has now been made for the completion of the mystery of God, and in **chapter 16** we will read the words, "*And it is done.*" Further unfolding of the trumpet judgment will issue in the **seven bowl judgments** and details in connection with it. Our preparation ought to be made for escape from that bitter judgment. Two immutable things proclaim the end: the promise of God, and the oath of God. And the very fact that this angel swears, and the very fact that God in the word of God gives his own oath with reference to the fulfillment of his word should indicate to us that it is sure to come to pass. We've suffered many delays. There have been many delays that others have suffered. Other events may occur, it may not be next week that this great program begins to come to its consolation, but those things don't drive us into the ranks of the scoffers. **The great day of consummation is sure to come.**

I. (:1-4) DIVINE REVELATION REMAINS UNDER GOD'S CONTROL

A. (:1) Angelic Agent of Divine Revelation

1. Mighty Angel from Heaven

"And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven,"

Buist Fanning: The initial protagonist in the story is "*another angel, a mighty one*" (ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρόν; v. 1a–b), who is thus distinguished from the angel with the sixth trumpet as well as the four angels who released the hordes of judgment in the previous vision (9:13–15). The added trait, "*mighty*,"¹ begins a series of impressive descriptions that show his heavenly credentials for the role he will play in the vision. He descends "*from heaven*" as God's emissary (cf. 18:1; 20:1). The other features in v. 1 reinforce the heavenly splendor of this one who comes to carry out the divine will on earth.

Robert Mounce: Some commentators have taken the mighty angel to be Christ. The phrases by which he is described are elsewhere used of deity. He is robed in a cloud (cf. Ps 104:3), there is a rainbow above his head (cf. Rev 4:3), his face is like the sun (cf. Rev 1:16), and his legs are like fiery pillars (cf. Exod 13:21–22). This identification is rejected by most scholars because in the Apocalypse **Christ never elsewhere appears as an angel**. In v. 6 the angel supports his declaration of no more delay by **taking an oath**—highly inappropriate for Christ. Others, arguing on the basis of a rather clear parallel with Dan 12:7, take the angel to be **Gabriel** (cf. Dan 8:16).

Sola Scriptura: Based on Revelation 5:2; 10:1 and 18:21, *strong angels* are revelatory angels. That is, they specifically communicate to man information from God. In Revelation 5:2, the strong angel communicates the identity of the person worthy to open the sealed scroll. In Revelation 10:1, he communicates a significant transition in the program of God. In Revelation 18:21, he communicates the destiny of the capital city of the beast empire. Similarly, an angelic being in Daniel 10 communicates the destiny of the Jews and Jerusalem.

2. Majestic Description of This Mighty Angel

a. "*clothed with a cloud*,"

Grant Osborne: In the OT God appears in a cloud as the sign of his “glory” (**Exod. 16:10; Lev. 16:2; 1 Kings 8:10; Ezek. 10:4**), and the angel as his representative also “wears” a cloud as a sign of God’s presence and of eschatological glory.

b. “and the rainbow was upon his head,”

Daniel Akin: “A rainbow over his head” is a sign of God’s **covenant faithfulness**. It echoes the story of Noah and the flood. It adorned his head like a crown (**Gen 9:12-16; Ezek 1:26-28; Rev 4:3**). **MacArthur** notes, “While the cloud symbolizes judgment, the rainbow represents God’s covenant mercy in the midst of judgment (as it did in **4:3**)” (**MacArthur, Revelation 1–11**, 280).

c. “and his face was like the sun,”

Daniel Akin: The angel’s “face was like the sun,” **brilliant and radiant**, for he had been in the presence of God. As a result, he is an awesome reflection of the Lord. “His legs were like fiery pillars,” a picture of **stability** and **uncompromising holiness**. And with a possible background in the exodus wanderings, ideas of guidance, protection, and deliverance are lurking about (**Osborne, Revelation**, 394).

d. “and his feet like pillars of fire;”

Kendell Easley: Several aspects of this majestic being's clothing and appearance point us to other parts of Scripture....

- *robed in a cloud* suggests the cloud of God's own glorious presence (**Exod. 16:10; Luke 9:34**).
- *a rainbow above his head* perhaps like a multicolored turban reminds us of the rainbow around the heavenly throne (**Rev. 4:3**).
- *face was like the sun* as had been the face of Christ as he first appeared to John in **Revelation 1:16**.
- *legs were like fiery pillars* like the fiery pillar that accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt (**Exod. 13:21**).
- *right foot on the sea and left foot on the land*, suggesting further the colossal size of this creature.

B. (:2a) Additional Little Scroll of Divine Revelation

“and he had in his hand a little book which was open.”

Buist Fanning: The word for “little scroll” (βιβλαρίδιον) used in **10:2, 9, 10** is different from “scroll” (βιβλίον) used six times in **5:1–8**, but βιβλίον also appears as a synonym for βιβλαρίδιον here in **10:8**, and the meaning of the two is close enough to allow for both to point to the same referent. It makes more sense overall to see this “little scroll” as a reappearance of the same “scroll” from **chapter 5**, now “lying open” after its seals have been broken. It comes back on the scene as part of the transition between the beginning judgments of **6:1–9:21** and the culminating judgments that follow (**11:15ff.**) when “the mystery of God will be completed” (**10:7**).

Robert Mounce: we will maintain that the second vision of the interlude (**11:1–13**) constitutes the contents of the little scroll. That being so, the two scrolls of Revelation cannot be the same.

The **scroll of destiny** begins with the seals and continues to the end of the Apocalypse. Within that larger scope the **little scroll** deals with the lot of God's people during the final days prior to the end.

Grant Osborne: the scroll was sealed in the right hand of God in **chapter 5**, progressively opened as the Lamb "*opened*" the seals in **chapter 6**, and now lies open in the hand of the mighty angel in **chapter 10**. It too tells the divine plan for the end of the age, and now John is to be shown how that plan relates to the saints that are still on earth. By using the imagery of the scroll closed in the hand of God, opened by the Lamb, and now open in the hand of the mighty angel, John is **expanding the vision of Ezekiel's call to relate his own prophetic call**. Nevertheless, the choice of βιβλαρίδιον here was probably quite deliberate, and thus it does carry some diminutive force (**Aune** 1998a: 558 calls it "a true diminutive" because it is the diminutive of βιβλίον, already a diminutive in form). **There is identity between the two scrolls but not absolute unity** (so also **Michaels** 1997: 133–34; **Beale** 1999: 530–32). The scroll here is a "*small*" portion of the whole scroll containing the plan of God for ending this present evil world and introducing the "*new heavens and new earth*," and depicting the place of the church in these events.

C. (:2b-3) Authoritative and Powerful Divine Revelation

1. (:2b) Dramatic Worldwide Dominion

"And he placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land;"

Robert Mounce: This dramatic appearance of an authoritative figure from heaven stands in marked contrast to the immediately preceding tableau of humanity's rebellious idolatry and immorality (**9:20–21**).

Grant Osborne: By having one foot on the land and the other on the sea, John was stressing the dominion of the angel over the whole world and the significance of the message in the scroll for all the world. Throughout the biblical period, a conqueror would place his foot on the conquered land to **signify possession of that land**. Moreover, that these feet/legs are "*like fiery pillars*" (**10:1**) stresses both **deliverance for the believers and judgment for the unbelievers**.

Van Parunak: These are the places from which the two beasts come (**13:1, 11**). Like the allusion to Babylon from **Daniel 4** and the references to "*the beast ... out of the bottomless pit*" (**11:7**) and "*the great city*" (**11:8**) in the next chapter, they are preparing us for the historical review and final judgments in **chapters 12–19**. Setting one's foot upon an adversary symbolizes dominion over the adversary.

2. (:3) Dramatic Powerful Voice and Divine Response

a. Dramatic Voice

"and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars;"

b. Divine Response

*"and when he had cried out,
the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices."*

Buist Fanning: Taking an imposing stance that represents the cosmic reach of what he has come to reveal (**vv. 6–7**), the angel straddles both sea and land (**v. 2b**). In **vv. 1–2** as well as in **v. 5** this picture encompasses all three of the commonly cited realms of God's created universe: heaven, earth or land, and sea (**v. 6**; cf. **5:13**; **14:7**; see other biblical texts cited at **v. 6** below); this

angel's actions will have cosmic significance. In this dramatic pose the angel then utters a loud cry "*like a lion roars*," apparently to garner attention for what he will declare in **vv. 6c–7**. But the angel's cry prompts a response from "*the seven thunders*," creating a short diversion in the storyline (**vv. 3b–4**). It is not clear who these "*seven thunders*" are who reply "*with their own voices*" to the loud voice of the mighty angel. John presents them as familiar to his readers (the seven thunders), but no ancient sources give evidence of well-known phenomena like this. This may represent seven angels who interact from heaven with the mighty angel (cf. **7:2–3; 14:17–18**, where angelic interaction is portrayed in John's visions; see also **John 12:29**). It could be a reference to the fullness of God's voice (like "*the seven spirits of God*" denoting the Holy Spirit in **Rev 1:4; 5:6**). **Psalm 29:3–9** (where "*the voice of the LORD*" is mentioned seven times and portrayed as a rainstorm "*thundering*" over the earth) could be a source for such an idea.

Robert Mounce: The voice from heaven could be that of God or Christ (cf. **14:13; 18:4**). In any case a voice from heaven would be a voice of authority (cf. 2 Esdr 6:17).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: **Thunder** is a symbol of judgment but also of revelation. It reminds us God has revealed Himself in history to man, first in creation and then in various ways through special revelation, i.e., through the holy Scriptures and through the Son. Thunder is portrayed as the voice of the Lord seven times in **Psalm 29:3–9**. The idea is that thunderstorms are a reminder to man that he should ascribe glory and strength to God and worship God as the Creator King of this world. In **Revelation 10**, the thunder is heard in a most electrifying message that John was both able to hear and understand.

D. (:4) Authorization to Communicate Divine Revelation Denied

1. Prepared to Communicate

"And when the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write;"

2. Prohibited from Communicating

"and I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken, and do not write them.'"

Buist Fanning: The things the thunders have said should remain **inaccessible**. Though he has not even written them yet, they are to be sealed off in John's mind only and not written down for others to read. So the things John heard are divine secrets, never to be made known more widely (cf. **2 Cor 12:4**). We can still wonder what purpose is served for John (under inspiration) to record this part of the vision that tantalizes the reader with heavenly secrets only to withhold them in the end. Why not just omit this portion of the vision? One suggestion is that it is an overt reminder that God's counsel has depths that humans will never see or understand. Prior to its fulfillment—and even after—the details of God's purposes that he has chosen to reveal through his prophets will always be a partial glimpse of his plan and seen only "*through a glass darkly*" (**1 Cor 13:12**). It is always a salutary thing for proud humans to be reminded of their limitations and to leave some matters to a trustworthy God.

Grant Osborne: John is being told to affirm God's sovereign control over the judgments proclaimed in the thunders and then is prohibited from revealing the contents to his readers. The major message is one of **sovereignty**. God is in control, and the saints do not need to know all the details.

II. (:5-7) DIVINE REVELATION GUARANTEES NO MORE DELAY IN CARRYING OUT END TIMES AGENDA

A. (:5-6a) Trustworthiness of God's Revelation

1. (:5a) Special Messenger Bears Witness

"And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land"

Kendell Easley: What impressed John most about the mighty angel was that he stood both on the sea and on the land, for he tells us this three times (**verses 3, 5, 8**).

William Barclay: This shows his size and power, for sea and land stand for the sum total of the universe. It also shows that the power of God stands as firm on the sea as it does on the land.

2. (:5b-6a) Swearing an Oath of Divine Guarantee

a. (:5b) Raising of the Right Hand in God's Presence

"lifted up his right hand to heaven,"

Richard Phillips: As a witness authorized to swear by God, the angel not only brings God's Word but also testifies to the certainty of its fulfillment.

b. (:6) Ratifying the Oath by God's Nature and Dominion

1) By God's Eternal Nature

"and swore by Him who lives forever and ever,"

Kendell Easley: For all the martyrs who must pass through violent death for Christ's sake, there is great comfort in knowing that their God is alive forever.

Grant Osborne: The eternality of God is a major basis for the finality of his proclamations. In this context, where the theme is the end of all earthly things (as also in **Dan. 12**), it is important to realize that the God of eternity is in control.

2) By God's Dominion by Virtue of Creation

*"who created heaven and the things in it,
and the earth and the things in it,
and the sea and the things in it,"*

Grant Osborne: **The God who created the universe is the God who will end it**, in keeping with his title as *"the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end"* (**1:8; 21:6**). All three spheres of life in this world are stressed: the heavens, the earth, and the sea. Moreover, with each sphere God is seen as creator of τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ (*ta en autē, the things in it*), meaning that God is creator and sovereign over every single thing in this world. In **10:1–2** the mighty angel descended from *"heaven,"* then placed one foot on *"the sea"* and the other foot on *"the land,"* indicating God's dominion over all that is in this world. Now we see also that he created all that is in each of these spheres. **Bauckham** (1993b: 253–54) observes that the threefold division of **10:5** (sea, land, heaven) is reversed in **10:6** (heaven, land, sea). This links the angel who comes from heaven and stands astride land and sea with the God who created all three.

B. (:6b-7) Timetable and Fulfillment of God's End Times Agenda

1. (:6b) God's End Times Agenda Will Be Delayed No Longer

"that there shall be delay no longer,"

Robert Mounce: The announcement of **no further delay** would come as welcome news. The martyrs under the altar (**6:9–12**) had been told to rest a while until the full number of their fellow servants and brothers and sisters should be put to death. The seven thunders would have involved yet another delay had they not been canceled. Now nothing stands in the way of the final dramatic period of human history.

2. (:7) God's End Time Agenda Will Be Completely Fulfilled

*“but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel,
when he is about to sound,
then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.”*

John MacArthur: The phrase *but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound* indicates that the judgment of the seventh trumpet is about to come and that it is not a single event, but covers days—indicating a period of time. This period includes the seven bowl judgments (**16:1–21**), which would appear to require some weeks or months to unfold. So the sounding of the seventh trumpet brings the final judgment depicted in the bowls of fury poured out on the earth. The time of God's patience is seen as having ended; the time for the final acts of judgment is seen as being at hand. The time anticipated in the disciples' questions recorded in **Matthew 24:3** and **Acts 1:6** has come. The prayers of all the saints of all the ages for the consummation of God's kingdom are about to be answered (cf. **6:9–11; Matt. 6:9–10**). When the seventh angel sounds, *“The kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever”*(**11:15**).

Buist Fanning: The main content of the vision, in terms of its relevance for the sequence of the seven trumpets, is presented in the angel's solemn declaration about the completion of God's purposes without further delay (vv. **6–7**). His declaration is recorded in terms drawn closely from **Daniel 12:5–13**. The angel's dramatic oath by the God “*who lives forever*” and affirmed with hand raised “*toward heaven*” mirrors **Daniel 12:7** almost exactly (see also **Gen 14:22; Deut 32:40**). Here the gravity of “*swearing*” by the living God is increased from Daniel's oath formula by adding the threefold description of God's creative work in heaven, earth, and sea (**Rev 10:6b**) commonly found in the Old Testament (e.g., **Gen 1:26; Exod 20:11; Neh 9:6; Ps 146:6; Jonah 1:9; cf. Acts 4:24; 14:15**). The angel's announcement must certainly be taken as an ironclad declaration of God's truth and its significance for John's portrayal of coming events duly noted. The seventh trumpet (and the seven bowls associated with it) will bring cataclysmic changes for the world.

Kendell Easley: The verb phrase “*about to sound*” represents the Greek precisely. In the dialect of the American South that I grew up with, this would be translated “‘fixin’ to sound his trumpet.” In other words, there will be no delay once the events of the six trumpets have occurred. The seventh trumpet will end everything (**11:15–18**). . .

Thus, with the blowing of the seventh trumpet God's final defeat of evil will be fulfilled. Then at last God's ultimate purpose in human history will be realized (**11:15**). The verb will be accomplished can also be translated, “*will be finished*” (a form of the verb Jesus used at his crucifixion, “*It is finished*,” **John 19:30**).

The verb *announced* is the usual NT verb for “tell the gospel” or “tell good news.” In this instance the good news is about God's complete defeat of wickedness and his judgment on sin.

Van Parunak: We usually think of the gospel as announcing deliverance from judgment through faith in the Lord Jesus. This gospel is the destruction of the kingdom of Antichrist, and the vindication of his saints. The good news is not just that God in his mercy has provided salvation for his people, but also that God in his righteousness will bring judgment on the wicked. This has been promised ever since **Gen 3:15**, when God promised to crush the head of the serpent. The destruction of God's enemies and the triumph of his kingdom is the message of all the prophets, and it is good news.

Sola Scriptura: We argue that the "*mystery of God*" is God's special work in Jesus Christ to bring many Gentiles to glory. This effort on the part of God concludes or is finished just prior to the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet.

This by definition necessitates that God's special work in Jesus Christ to bring Gentiles to glory does not conclude with the Rapture. This is easily proven given that the beheaded martyrs of **Revelation 20:4** who are resurrected in close proximity to the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ reign with Him for 1000 years. Paul states in **2 Timothy 2:12**, "*If we endure, we will also reign with Him. . .*" To reign with Christ in His temporal kingdom is a privilege shared by those who are saved (particularly Gentiles) during this present age. That the beheaded martyrs refer to Gentiles and not Jews can be discerned from the fact that the woman (Israel) is put in protective custody for three and a half years (**Rev 12:6, 14**). The beheaded martyrs are those who resisted the mark and the worship of Antichrist (**Rev 20:4**), but held to the testimony of Jesus. Since they are resurrected near the beginning of the millennium, they must have died after the Rapture, else they would have been taken at the Rapture.

III. (:8-11) DIVINE REVELATION CAN BE BOTH BITTER AND SWEET AS IT IS ASSIMILATED AND PROCLAIMED

Kendell Easley: John ate the glorious angel's small scroll, a message both sweet and sour for the churches, for the people of God must suffer further before the end comes.

Daniel Akin: These verses are the most applicable and practical in this passage of Scripture. They have a clear relevance for every generation of believers and followers of the Lamb. The imagery is striking, and the meaning is self-evident. The "*little scroll*" of **verse 2** reappears and takes center stage. It is mentioned three times in **verses 8-10**. God's Word comes with authority. Its promises and prophecies are certain to be fulfilled. However, it is of little or no value to us personally if we do not **take it, read it, feed on it, and then proclaim it**. It is a bittersweet book to be sure. It is a book that will change us. It is a book that leaves no one the same. Life and death are in its words. How then do we respond to this word? . . .

This book is honey (**Pss 19:10; 119:103; Prov 24:13**), better than bread (**Matt 4:4**), meat (**1 Cor 3:1-2**), and milk (**1 Pet 2:2**). Here is a diet for spiritual health and nourishment. However, we can expect a twofold reaction when eating and digesting this book. It will be sweet in our mouths, but it can be bitter to our stomachs (**10:9-10**). It is sweet in our mouths because it **reveals the gospel**—God's goodness and grace, His love and mercy, His plans and purposes, His will and His ways. It is bitter to our stomachs because it is a **word of judgment** to unbelievers and a word of **persecution and suffering for believers** (**Beale, Revelation**, 552–53; also **Osborne, Revelation**, 404, and **Mounce, Revelation**, 210). To my mind, **MacArthur** puts it well:

All who love Jesus Christ can relate to John's ambivalence. Believers long for Christ to return in glory, for Satan to be destroyed, and the glorious kingdom of our Lord to be set up on earth, in which He will rule in universal sovereignty and glory while establishing in the world righteousness, truth, and peace. But they, like Paul (**Rom. 9:1-3**), mourn bitterly over the judgment of the ungodly. (*Revelation 1-11*, 288)

There is joy and sorrow, sweetness and bitterness, gladness and sadness when God's Word does its perfect saving and sanctifying work in our lives.

A. (:8) Command to Take God's Word

"And the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, 'Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.'"

Van Parunak: These verses are a clear echo of **Ezekiel 2-3**. Portions of that chapter lie behind **Revelation 5**, but other portions are seen here. The fact that both chapters are needed to fill out the picture originally seen in Ezekiel is an additional confirmation that the same scroll is in view in **Revelation 5** and **10**.

Topic	Ezekiel 2-3	Revelation 5, 10
Command to eat the scroll	2:8 open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. 3:1a Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, ... 2 So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. 3a And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat , ...	10:9a And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up ;
Appearance of the scroll	2:9 And when I looked, behold, an hand was sent unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein ;	5:1a And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book
Open scroll	2:10a And he spread it before me;	10:2 And he had in his hand a little book open :
Written on both sides	2:10b and it was written within and without: ... lamentations, and mourning, and woe.	5:1b a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.
Eating	3:3b Then did I eat it;	10:10a And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up;
Sweet ...	3:3c and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness .	10:9c but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey 10b and it was in my mouth sweet as honey :
Command to speak	3:1b go speak unto the house of Israel. ... 4 And he said unto me, Son of man, go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them .	10:11 And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.
... bitter	3:14 So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness , in the heat of my spirit;	10:9b and it shall make thy belly bitter , ... 10c and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter .

B. (:9-10) Command to Assimilate (Feed on) God's Word

1. (:9) Object Lesson of the Command

a. Receiving the Revelation by Taking Action

*"And I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book.
And he said to me, 'Take it, and eat it;'"*

b. Feeding on the Revelation – Both Bitter and Sweet

1) Bitter

“and it will make your stomach bitter,”

2) Sweet

“but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.”

Buist Fanning: As John received and wrote down this part of the vision and as his first-century audience heard or read it, they would have quickly associated these actions with Ezekiel’s account of his prophetic appointment in **Ezekiel 2:1–3:15** and understood the vision’s significance accordingly. God called Ezekiel to go and speak as a prophet to the stubborn and rebellious people of Israel (**Ezek 2:1–7**). In his vision a hand offered a scroll to him filled with words of *“lamentation, mourning, and woe”* (**2:8–10**), and he was told to eat the scroll, to fill his belly with it, and then go and speak for God. When he ate it, Ezekiel found it *“sweet as honey in his mouth”* (**3:1–3**). But as he went out to preach he found the people unwilling to listen (**3:7–9**), and he went about his task discouraged and *“in bitterness”* (**3:14–15**).

2. (:10) Obedience to the Command

a. Receiving the Revelation by Taking Action

“And I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it,”

b. Feeding on the Revelation – Both Bitter and Sweet

1) Sweet

“and it was in my mouth sweet as honey;”

2) Bitter

“and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.”

Robert Mounce: The sweet scroll that turns the stomach sour is a **message for the church**. Before the final triumph believers are going to pass through a formidable ordeal. As the great scroll of **chapter 5** outlined the destiny of the entire human race, so the little scroll unveils the lot of the faithful in those last days of fierce Satanic opposition. It tells of the two witnesses who, when they have finished their testimony, are destroyed by the beast out of the Abyss (**11:7**). Like the crucified Lord their dead bodies are exposed for public contempt (**11:8**). The people of God as they faithfully bear their witness to the world are not delivered “from martyrdom and death, but through martyrdom and death to a glorious resurrection.” The prospect of no further delay in the fulfillment of God’s eternal purposes is sweet indeed. That it will involve a **bitter prelude** is hard to swallow.

C. (:11) Command to Proclaim God’s Word

“And they said to me, ‘You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.’”

Grant Osborne: After this parabolic action, John is given his **direct commission** to prophesy in **10:11**. Interestingly, the command does not come from either angelic figure, but rather is plural, λέγουσιν (*legousin, they say*). This could mean that both the mighty angel (**10:1–3, 5–7**) and the heavenly voice (**10:4, 8**) address John (so **Giblin** 1984: 435), but it is probably better to take this as an indefinite plural pointing to **God as the source of the commission**. John is told, Δεῖ σε πάλιν προφητεῦσαι (*Dei se palin prophēteusai, You must prophesy again*). His prophetic ministry is a divine “must,” a necessity in light of the importance of the message; God has

ordained it. This is not the first time John is commissioned in this book. In **1:11, 19** he was told to “*write*” down “*what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later.*” Then in **4:1** John was called to heaven in order to be shown “*what must take place after this.*” The commission to “*prophecy again*” builds on both these and so is a **recommissioning to his prophetic ministry**, somewhat on the line of Paul’s repeated calls to his mission to the Gentiles (**Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17–18**). John is reminded by God of his ministry in light of these visions, and this will especially relate to the rest of his prophetic writing in **chapters 12–22** as well as his prophetic action in **11:1–2** (**Michaels** 1997: 136–37 sees a special connection between the call to prophecy here and the action of **11:1–2**). In light of what God was about to reveal to John, he needed the strength he would get from realizing that his commission paralleled that of Ezekiel.

Warren Wiersbe: He must declare God’s prophetic truth **concerning** (not “before”) many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings (**Rev. 5:9**). The word nations usually refers to the Gentile nations. John will have much to say about the nations of the world as he presents the rest of this prophecy.

Sola Scriptura: Interestingly, **Revelation 11:7** focuses on the universality of the human opposition to God’s prophetic witnesses. **Revelation 11:18** focuses on the nations in opposition to God’s sovereign rule. **Revelation 12:3** focuses on the kings who are in opposition to the eternal plan of God for Israel. **Revelation 13:1-2** focuses on kings in opposition to God’s sovereign rule on earth. Therefore, John does in fact prophecy against “*peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.*”

Buist Fanning: **The Blessing and Unity of God’s Revelation in Scripture --**

This passage reminds us of the unsurpassed gift of God’s revelation to us in Scripture. John’s recommissioning here (after his initial prophetic call in **1:9–20** and mirroring the call of Ezekiel in **Ezek 2:1–3:15**) anchors his words not in his own human insight but in the authority of the Lord. And here as elsewhere, John identifies himself and his work with the prophets of old (**Rev 1:3; 22:6, 10, 18–19**). Through all these messengers God has graciously unveiled his “*mystery*” (**10:7**), the previously hidden truth about his plan to redeem Israel and then, through her, people from all the nations of the world. John’s visions reflect the unity of what he has seen with what God revealed through the Old Testament prophets, through Jesus’s own teaching, and through the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. We are not left to mere human speculation or opinion about the future of the world. Though we sometimes long for greater clarity in our grasp of his truth, God has not left us uninformed about what he will do to bring his full redemption to earth in both judgment and restoration.

Daniel Akin: Our assignment is to go. Our calling is to proclaim the good news of the gospel. In the midst of judgment, God is announcing through His prophets the good news of His grace revealed in the gospel of His Son. The sweetness of faithful obedience cannot be soured by the bitterness of persecution, rejection, suffering, and even death.

Robert Mounce: the prophecies deal with people in general without attention to racial, geographic, ethnic, or social distinctions. The only real distinction is between those with the seal of God and those with the mark of the beast.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How certain are you of the ultimate fulfillment of biblical end times prophecy and why are you so certain?
- 2) What similarities do you see between the *strong angel* of **Rev. 10** and the archangel Michael in the last chapters of the book of Daniel?
- 3) In what way do we find the assimilation and proclamation of God's revelation to be both bitter and sweet?
- 4) Are we fulfilling our divine commission to proclaim the gospel to the world today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Buist Fanning: This passage reveals the larger sense in which Revelation can aptly be called “**the climax of prophecy**.” John’s own contribution to the Old Testament prophetic tradition is not to counter or redirect what the prophets have said but to show how it will soon be fulfilled in God’s work of judgment and redemption directed toward Israel and all the nations of the world. His message particularly builds on what is said in central Old Testament texts such as **Daniel 7, Zechariah 12, Psalm 2**, and numerous passages from **Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel** that tell of the establishment of God’s coming reign on earth, even in the face of powerful worldly empires and their kings that oppose his rule and oppress God’s people.

This announcement that God’s saving plan is about to be completed without any more delay (**vv. 6c–7**) is the first of a series of anticipatory declarations in the coming chapters of the defeat of all enemies and the arrival of God’s kingdom (e.g., **11:15–18; 12:10–12; 14:7–8; 15:1; 18:2; 19:2**). God’s heavenly rule over all things means that this can be proclaimed as already done even while its earthly consummation is still in process. The temporal indicators in these verses (**10:6c–7**) and elsewhere in the book show that John does in fact present a fairly clear sequence of events revealed in the Old Testament prophets and confirmed here in Revelation.

Charles Swindoll: Just like John, we have roles to play in God’s ultimate plan. We can’t call ourselves “apostles,” and we don’t receive literal visions and revelations from God. We’re not required to swallow prophetic books to utter inspired words. But each of us has been given a crucial mission to share the good news of salvation with the world (**Matt 28:19-20**). Yet just like John, we must **first internalize the message**, allowing it to become a part of our own lives.

It’s true that the gospel of Jesus Christ involves **both bad news and good news**—bad news about lost humans subject to divine judgment but good news about the righteous Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who paid the complete penalty for us and saves us when we simply trust in Him. As ambassadors for Christ in this age, we must not only understand and accept the gospel ourselves, but we must also be able to **communicate that message to others**.

David Thompson: **Eat the book that you get from the angel. (10:9-10)**

This is a very important point. No matter what is happening in the world, it is imperative that God’s people feed on the word of God. It is critical that people have an appetite for the word of

God and God's ministers have a responsibility to digest a book like Revelation and feed it to the people.

By virtue of the fact that John is ordered to take God's word and eat it, we see that there must be a personal feeding and ingestion of the word of God at all times, even times of judgment. God's word will always taste good to God's people even though it contains bitter things.

Now the chronology of this is that as John ate the word of God, it was sweet, but became bitter. Before things become sweet for Israel and the world, there will be some very bitter things that will hit. This is especially true here for Israel. Judgment is bitter but it may also be sweet. If one is in a right relationship with God, there is sweetness to the judgment theme. But if one is not in a right relationship with God, the same theme is very bitter.

At this point . . . things are about to become very bitter for Israel. John was not only an apostle, but he was also a Jew. As he saw what was going to happen to Israel, it would have been bitter. But he also would come to realize that this bitter time would ultimately become a sweet time when Israel was in her land and Kingdom experiencing all the blessings of God. . .

After the sixth trumpet judgment, which is the second "woe" judgment, has been completed the seventh trumpet judgment, which is the third and final "woe" judgment **does not come immediately**.

There are **two prelude events** that occur prior to the seventh trumpet judgment, which is the finale of the wrath of God:

Prelude Event #1 - The angelic heavenly announcement that there is no further delay. **Rev. 10:6**

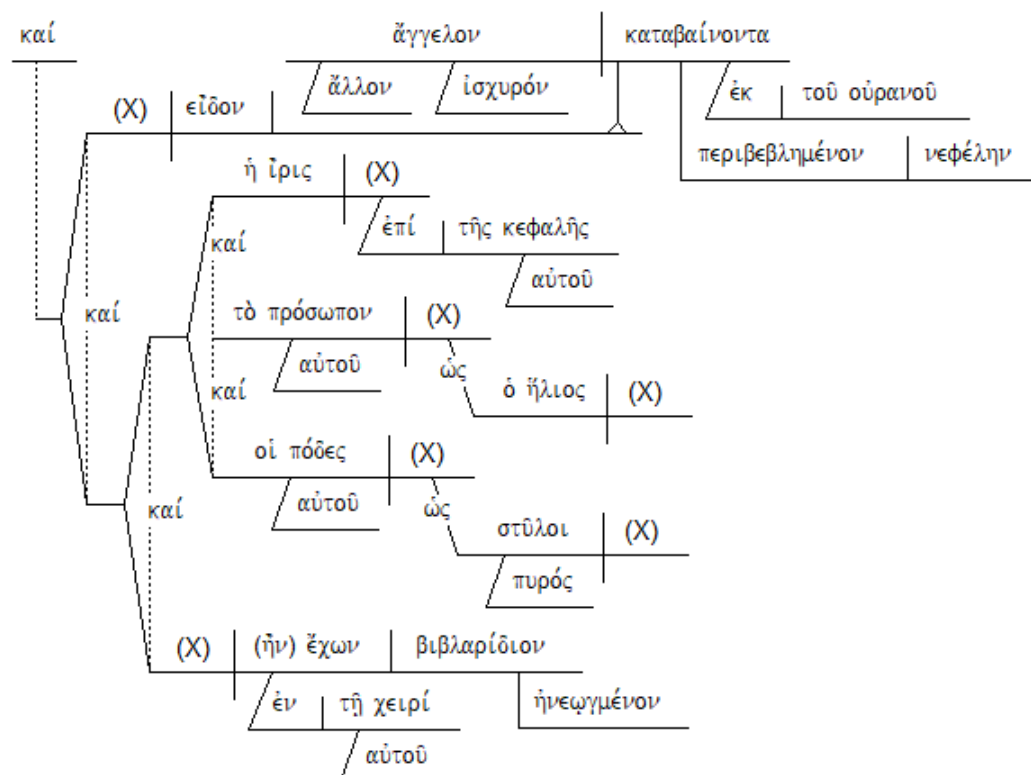
Prelude Event #2 - The measurement of the Temple and its worshippers. **Rev. 11:1-14**

Van Parunak: Universal Lists in the Revelation. Numbers are order of terms in a given verse.

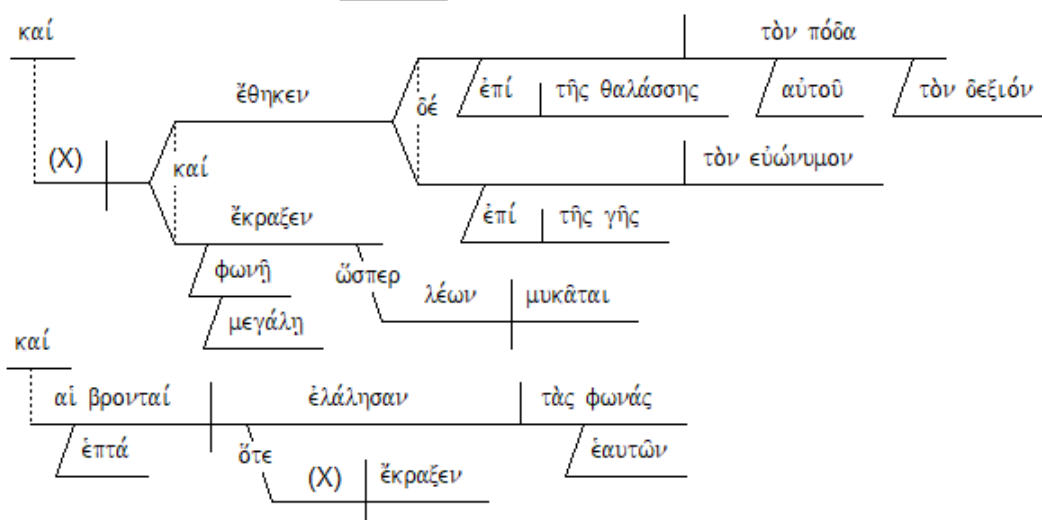
	Theme	λαός G2992 People	ἔθνος G1484 Nation	γλῶσσα G1100 Tongue	βασιλεύς G935 King	φυλή G5443 Tribe	ὄχλος G3793 Multitude
5:9	Who is redeemed?	3	4	2		1	
7:9	Who is able to stand?	3	1	4		2	
10:11	Against whom does John prophesy?	1	2	3	4		
11:9	Who opposes God's prophets?	1	4	3		2	
13:7	Over whom does the beast have power?	2	4	3		1	
14:6	To whom is the everlasting gospel preached?	4	1	3		2	
17:15	Over whom does the Whore rule?	1	3	4			2

Leedy Greek Diagram:

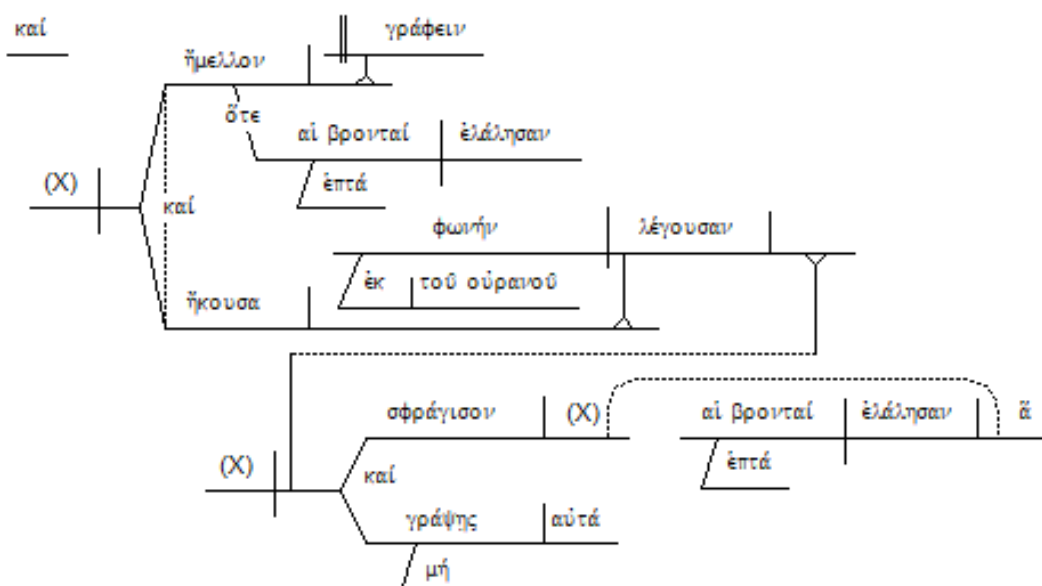
Rev 10:1-2a



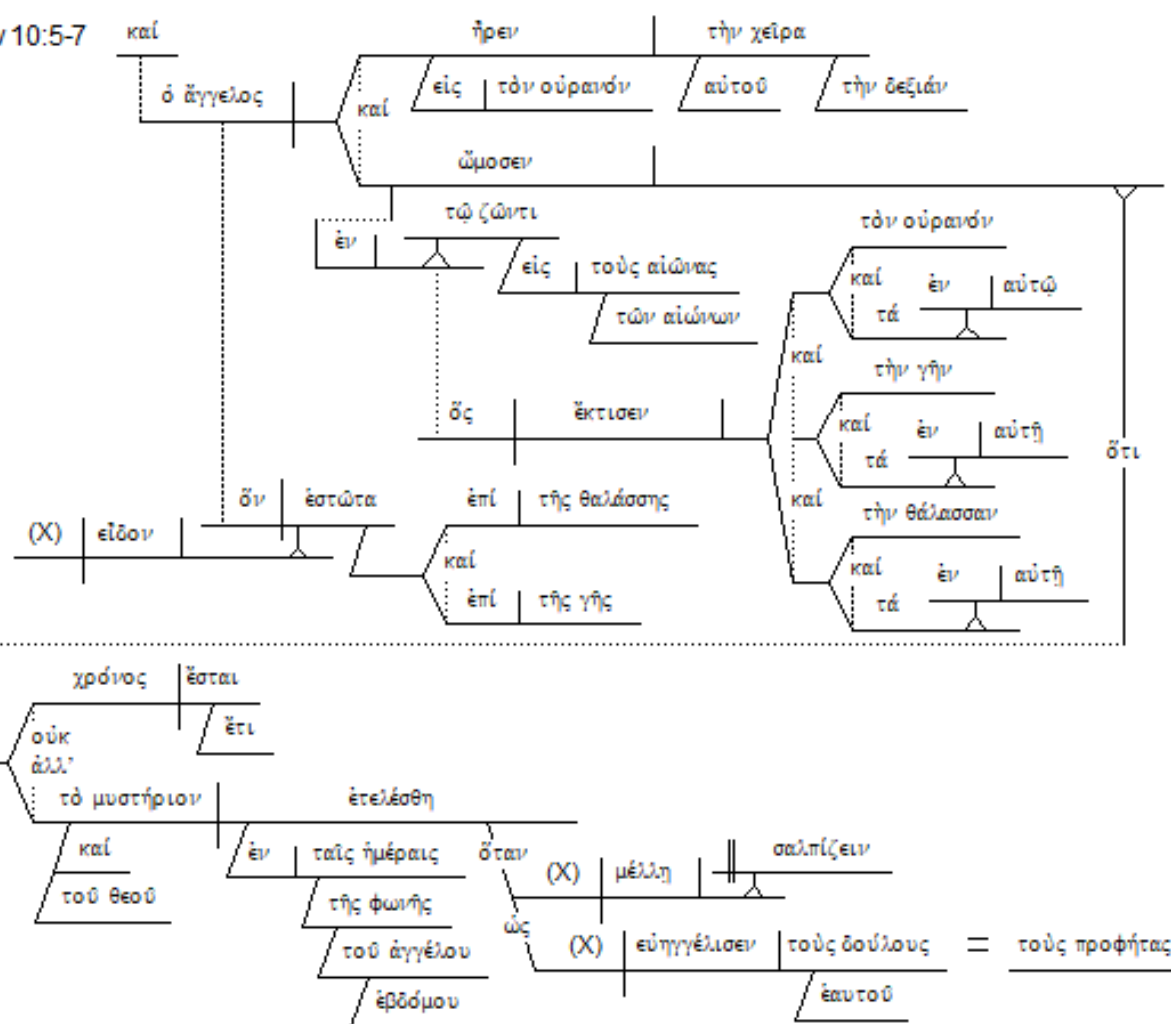
Rev 10:2b-3



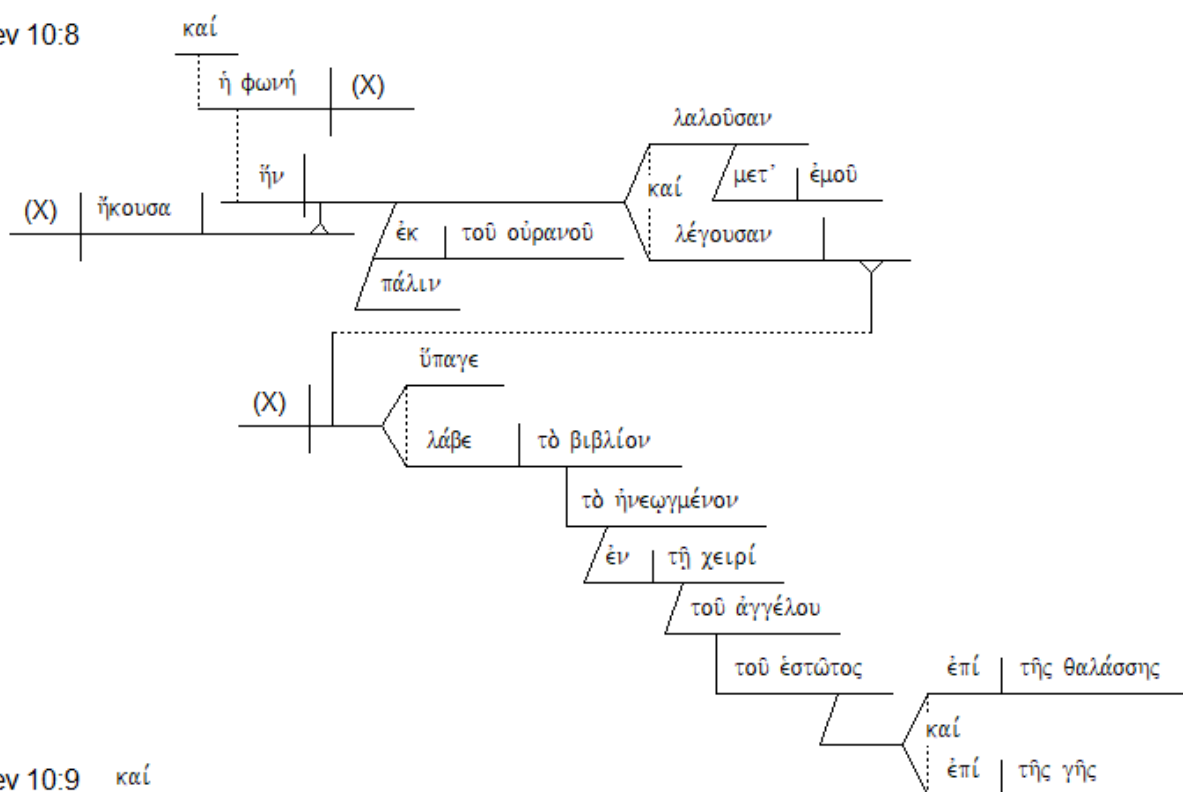
Rev 10:4



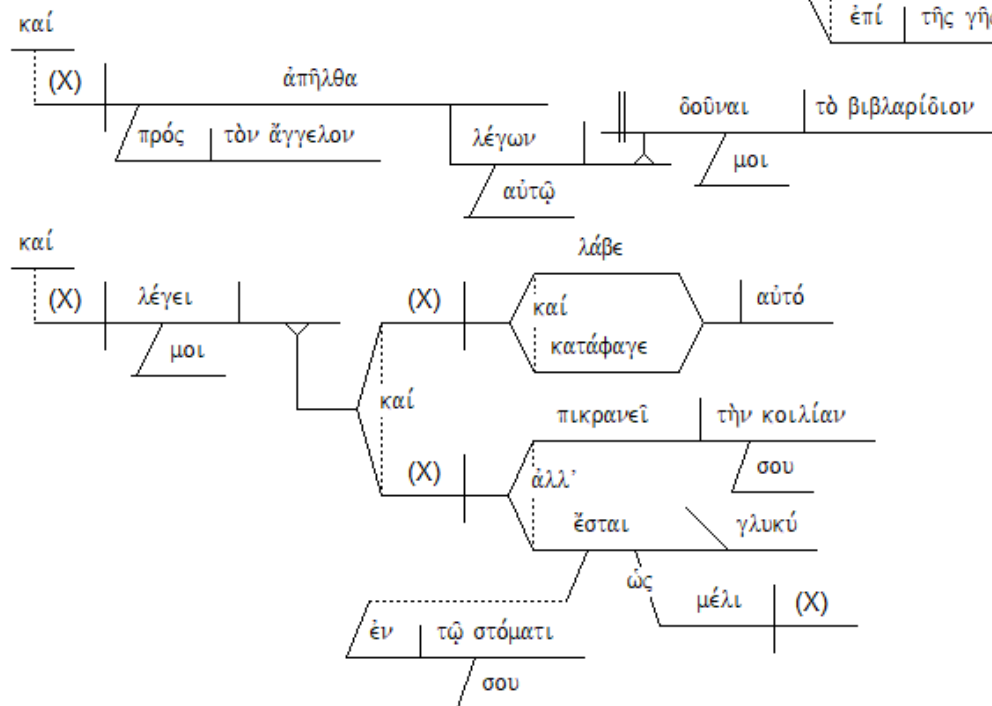
Rev 10:5-7



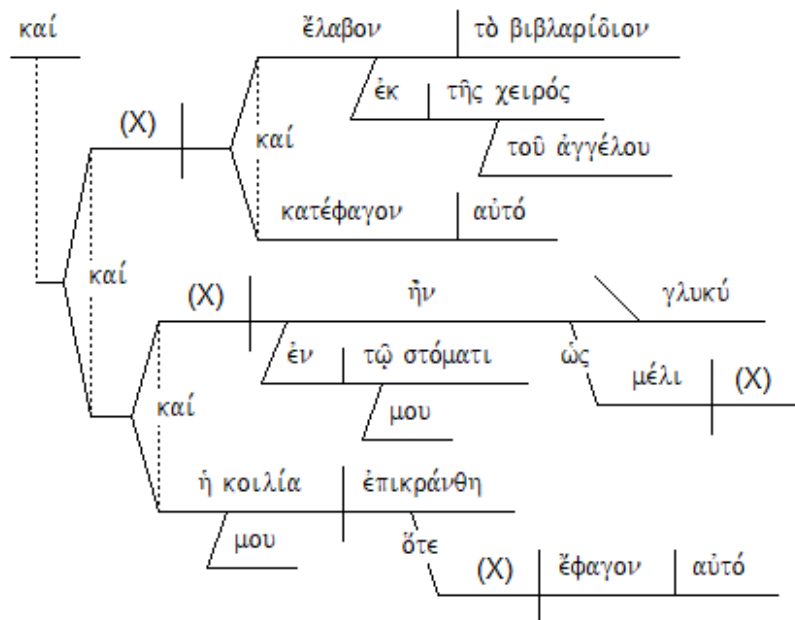
Rev 10:8



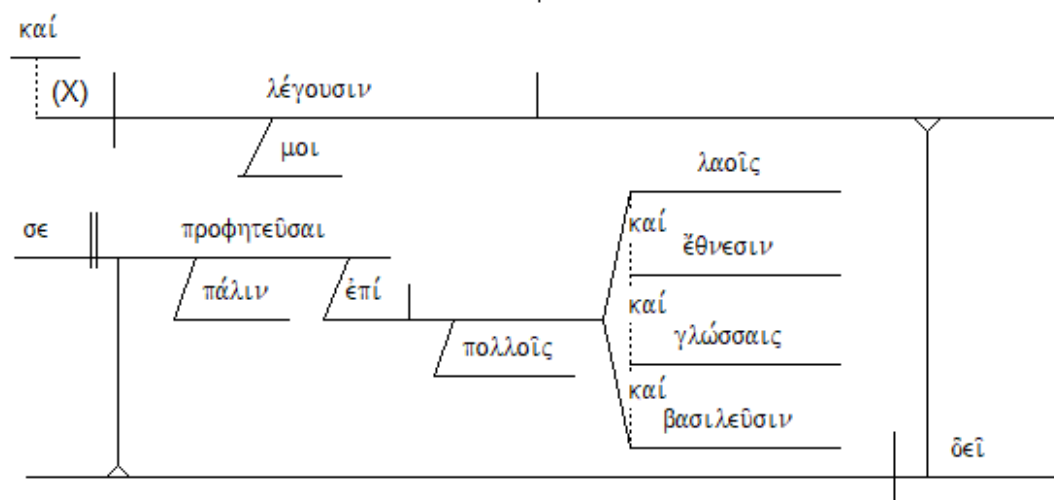
Rev 10:9



Rev 10:10



Rev 10:11



TEXT: Revelation 11:1-14

TITLE: INTERLUDE: TEMPLE MEASUREMENTS AND THE TWO WITNESSES

BIG IDEA:

THE MINISTRY OF THE TWO WITNESSES (UNDER GOD'S PROTECTION UNTIL MARTYDOM) PROCLAIMS THE MESSAGE OF COMING JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

John Walvoord: Chapter 11 of the Revelation continues the parenthetical section beginning in chapter 10 and extending through chapter 14. With the exception of 11:15-19, introducing the seventh trumpet, the narrative does not advance in these chapters and various topics are presented. In chapter 15, the chronological developments continue as the contents of the seventh trumpet, namely, the seven vials, are manifested. In 11:1-14 there is a continuation of the same subject as in chapter 10.

John MacArthur: So despite the maniacal efforts of Antichrist to destroy Israel, God will measure off Israel to save, preserve, and protect the nation. As Zechariah wrote, two-thirds of Israel will be purged in judgment and the remaining one-third will be saved and enter the glory of Messiah's earthly kingdom (**Zech. 13:8-9**). Instrumental in their conversion will be a unique, invincible two-man evangelistic team, which John introduces.

Greg Allen: God, in the most intense time of the outpouring of His wrath on this earth, will not leave Himself without a witness. In fact, He gives the world two outstandingly remarkable witnesses. This section tells us the story of these two powerful witnesses who will minister in His name in His name in an astonishingly dramatic way during that time. It reminds us that God has His set purposes for the times to come—and those purposes will not be thwarted.

I. (:1-2) MEASURING THE TEMPLE BUT NOT THE COURT

A. (:1a) Measuring Stick

“And there was given me a measuring rod like a staff;”

John MacArthur: *Kalamos* (measuring rod) refers to a reed-like plant that grew in the Jordan Valley to a height of fifteen to twenty feet [others say ten feet long]. It had a stalk that was hollow and lightweight, yet rigid enough to be used as a walking staff (cf. **Ezek. 29:6**) or to be shaved down into a pen (**3 John 13**). The stalks, because they were long and lightweight, were ideal for use as measuring rods. In Ezekiel's vision, an angel used such a rod to measure the millennial temple (**Ezek. 40:3-43:17**).

Charles Swindoll: Bible scholar **Charles Ryrie** suggests that the temple mentioned in **Revelation 11:1-2** is “the temple that will be built during the Tribulation, in which Jewish worship will be carried on during the first part of that seven-year period and in which, at the midpoint, the man of sin will exalt himself to be worshiped.” In other words, the temple will be rebuilt during a time of unparalleled global tension centered in the Middle East. This is probably why John was given a measuring rod—an implement used in construction.

B. (:1b-2) Measuring Target

“and someone said,”

Is this God or Jesus or a prominent angel?

Tony Garland: Whether the voice is that of an angel or from the throne, the speaker has full divine authority.

1. (:1b) What to Measure

*“Rise and measure the temple of God,
and the altar,
and those who worship in it.”*

Many commentators take the view that the language here for temple is figurative speaking of the people of God who are being protected in some fashion. But why then the distinction between the “*temple of God*” and “*those who worship in it*”?

Gordon Fee: Ezekiel is given a picture of a great eschatological temple (**chs. 40–43**). John is now drawing from that vision, while at the same time looking forward to its final fulfillment (**21:15–27**), where the New Jerusalem exists without a temple.

John MacArthur: It could have indicated, as on occasion in the Old Testament, that God sometimes marks things out for destruction (e. g., **2 Sam. 8:2; 2 Kings 21:13; Isa. 28:17; Lam. 2:8; Amos 7:7–9, 17**). But John’s measuring is better understood as signifying **ownership**, defining the parameters of God’s possessions (cf. **21:15; Zech. 2:1–5**). This measuring signified something good, since what was not measured was evil (v. 2). It is best to see it as God’s measuring off Israel, symbolized by her temple, for salvation and for His special protection, preservation, and favor. The prophecies yet to be given to John will thus distinguish between God’s favor toward Israel and His wrath on the pagan world.

John Walvoord: In **Zechariah 2**, a man is seen measuring Jerusalem, a scene which evidently portrays God’s divine judgment on the city. Another instance is found in **Ezekiel 40**, where the Temple of the future kingdom is carefully measured with a reed. Still another instance is **Revelation 21**, where the new Jerusalem is measured (**21:15–17**). The act of measuring seems to signify that the area belongs to God in some special way. It is **an evaluation of His property**.

The Temple here is apparently that which will be in existence during the great tribulation. Originally constructed for the worship of the Jews and the renewal of their ancient sacrifices, during the great tribulation it is desecrated and becomes the home of an idol of the world ruler (cf. **2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:14–15; Dan. 9:27; 12:11**). For this reason it is most significant that John is instructed to measure not only the Temple and the altar but also the worshipers. It is saying in effect that God is the judge of man’s worship and man’s character and that all must give an account to Him. It also implies, inasmuch as the reed is ten feet long, that man comes far short of the divine standard. Even a person very tall would fall short of the ten-foot measuring rod. God is therefore not only claiming ownership by this measurement of the Temple and the altar but demonstrating the shortcomings of the worshipers who do not measure up to His standard.

Sola Scriptura: From the building that houses the holy of holies (*naos*), John is to proceed to measure the altar. Since the altar of incense is located in the holy place, which is part of the building that houses the holy of holies, this altar is more than likely the altar of burnt offerings. It (in the Herodian temple) was located in the court of the priests, which is the next area one sees when leaving the building that houses the holy of holies.

Buist Fanning: To identify the referent of “*the temple of God*” in **v. 1c**, the first step is observing that its outside courtyard “*has been given over to the gentiles*” (**v. 2c**), and they “*will trample the holy city*” (**v. 2d**) for a period of time (cf. **Luke 21:24**). **This must represent some form of earthly temple.** Only by quite a stretch can this be taken as the heavenly temple, somehow defiled by God’s enemies. In addition, the widely held view that “*temple*” here is figurative in some sense for God’s people (either at the time of the end or throughout the church’s history) seems likewise to be an imposition from other passages rather than a careful engagement with these verses and their Old Testament background. Various symbolic views related to God’s people have been advanced, but they struggle to define the significance of measuring (i.e., **protecting**) God’s people and who or what is included and excluded from such protection. . .

the vision anticipates an earthly temple that will exist in Jerusalem at the cataclysmic time of future judgment just prior to the return of Christ to earth (i.e., at the time when the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments occur as presented in **chs. 6–16**; cf. **2 Thess 2:4** that also assumes this scenario). This vision, given to John at a time when Herod’s temple in Jerusalem lay in ruins (AD 90s), symbolizes God’s ownership of the sanctuary and its surroundings and his pledge of its future restoration at the center of national life among a renewed people who will worship him with true hearts. Just as in the Old Testament passages cited above (**Ezek 40**; **Zech 1–2**), the reference to “*measuring*” the temple indicates God’s intent to **restore it** in the future after the time of chastening that Israel will experience. The time indications in **Revelation 11:2c–3** (“*forty-two months*”; “*1,260 days*”) lend support to this view, since they correlate with other texts from Daniel (e.g., **Dan 7:25**; **8:13–14**; **9:24–27**; **12:1, 11**) that point to the period of final “*tribulation*” immediately preceding Christ’s second coming. These Old Testament texts also contain details often overlooked by spiritualizing or idealist interpretations of **Revelation 11:1–2**, details reflecting the prophets’ national and geographical focus on Jerusalem and its temple, which are made explicit here in **vv. 8** and **13** as well.

Daniel Akin: Now, who are those who worship in this sanctuary? . . . **Ladd**, who does not anticipate the rebuilding of a literal temple, has a perspective concerning the future of Jewish persons I find compelling and heartily endorse:

[Another] interpretation sees here a **prophecy of the preservation and ultimate salvation of the Jewish people.** In the day when John wrote, Jerusalem had been long destroyed and the temple laid waste. Just before the conflagration of AD 66–70, the Jewish Christian community had fled from Jerusalem to the city of Pella in Transjordan. This had augmented the hostility of the Jews toward the Jewish Christian community and hastened the complete break between the synagogue and church. The burning question among Jewish Christians was, “*Has God rejected his people?*” (**Rom. 11:1**). Paul devoted three whole chapters to this problem and concluded that finally the natural branches (Jews) which had been broken off the olive tree (the people of God) would be grafted back onto the tree; “*and so all Israel will be saved*” (**Rom. 11:26**). It is difficult to interpret these three chapters symbolically of the church—the spiritual Israel. **They teach that literal Israel is yet to be included in spiritual Israel.**

Our Lord himself had anticipated this. After his lament over Jerusalem, he asserted, “*For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord’*” (Matt. 23:39). Again, he implied the **salvation of Israel** when he said, “*Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*” (Luke 21:24). . . . The prophecy in **Revelation 11** is John’s way of predicting the preservation of the Jewish people and their final salvation. (Commentary, 150–51)

2. (:2) What Not to Measure

a. Restriction

“And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it,”

b. Reason

1) Belongs to the Gentile Nations

“for it has been given to the nations;”

Tony Garland: Regarding the times of the Gentiles -- Jeremiah explains the reason the times of the Gentiles will come to an end is so that the nation of Israel will be free to serve God under the Messianic economy of the Millennial Kingdom. It is God’s jealousy over His chosen nation which will bring this about. Woe to the nations who will fail to appreciate God’s zeal for Israel!

“‘Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,’ says the LORD, ‘Nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, and no one shall make him afraid. For I am with you,’ says the LORD, ‘to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, and will not let you go altogether unpunished.’” (Jer. 30:10-11)

S. Lewis Johnson: Now we read in Scripture of **the times of the Gentiles**. They represent the times from the days of Nebuchadnezzar all the way through to the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ when Jerusalem is no longer what God intended it to be. The times of the Gentiles reach their climax here. The Lord Jesus made reference to them when he said, “*Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot by the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*” We are living in that period of time, and Jerusalem is being trodden under foot. It’s not under the control of the nation Israel to this very day. I know you might think, “Well do they not have authority over it?” Well, yes authority over it but not over the most important part of it, the place of the temple. And there instead of a temple to the true God, we have a mosque to a false God. So, **Jerusalem today is still trodden under foot.**

2) Besieged for 42 Months

“and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.”

John Walvoord: Since the Gentiles are said to tread the holy city underfoot only forty-two months, this ill treatment better fits the **latter half of the week**. If the former half were mentioned, Jerusalem would be trodden underfoot for the entire seven-year period rather than for only forty-two months. The passage seems to anticipate freedom from Gentile dominion after the three and one-half years have run their course, which would mean that the second half of the seven-year period is in view.

The statement that the holy city is under Gentile control is borne out by the prophecy of Christ in **Luke 21:24** where He predicted of the people of Israel, “*They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*” The times of the Gentiles end at the second coming of Christ when Gentile dominion is destroyed and Christ establishes His kingdom. This is predicted in the seventh trumpet revealed later in this chapter. The first two verses then signify that while God is permitting Gentile dominion and persecution of Israel, God Himself will be the judge of her persecutors.

II. (:3-6) MINISTRY OF THE TWO WITNESSES UNDER DIVINE PROTECTION

A. (:3) Description of Their Prophetic Ministry

1. Ministry Commissioned by Divine Authority

“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses,”

Some take this as symbolic (e.g. the testimony of the church from the Law and the prophets, the Old and New Testaments, the Word of God coupled with the Spirit of God, etc.); others take a corporate view (e.g. some aspect of the church, believers who suffer martyrdom, combination of Israel and the church, etc.); but two distinct individuals are in view here. Probably these are two future unnamed prophets in the spirit and power of Moses and Elijah, rather than a reintroduction of Moses and Elijah or of Elijah and Enoch.

Buist Fanning: It seems most likely, however, that we should understand the witnesses as **unnamed individual spokesmen for God** in that future day rather than as representatives of a wide body of Christian prophets bearing witness at that time or of the church in its prophetic role throughout the age. The imagery of **vv. 7–12** becomes very unwieldy or even incoherent when read corporately (killed by the beast, bodies lie unburied, etc.).

Daniel Akin: it seems best to see the two witnesses as individuals or a group who come in the spirit of Moses and Elijah to fulfill a specific ministry given to them by God.

[Alternate View:]

John MacArthur: While it is impossible to be dogmatic about the specific identity of these two preachers, there are a number of reasons that suggest that they may be **Moses and Elijah**.

First, the miracles they will perform (destroying their enemies with fire, withholding rain, turning water into blood, and striking the earth with plagues) are similar to the judgments inflicted in the Old Testament by Moses and Elijah for the purpose of stimulating repentance. Elijah called down fire from heaven (**2 Kings 1:10, 12**) and pronounced a three-and-one-half-year drought on the land (**1 Kings 17:1; James 5:17**)—the same length as the drought brought by the two witnesses (**Rev. 11:6**). Moses turned the waters of the Nile into blood (**Ex. 7:17–21**) and announced the other plagues on Egypt recorded in **Exodus chapters 7–12**.

Second, both the Old Testament and Jewish tradition expected Moses and Elijah to return in the future. **Malachi 4:5** predicted the return of Elijah, and the Jews believed that God’s promise to raise up a prophet like Moses (**Deut. 18:15, 18**) necessitated his return (cf. **John 1:21; 6:14; 7:40**). Jesus’ statement in **Matthew 11:14** that “*if you are willing to accept it, John [the Baptist] himself is Elijah who was to come*” does not necessarily preclude Elijah’s future

return. Since the Jews did not accept Jesus, John did not fulfill that prophecy. He came “*in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*” (**Luke 1:17**).

Third, both Moses and Elijah (perhaps representing the Law and the Prophets) appeared with Christ at the Transfiguration, the preview of the Second Coming (**Matt. 17:3**).

Fourth, both left the earth in unusual ways. Elijah never died, but was transported to heaven in a fiery chariot (**2 Kings 2:11–12**), and God supernaturally buried Moses’ body in a secret location (**Deut. 34:5–6; Jude 9**). The statement of **Hebrews 9:27** that “*it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment*” does not rule out Moses’ return, since there are other rare exceptions to that general statement (such as Lazarus; **John 11:14, 38–44**).

Since the text does not specifically identify these two preachers, the view defended above, like all other views regarding their identity, must remain speculation.

2. Ministry Calling Down Prophetic Judgment

“and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days,”

Sola Scriptura: **Revelation 11:3** is the seventh explicit reference to a three and a half year period in the books of Daniel and Revelation. The burden of proof that **Revelation 11:3** does not refer to the second half of Daniel’s Seventieth Week lies with those who would argue differently. This question might have been left in the unsolvable category if it were not for the three woes. The strategic placement of the ministry of the two witnesses between woes one and two prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the ministry of the two witnesses must occur during the **second half** of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. John’s choice to place the details of the ministry of the witnesses in **Revelation 11** is logical. The death of the two witnesses coincides with the end of the Seventieth Week and provides another reason for John to “*prophesy against many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.*”

S. Lewis Johnson: the first coming of our Lord was heralded by John the Baptist. He was the ambassador of the king. It was his task to be the **forerunner**. It was his task to warn Israel that he was coming, and that judgment also would come if there is no response to the ministry of the king that would come. Well, the same thing is true, in a different way, with reference to the Second Advent of our Lord. Evidently, from the information we have from **chapter 11**, there will be **two witnesses**, not simply one like John the Baptist, but two witnesses who will herald the soon coming advent of the king.

3. Ministry Cloaked in Mourning and Sorrow for Lack of Repentance

“clothed in sackcloth.”

John MacArthur: **Sackcloth** was rough, heavy, coarse cloth worn in ancient times as a symbol of mourning, distress, grief, and humility. Jacob put on sackcloth when he thought Joseph had been killed (**Gen. 37:34**). David ordered the people to wear sackcloth after the murder of Abner (**2 Sam. 3:31**) and wore it himself during the plague God sent in response to his sin of numbering the people (**1 Chron. 21:16**). King Jehoram wore sackcloth during the siege of Samaria (**2 Kings 6:30**), as did King Hezekiah when Jerusalem was attacked (**2 Kings 19:1**). Job (**Job 16:15**), Isaiah (**Isa. 20:2**), and Daniel (**Dan. 9:3**) also wore sackcloth.

The two witnesses will put on sackcloth as an object lesson to express their great sorrow for the wretched and unbelieving world, racked by God's judgments, overrun by demon hordes, and populated by wicked, sinful people who refuse to repent. They will also mourn because of the desecration of the temple, the oppression of Jerusalem, and the ascendancy of Antichrist.

S. Lewis Johnson: And so, these individuals are individuals who **prophesy in sackcloth**. What's interesting about it, to me, is the fact that the kind of clothes they wear fits the doctrine that they are giving. For they are individuals who are prophesying of judgment, and therefore, consequently of a great deal of **mourning**. So, they are clothed in a way in which their message itself is underlined. They are not prophets who are clothed in the kinds of clothes you might buy at Brooks Brothers, but in sackcloth because their message is not a message of happiness and joy. It's rather a **message of judgment**.

B. (:4) Divine Enablement of Their Ministry = Power of the Holy Spirit

*"These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands
that stand before the Lord of the earth."*

John MacArthur: John identifies them merely as **the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth**. That enigmatic description is drawn from **Zechariah 4:1–14**.

Zechariah's prophecy looks forward to the restoration of Israel in the Millennium (cf. **Zech. 3:8–10**). The **olive trees** and **lampstands** symbolize the **light of revival**, since olive oil was commonly used in lamps. The connecting of the lamps to the trees is intended to depict a constant, spontaneous, automatic supply of oil flowing from the olive trees into the lamps. That symbolizes the truth that God will not bring salvation blessing from human power, but by the **power of the Holy Spirit** (cf. **Zech. 4:6**). Like Joshua and Zerubbabel, the two witnesses will lead a spiritual revival of Israel culminating in the building of a temple. Their preaching will be instrumental in Israel's national conversion (**Rev. 11:13**; cf. **Rom. 11:4–5, 26**), and the temple associated with that conversion will be the millennial temple.

Sola Scriptura: John's audience knew the witnesses as prophetic characters, but did not know their names or unique identities.

Tony Garland: The allusion back to Zechariah's visions is further proof of the **Jewishness** of these individuals, but also underscores their function in bringing Israel toward the final restoration seen by Zechariah. The Church Age having come to a close, the **focus has shifted back to Israel** in preparation of a faithful nation suitable for the Millennial Kingdom to come.

C. (:5) Divine Protection of Their Ministry

1. First Image of Protection from Harm

*"And if anyone desires to harm them,
fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies;"*

Tony Garland: Although set forth as a conditional statement, the remainder of the passage implies that the vast majority of people strongly oppose their ministry and do desire to harm them, for they rejoice at their eventual death (**Rev. 11:10+**). In the eyes of the earth dwellers who will hate these witnesses, the ability of the beast to kill them is a testimony to his

invincibility. He is seen as a “savior” from these detestable prophets and their defeat no doubt elevates his status before the earth dwellers (**Rev. 13:4+**). . .

Whether the fire comes directly from their mouths, or whether their words call it forth, it would seem that the unique miraculous authority which attends such a defensive ability is intended to manifest the divine source of their ministry (**Num. 10:2; 16:35; Ps. 106:18; Heb. 12:29**). The unusual nature of their response to their enemies brings to mind the incident in Numbers where Korah’s household is judged (**Num. 16:28-33**).

Moses explains that the unusual nature of the judgment serves a specific purpose. It provides unique testimony to the **source of the judgment** (God) and the **authority of Moses as His spokesman**. So will this fire-consuming ability testify that God is the one judging the opponents of His two witnesses and that they have His full authority in their ministry. We should also remember the **unique period** in which these two individuals minister. This is a time in history during which demonic powers are at a peak (**Rev. 9:1-2+, Rev 13-19+; Rev 12:12+**) and the time of the lawless one, the Antichrist, whose coming “*is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish*” (**2Th. 2:9-10a**). These are the days of the false prophet who “*performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men*” (**Rev. 13:13+**). These unique historic factors also argue for a completely nonfigurative interpretation because these two witnesses must exhibit miraculous powers which are on a par with, or even superior to, that of the man of sin and his false prophet in an age frequented by **demonic manifestations**.

2. Second Image of Protection from Harm

*“and if anyone would desire to harm them,
in this manner he must be killed.”*

Daniel Akin: they are untouchable until their work is done. The Baptist missionary to China, **Lottie Moon**, said, “I have a firm conviction that I am immortal ’til my work is done” (**Akin**, 10 *Who Changed the World*, 64). She was right, and that is a truth every servant of God can claim.

D. (:6) Destructive Power of Their Ministry

1. Restrain Rainfall

*“These have the power to shut up the sky,
in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying.”*

Tony Garland: James refers to the similar event in Elijah’s life to underscore the power of prayer in the life of believers. “*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months*” (**Jas. 5:17**). Both Jesus and James inform us that the heaven was shut against rain for a period of three years and six months—a period of time matching the days of their (the two witnesses) prophecy: 1,260 days (**Rev. 11:3+**).

2. Transform Waterways into Blood

“and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood,”

3. Unleash Variety of Plagues

“and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.”

John MacArthur: In both the Old and the New Testaments, God often used miracles to **authenticate His messengers**. In the Tribulation time when the world is overrun by supernatural demonic activity, false religion, murder, sexual perversion, and rampant wickedness, the supernatural signs performed by the two witnesses will mark them as true prophets of God.

The extent of their great power will be revealed when they demonstrate power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying. That will greatly intensify the torment people are experiencing. The third trumpet judgment resulted in the poisoning of one-third of the earth's fresh water supply (8:10–11). Added to that, the three-and-one-half-year drought lasting throughout the 1,260 days of their preaching (v. 3; cf. **Luke 4:25; James 5:17**) brought by the two witnesses will cause widespread devastation of crops and loss of human and animal life through thirst and starvation.

Further, like Moses the two witnesses will have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire. The havoc these two miracle-working preachers will wreak all over the earth will cause them to be hated and feared. People

will no doubt search desperately for a way to destroy them, but to no avail. **They will be invulnerable and unstoppable for the duration of their ministry.**

III. (:7-10) MARTYRDOM AND DESECRATION BY THE BEAST OF THE ABYSS

A. (:7) Martyrdom of the Two Witnesses

“And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.”

Arthur Pink: This name “*the Beast*” contrasts the **Antichrist** from the true Christ as “*the Lamb*,” and it is a significant fact that by far the great majority of passages where the Lord Jesus is so designated are also found here in the Apocalypse. The “Lamb” is the Saviour of sinners; the “Beast” is the persecutor and slayer of the saints. The “Lamb” calls attention to the gentleness of Christ; the “Beast” tells of the ferocity of the Antichrist. . . Under the Law lambs were ceremonially clean and used in sacrifice, but beasts were unclean and unfit for sacrifices.

John MacArthur: This is the first of thirty-six references in Revelation to the **beast** and anticipates the more detailed information about him to come in **chapters 13 and 17**. He is introduced here with emphasis on his origin. He is said to come up out of the abyss, indicating that he is empowered by Satan. Since Satan is depicted as a dragon (12:3, 9), this figure is not Satan. The revelation about him in **chapter 13** indicates that the beast is a world ruler (often called **Antichrist**) who imitates the true Christ, rules over the people of the world, and demands their worship (13:1–8). The abyss is the prison for certain demons. Though he is a man, the beast is energized by the demonic presence and power coming from the abyss. To the great joy and relief of the sinful world, the beast (Antichrist) will finally overcome the two witnesses and kill them (cf. his other successful assaults in 12:17; 13:7).

[Alternate View:]

John Walvoord: As in the case of many other great prophets of God, when their ministry is finished, God permits their enemies to overcome them. According to **verse 7**, the beast from the bottomless pit, which is none other than Satan himself, makes war against them and overcomes

them and kills them. Of interest is the fact that this is the first of thirty-six references in Revelation to the beast (Gr., the, *rion*), not to be confused with the living creatures of **chapter 4**. The beast out of the pit is Satan. The beast out of the sea is the world dictator (**13:1**). The beast out of the land is the false religious leader of that day (**13:11**). This **unholy trinity** is the satanic counterfeit of the divine Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

B. (:8-10) Desecration of Dead Bodies

1. (:8) Left Lying in the Streets of Jerusalem

“And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.”

Buist Fanning: Verse 8 simply continues the focus on Jerusalem that started in vv. 1–2. The larger vision (vv. 1–13) pertains to Jerusalem at the end of the tribulation period, and so we should understand John’s attitude toward Jerusalem as both negative (it will be subjected to severe judgment because of its sinful rejection of Christ) and positive (this is God’s disciplinary punishment leading to its forgiveness and restoration). This explains the mixed description found in vv. 2, 8: “*the holy city*” and “*the great city*,” but also “in spiritual terms is called Sodom and Egypt.” The names “Sodom and Egypt” reflect a pattern of evil, labeling Jerusalem as guilty of widespread wickedness like Sodom and of idolatry like Egypt (**Deut 29:23; Isa 1:9–10; 3:9; 19:1; Jer 23:14; 49:18; Ezek 20:7; 23:27**), both of which God judged severely. For Jerusalem to be the place where Israel’s messiah was crucified (**Rev 11:8c**) adds to the paradox, but it is understandable that God’s witnesses would complete their ministry there and that Jerusalem would be the locus for judgment and repentance when the witnesses are spectacularly vindicated after three-and-a-half days (vv. 11–13).

Daniel Akin: Jerusalem in this day will be no better than Sodom or Egypt. A Jew hearing this would be shocked, scandalized, angered. Yet her wickedness in that day will approach her wickedness when she crucified the sinless Son of God. These two superlative witnesses will be treated in the same shameful fashion as their Lord. The words of Jesus come to mind at this point: “*A slave is not greater than his master*” (**John 15:20**).

John MacArthur: In the ancient world, exposing an enemy’s dead body was the ultimate way of dishonoring and desecrating them. God forbade the Israelites to engage in that practice (**Deut. 21:22–23**).

S. Lewis Johnson: We have said a number of times that the book of Revelations contains a number of symbols and figures of speech, and here is one which is interpreted for us. “*The great city, Sodom and Egypt*,” is said to be Sodom and Egypt spiritually. That is, the **city of Jerusalem** has the characteristics of Sodom and Egypt, **wickedness and extreme worldliness**. So, the apostle gives us a clue as to how we should read this book, looking for symbols and figures. But when they are particularly explained for us, rejoicing in that, but remembering to that ordinarily, we take this book to be written in the **normal sense of the language**.

2. (:9) Looked Upon as a Humiliating Spectacle and Refused Burial

“And those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb.”

Tony Garland: Not only will their bodies be withheld from burial, but it seems likely they will be proactively protected from disturbance by scavengers, such as birds and dogs which would normally descend upon unguarded carcasses (2K. 9:10; Ps. 79:2; Jer. 7:33; Rev. 19:17-18+). They are prevented from burial and protected from scavengers because they serve as trophies which testify to the power of the beast and the victory of the world over the torment which they delivered at the hand of God. So long as they lie inert on the pavement they provide visual confirmation of the superiority of the beast (Rev. 13:4+).

3. (:10) Celebrated as No Longer Bringing Conviction of Soul

a. Party Time

*“And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them
and make merry;
and they will send gifts to one another,”*

Daniel Akin: they will gloat and celebrate and send gifts (11:10)! A new holiday will be established in order to celebrate the deaths of the two men of God. We can call it “Dead Witnesses Day.” What a stunning indictment of human depravity, wickedness, sinfulness, and evil.

S. Lewis Johnson: The goodness of God, the grace of God, the greatness of God, men may laugh at and may think they have overcome, but in the final analysis, God will overcome their horrible happiness at the apparent defeat of the plans and purposes of God and accomplish his own victory.

b. Peaceful Time

“because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.”

John Walvoord: A righteous prophet is always a torment to a wicked generation. The two witnesses are an obstacle to wickedness, unbelief, and satanic power prevalent in that time. If their ministry is in the time of great tribulation, it is all the more a thorn in the side of the world rulers of that day; and their death symbolizes the silencing of the prophets who announce the doom of those who will not believe in God. The Word of God makes it clear that it is often possible to silence a witness to the truth by death, but such action does not destroy the truth that has been announced. The power of God will be ultimately revealed. If this is at the end of the great tribulation, only a few days remain before Christ comes back in power and great glory.

IV. (:11-13) VINDICATION OF GOD’S TWO WITNESSES AND REACTION OF TERROR

A. (:11) Vindication by Miraculous Resurrection

1. Resurrection from the Dead

*“And after the three and a half days
the breath of life from God came into them,
and they stood on their feet;”*

J. Hampton Keathley, III: “And after three and one half days.” This is long enough for the bodies to have begun to decay. As the Lord did with Lazarus, God waits until there is no question about their death, **then suddenly God intervenes.**

“*The breath of life from God.*” “*From*” is *ek* meaning “*out of*.” The very life-giving breath from God Himself is breathed into them (**Gen. 2:7**) and “*they stood on their feet.*” “*Stood*” is an aorist tense and may stress **suddenness**. They are pictured lying there on the street with the party going on, and then suddenly, they stand up like a man waking up from a nap. What an effect this will have!

“*And great fear fell ...*” “*Fell*” is also an aorist and stresses the **suddenness of the effect**. From drunken merry making one moment to soberness and great fear the next. The word “*fell*” is most graphic, like a wet blanket, they were enveloped in fear. Suddenly now, they begin to realize God was not dead nor defeated; Satan would not be victorious and they were doomed.

2. Reaction of Terror

“and great fear fell upon those who were beholding them.”

B. (:12) Vindication by Glorious Ascension

1. Glorious Invitation

“And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, ‘Come up here.’”

Buist Fanning: An even greater mark of their vindication by God came about (**v. 12a–b**) when a commanding “*voice from heaven*” (cf. **10:4, 8; 14:2, 13**) instructed the two to “*come up here*” (ἀνάβατε ὧδε). John records that they did so immediately, ascending “*up into heaven in a cloud.*” Here the influence of two typologies that are intermingled in this passage come together in one image: just as a cloud received Christ as he ascended to heaven (**Acts 1:9**) and as Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind into heaven (**2 Kgs 2:11**; cf. 1 En. 39:3), so these two prophets are transported visibly to their welcome by God on high in **public recognition of their faithful service**. This evidence of divine approval is witnessed in this case, however, not by beloved followers but by terrified foes: “*Their enemies watched them*” (**v. 12d**; same verb as in **v. 11d**).

2. Glorious Reception

“And they went up into heaven in the cloud,”

Charles Swindoll: The ministry of the two witnesses will certainly leave a profound mark on the lives of those who witness their exploits. Yet as we examine the lives of those prophets, we see that they will have no basis for personal boasting. Everything that sets them apart—their incredible preservation, their miraculous powers, and their convicting preaching—comes from the sovereign hand of God. When their mission ends, their enabling power ends too. But God doesn’t abandon His vessels like disposable shells; instead, He will turn tragedy into triumph, whisking His two fearless witnesses into His heavenly presence.

3. Reaction of Terror

“and their enemies beheld them.”

C. (:13) Vindication by Shocking Judgment on the City of Jerusalem by a Great Earthquake

1. Shock of Great Earthquake

“And in that hour there was a great earthquake,”

Tony Garland: There are numerous earthquakes during the Tribulation. A previous great earthquake attended the opening of the sixth seal (**Rev. 6:12+**). As great as this earthquake is, a

still greater earthquake—the greatest of all recorded history—is yet to follow at the pouring forth of the seventh bowl judgment (**Rev. 16:17+**).

In the subsequent earthquake associated with the seventh bowl, Jerusalem is said to be “*divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell*” (**Rev. 16:19+**). In this **lesser precursor** to the final great earthquake, only one tenth of the city falls. Only a portion falls resulting in a relatively lesser death toll in order to provide opportunity for those remaining to respond in repentance and turn to God.

2. Slaughter Caused by Great Earthquake

a. Tenth of the City of Jerusalem

“and a tenth of the city fell;”

b. 7,000 People Killed

“and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake,”

John MacArthur: The term *people* in the Greek text is literally “*names of men*.” That unusual phrase may indicate that the seven thousand who were killed were **prominent people**, perhaps leaders in Antichrist’s world government.

3. Reaction of Terror and Glorifying God

a. Terror

“and the rest were terrified”

b. Glorifying God

“and gave glory to the God of heaven.”

Greg Allen: Humankind will fear greatly and will be **forced to give glory** to the God who had just borne witness of Himself through these two amazing prophets. But sadly, it does not seem that the people of this world will give Him glory in the sense of repenting of sin. (It may be more like the ‘glory’ that emperor Julian is reputed to have given when, wounded in the Battle of Ctesiphon—and realizing that his death would result in Christianity becoming the religion of the empire—“he filled his hand with blood, flung it into the air and cried, ‘You have won, O Galilean.’ Thus he gave utterance at once to a confession of the victory and to a blasphemy. So infatuated was he” [**Theodore**, *Ecclesiastical History*, Book III, Ch. 20].) It appears that, though giving God glory after this earthquake, their hearts still remain hard and unyielding toward Him—as is evidenced by the warfare they then go on later to make against the Lord Jesus at His return to this earth (**Revelation 19:19-21**).

(;14) EPILOGUE – THIRD WOE COMING QUICKLY

“The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.”

Thomas Constable: This verse is **transitional** (cf. **Revelation 9:12**). It refers to the end of the second woe (the sixth trumpet, **Revelation 9:21**) and ties this judgment in with the third woe (the seventh trumpet). It clarifies that God interjected the revelations of the mighty angel and the little scroll (**Revelation 10:1-11**) and the two witnesses (**Revelation 11:1-13**) into the chronological sequence of trumpet judgments. He did so to give supplementary, encouraging information. The

final woe will follow "*quickly*" (Gr. *tachy*, "*soon*," cf. **Revelation 2:16; Revelation 3:11; Revelation 22:7; Revelation 22:12; Revelation 22:20**), on the heels of the second woe.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How has God prepared you, empowered you and protected you for the ministry He has designed for you?
- 2) Why is it important not to engage in speculation about some of the details of these visions (such as the identity of the two witnesses)?
- 3) How is this an example of how present suffering cannot be compared to future glory?
- 4) How satisfying do you find it that despite the apparent injustice of this world, God will eventually have the last word and set things right?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Guzik: In point of fact, today there are Jewish people very interested in rebuilding the temple and resuming sacrifice, and are making preparations to do that exact thing even now.

- i. Today you can visit the Temple Institute in the Jewish Quarter of the old city in Jerusalem. There, a group of Jews absolutely dedicated to rebuilding the temple attempt to educate the public and raise awareness for a new temple. They are trying to replicate everything they can for a new temple, down to the specific pots and pans used in sacrifice.
- ii. Israel is a nation again, and efforts to rebuild the temple are for real. The main Jewish group leading the charge to rebuild the temple is an organization called **Faithful of the Temple Mount**, who say they will continue their efforts to re-establish the Jewish temple on the Mount. One leader in the group said, "We shall continue our struggle until the Israeli flag is flying from the Dome of the Rock." In Israel, there are students being trained for the priesthood, learning how to conduct animal sacrifices in the rebuilt temple.
- iii. It is important to understand that most Jews – religious or secular – do not care one bit about building a temple. And if there were one rebuilt, sacrifice would be difficult in a day of aggressive animal rights activists. Yet, there is a small, strong, highly dedicated group who live to see a rebuilt temple – a temple that will fulfill prophecy.
- iv. Rightly, Christians get excited when they see efforts to rebuild the temple. At the same time, we should understand that the **basic impulse** behind rebuilding the temple is not of God at all – the desire to have a place to sacrifice for sin. Christians believe that all sacrifice for sin was finished at the cross, and any further sacrifice for sin is an offense to God, because it denies the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

v. Orthodox Jews consider that the Messiah will rebuild the temple; however, the man they may initially embrace as their Messiah may in fact be the **Antichrist**: *I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive.* (**John 5:43**)

Daniel Akin: Particular spiritual lessons stand out, on which most students of the Apocalypse can agree. **Duvall** provides a good summary of these lessons:

- Although God's people are protected spiritually, they are still vulnerable to persecution.
- God's people are called to speak prophetically.
- The world will often react with hostility to the church's prophetic witness.
- God promises to raise His people from the dead, reversing their temporary defeat at the hands of evil powers.
- The witnessing church possesses tremendous power and authority to carry out its mission. (*Revelation*, 149)

Tony Garland: The “*beast*” most probably refers to the **future Antichrist**. Five facts support this view.

First, the persecutor of the witnesses is not “a beast” but “*the beast*” (τό θηρίον [*to thērion*]). This use of a **definite article** indicates that he is a figure well known to the writer. Since teaching on the Antichrist was so familiar to Jews and Christians through Old and New Testament prophecy (**Dan. 7:2-25; 9:27 ; 11:35-45 ; Mat. 24:15; Mark 13:14; 2Th. 2:3-12; 1Jn. 4:1-6**), it is not impossible that John was thinking of him here.

Second, since the word “*beast*” (θηρίον [*thērion*]) in the Apocalypse is always used with reference to the future Antichrist or his system (**Rev. 13:1+ ; Rev 14:9+, Rev 14:11+ ; Rev 15:2+ ; Rev 16:2+ ; Rev 17:3+ ; Rev 19:20+ ; Rev 20:10+**) [we note one exception: **Rev. 13:11+**], the beast in **11:7+** should be seen in the same light.

Third, the beast will come up *out of* (ἐκ [*ek*]) the **abyss**, that is, it will have a satanic, demonic source and character (cf. **Rev. 9:1+**). This feature corresponds with that of the coming Antichrist in **2 Thessalonians 2:9-10**.

Fourth, the description of the beast as “*coming up out of the abyss*” (ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἄβύσσου [*anabainon ek tēs abyssou*], **Rev. 11:7+**) corresponds with the beast “*about to come from the abyss*” (ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἄβύσσου [*anabainein ek tēs abyssou*]) in **Rev. 17:8+** (cf. **Rev. 13:1+**). This correspondence is illuminating, for since the beast in **Rev. 17:8+** probably refers to the future Antichrist with his kingdom, the same is probably the case in **Rev. 11:7+**.

Fifth, νικάω [*nikaō*] (“*to overcome*”) is used three times in the Apocalypse with reference to the enemy of God's people (**Rev. 6:2+ ; Rev 11:7+ ; Rev 13:7+**). Since other occurrences of the term are related directly to the coming Antichrist (**Rev. 6:2+ ; Rev 13:7+**), the same may be true in **Rev. 11:7+**.

Jerry Harmon: **The Temple and the Two Witnesses**

Seventh trumpet will sound at end of **Chap. 11**.

Interlude between sixth and seventh trumpets. We see here some things that will take place

before the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Severity of God's judgment picking up. God is in control no matter how things look. He is sovereign.

I. First Event: The Measuring of the Temple

John called to participate in the vision at certain times. Heightening the drama of what is about to happen. Herod's temple had been burned down. Gold melted down between the stones and the Romans had to tear apart the stones to get at the gold – fulfilling Christ's prophecy that not one stone would be left upon another.

Hard to measure something that doesn't exist – requires the construction of another temple in the future. Since book was written in 95 AD after temple already destroyed in 70 AD. [Preterists don't have this problem since they think book was written in 65 AD when temple still was standing.]

This is a vision – not John literally traveling to measure the temple. This is a prophetic passage.

Cf. **Dan. 9:27** – no temple existed when Daniel wrote this

Cf. **Ezek. 40 ff** – temple had been destroyed over a decade earlier

Temple will be rebuilt one day in order to fulfill prophecy of end times. Required for the abomination of desolation. The Antichrist is yet to come.

Jewish people are even now preparing for the rebuilding of the temple. They long for this.

Why does God want John to measure this temple = the Holy Place (naos)? Number the worshipers. Measurement is preparation for either destruction or preservation in the bible. This is for **protection** of the true people of God. God will have a remnant of Jewish people (**Zech. 13:8**) that He will bring through the fire of the Day of the Lord. (**Zech 14:1ff**)

Look at what he is not to measure. Don't bother with the outward court for it is given to the Gentiles.

II. Second Event: The Ministry of the Two Powerful Witnesses

Historist view: anybody in church history that resisted papal Rome

Preterist view: all over the map –

Futurist view: takes it as two literal people – Bible doesn't say so the rest is speculation.

Power of their ministry. Word of God being preached compared to fire coming out of their mouths.

Period of their ministry = 3.5 years

Purpose of their ministry = 2 olive trees and 2 lampstands – **Zech. 4:11** – oil and light – power of Spirit of God on their ministry

Persecution of their ministry (**vs. 7**) – nothing can happen to them until God is finished with what He wants them to do.

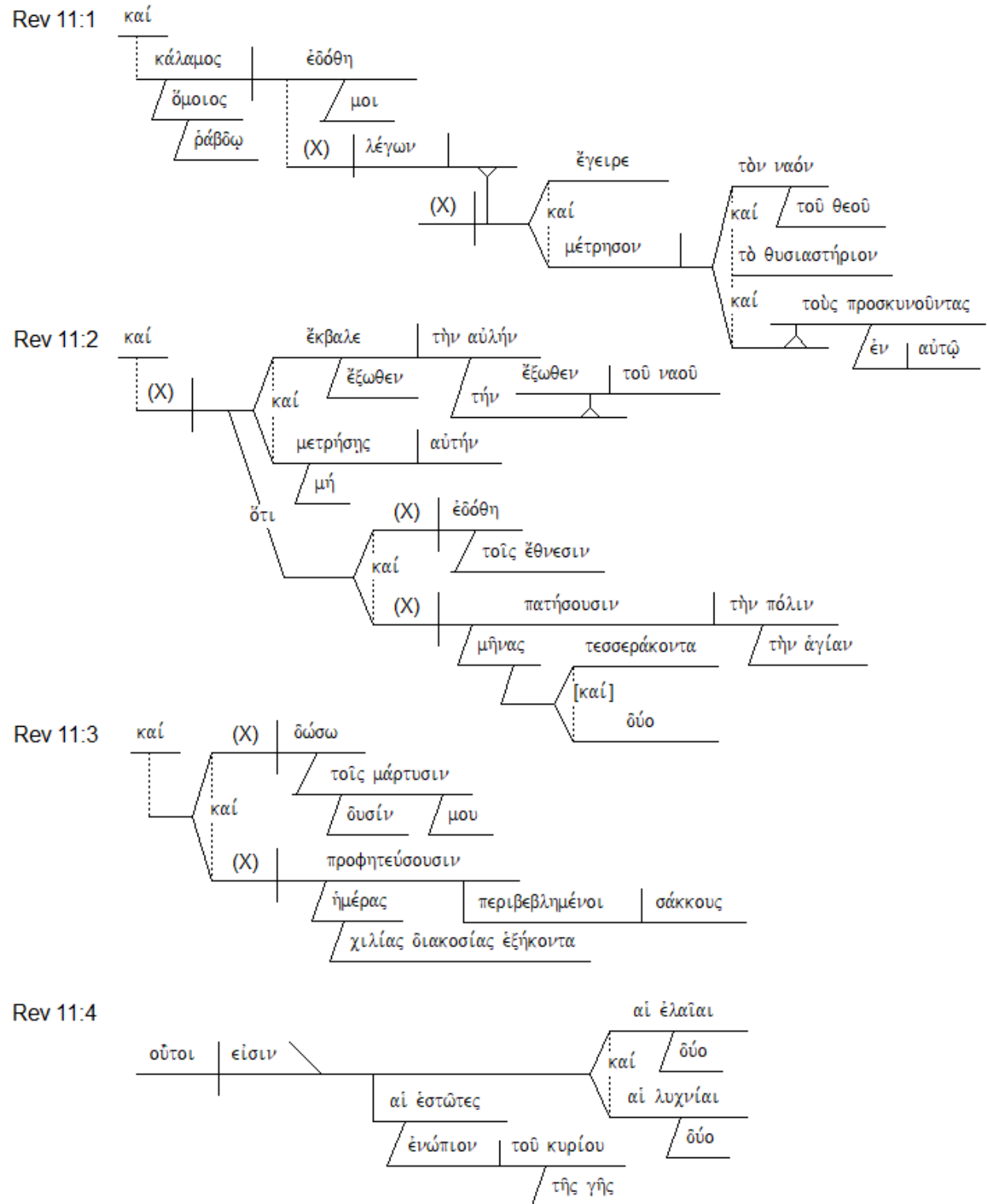
The Beast = **Rev. 13:1** – Ruler of the revived Roman Empire = Antichrist

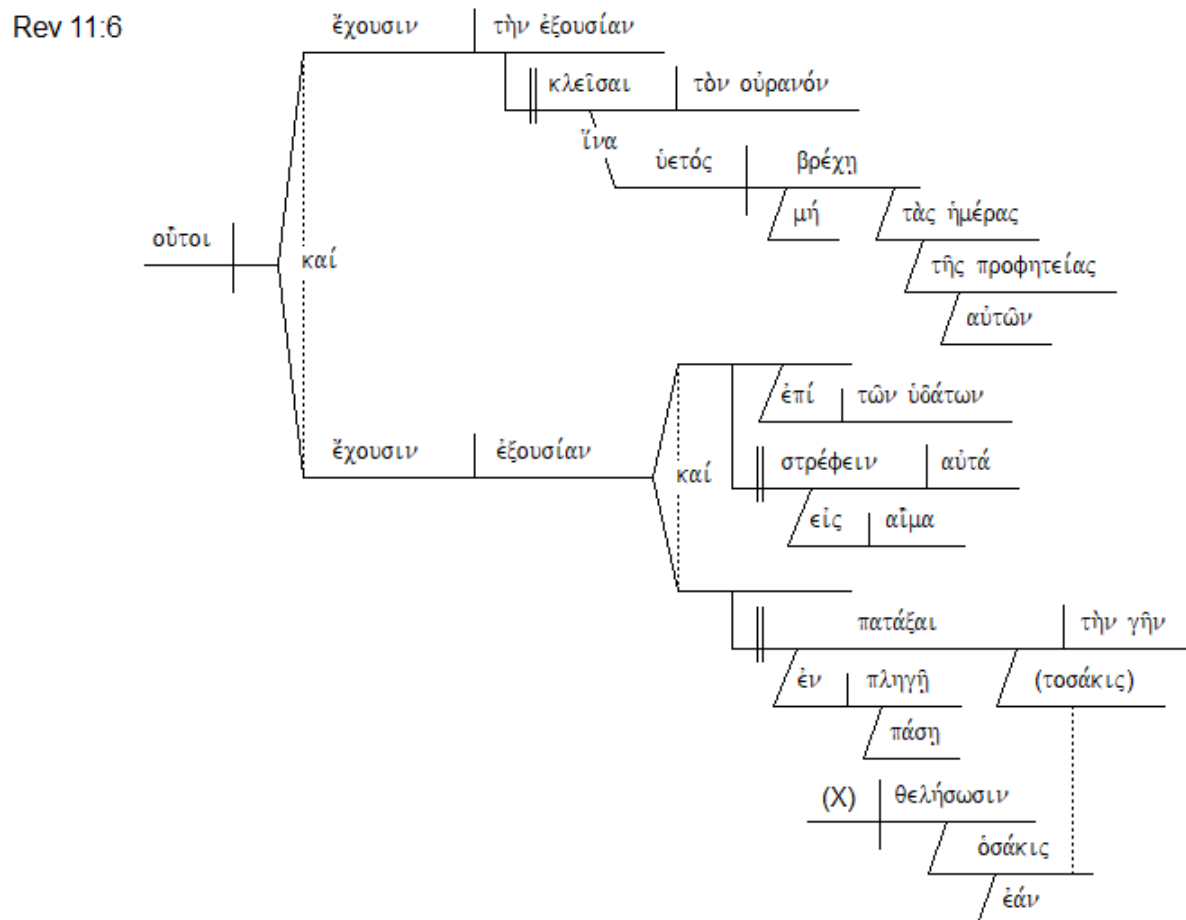
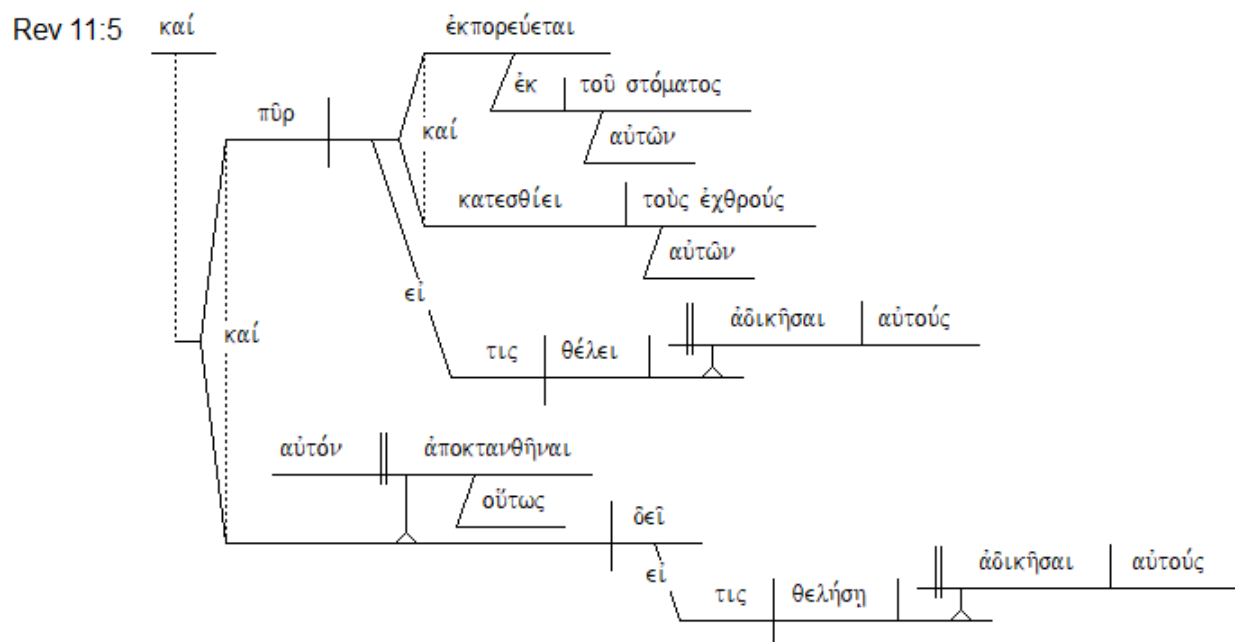
Panic over their ministry (**vs. 11**) – miraculous resurrection leading to incredible fear; still people won't repent because of hardened hearts – cf. teaching of Jesus – they won't believe even if someone rises from the dead

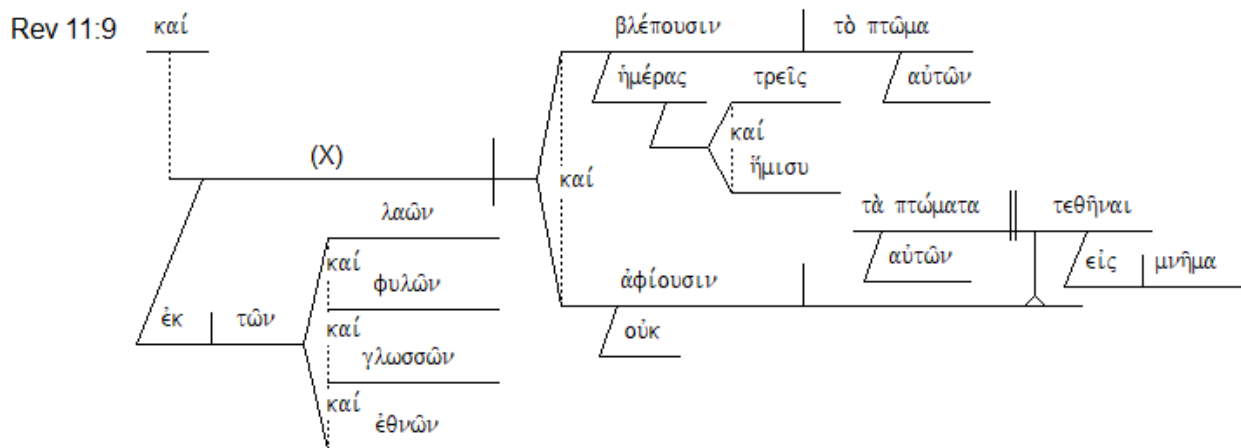
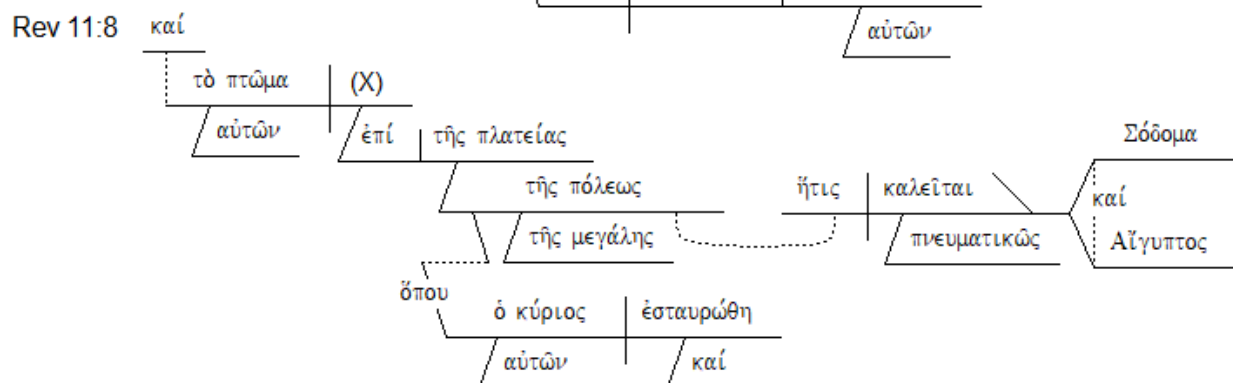
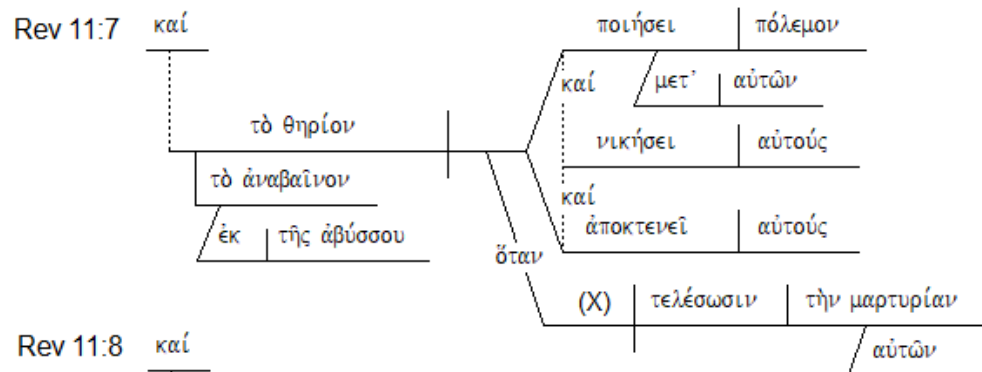
III. Third Event: The Majesty of the Seventh Trumpet (vs. 15)

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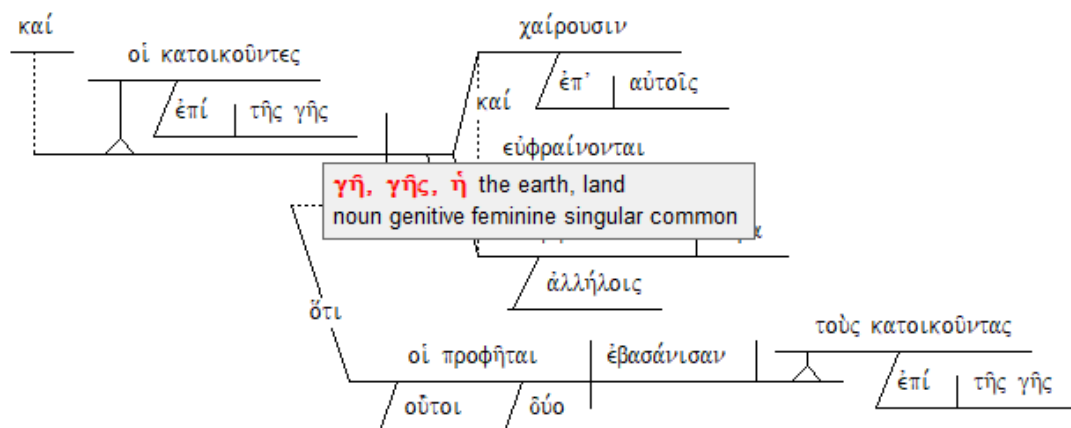
Leedy Greek Diagram:



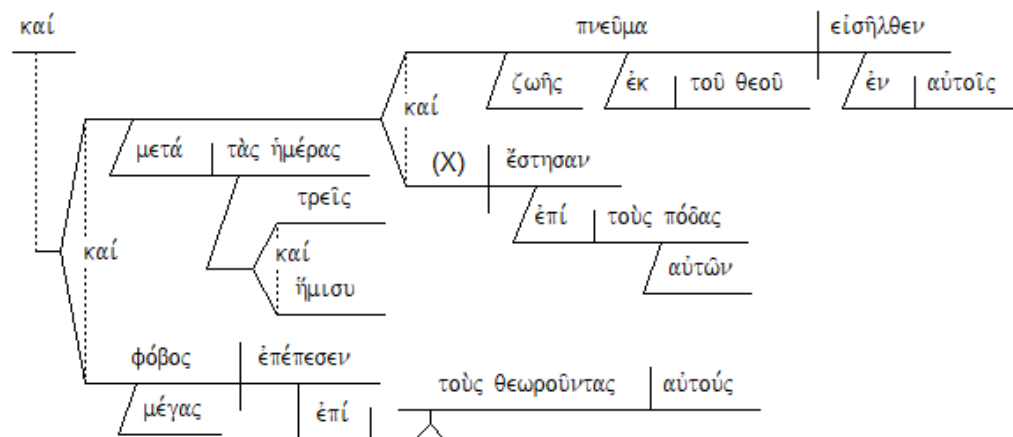




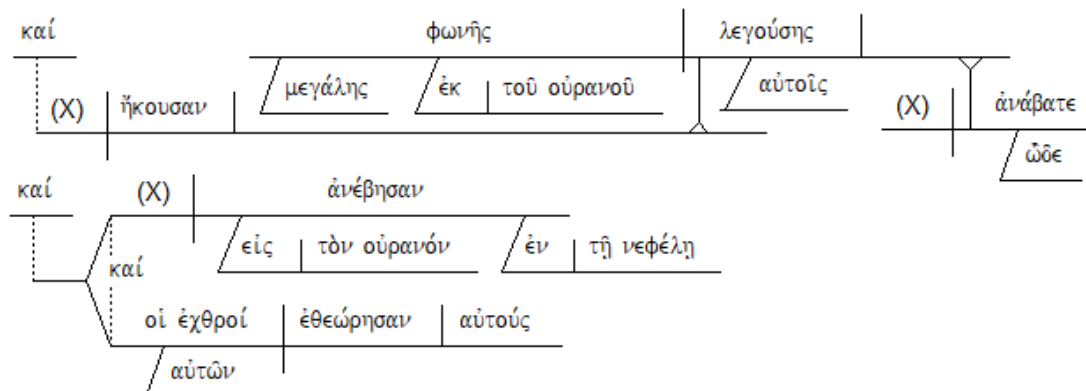
Rev 11:10



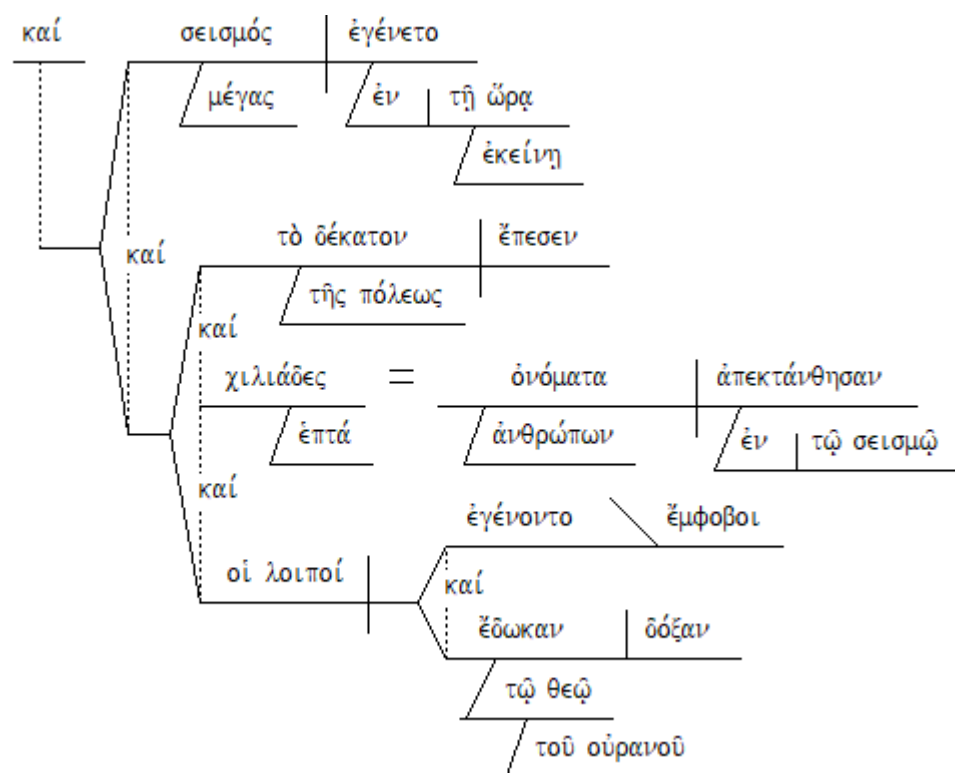
Rev 11:11



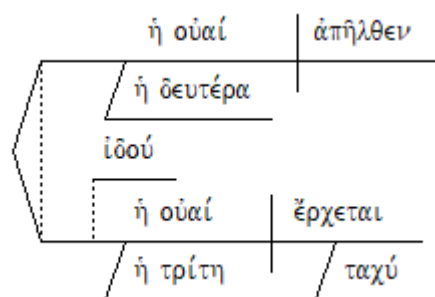
Rev 11:12



Rev 11:13



Rev 11:14



TEXT: Revelation 11:15-19

TITLE: SEVENTH TRUMPET – TRIUMPH OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

BIG IDEA:

WE SHOULD REJOICE NOW IN THE ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY OF THE ULTIMATE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST'S EVERLASTING KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: With the trumpet blast from the seventh angel (v. 15a) the series of trumpets that began in 8:2–7 is completed. But just as the opening of the seventh seal in 8:1 signaled no immediate judgments (unlike the first six seals; 6:1–17), so no explicit judgments follow the seventh trumpet blast. Instead, the seven bowls that eventually follow in **chapters 15–16** will fill out the judgments of the seventh trumpet (as the seven trumpets fill out the seventh seal). The cumulative effect of this **telescoping** of each of the seven judgments in this way is that each of the series brings the reader right up to the **climax of God's coming judgment and redemption**. The heavenly preview of the seventh trumpet in 10:6–7 sets the stage for this consummation (i.e., no further delay; God's mystery will be completed when the seventh angel sounds), and the description of the seven bowls as "*the seven last plagues*" (15:1) reinforces it at the other end.

Robert Mounce: When the seventh trumpet is blown, we might expect yet another plague but instead we hear voices in heaven declaring the eternal sovereignty of God and his Christ. The twenty-four elders join the celebration falling, before God in worship and praising him for having taken his great power and begun to reign. The time for rewarding his servants and pouring out his wrath on the destroyers of the earth has come. 11:15–19 is a summary of all that is yet to take place. The declaration of triumph by the heavenly hosts (v. 15) and the anthem of praise by the worshiping elders (vv. 17–18) introduce the great themes of the following chapters. The extensive use of the aorist tense (eleven times) conveys a sense of **absolute certainty** about the events taking place. . .

The burden of the angelic declaration is that the **dominion and rule of this world** have been transferred to God and his Christ, who shall reign forever and ever. This great eschatological event that establishes once and for all the universal sovereignty of God is a recurring theme in OT prophecy. Daniel predicted the day when the kingdom of God would utterly destroy the kingdoms of this world (**Dan 2:31–45**, esp. v. 44). The day is coming, said Zechariah, when God will be "*king over the whole earth*" (**Zech 14:9**). As the drama of the consummation moves toward the final scene, the hosts of heaven proclaim it *fait accompli*. During his earthly ministry Jesus had resisted the tempting offer of Satan to hand over the kingdoms of this world in exchange for worship (**Matt 4:8–9**). Now this sovereignty passes to him as a rightful possession in view of the successful completion of his messianic ministry. "*Our Lord and ... his Christ*" reflects **Ps 2:2**, which was interpreted messianically by the early church (Acts 4:26–28). Although the Son will ultimately be subjected to the Father (**1 Cor 15:28**), he will nevertheless share the eternal rule of God. The singular ("*he will reign*") emphasizes the **unity of this joint sovereignty**.

Grant Osborne: Indeed, this section effectively concludes this major section (4:1–11:19) of the book. As stated in the introduction to 4:1, the contrast between the throne of God (**chaps. 4–5**)

and the reign of the dragon and the Beast (**chaps. 12–13**) make this a natural break. Moreover, the heavenly acclamation of the victorious reign of God in **11:15–19** make this a perfect conclusion for this section. Note also the **inclusio** as the twenty-four elders, not part of the action since **chapters 4–5**, once more sound forth in worship (see **Michaels** 1997: 144). Thus, this seventh trumpet forms a kind of conclusion, summarizing many themes set forth in **chapters 4–11** and setting the stage for the elaboration of these themes in the rest of the book.

1. Third woe announced (**11:14**)
2. Announcement by heavenly voices (**11:15**)
3. Hymn of twenty-four elders (**11:16–18**)
4. Cosmic events heralding the end (**11:19**)

The interlude added the experiences of the people of God during the time of judgment depicted in the first two woes (**9:1–21**) and implicitly hinted that God’s judgment on the earth-dwellers was the result of their persecution of the saints (*lex talionis*, *law of retribution*). Therefore, the second woe could only be finalized when the whole picture was given.

John MacArthur: Satan will not relinquish his kingdom without a struggle. In a desperate and doomed effort to maintain control of the world, God will allow him to overrun it with hordes of demons during the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments (**9:1–19**). But his efforts will not keep the true King from returning and establishing His earthly kingdom (cf. **19:11–21**; **20:1–3, 10**). Jesus Christ will return to sit on the throne of His father David (**2 Sam. 7:12–16**) and take over the whole world from the satanically controlled people who now possess it. This is really the theme of Revelation – the triumph of God over Satan as evil is purged from the world and Christ becomes its holy ruler. . .

The message of the seventh trumpet is that Jesus Christ is the sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords. He will one day take the rule of the earth away from the usurper, Satan, and from Earth’s petty human rulers. History is moving inexorably toward its culmination in Christ’s earthly reign. When He returns, He will bring covenant blessings to the redeemed, but eternal judgment to those who reject Him.

Kendell Easley: The blowing of the seventh trumpet proclaims Christ’s long-awaited public reign, beginning with the time of judgment both for God’s saints and for those who are depraved.

I. (:15) CELEBRATION OF VICTORY OF CHRIST’S KINGDOM

A. Sounding of the Trumpet

“And the seventh angel sounded;”

B. Triumphant Refrain – Key Verse in the Book

“and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying,”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Note that their voices are “*loud*.” This stresses the joy and extreme exuberance over what God is going to do through the seventh trumpet.

Buist Fanning: Instead of an onslaught of judgment, the immediate effect of the seventh trumpet is “*loud voices in heaven*” proclaiming **God’s everlasting victory** over the whole world (**v. 15b–d**). This is another in the series of heavenly announcements in these chapters of the **imminent**

arrival of God's full judgment and redemption (10:6–7; 12:10–12; 14:7–8; 15:1; 18:2; 19:2). Giving heaven's perspective on earthly events, the voices proclaim the establishment of God's rule on earth, overcoming the existing evil empires: "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah*" (v. 15c). The full accomplishment has not yet come—the seven last plagues are still to be poured out (15:1–16:21) and Babylon must be defeated (17:1–18:24)—but God's rule on earth is already decided, and so it is certain and near at hand. The imminent victory is phrased using an aorist ("*has become*"; ἐγένετο) as well as a future verb ("*will reign*"; βασιλεύσει) to signal that what is anticipated has already been decreed and is about to come to pass on earth.

Van Parunak: "*Great voice*" φωνή μεγάλη is used frequently in the Greek Bible in the **singular**, to describe the voice of God (Deut 5:22) as well as of people (Gen 27:34), but the **plural** appears only here and in Lk 23:23, describing the demand of the chief priests, rulers, and people (23:13) for the Lord's death:

Luke 23:23 *And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed.*

Their joint demand for the death of God's supreme righteous witness recalls the raging of the peoples in Psalm 2:1 and anticipates the opposition we have just seen against the two witnesses in 11:3–13. Here we are reminded that God has a multitude who can cry "*with loud voices*" as well, perhaps angels as suggested by the LXX of Job 38:7,

Job 38:7 [LXX] *When the stars were made, all my angels praised me with a loud voice.*

David Thompson: What happens here in heaven is a worship service that anticipates Jesus Christ coming back to earth and taking it over and establishing a complete righteous kingdom. When Paul presented his message in Athens, he predicted that God has "*fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness.*" Heaven realizes the day is near and the Kingdom is about to Come.

1. Transfer of Dominion

*"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord,
and of His Christ;"*

Kendell Easley: The first line announces **transfer of this world's kingship** (notice the singular). Satan had assumed kingship, and indeed could be called "*the prince of this world*" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He had even claimed ability to offer all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus (Matt. 4:8–9). He was a usurper, and in the days of the blowing of the seventh trumpet, the kingdom publicly returns to our Lord (God the Father) and his Christ (God the Son), recalling Psalm 2:2: "*The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.*"

The second line proclaims the eternal rule of the divine kingship over the world by Christ and God. His reign for ever and ever will never be interrupted. This rule had long been predicted by the ancient prophets of Israel as the LORD's everlasting goal (Dan. 2:44; Zech. 14:9). How that transfer of kingship will be worked out is detailed in the two dramas with which vision two ends (12–14 and 15–16).

Grant Osborne: The heavenly throne will become the earthly throne (see 22:1–2), and this will be an eternal reign. The emphasis on the eternal nature of God (1:6; 4:9, 10; 5:13; 7:12; 10:6; 15:3, 7), of Christ (1:18; 5:13), of the final kingdom (11:15), and of our eternal reign with Christ (22:5; cf. 20:4) in Revelation shows the centrality of this theme in the book. The temporal reign of sin and the temporal nature of life in this sinful world will be replaced by an eternal Godhead, an eternal kingdom, and eternal life in glory for the faithful children of God. The suffering of the people of God (6:9–11; 10:9–10; 11:2, 7–10) will result in their vindication (6:11; 7:13–17; 8:3–5; 10:7, 9–10; 11:1, 18) and resurrection to eternal glory (11:11–12, 15). The Son of Man passage in Dan. 7:13–14 stated, “*His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed*” (see also Ps. 10:16; Dan. 2:44; Zech. 14:9). These are now fulfilled in a final way with the coming of God’s eternal kingdom.

John MacArthur: This phrase also describes the kingdom in its broadest sense, looking forward to divine rule over the creation and the new creation. No differentiation is made between the earthly millennial kingdom and the eternal kingdom, as, for example, Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15:24–28. At the end of the thousand years, the millennial kingdom will merge with the eternal kingdom, in which Christ will reign forever and ever. Once the reign of Christ begins, it will change form, but never end or be interrupted. . .

All attempts to equate this glorious reign of Christ over the whole earth with any past event or with the church is utterly foreign and contradictory to the clear eschatological teaching of Scripture, including especially this passage. There is no way this text can be fulfilled except by the universal reign of Jesus Christ over the whole earth – as the prophets had for so long predicted.

J.A. Seiss: Not yet has the sovereignty of this world become the Lord’s. All earthly governments, principalities, and powers, from the beginning until now, are uniformly represented in the Scriptures as wild beasts, having no lawful owner, and full of destructive savageness and offensive uncleanness. A lion with eagle’s wings, a bear crunching bones and flesh, a four-winged and four-headed leopard, a nondescript with many horns, dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly, having great iron teeth to devour and break in pieces; these are the prophetic symbols of the greatest and most lauded of them. Even the premiership of Daniel himself in one of them does not alter its general character. It is but folly and fanaticism for men to talk of Christian states and governments in this world. . . True, the kingdom is by right the Lord’s. All authority and power originates with Him and belongs to Him. Government is His own ordinance. But since the apostasy of the race to Satan’s standard, usurpation, falsehood, and other powers than the rightful sovereign of men and nations, have held and directed the sway in this world.

2. Timeless Reign

“and He will reign forever and ever.”

Charles Swindoll: Perspective is everything. The events described in 11:15–19 await fulfillment at God’s final judgment and the second coming of Christ, but the loud voices of praise from heaven refer to future events in the past tense because John sees them as they happen. None of us today see things from that same prophetic perspective, but we can be just as certain of the ultimate reign of Christ “*forever and ever*.”

In his musical masterpiece, *Messiah*, **Handel** incorporated this refrain into his famous “Hallelujah Chorus.” The words emphasize the great transfer of power from wicked humanity under the spiritual bondage of Satan (the kingdom of the world) to Christ and the saints under the sovereign headship of God the Father (the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ). However, to effect this change, the kingdom of darkness must be judged and the kingdom of light must cast its brilliance upon the face of the earth.

II. (:16-18) CRESCENDO OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

A. (:16-17) Directed Towards the Eternal, Almighty Sovereign

1. (:16) Response of Worship by the 24 Elders

“And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,”

Buist Fanning: Just as in the vision of **chapters 4–5**, the twenty-four elders who surround God’s heavenly throne, sitting on their own thrones (**4:4**), now join the acclamation of the heavenly voices (**11:15b**) with their own worshipful posture (v. **16**; cf. **4:10**; **5:8**, **11**, **14**) and song of thanksgiving (v. **17**). Their heavenly declaration of gratitude is reminiscent of **4:9** and **7:12**, and is addressed to the Lord here using titles appropriate to the theme of their thanksgiving. The Lord God is “*Almighty*” (παντοκράτωρ), a characteristic title for God in Revelation, rooted in the Old Testament and denoting his all-powerful sovereignty over the affairs of his created universe. As in **1:8** and **4:8**, the name “*Lord God Almighty*” is accompanied by the title “*the One who is and who was*” (**11:17b**), signifying his eternal, self-existent deity. The latter is rooted in **Exodus 3:14**. In **1:8** and **4:8** a third epithet is included, “*and who is to come*,” but here and in **16:5** this phrase is omitted because its sense of God’s future coming has now been made real (see **1:4**). The reason (“*because*”; ὅτι) for giving thanks (v. **17c**) is that God has “*taken*” in hand (cf. NLT, REB: “*assumed*”) his “*great power*” in order to exert it in ruling authority on earth: “*You have begun to reign*” (ἐβασίλευσας).

2. (:17) Refrain of Thanksgiving for Kingdom Reign

“saying, ‘We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign.’”

Robert Mounce: “*Great power*” does not indicate omnipotence as a divine attribute in a general sense, but points to the final conflict in which God overpowers all his enemies. As in **1:8** and **4:8**, he is the **Lord God Almighty**. He is able to accomplish all that in his decrees he has determined to do.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Thanks is given because at this point in history **God will be exercising His complete sovereignty**. The elders say “*because you have taken your great power*.” “*Have taken*” is the perfect tense of *lambanw* “*to take hold of, possess*.” In His immutability God has always possessed omnipotence, but He has not always exercised His absolute authority or power over the earth. Here, at this point, He takes hold of it in the sense that **He begins to exercise it absolutely**. The perfect tense points to action accomplished with continual results. This stresses that once God so acts it will be permanent and the world will begin to experience the results.

B. (:18) Directed Against the Nations Deserving of Divine Wrath and Judgment

1. Wrath of the Nations

“And the nations were enraged,”

Warren Wiersbe: **Why are the nations angry?** Because they want to have their own way. *“Why do the heathen [the nations] rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed [Christ], saying, ‘Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us’” (Ps. 2:1–3).* They want to worship and serve the creature instead of the Creator (**Rom. 1:25**). Like adolescent children, the nations want to cast off all restraint, and God will permit them to do so. The result will be another “Babylon” (**Rev. 17—18**), man’s last attempt to build his Utopia, a “heaven on earth.”

John Walvoord: There is a play on words in the Greek of this verse, for the word in verb form for the rage of God’s enemies is used in noun form for God’s wrath. The contrast is clear; the wrath of humanity is impotent, but the wrath of God is omnipotent.

2. Wrath of God

“and Thy wrath came,”

Warren Wiersbe: There was intense suffering in the first half of the tribulation, but only the last half will reveal the wrath of God (**Rev. 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15**).

S. Lewis Johnson: So what are we living in at the present time? Well, we’re living in the forbearance of God, in the long suffering of God. But let me tell you this, my friends, that there is coming a time when his forbearance will reach its end, when his long suffering will finally reach its destined end. Then shall he speak under the nations in his wrath and he’ll be very displeased and carry out his judgments. The one who controls all sits in calm content, but then what difference.

3. Judgment of God

a. General Judging of All the Dead

“and the time came for the dead to be judged,”

Van Parunak: —Something else has come, *“the time of the dead.”* This expression, unique in the Greek Bible, indicates that **death is not the end of existence**. God yet has an appointment with those whose physical life has come to an end.

Buist Fanning: The first of these is for *“the dead to be judged”* (**v. 18d**), a general reference to both the righteous as well as unrighteous “dead” who will face God’s assessment for good or for ill (cf. **14:7; 22:12**). This judgment is then defined both positively and negatively by the two infinitives that follow (*“to reward”* and *“to ruin”*).

Robert Mounce: In the schedule of God’s redemptive program a decisive point has now been reached. It is a fitting time for judgment, reward, and destruction. The judgment anticipated by the elders is carried out in the great white throne scene of **20:11–15**. It is preceded by resurrection and followed by retribution. If the wrath of God is the judgment of the wicked, the vision of a New Jerusalem (**21:9–22:5**) with the presence of God its crowning joy (**22:4**) is the reward of the faithful. Although rewards are all of grace (**Rom 4:4**), they vary according to what each has done (**1 Cor 3:8**).

John MacArthur: The establishing of Christ's kingdom will be a fitting time for the dead to be judged. The Great White Throne judgment (**20:11-15**) is not in view in this passage, as some argue, since that judgment explicitly involves only unbelievers. It is best to see the reference to judgment here as a **general reference to all future judgments**. The elders in their song make no attempt to separate the different phases of judgment as they are separated in the closing chapters of Revelation. They simply sing of future judgments as though they were one event, in the same way that other Scriptures do not distinguish future judgments from each other (cf. **John 5:25, 28-29; Acts 17:31; 24:21**).

b. Positive and Negative Judgments

1) Positive: Rewarding the Righteous

*“and the time to give their reward to Thy bond-servants the prophets
and to the saints and to those who fear Thy name,
the small and the great,”*

2) Negative: Ruining the Wicked

“and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

Buist Fanning: The negative side of God's time of judgment that has now arrived is “*to ruin those who ruin the earth*” (v. **18f**). This is a clear reference to the coming judgment of the great harlot Babylon who “*corrupted the earth with her sexual immorality*” (**19:2**), using a play on words. The verb “*ruin*” (διαφθείρω and its cognate words) can refer either to physical decay or outright destruction (**8:9**; cf. **Luke 12:33; 2 Cor 4:16**) or to moral or spiritual corruption (**Rev 19:2**; cf. **Gen 6:11; 1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 7:2; 11:3; 1 Tim 6:5**). John uses the verb with its double sense to describe God's destructive judgment against those who lead others astray morally and spiritually (see Paul's play on the simple verb in **1 Cor 3:17**; also **2 Pet 2:12; Jude 10**). . . The related verb καταφθείρω is used twice in LXX **Genesis 6:12** to describe the corruption of the earth as well as “*all flesh*” and is then used in **6:13** to declare God's imminent “*corruption*” or destruction of the earth and humanity in the flood of Noah's day.

III. (:19) CELESTIAL ACCESS TO GOD'S PRESENCE

A. Climactic Access into God's Heavenly Temple

“And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened;”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: We should note that this chapter began with the apostate temple on earth, but closes triumphantly with the heavenly temple in view. Again this stresses, as in **Isaiah 6**, the awesome holiness of God, the basic cause of God's wrath (**Heb. 1:13**). Remember, this earthly, apostate temple is desecrated by the beast, but he cannot touch the heavenly temple which reflects God's perfect righteousness, perfect justice and majesty.

The things seen in the temple are symbolical of:

- (a) the presence of God by the Shekinah glory which hovered over the mercy seat;
- (b) the faithfulness of God as evidenced by the contents of the Ark—the Law which guided God's people, Aaron's rod, a picture of resurrection, and the pot of manna, a picture of the person of Christ and daily provision; and

(c) God's divine holiness which could not be approached without blood, and spoke of the sacrifice of Christ.

All this is seen in heaven to remind the Jews that God is going to fulfill His covenant promises. It is to encourage faith in Christ.

B. Covenant Commitment

“and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple,”

Kendell Easley: Although nothing was more sacred to ancient Israel than its ark, the ark had been forever lost when the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C. Thus, when John saw the heavenly counterpart, the ark of his covenant, he was beholding what no human had seen—even in an earthly form—for centuries (**Heb. 8:5; 9:23–24**).

Robert Mounce: The **ark of the covenant** corresponds to the rewarding of the faithful, and the cosmic disturbances to the outpouring of God's wrath. The sanctuary that opens to reveal the ark of the covenant is not an earthly temple (as in **11:1**) but the sanctuary of God in heaven (cf. **3:12; 7:15; 15:5–8; 21:22**). From this most holy place proceed both the promise of covenant love and righteous anger (cf. **16:1**). The opening of the temple is of limited duration (cf. **15:5**) and serves to reveal a heavenly ark, the symbol of God's **faithfulness in fulfilling his covenant promises**. For the days of wrath that lie immediately ahead, believers will need the assurance that God will bring his own safely to their eternal reward.

John MacArthur: The ark symbolizes that the covenant God has promised to men is now available in its fullness. In the midst of the fury of His judgment on unbelievers, God, as it were, throws open the Holy of Holies (where the ark was located; **Ex. 26:33–34; 2 Chron. 5:7**) and **draws believers into His presence**. That would have been unthinkable in the Old Testament temple, when only the high priest entered the holy of Holies once a year (**Heb. 9:7**).

John Schultz: In the fact that the ark becomes visible, we see God's revelation as an **invitation to fellowship with Him on the basis of atonement**. This speaks of God's love, holiness, faithfulness, and grace. The flashes of lightening and peals of thunder are images of God's majesty. They give us an image of God's greatness, omnipotence, and glory. The flashes of lightning are also part of the revelation of the ark. But the ark is named *“the ark of His covenant,”* the symbol of God's friendship with man. God has made His covenant with Abraham, with Israel, and with us in Jesus Christ. His calls us *“friends”* and the bond of our fellowship is more intimate than that of a marriage relationship. Our friend is God, the Almighty, the God of lightning, thunder, and hail.

C. Cosmic Disturbances

*“and there were flashes of lightning
and sounds and peals of thunder
and an earthquake
and a great hailstorm.”*

James Hamilton: As we were given a vision into the heavenly temple after the seventh seal was opened in **8:1–5**, and as we saw there lightning, thunder, and an earthquake, so also here in **11:19** after the seventh trumpet **the temple of God is opened**. The ark of the covenant becomes visible. The heavens went dark, the veil was split, the earth shook, and the dead were raised also

when Jesus died on the cross (**Matthew 27:50–53**). This is what happens at the day of the Lord. The lightnings, thunder, earthquake, and hail seen emanating from God's throne in **4:5** also punctuate the events of the seventh trumpet and remind us that these judgments are God's judgments.

John Walvoord: Before the details of the judgment to follow are unfolded in the seven bowls in **chapter 16**, the revelation turns to other important aspects of this period that **chronologically precede the consummation**. Apart from the outpourings of the bowls, which occur in rapid succession, there is little narrative movement from this point until **chapter 19** and the second coming of Christ. Events and situations are now introduced that are **concurrent with the seals and the trumpets**. These serve to emphasize the dramatic climax of this period in the second coming of Jesus Christ.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what sense can these verses be considered the climax of God's kingdom agenda down through history?
- 2) How is the wrath of Satan and of man countered by the wrath of God?
- 3) How does the certainty of God's coming and of the establishment of His future kingdom on earth impact how you live today?
- 4) Why is judgment essential for the establishment of God's righteous kingdom on earth?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Schultz: We may consider these verses to be the **climax of the book**. In **verse 7** of the previous chapter, the importance of the blowing of the seventh trumpet had already been mentioned. The opening of God's temple in heaven and the revelation of the ark of the covenant constitute the focal point of world history. The importance of this event is immediately recognized in heaven. We are not told whose are the loud voices that sing antiphonally with the elders. This is the point in time that has been eagerly anticipated by all of creation. The kingship over the earth, which God had entrusted to Lucifer, falls back to the Creator.

William Barclay: What makes this passage difficult is that it seems to indicate that things have come to an end in final victory, while there is still half the book to go. The explanation, as we have seen, is that **this passage is a summary of what is still to come**. The events foreshadowed here are as follows.

- (1) There is the victory in which the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Anointed One. This is really a quotation of **Psalms 2:2**, and is another way of saying that **the messianic reign has begun**. In view of this victory, the twenty-four elders – that is, the whole Church – break out in thanksgiving.

(2) This victory leads to the time when God takes his supreme authority (**verse 17**). That is to say, it leads to the thousand-year reign of God, the **millennium**, a thousand-year period of peace and prosperity.

(3) At the end of the millennium, there is to come the **final attack of all the hostile powers (verse 18)**; they will be finally defeated, and then will follow the last judgment.

In **verse 19**, we come back, as it were, to the present. There is a vision of the heavenly Temple opened and of the ark of the covenant. Two things are involved in this vision.

(1) The ark of the covenant was in the Holy of Holies, the inside of which no ordinary person had ever seen, and into which even the high priest went only on the Day of Atonement. This must mean that now the glory of God is going to be fully displayed.

(2) The reference to the ark of the covenant is as a **reminder of God's special covenant with his people**. Originally, that covenant had been with the people of Israel; but the new covenant is with all people of every nation who love and believe in Jesus. Whatever the terror to come, God will not be false to his promises.

This is a **picture of the coming of the full glory of God**, a terrifying threat to his enemies but an uplifting promise to the people of his covenant.

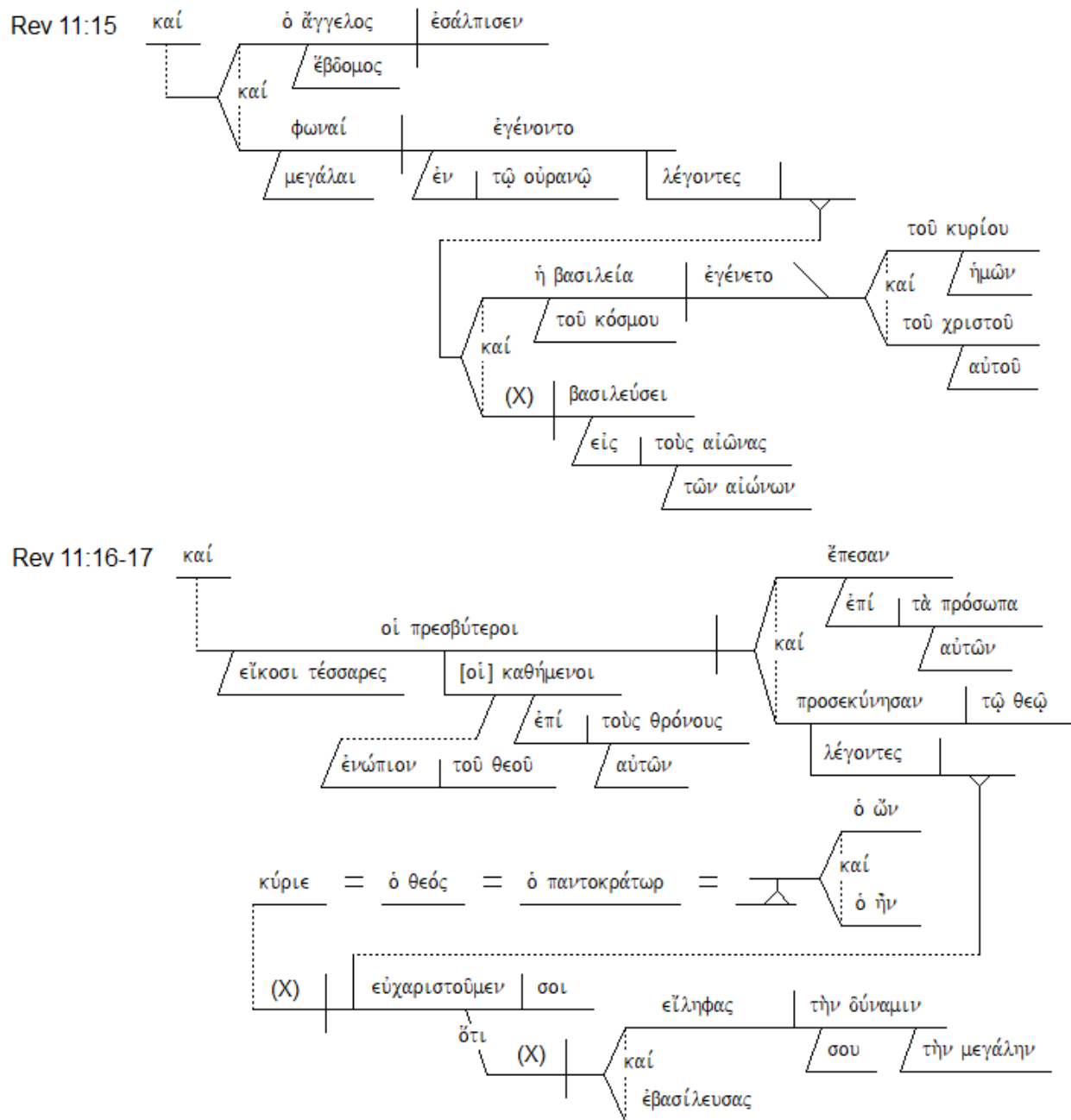
John MacArthur: The seventh trumpet sets in motion the final consummation of God's redemptive plan for the present universe. During its tenure will come the final fury of the Day of the Lord judgments (**16:1-21**), the final harvest of judgment on earth (**11:18; 16:19**), and the Lamb's defeat of the kings of the earth (**17:12-18**), culminating in the final, climactic triumph of Christ at Armageddon (**19:11-21**). The sounding of the seventh trumpet signals God's answer to the prayer, "*Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*" (**Matt. 6:10**). That answer sweeps through **chapters 12-22** as God finishes His mighty work of reclaiming creation from the usurper, Satan.

J.A. Seiss: The particular passage we have now to consider, is only a synopsis of the matter – a rehearsal in brief of what is subsequently given in detail. It is an important point to remark, that the seventh trumpet does not sound merely for one instant or for one day. . . What measure of "*days*," or how many of them, we are not told; but a period of time is specifically indicated. . . From the plainly expressed character of the events, and from the oath of the Angel, we are sufficiently assured, that this seventh trumpet embraces everything involved in the completing of the whole mystery of God, up to the termination of all this judgment history. That fulfilment is certainly not accomplished without the seven vials of wrath, the harvest and vintage of the world, the manifestation of the great white throne, and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth. In the nature of the case, that fulfilment overspans everything this side of the completed redemption; and yet that fulfilment is most specifically located "*in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall sound.*"

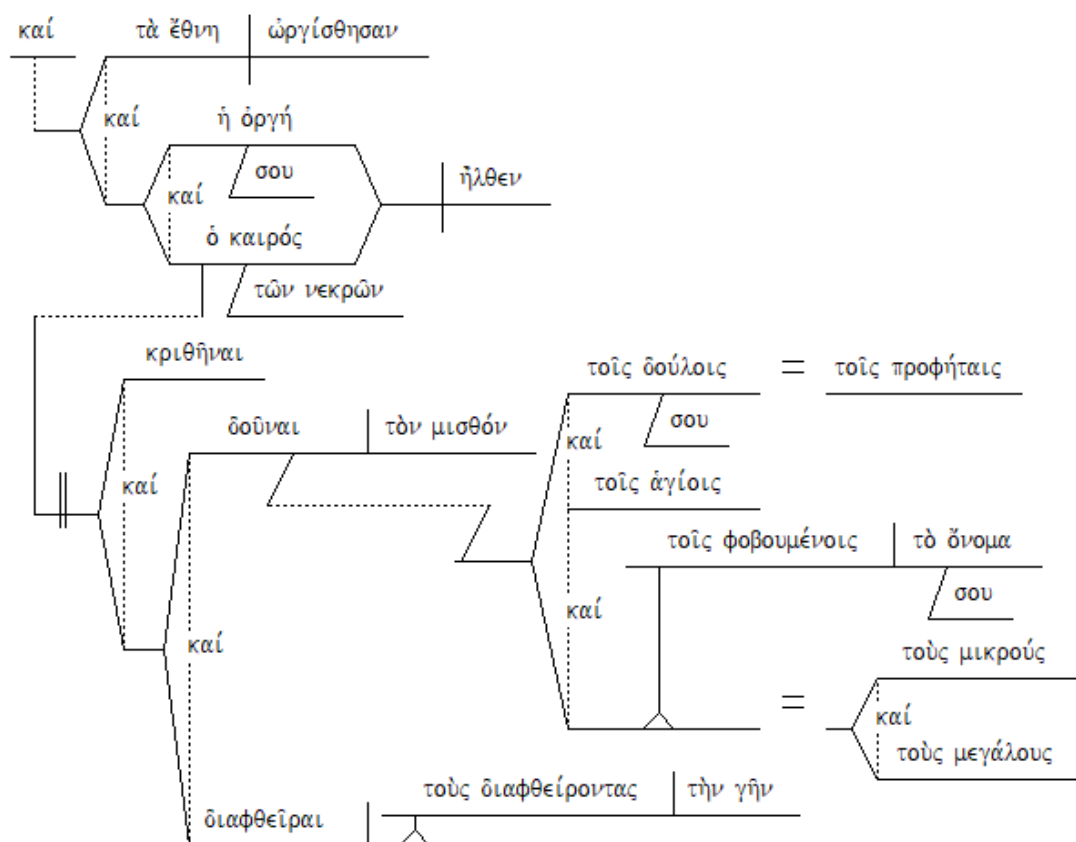
There is, therefore, no alternative, but to take the text as only synoptical of this trumpet – a sort of summary of its chief contents, the full details of which are subsequently described, and spread over a considerable period; -- an anticipative programme, so to speak, of the main elements and issue of the great drama, given out in advance of the more special narration of circumstantial

particulars and related events. In other words, we now have to do with a syllabus of the fulfilment of consummation of the mystery of God – with a prelusive sketch of the contents of the Last Trump. . .

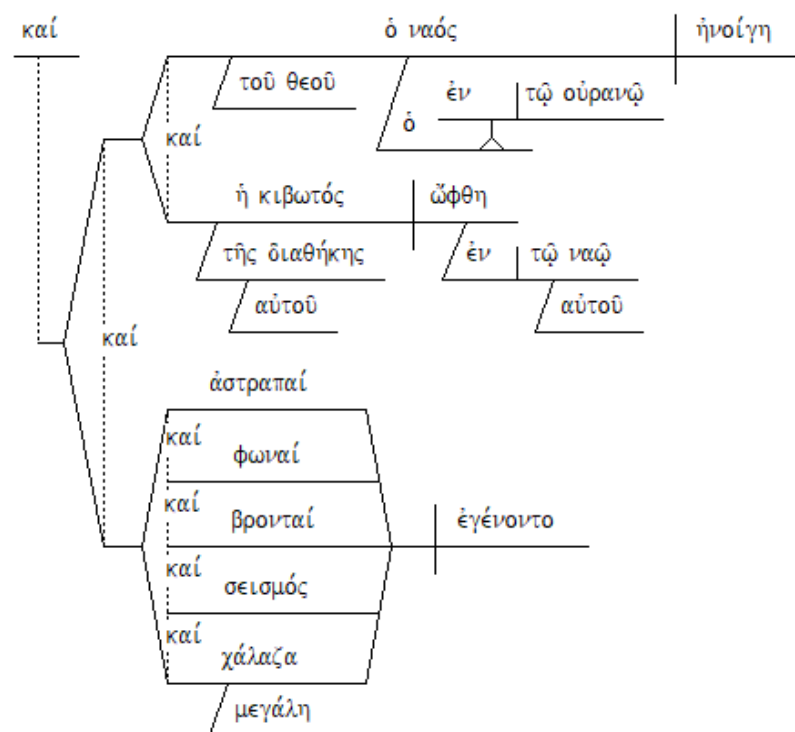
Leedy Greek Diagram:



Rev 11:18



Rev 11:19



TEXT: Revelation 12:1-6

TITLE: *FLASHBACK: 2 DRAMATIC SIGNS IN HEAVEN – CONFLICT BETWEEN A WOMAN (WITH HER SON) AND A GREAT DRAGON*

BIG IDEA:

GOD HAS ALWAYS PROTECTED THE SEED OF THE WOMAN (THE JEWISH BORN MESSIAH-KING) FROM SATAN’S SAVAGE ATTACKS

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: The passage falls into three sections that symbolically and elliptically tell the story of Satan’s efforts to thwart God’s salvation through Israel and her Messiah.

1. First the chief actors are introduced, and both the Messiah (in the past) and Israel (in the future) escape Satan’s attacks (**12:1–6**).
2. Next the backstory of Satan’s future expulsion from heaven and enraged attacks on the earth in the final tribulation are portrayed (**12:7–12**).
3. Then the story of his attacks on Israel and her national preservation in the end times is resumed, but it includes a preview of Satan’s continued warfare on parts of faithful Israel during that intense period (**12:13–18**).

This warfare on Israel and the wider world is portrayed in subsequent chapters.

James Hamilton: Can you imagine anything more vulnerable than a woman laboring to give birth? Women in labor are completely occupied with giving birth. They are not thinking about defending themselves. They cannot strategize about how to escape from danger. They are focused on one thing: giving birth. The process of giving birth is a colossal struggle for life. The whole of a woman’s mental energy, emotional strength, and bodily power are focused on what seems impossible and is nothing short of miraculous. A human being is about to come into the world out of her body, and the baby seems bigger than the birth canal. It looks impossible. It is a miracle of frantic human determination and astonishing divine design.

Can you imagine anything more frightening or threatening than a huge dragon? Let me suggest a way to make a dragon even more dreadful: give it seven heads. Now put a horn on each head, and three of the heads have two horns; so there are seven heads and ten horns.

Put the two images together and you have a **powerful drama**. A pregnant woman is in the process of giving birth, and she is threatened by a massive dragon who wants to eat her baby the moment he is born. She cannot run. She cannot hide. What hope does she have?

Do you want to heighten the desperation and urgency of the situation? The child about to be born, sure to be eaten by the dragon, is the world’s last hope. This is an **epic pageant** of intense, unprotected goodness confronted with a shocking evil that looks powerful, inevitable, devastating.

We need to know the danger we face. We need to know that it always looks like the odds are that Satan will win, but he always loses. And we need to know that victory has been secured, that no satanic accusation will stand against those who trust in Christ, and that God can and does protect his people.

John MacArthur: Now, the archenemy of God, obviously, is Satan. He's been trying ever since his rebellion to destroy the purposes of God. Satan hates God and does everything he can possibly do to thwart God's purposes. First, he attempted to destroy the paradise of heaven and led a mutiny against God among the angels. Then he attempted to destroy the paradise of earth and led a mutiny against God among men. And all of this will culminate in a great climactic effort in the time of the great tribulation to thwart the Kingdom that God has prepared and promised and even to destroy God's plan for the eternal rule and reign of Jesus Christ. . .

We also are very much aware of the fact that God has made an inviolable promise to Israel to bring them a Kingdom, and that God through Zechariah said there would come a time when Israel would look on the one they had pierced and mourn for Him as an only son, and a fountain of cleansing would be opened and there would be salvation. And Paul, in **Romans chapter 11**, said there's coming a day when all Israel will be saved. And the Kingdom is promised to Israel. And the prophets said they will enter into that Kingdom and they will reign and rule in that Kingdom with their Messiah from Jerusalem and they will be the attraction of the whole world so that hanging on the garment of every Jew will be ten gentiles.

So the Bible tells us clearly that Israel, as a nation, as a people, is a very main player in the scenario of the end drama. Salvation of Israel and her promised Kingdom is now very near. We're already at the seventh trumpet. The seventh trumpet is the last trumpet. The events in the seventh trumpet are the seven bowl judgments which are poured out very rapidly. We're in the last few weeks, the last few days of the time of tribulation just prior to Armageddon, the return of Christ, and the establishment of the Kingdom.

David Thompson: Since Israel is so critical to the Bible and the whole program of God, it is only logical to assume that Satan will hate the Jews, will wage war against the Jews and seek to destroy the Jews. Since part of the reason for the Great Tribulation is to "*regather Israel*" to establish a Kingdom on earth (**Matt. 23:37-39**), we may expect that at some point in the Tribulation Satan will unleash a destructive barrage against Israel in an attempt to destroy her.

That point is stressed and that does happen in **Revelation 12**. What we have here in this chapter is this thesis:

SATAN HAS ALWAYS HATED ISRAEL AND HAS ALWAYS TRIED TO DESTROY ISRAEL, AND DURING THE GREAT TRIBULATION HE WILL INTENSIFY HIS EFFORTS BUT HE WILL NOT SUCCEED BECAUSE GOD WILL NOT LET HIM SUCCEED.

Grant Osborne: **Chapters 12–13 are a unit**, and it is not the number of elements but the remarkable structure of the narrative that matters. The organization is the same as that in 21:1–22:5, with a basic narrative of the whole story (**21:1–8**) followed by a series of expansions of details within the story (**21:9–27; 22:1–5**). Here **12:1–6** is the **basic story of the conflict** between the woman with her child and the dragon. This basic story is expanded via the war in heaven (**12:7–12**, expanding **12:4**), the war on earth (**12:13–17**, expanding **12:6**), and the activity of the two beasts in the war (**13:1–10, 11–18**, expanding both **12:6** and **12:17**).

I. (:1-2) FIRST DRAMATIC SIGN IN HEAVEN = A WOMAN WITH HER SON – THE SEED OF THE WOMAN – THE MESSIAH BORN FROM ISRAEL

A. (:1) Significance of the Woman = Israel

1. Illuminating Great Sign

“And a great sign appeared in heaven.”

Buist Fanning: here “*sign*” means a visual or physical symbol pointing to something beyond itself, especially something with a spiritual significance (**Rev 12:1, 3; 15:1**; cf. **Josh 4:6; Dan 5:9 LXX**; similar to “*signs*” in John’s Gospel).

2. Identifying Characteristics

a. Glory / Brilliance

“a woman clothed with the sun,”

John MacArthur: That the woman was **clothed with the sun** reflects redeemed Israel’s unique glory, brilliance, and dignity because of her exalted status as God’s chosen nation (cf. **Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 1 Kings 3:8; Pss. 33:12; 106:5; Isa. 43:20**). It also links her with Jacob (the sun in Joseph’s dream), an heir in the Abrahamic covenant.

b. Exaltation

“and the moon under her feet,”

John MacArthur: The *moon under her feet* - interesting to think about that. Could refer again to nothing more than exaltation, but it also could have the concept of covenant relationship there, since the moon was so central in the cycle of worship, they, you remember, worshiped in their yearly cycle through a series of new moons and feasts and festivals and Sabbaths associated with them.

c. Legacy of the 12 Tribes

“and on her head a crown of twelve stars;”

Daniel Akin: Her marvelous description draws directly from the dream of the patriarch Joseph in **Genesis 37:9-11**. There the sun represents Jacob, the moon Rachel, and the stars the tribes of Israel. Perhaps it is best to see her representing the **righteous remnant of Israel**, the people of God. I believe **Romans 11** would lend support to this understanding.

James Hamilton: These heavenly bodies are reminiscent of Joseph’s second dream in **Genesis 37:9**, where Joseph says, “*Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.*” Joseph’s father Jacob, aka Israel, interprets the dream in **37:10** saying, “*Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?*” So in Joseph’s dream, Jacob/Israel is the sun, Joseph’s mother Rachel is the moon, and Joseph’s eleven brothers are the eleven stars, with Joseph evidently the twelfth.

B. (:2) Significance of Israel’s Pregnancy

1. Channel for the Birth of the Messiah

“and she was with child;”

2. Characterized by Suffering and Pain

“and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.”

Buist Fanning: This evokes Old Testament pictures of Israel as an expectant mother who suffers in birth pangs during God's judgment but anticipates God's redemption and renewal as the joyful result of such suffering (**Isa 26:16–21; 66:6–13; Mic 4:9–10; Jer 4:31**).

James Hamilton: The birth of Jesus is interpreted here as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies that point to the birth of the child who brings redemption for God's people and rules over all the nations of the earth. This child is the hope of the world.

John MacArthur: Ever since the first promise of a Redeemer who would come to destroy him (**Gen. 3:15**), Satan has attacked Israel. For centuries, Israel agonized and suffered, longing for the Child who would come to destroy Satan, sin, and death, and establish the promised kingdom. No nation in history has suffered as long or as severely as Israel has—both from God's chastening, and also from Satan's furious efforts to destroy the nation through whom the Messiah would come.

Marvin Rosenthal: To Abraham God gave a series of unconditional promises in what has become known as the Abrahamic covenant (**Gen. 12; 15; 17; 22**). Chief among them was the promise that "*in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed*" (**Gen. 12:3**). Looking backward in time, this promise to Abraham identified him as the channel through which the seed of the woman was to come (**Gen. 3:15**). Looking forward in time, this promise pointed to a lowly people (the Jew), in an insignificant land (Israel), within an obscure village (Bethlehem). There, in a stable for animals, a righteous Jewish maiden, a virgin named Miriam (her proper biblical name) gave birth to the Lamb of God. Nine months earlier, the Holy Spirit had come upon her, and the power of the Highest had overshadowed her (**Luke 1:35**).

The entire Old Testament is a history of the nation Israel and her vicissitudes. From Abraham to the incarnation, her glory and her ignominy, her victories and her defeats alike are chronicled. The mention of other nations and peoples of the world are only referred to in passing when, in one way or another, for good or bad, they impacted the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the land of Israel.

This entire period of time, from Abraham to the birth of Christ, is described in the Bible this way: "*And she [Israel], being with child, cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered*" (**Rev. 12:2**).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: **Verse 2** describes the woman in travail, waiting to give birth to the Christ child. This undoubtedly refers to the sufferings of the nation and her troublesome and restless times at the first advent of Christ. She was even then suffering under not only the judgment of the deportations (see **Matt. 1:11, 17**) but the hatred of Satan. In fact, it was because of the Roman rule that Mary and Joseph had to make the trip to Bethlehem for the census during the winter when Christ was born.

II. (:3-4) SECOND DRAMATIC SIGN IN HEAVEN = GREAT RED DRAGON – THE DEVOURING ANTAGONIST = SATAN

A. (:3) Significance of the Red Dragon = Satan

1. Illuminating Great Sign

"And another sign appeared in heaven:"

David Thompson: The pronoun “another” means another of the same kind of sign appeared in the same place, the heaven. Again we believe these signs will be **visible signs** that those on earth will be able to look up and actually see.

2. Identifying Characteristics

J. Hampton Keathley, III: That the red dragon is called “great” points to the magnitude of Satan’s power and activity in the world. “Red” emphasizes his murderous and blood thirsty character and behavior throughout history (cf. **John 8:44**). “Dragon” pictures his ferocious and intensely cruel nature. “*Having seven heads and ten horns*” relates him to the ten nation confederation of the revived Roman empire, the system of the beast (**13:1**). “*Seven diadems*” speaks of his ruling power, but also usurped power and authority which he has and will have especially in the last days. Satan is really a dragon, a hideous beast. Today he often appears as an angel of light; he masks his true identity, but in the Tribulation he will be seen for what he really is.

- a. Presenting as a Dragon of Fiery Destruction and Murderous Bloodshed
“*and behold, a great red dragon*”

John MacArthur: Red, the color of fiery destruction and bloodshed, further stresses Satan’s vicious, deadly, destructive nature. In the words of Jesus, “*He was a murderer from the beginning*” (**John 8:44**). The Hebrew word for “serpent” (*nachash*) used in **Genesis 3:1** is used interchangeably in some texts with the Hebrew word for *dragon* (*tannin*) (cf. **Ex. 7:9, 15**). So the animal Satan used in the Garden of Eden was a reptile, but one not yet cast down to its belly (**Gen. 3:14**). Likely, it was more upright—a dragon standing upon two legs, cursed to walk on four legs close to the ground, or slither like a snake. Red is a fitting color for the dragon, since he attacks both the woman and her child.

William Barclay: In the Temple of Marduk – the creating god – in Babylon, there was a great image of a ‘red-gleaming serpent’ who stood for the defeated dragon of chaos. There can be little doubt that that is where John got his picture. This dragon appears in many forms in the Old Testament.

- b. Portraying Fearsome Intimidation
“*having seven heads and ten horns,*”

John MacArthur: Satan has been allowed by God to rule the world since the Fall and will continue to do so until the seventh trumpet sounds (**11:15**). The seven heads with their seven diadems (*diadema*; royal crowns symbolizing power and authority) represent seven consecutive world empires running their course under Satan’s dominion: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and Antichrist’s future empire (**17:9–10**). The final kingdom, ruled by Antichrist, will be a **ten-nation confederacy**; the ten horns represent the kings who will rule under Antichrist (**17:12**; cf. **13:1**; **Dan. 7:23–25**). The shifting of the diadems from the dragon’s heads to the beast’s horns (**13:1**) reveals the shift in power from the seven consecutive world empires to the ten kings under the final Antichrist.

- c. Possessing Earthly Power and Authority
“*and on his heads were seven diadems.*”

Buist Fanning: The figure of a “*dragon*” (δράκων) is also familiar in the Old Testament as a representation of **cosmic opposition to God** as well as more mundane enemies of God’s people like Egypt and Babylon (**Ps 74:13–14; Isa 27:1; 51:9–10; Ezek 29:3; 32:2**). In v. 9 John will identify the dragon specifically as the ultimate adversary of God (“*the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who leads the whole world astray*”), but as **chapters 13–18** show, the devil uses earthly kingdoms in his efforts to oppose God’s people.

David Thompson: There is no question that when we read he has seven diadems on his head that he has **royal power and authority** over seven major powers of the world. These powers will be under his control during the Tribulation and he will use these reigning powers to try to completely destroy Israel.

There is no question Satan is a powerful angelic being and he does have authority and power. If we consider the fact there are seven continents in the world: Europe; Asia; Africa; North America; South America; Australia; and Antarctica, we suspect at this point in the Tribulation he will be the royal and dominant force of the whole world.

During the Tribulation [Day of the Lord], as part of a worldwide judgment, God will permit Satan to be the royal power for a short time. He will use that power **to try to destroy Israel and anything connected to God.**

B. (:4a) Supported by Demonic Subordinates

“And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth.”

Daniel Akin: this refers to the primordial war in heaven when Satan rebelled against God and a third of the angelic host chose to follow him in his rebellion (**Osborne**, Revelation, 461). **Isaiah 14:12-15** may typify this tragic event.

C. (:4b) Salivating in Anticipation of Devouring the Seed of the Woman

“And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.”

Daniel Akin: The dragon takes his stand in front of the woman to devour, consume, eat up her child. This action, on the part of the dragon, is not new. Since God’s declaration in **Genesis 3:15**, Satan has sought to prevent this male child from coming. He moved Cain to kill Abel (**1 John 3:12**). He moved Pharaoh to kill Hebrew baby boys (**Exod 1–2**). He moved Saul to kill David (**1 Sam 18:10-11**). He moved wicked Athaliah to destroy all the royal heirs of the house of Judah (**2 Chron 22:10**). He moved Haman to plot genocide against the Jews (**Esther**). He moved Herod to kill Jesus (**Matt 2**). But in all of this, **he failed!** **Verse 5** tells us, “*But she gave birth to a Son—a male who is going to shepherd all nations with an iron scepter.*” **David Platt** says,

The birth of Christ on that day in Bethlehem inaugurated the death of this ancient serpent, just as it had been promised back in **Genesis 3**. The birth of Christ declared the death of the ancient serpent; the death of Christ defanged the adversary. (“*Fighting*,” 2012)

James Hamilton: The dragon being ready to devour the child about to be born to the woman reminds us that God cursed the serpent in **Genesis 3:15**, putting enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman and promising that the seed of the woman would crush the

head of the serpent. These symbols depict the **cosmic, epic battle between God and Satan**. Satan looks like he has all the advantages—he's a dragon with seven heads and ten horns against a pregnant woman! Who would you bet on in that conflict?

John Walvoord: The dragon is seen awaiting the birth of the child with the intent to destroy it as soon as it is born. The allusion here is unmistakably to the circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ in Bethlehem (the dragon referring to the Roman Empire at that time as dominated by Satan) and the attempts of Herod to destroy the baby Jesus (cf. **Matt 2:13–15**). It is significant that Herod as an Edomite was a descendant of Esau and of the people who were the traditional enemies of Jacob and his descendants. Whether motivated by his family antipathy to the Jews or by political consideration because he did not want competition in his office as king, Herod nevertheless fulfilled historically this reference to the destruction of children in Bethlehem.

III. (:5-6) DIVINE PROTECTION OF THE FUTURE MESSIANIC KING

A. (:5) Divine Plan for the Messiah to Eventually Reign on Earth

1. Miracle of the Incarnation

“And she gave birth to a son, a male child,”

John MacArthur: The incarnation of the male child, the Lord Jesus Christ, “*who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh*” (**Rom. 1:3**; cf. **Rom. 9:5**), was the fulfillment of prophecy (cf. **Gen. 3:15**; **Isa. 7:14**; **9:6**; **Mic. 5:2**). Israel brought forth the Messiah. The Bible emphasizes that Jesus was of **Jewish lineage**. He was a son of Abraham (**Matt. 1:1**), a member of the tribe of Judah (**Gen. 49:10**; **Mic. 5:2**; **Rev. 5:5**), and a descendant of David (**Matt. 1:1**; cf. **2 Sam. 7:12–16**).

2. Mission of Messianic Rule over the Nations

“who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron;”

Craig Koester: The description of the child is taken from **Psalm 2**, which speaks of the Lord's anointed one or “*messiah*,” who is called the Son of God, the one who will be given the nations as his heritage. The Hebrew version of the psalm says that the anointed one will “*break*” the nations with a rod of iron, but the Greek version says that he will “*rule*” or literally “*shepherd*” the nations with his iron rod (**Ps. 2:9**). This image threatens the opponents of God, for it points to their demise (**Rev. 2:27**; **19:15**); yet the same image is encouraging for the people of God, for Christ “*shepherds*” them by leading them to living water (**7:17**).

3. Majesty Enthroned in Heaven until the Appointed Time for Earthly Dominion

“and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.”

Buist Fanning: From the New Testament perspective this transfer of royal rule to Jesus as Messiah and son of David has already been accomplished in his cross, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to God's right hand in heaven. He already has been vindicated as God's son and has taken his seat in the position of greatest authority in heaven, as **Psalm 110:1** anticipated. Jesus cites **Psalm 110:1** as messianic (**Mark 12:35–37**), and numerous writers all across the New Testament affirm its fulfillment in his present position in heaven (**Acts 2:33–36**; **Rom 8:34**; **Heb 1:13**; **1 Pet 3:22**). In contemporary Christian theology the cross and resurrection have a central place, and this is appropriate, but Christ's ascension and heavenly exaltation are too often treated with relative neglect compared to their important place in biblical theology.

This explains some of the unease interpreters have felt at the seemingly deficient summary of Jesus's course of life that **Revelation 12:5** provides: How can a Christian portrayal of Christ, even a fragmented visionary one, skip from his birth to his ascension without mentioning the cross and resurrection? The explanation is that for John, especially in a context building toward the actualization of Christ's reign on earth, to cite his ascension and exaltation includes within itself a reference to the victory already won by his cross and resurrection. The climactic step in the journey entails the intermediate steps along the way (as shown by **Rev 12:11**; see too **1:5–6; 5:9–10; 7:14; 19:13**). In terms of the visionary portrayal, this ascension to heaven represents not merely a frantic escape from the clutches of the dragon but the decisive victory of this “*child*” over him (see further in **12:13**). But the vision skips ahead: the ascension does not follow immediately after the birth.

Daniel Akin: the **ascension** is the unquestionable proof that Satan was defeated in that he could not prevent Christ from rising from the dead and ascending back to His Father, where He now is seated at the right hand of the throne of God, perhaps the place Satan coveted when he fell. Satan disgraced and dishonored himself with his idolatrous ambition. God exalted and honored His Son in His incarnation and humiliation. The way up really is found in a willingness to go down.

B. (:6) Divine Witness Protection Program for Remnant of Israel

1. Sanctuary of Refuge

“And the woman fled into the wilderness”

John MacArthur: Antichrist's desecration of the temple will send the Jewish people fleeing into the wilderness. The exact location where God will hide them is not revealed, but it is probably somewhere east of the Jordan River and south of the Dead Sea, in the territory formerly occupied by Moab, Ammon, and Edom (cf. **Dan. 11:40–41**). Wherever their hiding place will be, they will be nourished and defended by God (cf. **vv. 14–16**), just as their ancestors were during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. The length of Israel's stay in hiding, one thousand two hundred and sixty days (three and a half years; cf. **11:2–3; 12:14; 13:5**) corresponds to the last half of the Tribulation, the period Jesus called the Great Tribulation (**Matt. 24:21**). Those Jews who remain behind in Jerusalem will come under the influence of the **two witnesses**, and many in that city will be redeemed (**11:13**). Eventually, in spite of Satan's efforts, “*all Israel will be saved*” (**Rom. 11:26**).

Robert Mounce: The intent of the verse, however, is not so much the flight of the church as the **provision of God** for her sustenance. To the Jewish people the wilderness spoke of divine provision and intimate fellowship. It was in the wilderness that God had rained down bread from heaven (**Exod 16:4ff.**) and nourished his people for forty years. Of Israel God said, “*I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her*” (**Hos 2:14**; cf. **1 Kgs 17:2–3; 19:3–4**). For John's readers the wilderness in this context would not suggest a desert waste inhabited by evil spirits and unclean beasts, but a **place of spiritual refuge**. The purpose of the vision is to assure those facing martyrdom that God has prepared for them a place of spiritual refuge and will enable them to stand fast against the devil. The duration of divine nourishment (1,260 days) corresponds to the period of persecution (cf. **11:2; 13:5**). The place is one set in readiness by God himself.

2. Sovereign Protection

“where she had a place prepared by God,”

Daniel Akin: Trust God to Care for His People –

Here the **wilderness** symbolizes a place and promise of protection and provision, just as God cared for Israel following the exodus. God has specifically prepared a place for the woman, a place where He will feed her for 1,260 days, or 3½ years. The place will be one of spiritual refuge. She may be persecuted and suffer, but she will also be provided for and sustained.

Everything the righteous remnant needs to honor her God and experience the victory provided by the male child, the babe of Bethlehem, she will have. God has preserved and taken care of His people in the past. He continues to meet our needs in the present. He will not fail us in the future. We have His word. You can trust Him.

3. Sustenance and Nourishment

“so that there she might be nourished”

Sola Scriptura: Not only will the woman receive protection, but she will also receive nourishment (food and water) to sustain her life during the time of **protective custody**.

4. Specific Time Duration

“for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”

Charles Swindoll: Revelation 12:6 begins to describe what happens to the restored, elect remnant of Israel during the Tribulation. We’ve already seen that this future remnant will be composed of the 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel (**7:1-8**). They will be sealed for protection by God with a special calling. Through the symbol of the woman, we see that God will take special care of His people Israel during the final three and a half years of the Tribulation, providing a place for them in the “*wilderness*” to protect them during the most intense period of judgment and wrath on this earth (**12:6**).

Joe Anady: At this point I think it would be beneficial for you to know something of the **basic structure of Revelation chapters twelve through twenty**. Four figures will be introduced to us in these chapters. These four represent powers that oppose God and his people. And then these same four will be defeated by God and his Christ and judged in the reverse order that they were introduced. These chapters, therefore, reveal to us something of the spiritual battle that rages beyond our sense perception.

Notice that here in chapter twelve Satan himself is introduced. In **12:3** he is described as a “*great red dragon*”. In **12:9** he is identified by name: “*And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him*” (**Revelation 12:9**, ESV). Notice that in chapter thirteen two of the powers that Satan uses to wage war against God and his people are introduced. First there is the beast that rises out of the sea (**13:1**). This beast, we will see, represents persecuting powers. Secondly, the beast that rises out of the earth is introduced (**13:11**). This beast will later be called the false prophet (**16:3; 19:20**). And then in chapter seventeen the great prostitute or harlot is introduced (**17:1**). She will represent the seductiveness of the world.

So by the time we come to the end of **chapter 17** four key players in this ancient and cosmic battle will have been introduced to us. Satan is the person behind all of the opposition towards the kingdom of God and of Christ, but he uses these three powers primarily in his fight, the

persecuting beast, the false prophet, and the harlot. These wage war against all that belongs to God and to his Christ.

But notice that beginning with **chapter 18** each of these are defeated by God and judged in the reverse order that they were introduced. In **chapter 18** the harlot is judged. In **19:19-20** the false prophet and the persecuting beast are judged. And in **20:7-10** we find a description of the defeat and judgment of Satan.

So **chapters 12 through 20** have a chiasmic structure. If you were to diagram this section of the book of Revelation it would form an “X”. Satan, the persecuting beast, the false prophet, and the harlot are introduced – 1, 2, 3, 4 – and then they are in reverse order quickly removed, being defeated by Christ at his second coming – 4, 3, 2, 1.

<https://emmausrbc.org/2017/08/27/sermon-dragon-woman-child-revelation-121-6/>

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is Satan’s hatred toward Israel manifested in our day?
- 2) What is going to be the impact on the world of viewing these great two signs in the heavens in the end times?
- 3) Why is a **great red dragon** such an appropriate image for Satan?
- 4) What parallels do you see between how God providentially provided for Israel in their wilderness wanderings after leaving Egypt and how God will protect and provide for the Jewish remnant in the end times?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John MacArthur: Often as an instrument of God’s judgment, Satan has persecuted the Jewish people throughout their history. He knows that to destroy Israel would make it impossible for God to fulfill His promises to the Jewish people. God will not allow him to do that, but will use Satan to chasten Israel. It comes as no surprise that **the devil will intensify his persecution of Israel as the establishment of the millennial kingdom draws near**. As previously noted, the seventh trumpet will sound near the end of the Tribulation [Day of the Lord]. Only weeks, or perhaps a few months at most, will remain after it sounds until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. With his time running out (cf. **v. 12**), Jewish people will become the special target of Satan’s hatred and destructive attacks.

Gordon Fee: The main theme throughout is the **Holy War**. The two primary words for this in Greek are the noun *polemos* (“war”), plus its cognates, and the verb *nikao* (“triumph”). Thus in **12:7** “war” between the archangel Michael and the dragon occurred in heaven, resulting in Satan’s being cast out of heaven. Again, in **13:4**, but now on earth, the question is put as to “*who can make war against [the beast]?*” who in **verse 7** is said to have been “*given power to make*

war against God's people and to conquer them." In this latter passage the verb "*to conquer*" is the same as that translated "*are victorious*" in its appearance at the end of each of the letters to the seven churches. But here also (in **12:11**) occurs the key theological sentence of the entire book: "**And they triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.**"

Grant Osborne: Here we have an extended description of **Satan's purpose and strategy**, and the **triumvirate** of dragon, beast, and false prophet will dominate **chapters 12–20**. Also, the theme of the **futility of Satan** becomes central. First, he is pictured as already defeated in heaven (**12:7–12**) and at the cross (**12:11–12**; cf. **5:6**), and his rage stems not merely from his hatred of God but from his defeat by Christ. Second, everything he does is merely a parody or imitation of what God has already done. His "*diadems/crowns*" are a copy of Christ's crowns (**19:12**); the beast's "*mortal wound*" that is healed (**13:3**) imitates Christ's resurrection; the "*great and miraculous signs*" of the second beast (**13:13**; **16:14**) imitate the "sign-miracles" of John's Gospel; and the "*mark of the beast*" (**13:16**) parodies the sealing of the saints (**7:3**). Moreover, the saints participate in this great victory over Satan even through their suffering. Every time Satan "*conquers*" them through persecution (**13:7**), they "*conquer*" him by "*not loving their lives so much as to shrink from death*" (**12:11**). The lot of the believers is one of suffering (**12:13–17**; **13:10**), but in their faithful perseverance there is victory and vindication (**14:1–5**, **13**).

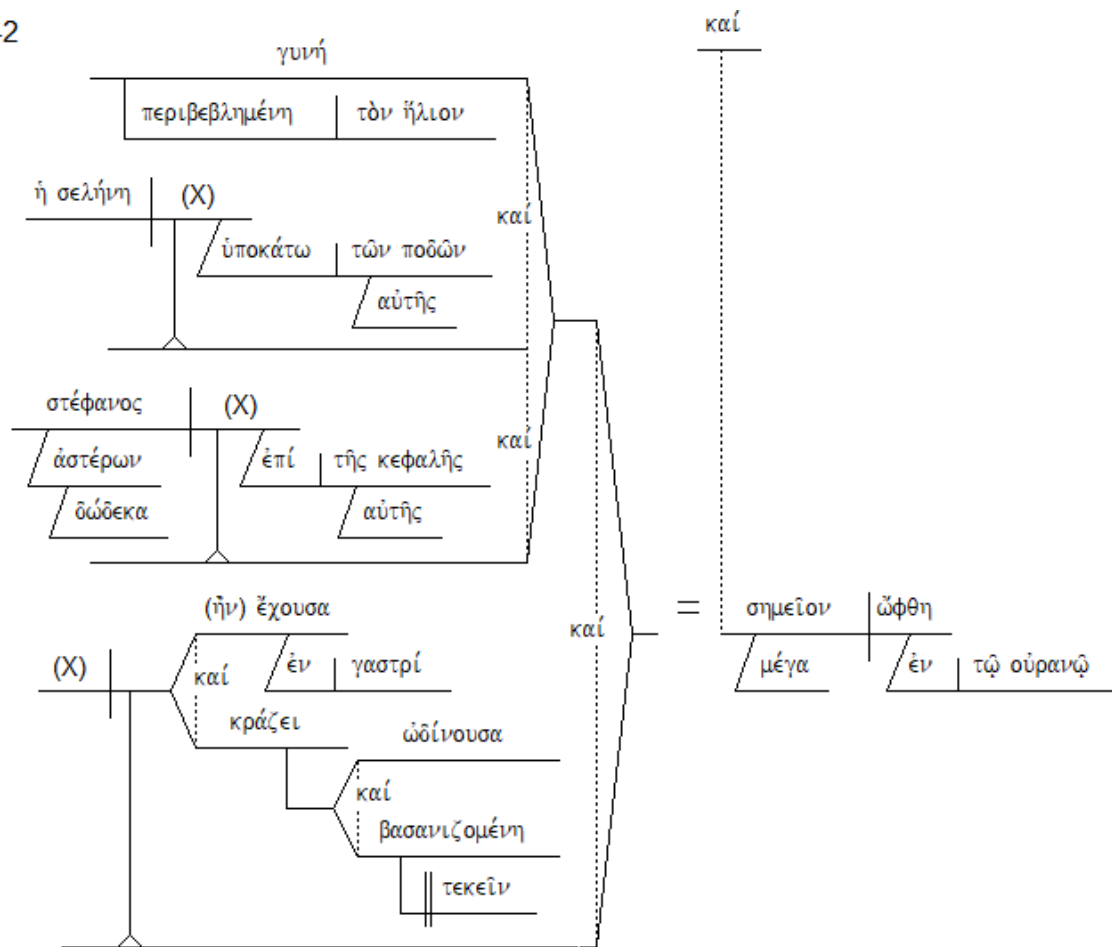
S. Lewis Johnson: What we also find here, I think, is the **origin and the overthrow of anti-Semitism**. Now we know that anti-Semitism is something that has characterized the human race since the time of the elective action of God. One can go back to the Abrahamic promises, follow the flow of them through the word of God, and one will find that those who are not in the elect people of God have resented it, have fought against them, have sought to persecute them and actually kill them if possible. We see it even in the case of Ishmael and Isaac. "*In Isaac shall thy seed be called*," the Scriptures say. Ishmael did not like it, according to tradition shot arrows at Isaac. And the conflict that is characterized by those who are not of the elective purpose of God, apparently, with those who are is a conflict that we still have with us today. It reached its climax in the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **the conflict still continues**.

Kendell Easley: The presence of two great spectacles (**chapters 12–14** and **chapters 15–16**) suggests that these are dramatic presentations that explain the consummation symbolically. Studying the contents of each drama confirms this. The first drama explains the consummation from the **why perspective**. Why must God end the world in this way? The answers given in **chapters 12–14** are a kind of heavenly history of the ages, the ongoing conflict between God's people and the devil looked at through a fish-eye lens. The second drama, as we will see, explains the consummation from the how perspective. There we see the end of the age through a zoom lens. . .

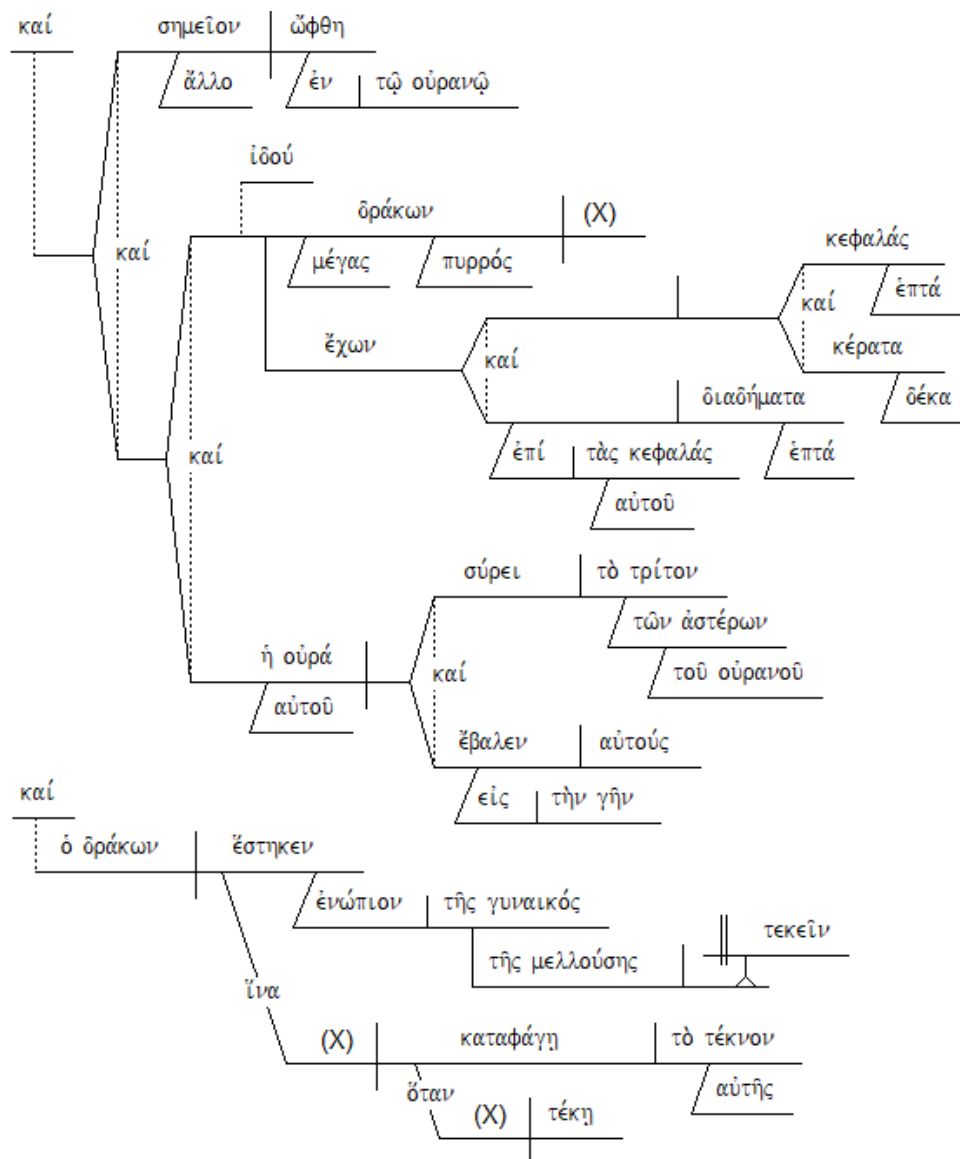
In these verses [**12:1–6**], then, we receive the first part of the answer to the question, "Why is the consummation necessary?" The answer: because the devil has always abhorred God's redeemed people and has tried to ruin God's plan for Christ's rule. The consummation will end this state of affairs forever.

Leedy Greek Diagram:

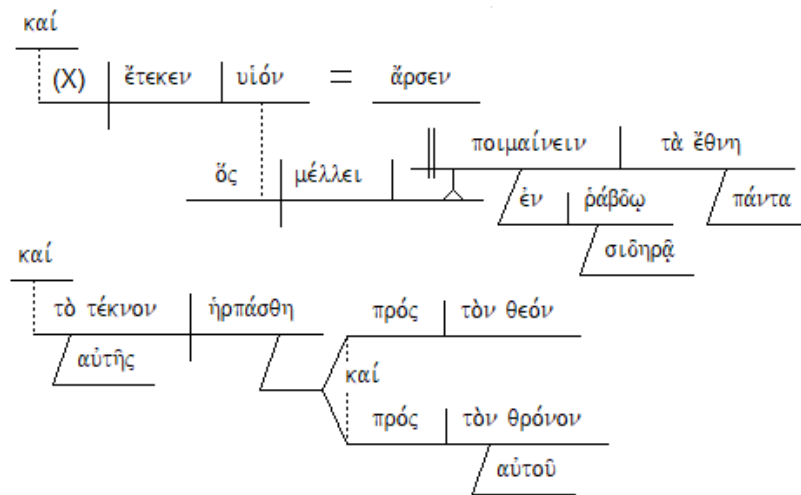
Rev 12:1-2



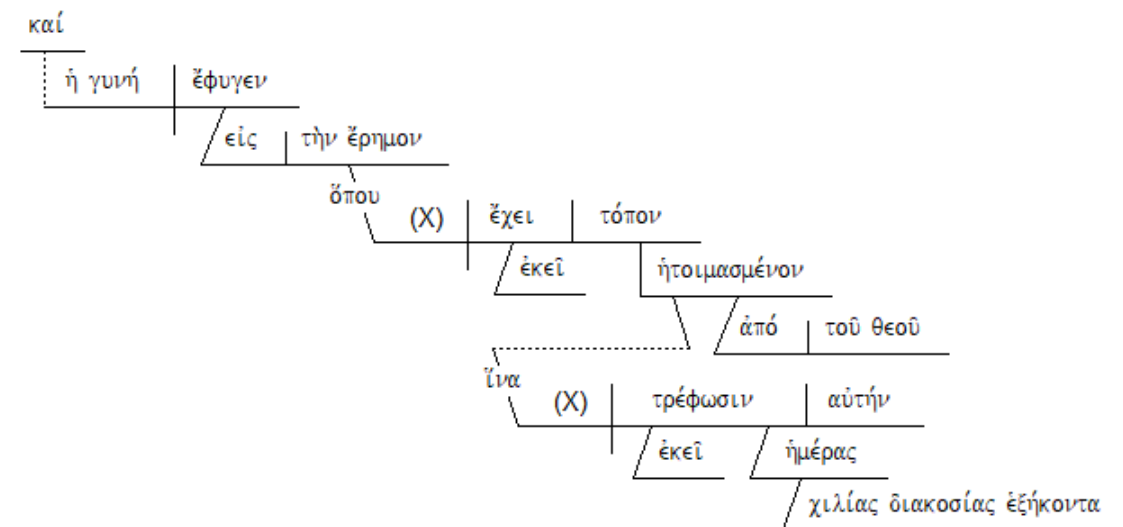
Rev 12:3-4



Rev 12:5



Rev 12:6



TEXT: Revelation 12:7-12

TITLE: FLASHBACK: DEFEAT OF THE DRAGON, EXPULSION FROM HEAVEN AND DIVERSE REACTIONS

BIG IDEA:

MICHAEL DEFEATS SATAN AND CASTS HIM DOWN TO EARTH = THE IMPETUS FOR HIS FINAL WRATH – RESULTING IN JOY IN HEAVEN AND TERROR ON EARTH

INTRODUCTION:

Marvin Rosenthal: **Revelation 12** describes a war that occurs in heaven. The time for that conflict can be pinpointed at precisely the **middle of the seventieth week** of Daniel (**Rev. 12:6, 13-14**). The woman represents Israel, who gave Christ (the male child) to the world (**Rev. 12:5**) and who will be severely persecuted during the Great Tribulation (**Rev. 12:13-17**).

Speaking of this one who will hinder the Antichrist, Paul said, “*only he who now hindereth will continue to hinder until he be taken out of the way*” (**2 Thess. 2:7**). The word *hindereth* means *to hold down*, and the phrase *taken out of the way* means *to step aside*. Therefore, the one who had the job of *hindering* the Antichrist will *step aside*; that is, he will no longer be a restraint between the Antichrist and those the Antichrist is persecuting.

The Bible is explicit that the archangel Michael is the personage who will step aside. Daniel records that event this way: “*And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people, and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time*” (**Dan. 12:1**).

It is important to note when this event occurs. The preceding verse says, “*And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain*” (**Dan. 11:45**). This can only refer to the Antichrist, who will establish his headquarters between the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea on the glorious mountain – Jerusalem. This occurs in the middle of the seventieth week in connection with his desecration of the temple and erection of a statue of himself.

Further, Daniel has already said that Michael will *stand up* during “*a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time*.” The unprecedented time of trouble can only refer to the Great Tribulation. Since Daniel is told that this great trouble relates to his people – and his people are the Jews – this can only be “*the time of Jacob’s trouble*” (**Jer. 30:7**), which is a synonym for the **Great Tribulation**. It is at that time that the archangel Michael will **stand up**. . .

The restrainer is not the Spirit. The restrainer is not taken out of the world; he simply **ceases restraining**. The restrainer does not cease his activity at the beginning of the seventieth week but at the **midpoint**. All of this activity fits, unstrained and perfectly, into a **prewrath rapture** of the church. The identification of Michael as the restrainer is by no means a new and novel idea. Michael is mentioned as the restrainer of Satan and the forces of evil as early as the first or second century A.D. in Greek magical papyri.

Craig Koester: The story of Satan's expulsion from heaven offers readers **incentive to persevere**, despite the ongoing threat of evil. From an earthly perspective, evil can seem so pervasive as to be unstoppable. Where the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, the Devil seems to reign. From a heavenly perspective, however, evil rages on earth, not because it is so powerful, but because it is so vulnerable. Revelation likens Satan to a rogue animal that the forces of God have corralled, driving it off the expansive plains of heaven into the fenced-in area of earth. The beast rampages within its newly limited circumstances, seeking to do as much damage as possible during the short time that remains until the company of heaven slips the noose around its head and chains it up so that it can do no further damage (**12:11; 20:2**). Those who think that Satan rages because he is invincible will give up in despair, but those who recognize that Satan rages on earth because he has already lost heaven and is now desperate have reason to resist him, confident that God will prevail.

Gordon Fee: On the basis of how this part of the narrative begins, one might be tempted to refer to this section under the heading "**War in Heaven**." But that would be to mislead the reader by a large margin, since John's interest lies not with the war as such, but with the defeat of the dragon and his eventually being "*hurled to the earth*." The narrative thus comes in two clear parts: **verses 7–9**, which concentrate altogether on the defeat of the dragon; and **verses 10–12**, which by way of poetry announce the twofold effect of his defeat for the people of God on earth. In so doing it tells the essential Christian story in four parts, beginning with an announcement of the outcome (**v. 10a**) and its cause (**v. 10b**), followed by the believers' own involvement (**v. 11**), with a concluding note of rejoicing in heaven and woe on earth (**v. 12**).

I. (:7-9) DRAGON'S DEFEAT AND EXPULSION FROM HEAVEN

A. (:7) Epic Angelic Warfare in Heaven

1. Conflict

"And there was war in heaven,"

Robert Mounce: It is an all-out attempt on the part of Satan to **regain his position** in the presence of God. It does not refer back to the original expulsion of Satan from heaven but is the cosmic prelude to the consummation, an "**end-time event**." At the same time it is the heavenly counterpart to the victory of Christ in his death and resurrection (cf. **John 12:31**). The triumph of the Messiah (**v. 5**) is now expressed in terms of the **Holy War**.

Sola Scriptura: This war is a **cleansing war**. First heaven will be cleansed of Satan. Then the earth will be cleansed of all evil doers – Satan and followers.

Kendell Easley: Unless one takes the events of this chapter to reflect a flashback to the church age, the present event seems to be even later, at a time when Christian martyrs are being made (**v. 11**). Further, it is at a time **very shortly before the end of the age**, when "*he knows that his time is short*" (**v. 12**). This, then, must be a **final exclusion of the devil from access to God shortly before Christ's return**.

John Walvoord: This event marks the beginning of the great tribulation described in **Daniel 12:1**. It is undoubtedly the same event as in **Revelation 12**. . . Though the events of this chapter deal in general with the end of the age, it is clear that they do not come chronologically after the

seventh trumpet. Rather, the fall of Satan may be predated to the time of the seals in **chapter 6**, or even before the first seal. **His fall begins the great tribulation.**

David Thompson: It is clearly stated that there was war “*in the heaven.*” There are three heavens mentioned in the Bible:

- Heaven #1 - The atmospheric heaven where the birds fly and clouds are - **Jeremiah 4:25**.
- Heaven #2 - The stellar heaven where the sun, moon, galaxies and planets are - **Is. 13:10**.
- Heaven #3 - The throne of God heaven where God’s throne and home are - **Rev. 4:2**.

This third heaven is the heaven Paul referred to when he said he was caught up to the third heaven (**II Cor. 12:2**). This is “*the*” heaven where Satan is apparently permitted from time to time to come appear before God (**Job 1:6; 2:1**). It is somewhere in this third heaven where this war apparently occurs.

2. Combatants

a. Michael and the Good Angels

“Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon.”

Sola Scriptura: The **importance of Michael** to the eschatological end times cannot be overstated. His voice will be heard at the Rapture (**1 Thess 4:16**). His actions will initiate the final unparalleled persecution of Israel (**Dan 12:1**). He initiates the battle that ignites the final conflict prior to the coming of the Son to rule all the nations (**Rev 12:7**). There is every possibility that he is the restrainer of **2 Thessalonians 2:6-7**. The former three passages mentioned all deal with the beginning of the forty-two months; time, times and half a time; and, one thousand two hundred and sixty days, which mark the eschatological period just prior to the Lord’s return at Armageddon.

Daniel Akin: Michael is named in Scripture as the archangel (**Dan 10:13,21; 12:1; Jude 9**). The name Michael means, “*Who is like God?*” The rhetorical question stands in stark contrast to Lucifer’s egocentric attack on the Lord, in which he said, “*I will be like the Most High*” (**Isa 14:14**). Michael is the guardian and protector of God’s people. He has a particular role with respect to Israel, as **Daniel 12:1** makes clear.

Satan and his angels (i.e., demons) fight and are defeated. They are cast out of heaven, and, as **verse 13** notes, they are “*thrown to the earth.*” Satan and his demons were cast out of heaven as their home at the time of their original rebellion. The Bible seems to indicate that they still had some degree of access to heaven for a time (see **Job 1:6; 2:1**), but now having been beat down in this great battle, they are **cast out permanently** and denied any access to heaven at all. In other words, they are banished and barred from the presence of God and heaven forever.

David Thompson: Michael is an **arch-angel** (**Jude 9**). The adjectival prefix “*arch*” (*arci*) means he is a very **high ranked** angel who holds a high office and chief position among angels (**G. Abbott-Smith**, Greek Lexicon, p. 62). He is the only angel specifically identified this way. We suspect there are other angels that have this rank, but he is the only one specifically identified. Only two times in the New Testament is this term used. Here and **I Thessalonians 4:16** when an

archangel will announce the Rapture of the Church. There the angel is not named.

b. Dragon and the Bad Angels

“And the dragon and his angels waged war,”

B. (:8-9) Epic Defeat of the Dragon and Expulsion down to Earth

1. (:8) Epic Defeat

a. Overpowered

“and they were not strong enough,”

b. Ousted from Heaven

“and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.”

2. (:9) Expulsion down to Earth

a. Summary of the Great Dragon’s Defeat

“And the great dragon was thrown down,”

Daniel Akin: *“The great dragon”* emphasizes his ferocity and terror.

David Thompson: Satan is cast down here in Revelation from any present position that God has permitted him to have. Satan appears to have some sort of permitted access to God at the present time when he may appear before God to request something - **Job 1:12; I Kings 22:21; Zechariah 3:1; Luke 22:31; Rev. 12:10**. At this point in the Great Tribulation, Satan is no longer permitted to have any more access to heaven.

b. Specific Characterizations of the Great Dragon

1) Ancient Serpent

“the serpent of old”

Buist Fanning: The title *“the ancient serpent”* (v. 9a) specifies the dragon as the creature who deceived Eve in the garden (**Gen 3:1–15**; cf. **2 Cor 11:3**). Genesis does not identify the serpent as Satan or the devil, but this became the traditional Jewish understanding (cf. Wis 2:23–24; 1 En. 13:1; 3 Bar. 9:7; Apoc. Ab. 23:1–14), and Paul reflects this as well (**2 Cor 11:3** with **Rom 16:20**).

Grant Osborne: The *“ancient serpent”* is characterized by two things: crafty deceit and implacable opposition to God and his people. The latter is seen in the curse of **Gen. 3:15**, where continual “hostility” characterizes the relationship between the serpent and all human beings, a hostility demonstrated in the last part, *“He will crush your head, and you will crush his heel.”* In one sense this portrays the uneven battle between snakes and humans, where the snake has to strike at the heel while the person smashes its head. In another sense it portrays the ongoing battle between good and evil. In the OT the “serpent” is linked to Leviathan, the sea monster of chaos (**Job 26:13; Isa. 27:1**); but it was not until later Judaism that the serpent was linked to Satan (Wis. 2:24; 3 Bar. 9:7; b. Sanh. 29a). In the NT this identification is made complete (**2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9; 20:2**).

David Thompson: He is identified as the *“serpent of old.”* What this means is that he started his attack in Eden and ever since then he has been slithering around in a secretive way trying to poison and destroy everything and everyone. He secretly slithers around and tries to destroy and

devour any that he can. He is not the friend of people; he is a deadly, venomous serpent.

2) Devil = Satan

“who is called the devil and Satan,”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: “*The devil*” is the Greek *diabolos* and means “*slanderer, defamer.*” It reminds us of Satan’s activity to impugn the character of God (see **Job 1**) and to accuse believers for whom Christ died (cf. **Rev. 12:10** and **Rom. 8:34**).

“*Satan*” is the Greek *satanas* and is derived from the Hebrew *satan* which means “*adversary.*” It points to Satan as the opponent of God, of believers, and of all that is right and good. Satan may appear as an angel of light (**2 Cor. 11:14**), but it is only a sham of deception to further aid him in his work as the arch adversary and opponent of God. In **1 Peter 5:8** Satan is called “*your adversary, the devil.*” Here the word “*adversary*” is not *satanas*, but *antidikos*, and though similar in meaning, *antidikos* is more explicit. It specifically refers to “*an opponent in a lawsuit.*” It was used of a court scene where accusations are made. God has indicted Satan for his sin, found him guilty, and sentenced him to the lake of fire (**Matt. 12:41**). By the implications of Scripture, as in the titles of Satan and in the keen interest of angels in man (cf. **Eph. 3:10; 1 Pet. 1:12**), it appears that Satan has appealed the sentence and called God unfair, unjust, and unloving. He has impugned the character of the supreme judge. He stands as **the defamer of God’s character, the accuser of believers, and our adversary in general.**

3) Deceiver

“who deceives the whole world;”

Buist Fanning: The readers knew these titles already, and John had previously used “*Satan*” (**2:9, 13 [2x], 24; 3:9**) and “*devil*” (**2:10**) to warn them about this one’s insidious influence in the world of their day. But gathering these descriptions together in one place as here (also four of them again in **20:2**) provides an unmistakable reinforcement to strengthen the readers’ resistance for the future. Knowing their enemy and his ruthless schemes will serve them well.

David Thompson: Satan is not a truth setter or a straight shooter; he is a **deceiver**. His goal is to deceive the world. He has deceived many angels into following him, but now his goal is to deceive people and lead them away from God and His word and His will. He is deceptively trying to lead people away from the good and true ways of God. He is trying to deceive nations in regard to Israel, to the Bible, to methods of salvation and to concepts of God. He is a deceiver, not a truth setter.

Tony Garland: His ultimate deceiving tool at the time of the end is the False Prophet who performs great signs to deceive those who dwell on the earth (**Rev. 13:13-14+**), those who receive the mark of the beast and worship his image (**Rev. 19:20+**). Satan empowers both the Beast and the False Prophet as two mighty deceivers. In a similar way that God gives power to the two witnesses who testify of God (**Rev. 11:3+**), these two are empowered by Satan as master deceivers during a time when deception will be the rule rather than the exception. The deception will be so strong that only by the power of the Holy Spirit will the regenerate avoid succumbing to the signs and lying wonders:

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because

they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
(2 Th. 2:9-12)

The False Prophet is the ultimate from among those Jesus warned of: “*false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive*” (Mat. 24:24a.). At the Second Coming of Christ, Satan is bound in the abyss so as to halt his deceiving ministry for the duration of the Millennium (Rev. 20:3+), but at the end he will be released to deceive the nations one final time (Rev. 20:8-10+).

c. Summary of the Great Dragon’s Defeat Repeated and Expanded

1) Repeated

“he was thrown down to the earth,”

2) Expanded

“and his angels were thrown down with him.”

II. (:10-12) DIVERSE REACTIONS TO THE EXPULSION OF THE DRAGON

A. (:10-12b) Joy in Heaven

1. (:10) Hymn of Praise

“And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying,”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: At this point a voice is heard in heaven. It is a voice of praise announcing the millennial kingdom with its salvation accompanied by the power of God and authority of Christ. Salvation in this context refers not to one’s personal salvation from sin’s penalty, though this is included, but to deliverance from the reign of Satan and the Tribulation and to the completion of that which God will do to establish the reign and rule of Christ on earth.

With the casting down of Satan one more step, and a very important one at that, has been accomplished in moving toward the reign of God on earth. This must occur before peace can be established on earth. The angelic conflict and the slandering accusations of Satan that God has allowed throughout history to demonstrate His divine essence, especially His holiness, will at this point be just about over.

a. Focus of Praise

1) Deliverance

“Now the salvation,”

2) Power

“and the power,”

Buist Fanning: This mention of God’s “*power*” (δύναμις) is significant in this context because it reminds us that the victory of Michael and his company over Satan (vv. 7–9) will be due ultimately to God’s ruling power and Christ’s victorious authority. God’s holy angels are the instruments of his sovereign purpose in the universe.

3) Kingdom Advancement
“and the kingdom of our God”

Tony Garland: The seventh trumpet is yet future to our day and so the kingdom awaits and we continue to pray, *“Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (**Mat. 6:10**).

How utterly idle is the discoursing of modernists and religious educationalists and social reformers about “the kingdom.” Their talk is full of “the kingdom this” and “the kingdom that”; whereas our Lord Jesus has not yet taken His kingdom. It has not yet been given Him of the Father. We are not living in kingdom days, but in days when Satan is the prince of this world and the god of this age, also, when he is accusing the saints before God. Only those born again ever see the kingdom of God; and *“righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost”*—wholly a separate thing from human arrangements and reforms! is the only form of the kingdom of God now. (**Newell**)

4) Authority of Christ Demonstrated
“and the authority of His Christ have come,”

Sola Scriptura: This is the only place in the Revelation to speak of the **authority of Christ**. After His resurrection, the Lord Jesus declared, *“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”* The expulsion of Satan from heaven will be an overt expression of the Lord’s authority over heaven. The expulsion of Satan from the earth will be an overt expression of the Lord’s authority over earth.

- b. Finishing Off Satan’s Role as Accuser – Denied Access to God’s Throne
*“for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down,
who accuses them before our God day and night.”*

2. (:11) History of Triumph

a. Powerful Testimony

1) Triumphant

“And they overcame him”

Marvin Rosenthal: *To overcome* is to vanquish the enemy, to be triumphant over difficulty. The entire context of the seven churches is set in the arena of the seventieth week and the activity of Satan and the Antichrist. Of those who are truly triumphant, John wrote, *“And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”* (**Rev. 12:11**); that is, they were willing to be martyrs, if being an overcomer required it. The only other time the word *overcomer* is used in Revelation is after all of the events of the seventieth week are complete. John wrote: *“He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son”* (**Rev. 21:7**).

2) Trustworthy

- a) *“because of the blood of the Lamb”*

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The blood of the Lamb, the basis of victory, refers to the person and work of Christ on the cross. This is the place, point in time, and the means of Satan’s defeat (cf. **John 16:8f; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14**). At the cross Jesus answered the accusations of Satan proving that God is perfectly consistent with His divine essence. The cross demonstrated that He

is perfect righteousness, justice, holiness, love, mercy, and grace. Therefore men can always resist and overcome Satan if they will turn to Jesus Christ (see **1 John 5:4-6**).

S. Lewis Johnson: Waylon Morris, some years ago, made a very significant study of the term **blood**. And he came to the conclusion, and I think it's a right conclusion, is that when the Bible speaks about the blood and the blood of Christ, specifically, it refers not to what one might think, that is simply the shedding of physical blood, but it refers to a **violent death**. To put it in other language, when we read of the blood of Christ, we are talking about a death that is a death by violence. In other words, it **involves a sacrifice**. It involves the **making of propitiation**. We cannot speak of the blood in a physical sense only. It's necessary that our Lord die physically, but the real significant death of our Lord is his **spiritual death**. When he cried out, "*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me,*" he is experiencing spiritual death. The physical death follows, that's part of the curse of the fall. But the real death is the spiritual death.

b) "*and because of the word of their testimony,*"

Kendell Easley: In the face of pressure to turn away from faith in Christ, they did not give in. Such **perseverance** not only reveals the genuineness of their faith, it completely overcomes the devil. Of course, he does his best to overcome them, successfully killing some. Those who did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death show by that very death their victory. Loyalty to Christ to the point of death not only overcomes the devil, but it will have its own grand reward (**20:4-6**).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: "*And because of the word of their testimony*" draws our attention to **the activity** that overcomes and defeats the attacks of Satan. The word of their testimony refers to the proclamation of the Word, Bible doctrine and the truth of Jesus Christ both by life and by lip. By the word of God known, believed, and applied by faith in consistent Christian living, believers are able to put to silence the accusations of Satan and to reveal him for what he is. Jesus Christ, our Advocate, answers his accusation in heaven, but we too can answer them by proclaiming and living the Word. Satan and his world system claim that God is not what man needs; the world claims man's need is human knowledge, science, and the material things of life. But we demonstrate the world to be wrong when we do not live as materialists, when we love not the world nor the temporal things in the world (**1 John 2:15-17**). When we seek to live by God's Holy Word and live as sojourners rather than by the temporal details of life, we counter Satan's accusations (cf. **Job 1 and 2** with **Matt 4:4**).

b. Persevering Testimony

"and they did not love their life even to death."

Daniel Akin: Those who follow the Lamb, the Christ of God, have conquered, become victorious, over the dragon. And how did we overcome? Two grounds for our victory are noted: the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony (i.e., our faithfulness to the gospel of King Jesus). The power of the blood of Jesus is indeed sufficient for our sin. It is also sufficient for a martyr's death. Indeed, the loyalty of the child of God to the Lamb who shed His blood is witnessed by their faithfulness even unto death. This verse beautifully states that their love for the Lamb was greater than their love for their own life. Amazingly, the blood of the martyrs shows not the triumph of Satan but rather the triumph of the saints as their acceptance of Jesus and His work on the cross provides victory over sin as well as Satan. Because our sins have been washed in the blood of the Lamb of God, no accusation by the Devil can stand against us. We

have not been forgiven because of who we are; we have been forgiven because of who He is and what He has done for us. He washed our sins away in His precious blood. For such a great salvation, we gladly and willingly put our lives on the line. He is worth it.

3. (:12a) Heavenly Celebration

“For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them.”

Robert Mounce: Verse 12 refers back to v. 10—the heavens are to rejoice because the accuser is cast down. The call for rejoicing echoes such exclamations as **Isa 49:13** (“*Shout for joy, O heavens*”) and **Ps 96:11** (“*Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad*”). Those that dwell in heaven are angelic beings. That they “*tabernacle*” there does not indicate a temporary residence, but emphasizes the presence of God (cf. **7:15; 21:3**). While the casting out of Satan brings rejoicing in heaven, it is cause for woe upon the earth and the sea.

Grant Osborne: The third part of this hymn (**12:12**) relates the **results for heaven and for earth**. Διὰ τοῦτο (*dia touto, on account of this*) refers to the whole of **12:10–11**, not just to **verse 11** itself. Because of the coming of the kingdom, which involves both the overthrow of Satan and the victory of the faithful, the heaven-dwellers are called upon to rejoice and the earth-dwellers to mourn. In the OT heaven and earth are normally called on to rejoice together (**Ps. 96:11; Isa. 44:23; 49:13**). Since the “*earth*” has come under the control of evil powers, however, it must suffer the consequences. Εὐφραίνεσθε (*euphrainesthe, rejoice*) was used in **11:10** of the earth-dwellers’ “joy” at the death of the two witnesses. There is often a religious tone to the term, with implications of worship (in **11:10** they exchange gifts, reflecting the Festival of Purim), and that is certainly the case here, as all of heaven is called to celebrate with joy over the great victory of Christ and the saints (see also **18:20**). Both “*heaven*” and those who “*dwell*” in it are named. These are not separate entities, and the καί (*kai, and*) is probably epexegetical, “*heaven, namely those who dwell in it.*” While some think these are angelic beings (**Morris, Mounce, Thomas**), it is more likely that all heavenly beings, including the saints (**6:9–11**), are intended. **Bauckham** (1993b: 240) rightly sees a contrast between “*the heavens and those who dwell in it*” here and “*the earth and those who dwell in it*” in **13:12**. The earth-dwellers are those who worship the beast, while the heaven-dwellers are those who worship God and Christ. This parallels the contrast between heaven and earth/sea in **chapter 13**, and this contrast is further heightened by the verb that always characterizes the earth-dwellers, κατοικοῦντες (*katoikountes, those who inhabit*) and the verb for the heaven-dwellers, σκηνοῦντες (*skēnountes, those who tabernacle*), a contrast repeated in **13:6, 8**. This verb was used in **7:15** of the enthroned God “*spreading his tent*” over the victorious saints in heaven, indicating his eternal protection over them and fellowship with them. This builds on that image and pictures the redeemed as having a permanent home in heaven. They belong to heaven, while the unbelievers belong to earth. **Michaelis** (TDNT 7:377–78) shows how the σκῆνη word group in Revelation consistently evokes the tabernacle-in-heaven imagery (see **21:3**), and the thrust here is that the believers will “*tabernacle*” permanently with God in heaven.

While the heavens rejoice, the “*earth and the sea*” are called on to mourn. In this verse the three primary regions of the Apocalypse are found: **heaven, earth, and sea**. The last two, however, refer to the same entity, the realm of evil. The two beasts of **chapter 13** emerge from the sea and the earth respectively. In the laments of **chapter 18**, the grief of the “*kings of the earth*” (**18:9–10**), the “*merchants of the earth*” (**18:11–12**), and the “*captains of the sea*” (**18:17b–18**) are again contrasted to the rejoicing of the heavens (**18:20**). Here the call to mourn utilizes the same term (οὐαί, *ouai, woe*) that initiated the three “woes” of the trumpet judgments (**8:13; 9:12;**

11:14). As there, the “woe” builds on the judgment oracles of the OT and depicts the effects of the wrath of God on those who have rebelled against him. In the only other occurrence of the term in the book, double “woes” introduce the laments of the kings, merchants, and sea captains in **18:10, 16, 19** at the fall of Babylon the Great. There and here the other aspect of the “woe” is seen, the mourning of those who have felt the wrath of God. While the primary thrust in **12:12b** is the devil’s “wrath” against the unbelievers on earth, **Beale** (1999: 667) correctly points out that John does not have just unbelievers in mind but all who are still on the earth, the saints and the unsaved. In **12:13–17** his attack on the saints is part of his “wrath” against all on earth.

B. (:12b) Terror on Earth

1. Unleashing of Woe

“Woe to the earth and the sea,”

2. Unavoidable Terror

“because the devil has come down to you,”

3. Unleashing of Great Wrath

“having great wrath,

Daniel Akin: As his time draws to a close, his fury will increase to proportions beyond our wildest imagination. Truly hell will come to earth during these horrible final days of the tribulation [**Great Tribulation**].

Kendell Easley: In these verses, then, we receive the second part of the answer to the question, “**Why is the consummation necessary?**” The answer: because the devil's final expulsion has so filled him with fury that he will bring terrible woes to earth and sea. The consummation will end this state of affairs forever.

Sola Scriptura: This conclusively proves that the wrath that the followers of Christ will experience on the earth during the “*short time*” of Satan’s anger outbursts is not the wrath of God. The overwhelming part of the time called “*the great tribulation*” is the **wrath of Satan** against God’s elect [who are not raptured until after the Great Tribulation and right before the Day of the Lord].

4. Urgency of Satan’s Wrath

“knowing that he has only a short time.”

Buist Fanning: His accusations in God’s presence have now come to an end, but as **vv. 12b–17** will show, his angry persecution of God’s people will intensify for the limited time that will remain for him on earth in that future day.

John MacArthur: **Verse 12** says that Satan and his forces have only “*a short time*” after they leave heaven, supporting the view that they will have only the last three and a half years of the Tribulation to operate, rather than the full seven years. They will not arrive on earth later than that, since they clearly are present during the terrible events of the last three and a half years, the Great Tribulation (cf. **9:1ff.**). During that last period, Satan’s full power will be directed at anyone belonging to God, **especially Israel**.

Grant Osborne: There are two reasons for the devil's wrath: First, he has **lost his place in heaven (12:7–9, 10b)**, and second, this means ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει (*oligon kairon echei, he has a short time*) left. **His final defeat is imminent.** Satan knows that he cannot win and that it is only a “*short time*” before he is cast into the lake of fire (20:10). This same sense of imminence characterizes the *parousia* expectation of the NT (Matt. 16:27; 1 Cor. 1:7; Rev. 22:7, 12, 20), even though Jesus said that only the Father “*knows about the day or the hour*” (Matt. 24:36). While believers are characterized by good works in their time on earth, Satan wants to do as many evil works as he can in his short time left. **His judgment is both inevitable and imminent**, so the world must brace itself for the outpouring of evil from Satan and his demonic hordes. Why does Satan hate his own followers, the earth-dwellers? Unbelievers are still made in the image of God, and they are still the objects of God's love (John 3:16). So they are the objects of Satan's wrath. It is clear in the Gospels that demon possession has only one goal—to torture and kill all who are made in the image of God (see Mark 5:1–20 and 9:14–29).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What would lead you to think that this battle and expulsion from heaven is different from the account of the original fall of Satan and his co-conspirator demons in **Is. 14** and **Ezek. 28**?
- 2) Who are the ones singing the hymn of praise in **v. 10**?
- 3) What can we learn about Satan's schemes against God's people from the names and characterizations of him in this text?
- 4) What type of distinction do you see in the end times scenario of events between Satan's wrath and God's wrath?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Buist Fanning: What is not immediately clear from these verses is **the time** when this heavenly conflict and expulsion takes place.

1. The language of being “*thrown to the earth*” (**v. 9**) could suggest Satan's primordial fall from heaven, as many Jewish and Christian interpreters understand to be portrayed at least typologically in **Isaiah 14** and **Ezekiel 28** (cf. LAE 12:1–16:3). However, the limits to Satan's actions described in **Revelation 12** (e.g., no access to heaven, intense anger because his time is short) have hardly characterized his career since that primeval event itself. Possibly this later expulsion repeats and intensifies key features of the pattern of that original fall.
2. A second quite plausible option is the decisive defeat of Satan at the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ. **Verse 5c** in this vision focuses on the exaltation of the woman's male child, and several references in John's Gospel point to Jesus's coming death as the decisive judgment of Satan (**John 12:31; 16:11; Luke 10:17–18** is sometimes read this way). But it seems unlikely that Satan is understood to have no more access to accuse Christians before God (**v. 10**) for the entire period after the cross of Christ. It makes more

sense to understand a decisive victory to have come at the cross, resurrection, and exaltation (**Col 2:15**), but that this victory awaits its full accomplishment in the end times (cf. **1 Cor 15:20–28**; **Heb 2:8–9, 14–15**).

3. A third interpretation takes this expulsion as a yet-future event just prior to the arrival of “*the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah*” on the earth (**Rev 11:15**; cf. **12:10a**), at the time of the seventh trumpet when God’s revealed plan for redemption is brought to completion without further delay (**10:6–7**). This coheres with the point that the devil’s brief remaining time to inflict his anger will bring great woes for the earth and sea (**v. 12b**), and that the woman will need protection from him for a period of three-and-a-half years in the future (**vv. 6, 14**; cf. **11:2–3**; **13:5**).

John MacArthur: The repetition of the phrase *waging war ... waged war* emphasizes the force and fury of the battle; this will be no minor skirmish, but an all-out battle. Satan will fight desperately to prevent Christ from establishing His millennial kingdom (just as he opposed Israel’s restoration from captivity and was rebuked for it; **Zech. 3:2**). Thus, the supernatural war will reach a crescendo as the time for Christ to establish His earthly and eternal kingdom draws near.

S. Lewis Johnson: the important thing is the consummation, triumphant consummation, of human history in the son. . .

Let me read **verse 12** first, “*Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*” In other words, that statement is a reference to something that transpires just a short time before the consummation of things in the Second Advent of our Lord and the institution of the Kingdom of God. If that is true, then when we read in **verse 13**, “*And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.*” This is **set in the future**, and the woman is there, the mother of the man child.

We can only conclude from comparing those passages that when we read in **verse 6**, “*and the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared of God that they should feed her there for the three and a half years.*” That too is a reference to that which is going to happen **in the future**. It’s clear from the time. It’s clear from the fact that the dragon persecutes the woman, and it’s clear from the woman fleeing. So, the *fled* is written from the standpoint of the beasts breaking of the covenant described in **Daniel chapter 9** ushering in the last half of Israel’s seventieth week, in other words, the last half of the history of the nation upon the earth **before the establishment of the kingdom**.

Van Parunak: Our legal system recognizes the danger of **entrapment**, when law enforcement officers try to lure people into breaking it so that lawkeepers can appear more productive in prosecuting evildoers. Satan’s conduct with Eve and later with Job shows him as a master of entrapment. He does not simply bring accusations against sins we have already committed, but deliberately tries to lure people into sins that he can then bring before the heavenly court. This malice is active against “the whole world.” The only remedy is God’s sovereign enlightenment:

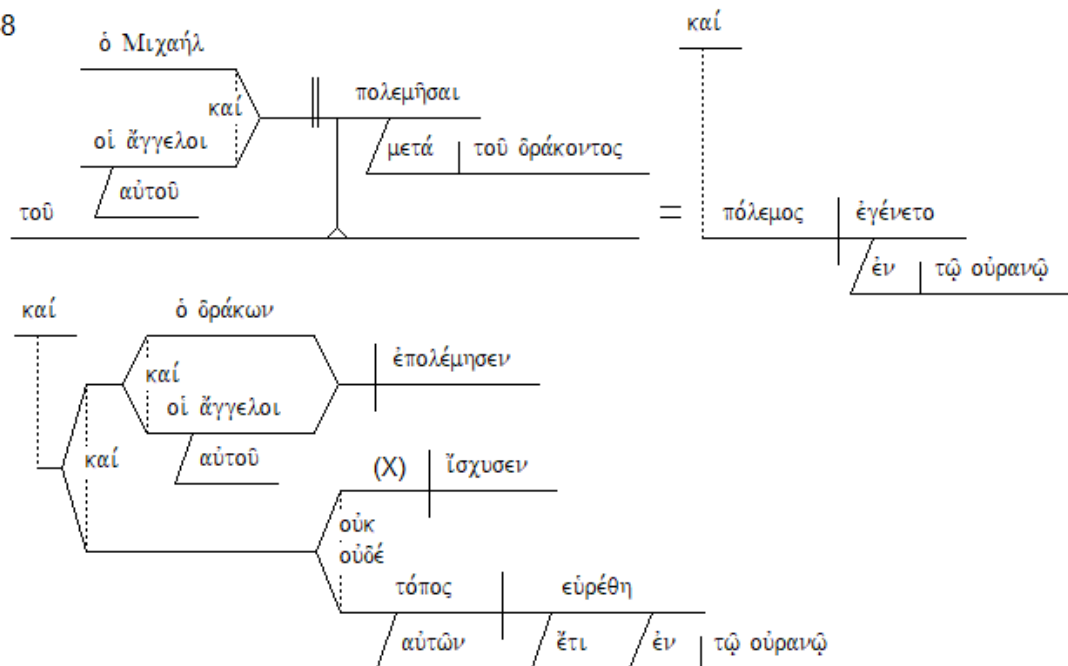
2 Co 4:6 *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Who will defend us in the face of such a malicious accuser? Job was confident:

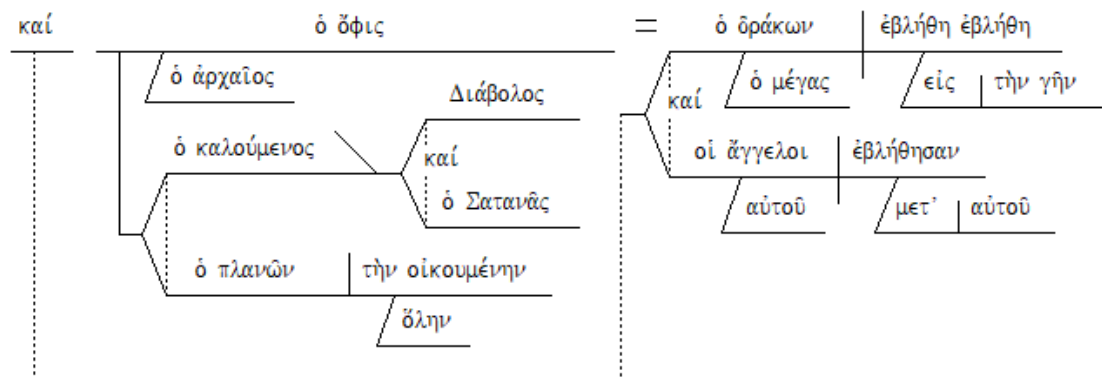
Job 16:19 *Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record (ἡ ψῆφος H7717 advocate) is on high.*

Leedy Greek Diagram:

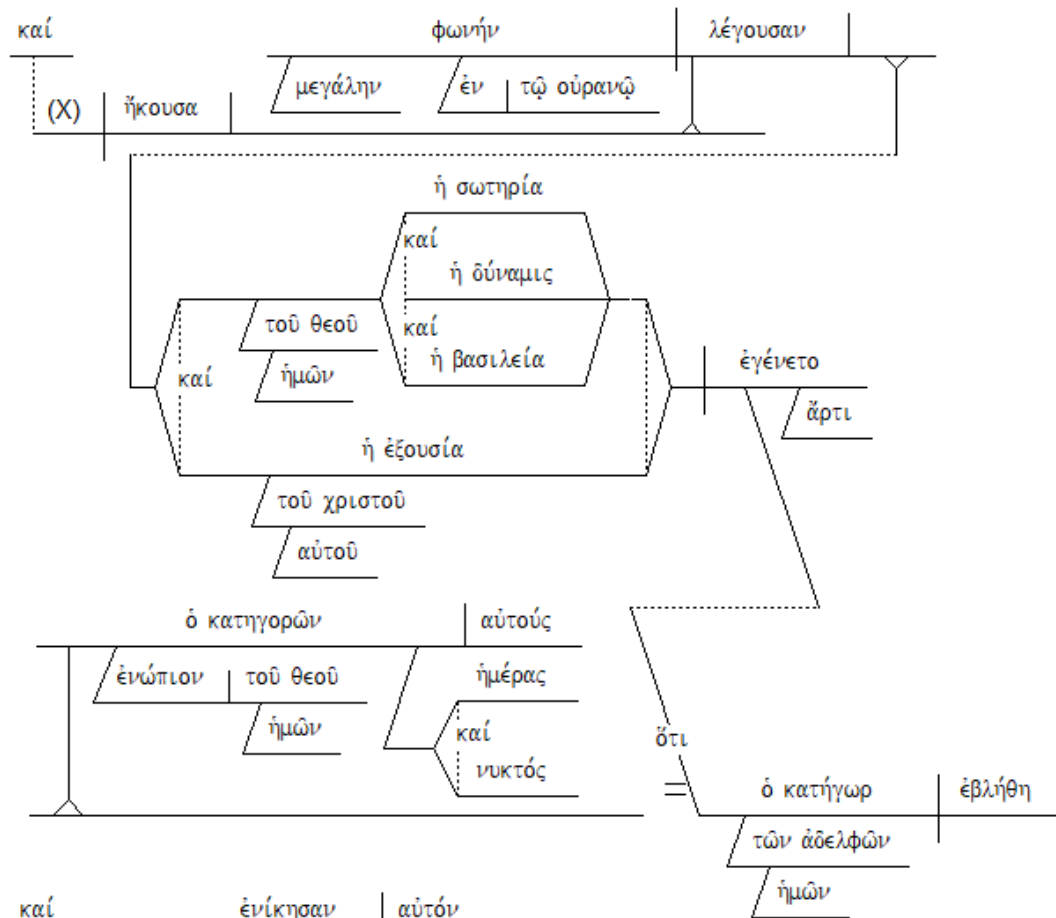
Rev 12:7-8



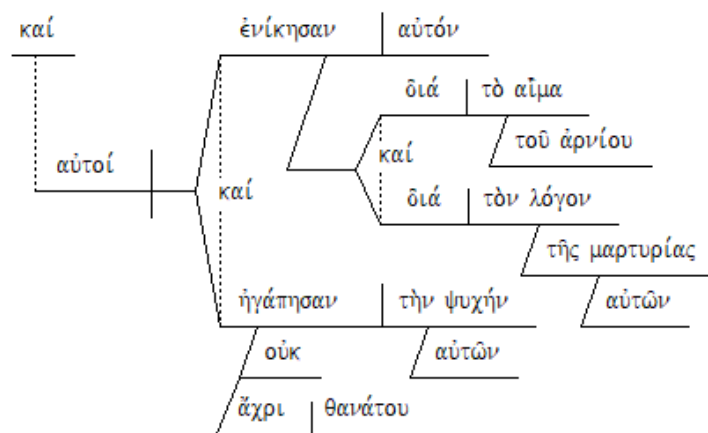
Rev 12:9



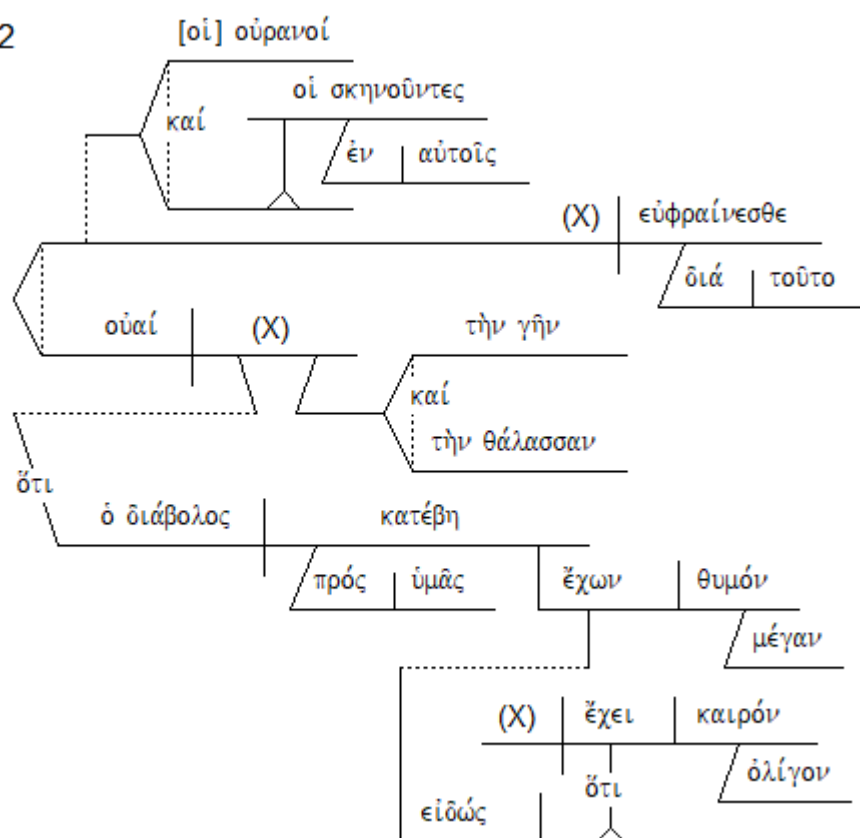
Rev 12:10



Rev 12:11



Rev 12:12



TEXT: Revelation 12:13-17

TITLE: THE ENRAGED DRAGON FAILS IN HIS ATTEMPTS TO DESTROY ISRAEL

BIG IDEA:

PROVIDENTIAL PROTECTION SPARES PERSECUTED ISRAEL FROM HER ENRAGED ATTACKER

INTRODUCTION:

“*From the river to the sea*” – the chant of the goal of exterminating Israel still resonates today in the Middle East. But God continues to demonstrate His faithfulness to protect a remnant. Ultimately in the last days, *all of Israel will be saved* and the enraged attacks of Satan will finally be defeated.

Buist Fanning: Having now recounted the conflict in heaven leading to the dragon’s banishment to earth and the heavenly commentary on those events (vv. 7–12), John now returns to the story of the woman and the dragon from vv. 1–6. To resume that story the first step is to cite the key point from the intervening section (vv. 7–12), that is, the dragon “*thrown to the earth*” (v. 13a, which also picks up the thread of “*woe to the earth*” in v. 12b–d). Then John is ready to move the narrative along further.

Daniel Akin: Exodus imagery and typology dominate these final verses of **chapter 12**. The dragon seeks the destruction of the Son’s children, but God comes to the rescue.

David Thompson: WHEN SATAN AND HIS DEMONS ARE CAST OUT OF HEAVEN IT WILL SO ENRAGE SATAN THAT HE WILL TRY TO DESTROY EVERY JEW ON THE EARTH.

John MacArthur: One of the darkest stains on the history of mankind has been the persistent specter of **anti-Semitism**. Over the centuries the Jews have faced more hatred and persecution than any other people. Much of that suffering was chastisement from God to turn the nation away from their sin and unbelief and back to Him. God repeatedly warned Israel of the consequences of disobedience (cf. **Deut. 28:15–68**) and punished them when they failed to obey (cf. **2 Kings 17:7–23**). Within the paradigm of God’s sovereign purpose for His people, Israel also has suffered constantly and severely at the hands of Satan, acting as God’s instrument. Unlike God, however, Satan’s purpose in causing the Jewish people to suffer is not remedial, but **destructive**. He seeks to bring them not to repentance and salvation, but to death and destruction.

The Tribulation will be the worst of times for Israel for two reasons. During that seven-year period God will pour out His final fury on the unrepentant and unbelieving world (including the unrepentant rebels of Israel). At the same time, Satan will make his last, desperate attempt to prevent the promised reign of the Lord Jesus Christ on Israel’s throne and thus negate the salvation and kingdom promised to Israel. He will savagely assault the Jewish people, seeking to destroy both those Jews who have already come to faith in Christ, and those who still might. The devil will also do everything in his power to hinder the ministries of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (7:4) and the two witnesses (11:3–14).

But **Satan's efforts will not succeed**. His worst fears will be realized when the Jews "*look on [the One] whom they have pierced; and ... mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and ... weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn*" (**Zech. 12:10**). The believing remnant of Israel will be saved (**Rom. 11:25–29**), and their promised kingdom will be established (cf. **Hos. 2:14–23**).

I. (:13) PERSECUTION PURSUED BY ENRAGED DRAGON

A. Triggering Defeat

"And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth,"

B. Target of Persecution

"he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child."

Grant Osborne: It is the "*pursuit*" of the dragon that makes the woman "*flee*." It is interesting that the dragon "*saw*" or realized that he had been cast down to earth. This hints that the expulsion was the instantaneous act of a vastly superior force (God and Michael in **12:9**). One minute Satan was in heaven fighting against Michael, the next minute he found himself on earth. At that point, he turned his anger against the woman and ἐδίωξεν (*ediōxen*, *pursued*) her. There is a double meaning in this verb, as the dragon both "*pursued*" and "*persecuted*" her (so **Swete** 1911: 157). The picture of the woman fleeing before the pursuing dragon is another **exodus motif**, built on Israel fleeing before the pursuing chariots of Pharaoh (called the dragon "*Rahab*" in **Isa. 51:9–10**; cf. **Ps. 74:13–14**).

Thomas Constable: Satan will concentrate his vengeance on Israelites during the Great Tribulation, under the sovereign control of God, since He cannot antagonize Christ. The Israelites will flee from Satan in the future as they fled from Pharaoh in the past (cf. **Exodus 14:5**; **Joshua 24:6**). Jesus predicted this flight in the Olivet Discourse (**Matthew 24:15–28**; **Mark 13:14–23**). The reason Satan will oppose the Jews is that Christ, his archenemy, came from them and is one of them. They are also the special objects of His favor.

II. (:14) PROVIDENTIAL PROTECTION #1 – REFUGE IN THE WILDERNESS

A. Way of Escape Provided

"And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman,"

Daniel Akin: The phrase "*two wings of a great eagle*" should not be taken literally. Neither should this be viewed as some type of Boeing 747! It is simply a picture of God's **providential protection** of His people. Wings often appear in the Bible as a sign of God's protection (see **Exod 19:4**; **Deut 32:9–12**; **Pss 17:8**; **18:10**; **36:7**; **57:1**; **61:4**; **63:7**; **91:4**; **Isa 40:31**).

John MacArthur: *Eagle* translates *aetos*, which can also refer to the griffon, or vulture (cf. **Matt. 24:28**; **Luke 17:37**). These large birds with enormous wing-spans serve as a fitting symbol for God's protection and sheltering of Israel. This is not, of course, a reference to an actual eagle with literal wings; rather, it is picturesque language depicting God's miraculous assistance of the woman, so that she could fly swiftly into the wilderness to her place of shelter and safety.

B. Wilderness Refuge

"in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place,"

John MacArthur: Jesus' warning to flee to the mountains (**Matt. 24:15–16**) suggests that the place of refuge will not be in the coastal plain to the west of Jerusalem, or the relatively flat Negev (desert region) to the south. More likely, it will be in the mountainous region east of Jerusalem. **Daniel 11:41** provides further evidence for that view: “[Antichrist] *will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many countries will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon.*” Perhaps God will spare Edom, Moab, and Ammon, ancient countries to the east of Israel, to provide a refuge for His people.

S. Lewis Johnson: Perhaps with “*the woman*” is not only a small element of the nation in that day, but inclusive of the one hundred and forty four thousand that we read about in **chapter 7**, who were sealed out of the twelve tribes of Israel. And further, perhaps the two witnesses of whom we have read in the 11th chapter may be accounted among them. But at any rate, the woman or Israel, that is the true believing ones in the tribulation period, that seven year period of time, now are persecuted by Satan and they are driven into the wilderness, the place prepared of God.

C. Witness Protection Program for Last Half of Seventieth Week of Daniel

“where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time,”

John MacArthur: In her place of safety and refuge, Israel will be supernaturally nourished (fed) by God. Cut off from the world system, and unable in any case to buy and sell (cf. **13:17**), the Jews will need outside help to survive. God will supernaturally supply them with food, just as he did by providing their ancestors with manna and quail in the wilderness (**Ex. 16:12ff.**), and Elijah with food at the brook Cherith (**1 Kings 17:1–6**). Certainly it is not incredible that, in a time of devastating miraculous judgments, God will miraculously provide provisions for His people.

D. Withdrawn from Serpent’s Presence

“from the presence of the serpent.”

Tony Garland: *Presence* is προσώπου [*prosōpou*], she is protected from the “*face, countenance*” of the serpent. This denotes his inability to access her. It is used “in all kinds of more or less symbolic expressions which, in large part, represent OT usage, and in which the face is often to be taken as the seat of the faculty of seeing.” She is hidden from his access, and possibly even from his knowledge.

III. (:15-16) PROVIDENTIAL PROTECTION #2 – ESCAPE FROM THE FLOOD

A. (:15) Destruction Attempted

“And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood.”

John Walvoord: Though the exact meaning of these two verses cannot be determined with certainty, the implication is that Satan strives with all his power to persecute and exterminate the people of Israel. By divine intervention, both natural and supernatural means are used to thwart the enemy’s program and carry a remnant of Israel safely through their time of great tribulation.

Van Parunak: The “flood” that “*the serpent cast out of his mouth*” is most likely **his seed**, who share his antipathy for the woman and her believing offspring. Satan opposes the faithful not only with the centralized oppression of the Antichrist, but also with social pressure from multitudes of unbelievers who overwhelm the faithful with ostracism.

We have examples of this kind of Satanic flood in the Bible. Recall the history of **Korah**, when the ground opened. The Levite Korah and three Reubenites object to the prominence of Moses and Aaron, insisting that all the congregation are holy.

Num. 16:1 *Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: 2 And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: 3 And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?*

Their strategy is one used by revolutionaries in every age: present themselves as the voice of the people, and try to arouse widespread popular opinion against those they oppose. To the degree they are successful, they will produce a “flood of ungodly men,” in the words of **2 Sam 22:5**.

In **2 Sam 22:5**, David may be recalling the history of **1 Samuel 23**. He courageously delivers the people of Keilah from the Philistines. In spite of this, perhaps because of their fear of Saul, they are willing to deliver him into the hands of Saul:

1Sa 23:12 *Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver thee up.*

David Thompson: The prophet Daniel specifically predicted that this Satanic persecution would come against Israel like a flood (**Daniel 9:26**). By using the adverb “like”, we know that this is not a reference to a literal flood of water; but a fast flowing **flood of persecution**.

When a river floods, it rises quickly and flows swiftly and ferociously. When the prophet Jeremiah used this imagery, he used it in reference to Gentile powers that would quickly and swiftly rise against Israel (**Jer. 46:7-8; 47:2-3**).

More than likely what this means is that Satan’s first assault against Israel will be a rise of Gentile powers that will quickly and swiftly rise and turn against Israel in an attempt to completely destroy her.

B. (:16) Deliverance Successful

“And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.

Buist Fanning: The saga does not end with her initial escape into the wilderness, as **vv. 15–16** show (see also the note at **v. 6** about the “wilderness” as both positive and negative for Israel). The serpent (or dragon, **v. 16**, who controls the rivers and seas; cf. **Ezek 29:3; 32:2**) intends to destroy the woman even in the wilderness with a flood of “*water like a river*” disgorged like a

weapon “*from his mouth*” (v. 15a). But the earth itself comes to the woman’s aid by “*swallow[ing] up*” the dragon’s river of water (v. 16). This imagery seems to be based on the exodus pattern of deliverance also, but with a strategic twist. Instead of Israel going on dry land through a sea of water that sweeps away the Egyptians, the earth delivers Israel from the flood that the dragon unleashes against her (see **Exod 14:13–29; 15:4–13**; also **Ps 74:12–15** that seems to adapt exodus imagery in a similar way). Similar symbolism about the Lord delivering his people through “*floods*” of adversity occurs more generally in the Old Testament (**Pss 18:4; 32:6; 124:4; Isa 43:2**) and sometimes refers to armies that attack like an overwhelming flood (e.g., **Isa 8:7–8; Jer 46:7–8; 47:2–3**). Again, it is unnecessary to speculate about how such a satanic attack and divine deliverance will take place in future earthly terms. The exodus typology communicates the broader truth without dictating the specific ways it will be replicated in the end times.

IV. (:17) PERSECUTION PURSUED BY ENRAGED DRAGON

A. Rage of the Dragon Intensified

“And the dragon was enraged with the woman,”

B. Redirection of Persecution Efforts

1. Attacking the Seed of the Woman

“and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring,”

Buist Fanning: This distinction between the “*woman*” who will escape and “*the rest of her offspring*” who will still suffer attack is a conundrum that interpreters have solved in various ways. The explanation that makes the most sense is to understand the “*woman*” protected in her refuge (**vv. 6, 14**) as a representative body of ethnically Jewish followers of Jesus (who are described also as the sealed 144,000 from every tribe of Israel in **7:4–8; 14:1–5**) and “*the rest of her offspring*” as other ethnically Jewish believers who will not escape satanic persecution in those terrible days to come. They along with believers in Christ from other ethnic origins will face great persecution, and many of them will be killed for their loyalty to Christ (**6:9–11; 7:14–15; 12:10–12; 20:4**).

Daniel Akin: Although the Devil will be unable to totally exterminate Israel, **Zechariah 13:8** sorrowfully informs us that two-thirds of the Jewish population will be killed during the tribulation. Satan will not utterly succeed in wiping God’s people from the face of the earth, but he will succeed in plunging many to their death. Satan indeed hates the righteous remnant of God.

Thomas Constable: Enraged because of his lack of success in completely annihilating all fleeing Jews, Satan will proceed to concentrate his attack on those who do not flee. Jews who believe in Jesus Christ become his special target, those who hold fast to the truth that God and Christ revealed. Specifically this group seems to be, or perhaps includes, the 144,000 (**Revelation 7:1–8; Revelation 14:1–5**).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Some see this verse as pointing to a geographic contrast between the persecution of Israel in the land (**vss. 13–16**) and Israel outside the land in other portions of the world (**vs. 17**). However, the contrast is more likely between the nation as a whole symbolized in the term “*the woman*” versus the godly and believing remnant, “*the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus*” (**vs. 17**). The godly remnant

are believers in the Lord Jesus, those who during the Tribulation will turn to Christ. The word used here for the remnant translated by the NASB as “*the rest*” is not the same word used in **Romans 9:27** or in **Romans 11:5** (*leimma*). Here the word is *loipon*, but they all come from the same verb, *leipw*, and the context clearly shows that **the believing and godly remnant are in view**.

This verse serves to emphasize that the dragon will become totally frustrated and enraged over his inability to wipe out the woman, but he will become particularly angry with the believing remnant who will turn to Jesus Christ, believe the Word, and stand ready to die for their faith in the Savior.

2. Allegiance of the Faithful Remnant

a. Obedience

“who keep the commandments of God”

John MacArthur: They are further described as those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. *Entolas* (*commandments*) is a word used frequently in John’s writings to refer to New Testament commands (e.g., **14:12; John 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12; 1 John 2:3–4; 3:22–24; 5:2–3**). The testimony of Jesus is not testimony about Him, but the testimony He gave, the truths He taught that are revealed in the New Testament. These persecuted believers will give further evidence that their salvation is real by their obedience to the truth of Scripture.

b. Perseverance

“and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

S. Lewis Johnson: if you examine the other occurrences in the Book of Revelation in which that expression occurs, there are several of them, probably indicates that this is the testimony that he, himself bore rather than testimony to him; the testimony that he bore and that has now been committed to the apostles.

[Alternate View:]

Van Parunak: Here are two characteristics that mark the people of God.

1. Toward God, we owe unquestioning obedience, whatever the consequences.
2. Toward unbelievers, we must bear witness to the Lord Jesus and his gospel.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some evidence of antisemitism in our culture today?
- 2) What makes Satan especially angry?
- 3) Why does Satan so arrogantly continue to oppose God’s people even after his defeat has been established?
- 4) How would the Lord characterize the extent of your spiritual allegiance?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: Immediately after Satan is thrown down, he will attempt to erase Israel from the face of the earth (**12:13**). Satan has inspired countless attempts at destroying God's special covenant people. Throughout history, the Jews have been the special object of hatred, ridicule, and persecution. During the Middle Ages, they were looked on with suspicion and treated as outcasts in a world dominated by a form of political Christianity that viewed all Jews as Christ-killers. During World War II, the Nazis attempted to obliterate the Jewish people in a horrific holocaust driven by absolute evil. Even after the birth of the modern nation of Israel in 1948, its neighboring nations in the Middle East have often talked of driving the Jews into the sea and retaking the land. Anti-Semitism has a long and sordid history. Yet God has continued to fulfill His promise to preserve Israel, even in their spiritually blind condition of rejecting Jesus as their Messiah (**Rom. 11:28-29**).

During the Tribulation, God will continue to preserve the righteous remnant of Israel from harm (**Rev. 7:1-8**). Represented by the symbol of the woman in **Revelation 12**, Israel will receive supernatural protection from Satan's military attack, which is signified by a flood flowing from the dragon's mouth (**12:14-16**). This image of a flood overtaking Israel is also seen in **Daniel 9:26**, a prophetic reference to the Roman invasion that destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70: *"And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined."*

Those first-century events foreshadow the future Tribulation, when Satan will inspire the Gentile nations to invade the nation of Israel once again with hopes of destroying God's covenant people. This invasion of the Promised Land will evidently take place during the first three and a half years of the seven-year Tribulation. Perhaps in league with the two witnesses who prophesy during this same period (**11:3-6**), the remnant of Israel will be miraculously protected from Satan's attempts to annihilate them. Following these attempts, the remnant will flee from the land of Israel into the "wilderness" to be protected by God during the second half of the Tribulation (**12:14**).

By the middle of the seven-year Tribulation, then, Satan will have grown increasingly frustrated with his foiled attempts at destroying Israel through conventional means. With cunning wickedness, he will intensify his attack: *"So the dragon was enraged with the woman [the remnant of Israel], and went off to make war with the rest of her children [the Tribulation saints], who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus"* (**12:17**).

Warren Wiersbe: Heaven will rejoice when Satan is cast out, but the earth-dwellers will not, for the last half of the tribulation will mean intense suffering for the world. The "woe" in **Revelation 12:12** reminds us of the "three woes" referred to in **Revelation 8:13**. The first "woe" is described in **Revelation 9:1-12**, and the second in **Revelation 9:13-21**. The third "woe" is referred to in **Revelation 11:14ff.**, but this passage only summarizes the events that will climax God's plan for the earth. It may be that part of this third "woe" is casting out Satan and permitting his terrible wrath on earth.

This, then, is the third scene in the drama: **Satan's wrath on earth (Rev. 12:13-16)**. Knowing that his time is short, and having no more access to heaven, the adversary must vent all of his anger earthward. He begins with Israel (the woman), and creates a wave of anti-Semitism. Satan

has always hated the Jews because they are God's chosen people and the vehicle through which salvation came into the world. Satan would like to destroy the nation, particularly as the time draws near for the Messiah to return to earth to establish the promised kingdom. A Jewish remnant must be ready to receive Him and form the nucleus for the kingdom (**Zech. 12:9—14:21; Rev. 1:7**).

God will prepare a special place where the Jewish remnant will be protected and cared for. It is interesting that the remnant's escape from Satan is described in terms of a **flying eagle**, for this is a repeated image in the Old Testament with reference to Israel. God delivered Israel from Egypt "on eagles' wings" (**Ex. 19:4**) and cared for the people in the wilderness as an eagle would her young (**Deut. 32:11–12**). Their return from Babylonian captivity was like "mounting up with wings as eagles" (**Isa. 40:31**).

Note that the remnant will be sheltered for the last half of the tribulation. We do not know where this sheltered place will be, nor do we need to know. But the lesson for all of us is clear: God cares for those whom He wants to use to accomplish His purposes on earth. True, some people will give their lives (**Rev. 12:11**), but others will be spared (see **Acts 12** for an example of this principle).

The phrase "water as a flood" is not explained, but there is a parallel in **Psalms 124**. (Also note the phrase "escaped as a bird" in **verse 7** of this same Psalm.) This "flood" is probably an outpouring of hatred and anti-Semitic propaganda. Or it may symbolize armies that invade Israel and seek to defeat the remnant. If that is the meaning, then the earth opening up could well be an earthquake that God sends to destroy the invaders. When Satan discovers that the people he seeks to kill are protected, then he turns on those who were not carried to the hidden place of safety. He will declare war, and God will permit him to have victory for a time (**Rev. 13:7**), but **ultimately, the old serpent will be defeated**.

Kendell Easley: Combining what is said about the "overcomers" (**v. 11**) and the "offspring" (**v. 17**), the following portrait of believers living at the end emerges:

- They have personally applied Christ's death to their own lives.
- They hold to Christ's testimony that they have life eternal by faith in him.
- They practice lives of faithful obedience to God's commands.
- They do not waver in the word of their testimony when pressure comes.
- They are willing to die for Christ's sake.

No wonder the devil wages war against such as these!

In these verses, then, we receive the third part of the answer to the question, "Why is the consummation necessary?" The answer: because the devil's fury against God's obedient and faithful people will explode in an unprecedented way during the final days. The consummation will end this state of affairs forever. . .

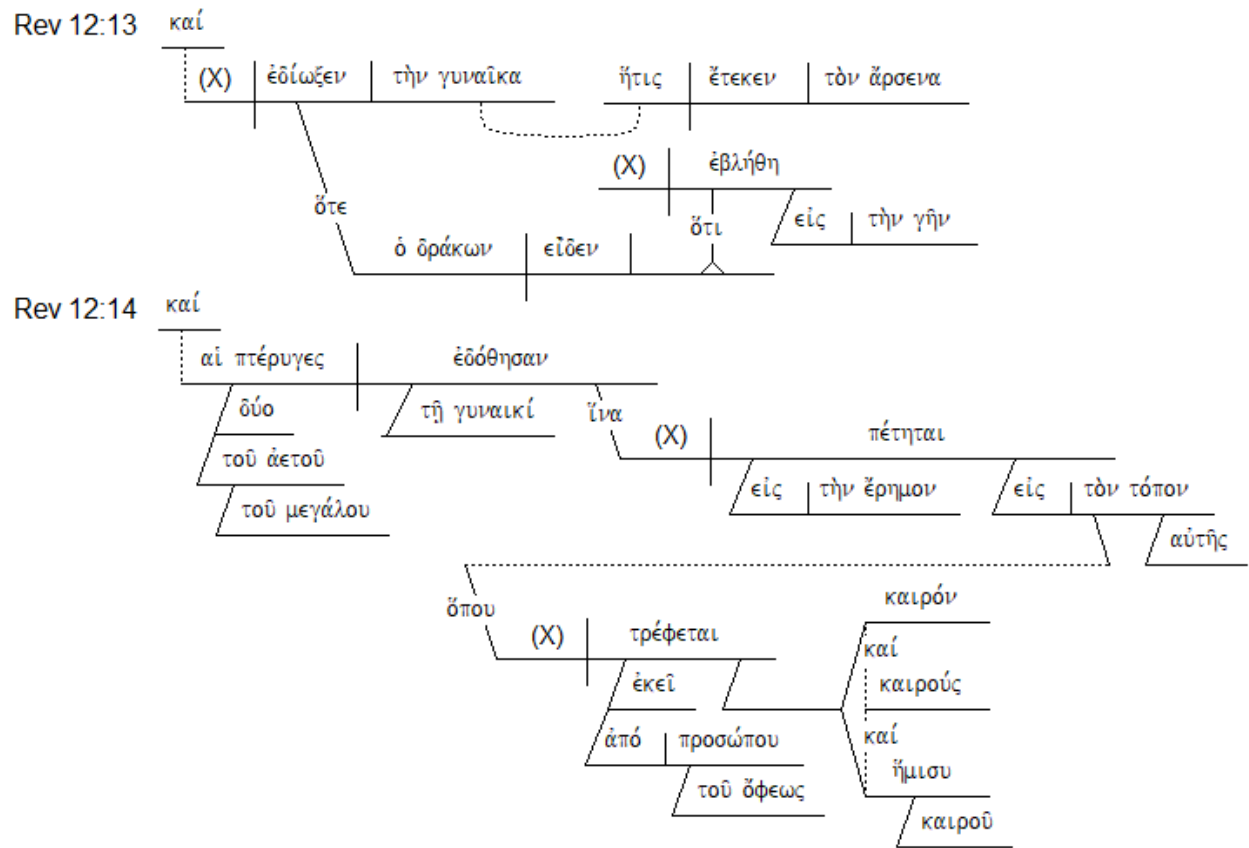
The great reformer **Martin Luther** got it just right in the closing lines of the first stanza of his great hymn, "*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*":

*For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,*

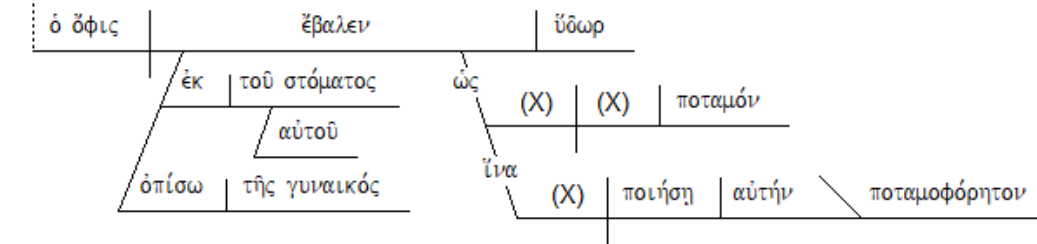
*And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

James Hamilton: Satan is at enmity with the woman and her seed. He wants to accuse us before God, but Jesus has defanged the dragon, and all his accusations are now toothless against those of us who trust in Christ. The new exodus has happened, and God is carrying us, those who trust him, on eagles' wings, sustaining us in the wilderness as we sojourn toward the promised land. Satan is making war on us, but the outcome will be as it has been throughout history. Strong as Satan may look, the seed of the woman will crush his head.

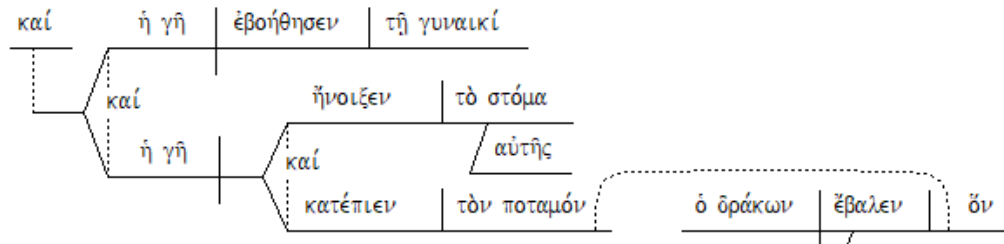
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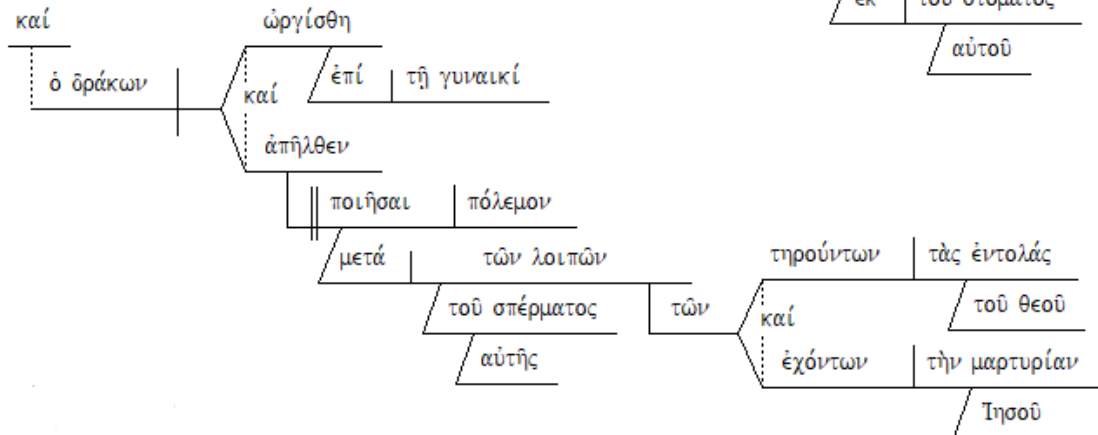
Rev 12:15 καί



Rev 12:16



Rev 12:17



TEXT: Revelation 13:1-10

TITLE: EMERGENCE OF THE BEAST FROM THE SEA = THE ANTICHRIST

BIG IDEA:

THE ANTICHRIST WILL BE EMPOWERED BY SATAN TO BLASPHEME GOD AND WAGE WAR AGAINST THE SAINTS IN SEEKING WORLDWIDE WORSHIP AND DOMINION

INTRODUCTION:

Marvin Rosenthal: According to the Word of God, the Antichrist is a man who lived before. He ruled one of the previous seven great empires which directly impacted Israel. . . Not only has the Antichrist lived and ruled before, but he will live and rule again. He will literally be raised from the dead. . . Since the Antichrist will be a counterfeit Christ, he will also perform a counterfeit resurrection. He will be raised, but he will die again and go “*into perdition*.” **Charles Ryrie** wrote:

One of the heads of the beast was “*wounded to death*.” Literally it reads, “*as having been slain to death*.” This is exactly the same word that was used in **5:6** of the Lamb where it was translated “*as it had been slain*.” If Christ died actually, then it appears that this ruler will also actually die. But his wound will be healed, which can only mean restoration to life. In **11:7** he was seen as coming out of the **abyss**, and that coincides with his restoration to life here.

John Walvoord: **Revelation 13:1–10** predicts a future world government that from God’s point of view will be a continuation of the ancient Roman Empire, expanded to cover not only the area of the ancient empire, but the entire world. This government will be empowered by Satan, and its primary objective will be forcing the whole world to worship Satan and his human representative, the world dictator.

Satan’s purpose to **take the place of God** in the great tribulation is the motivating power behind Satan’s activities today. Satan’s desire to be like God first plunged the universe into sin (**Isa. 14:14**). His program has never changed, and he is always seeking to lure people to obey him instead of God. In the great tribulation this purpose will be transparently clear, and after its manifestation it will be brought into divine judgment.

Charles Swindoll: Since the birth of Christianity, faithful believers have expected the coming of an evil dictator and his deceptive right-hand man who will have an enormous evil influence over the entire world. This diabolical duo will derive their power from none other than Satan himself. Although the Antichrist and false prophet are revealed in Scripture under various titles, the clearest and most definitive description of these figures is set forth in **Revelation 13**. These powerful end-times antagonists will emerge on the world stage like beasts rising up out of the sea (**13:1**) and bursting out of the land (**13:11**). Together, these two monstrous emissaries of evil will be the most persuasive and dynamic political and religious leaders in all of time.

Daniel Akin: **Antichrist.** The word itself conjures up images of supreme evil, ultimate deception, and eschatological holocaust. Called the “*beast coming up out of the sea*” in Revelation (**13:1**), his origin is the abyss or bottomless pit (**11:7**). It speaks of one who is coming at the end of

history, though he has been preceded by many forerunners (**1 John 2:18; 4:3; 2 John 7**). The word identifies one who will be given power, a throne, and a great authority from Satan himself (**13:2**). He will be worshiped as a god, and the whole world will marvel as they follow him (**13:3**). But his reign of terror will not last. Actually it will be quite brief (**13:5-7**).

The word *antichrist* does not appear a single time in Revelation. In the Apocalypse he is called “*the beast*.” Elsewhere in Scripture he is called

- the little horn (**Dan 7:8**)
- the prince (ruler) who is to come (**Dan 9:26**)
- the lawless one or man of sin (**2 Thess 2:3-8**)
- the antichrist (**1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7**)

Buist Fanning: Main Idea: During the future period of final tribulation a ruthless world leader with a deceptive propagandist at his side will, under Satan’s authority, persecute God’s people and dominate the whole world.

The two main sections of this chapter are clearly set out by the occurrence of the words “*and I saw*” (καὶ εἶδον) in **13:1** and **13:11**, coupled with the parallels “*a beast coming up from the sea*” (v. 1) versus “*another beast coming up from the earth*” (v. 11). In recounting the character and career of the beast from the sea (**13:1–10**) and the beast from the earth (**13:11–18**), John shows how they work together under Satan’s authority (vv. 2, 4) to persecute God’s people and to deceive and dominate the whole world during the period of final tribulation.

Kendell Easley: Political Evil Incarnated

Throughout the ages God has seen political evil as a horrible water monster, and in the final time of the Great Tribulation this monster will become a personal, powerful Antichrist who will receive worship and wage war against God's people.

James Hamilton: Satan’s strategy is really pretty simple: he acts like he is God, and he tries to kill anyone who isn’t fooled by his impersonation. So in **13:1–4** Satan’s beast will try to convince the world that he is Jesus. Then in **13:5–8** Satan will go to war against everyone who isn’t convinced. **Revelation 13:9, 10** calls the people of God to endure until God vindicates them. . .

The point of application for us here is very simple: let’s disabuse ourselves of any false hope that some merely human government is going to bring in the kingdom of God. God’s King, Jesus, is going to bring in the kingdom of God. And until he does, we’re not to be fooled by any cheap imitations.

(:1a) PROLOGUE – THE DRAGON OVERSEES THE EMERGENCE OF THE BEAST FROM THE SEA

“*And he [the dragon] stood on the sand of the seashore.*”

Sola Scriptura: Some translations include this verse in **chapter 12**. Other translations understand John to be the seer standing on the sand, thus the translation in the NKJV “*And I stood.*” However, given the relationship between **chapters 12 and 13**, it is more probable that the **dragon** is standing on the seashore. Having failed to destroy the Male-Son at birth, he brings

together the final Beast Empire that will attempt to prevent the reign of the Son by resisting His takeover of earth.

Chapter 13 continues the reasons John must prophesy against “*peoples, nations, tongues and kings*.” He will now focus on the kings, particularly, the kings who will form the power base of the final restored Beast Empire.

I. (:1b-4) THE ANTICHRIST LEVERAGES POLITICAL POWER INTO WORLDWIDE WORSHIP

A. (:1b-2a) Description

1. (:1b) Appearance of the Beast of the Sea

a. Coming Up Out of the Sea

“And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea,

John MacArthur: The astounding description of the Antichrist presented in the opening verses of this chapter is the most gripping, thorough, and dramatic one in all of Scripture. However, it was **not new teaching** to John’s readers. John wrote in his first epistle that his readers had “*heard that antichrist is coming*” (**1 John 2:18**). After describing Antichrist and his activity, the apostle Paul reminded the Thessalonians, “*Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?*” (**2 Thess. 2:5**). Those passages indicate that the truth about Antichrist was common knowledge in New Testament times. . .

Since **11:7** and **17:8** state that the **beast comes up out of the abyss**, it is best to equate the sea with the abyss. That interpretation is in harmony with the Old Testament, which also uses the metaphor of the sea to picture the realm of satanic activity (cf. **Job 26:12; Pss. 74:13–14; 89:9–10; Isa. 27:1**). Some of the demons are currently incarcerated in the abyss (cf. **9:1–11; Luke 8:31**), and Satan will be imprisoned in that abyss during the millennial kingdom (**20:1–3**).

The Antichrist will be a man (**2 Thess. 2:4**), but at some point in his life, he will be indwelt by a powerful demon from the abyss. This demon-possessed man will be a gifted orator, an intellectual genius, possess great charm and charisma, and have immense leadership power. Added to those natural qualities will be the hellish power of Satan. The result will be a person of superhuman power, vast intelligence, and consummate wickedness.

b. Composite Nature

“having ten horns and seven heads,”

Sola Scriptura: The *heads* represent **empires**. The *horns* represent **kings**. As in **Daniel 7**, the beasts (four king/kingdoms) and ten horns (ten kings) have eschatological significance. The beasts (kingdoms) follow one after the other, however, the ten horns (kings) rule at the same time.

The ten-horn phase of the fourth Beast Empire is directly connected with the end-time scenario that eventuates into the kingdom of God. The composite beast of **Revelation 13** pictures the second phase of the dragon’s plan. The fourth Beast Empire of **Daniel 7** (the seventh empire of the dragon) is part of the first phase. The fourth Beast Empire eventuates into ten horns/kings. This is the second phase, which is pictured in the Revelation as “*the beast who rises from the sea*.” This explains why the composite beast has ten crowns on the ten horns. The kings are in

focus and not the seven satanically inspired kingdoms that failed to prevent the rapture of the Male-Son to heaven after His birth. . .

Daniel's fourth beast empire with ten horns is John's composite beast with seven heads and ten horns with diadems. Daniel emphasized the fourth beast kingdom and John emphasizes the ten horns. Daniel emphasized the original best kingdom. John emphasizes the restored beast kingdom, which is evidenced in the ten kings.

- c. Counterfeit Majesty and Claims to Deity
*"and on his horns were ten diadems,
and on his heads were blasphemous names."*

Richard Phillips: The beast had "*blasphemous names on its heads*" (**Rev. 13:1**). This points to **false claims to deity** made by earthly rulers. The Roman emperors gave themselves the titles of lord, savior, son of God, and lord and god. The earliest emperors were deified only after their deaths, but before long the emperors began demanding living worship. This was particularly true of Domitian, the beastly emperor of John's time, who demanded that sacrifices be offered to him in Rome and required the worship of his image throughout the empire upon pain of death.

John MacArthur: The final world empire will be in some sense a **revival of the Roman Empire** (the iron legs and ten toes of the statue in **Daniel 2**), but will far exceed it both in power and extent. It will be much more than a European confederacy; it will **cover the entire world**. Ultimately, Antichrist's empire will be crushed by Christ (the "*stone [that] was cut out without hands*"; **Dan. 2:34, 45**) when He comes to establish His earthly kingdom.

2. (:2) Animal Comparisons

- a. Leopard-Like = Speedy (Greek empire under Alexander the Great)
"And the beast which I saw was like a leopard,"
- b. Bear-Like = Strong (Medo-Persia)
"and his feet were like those of a bear,"
- c. Lion-Like = Savage and Majestic (Babylon)
"and his mouth like the mouth of a lion."

John MacArthur: He will be an insolent intimidator, devious, possessing a power not his own, a fierce destroyer of his victims, and so arrogant that he will dare even to "*oppose the Prince of princes*" (cf. **v. 11**), who is the Lord Christ. That move will prove fatal, however, and God's power will fall on Antichrist, who "*will be broken without human agency.*"

B. (:2b) Delegated Power, Dominion and Authority

"And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority."

John MacArthur: Having been cast permanently from heaven (**12:9**), Satan will know that the time remaining to him is brief (**12:12**). To lead his last, desperate onslaught against God, he will **empower** his final Antichrist. The opening verses of this chapter reveal seven features of this ultimate dictator: his ancestry, authority, acclaim, adoration, arrogance, activity, and admirers.

C. (:3) Deceptive Resurrection

1. Apparently Killed

“And I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain,”

2. Apparently Resurrected

“and his fatal wound was healed.”

3. Amassing Worldwide Allegiance

“And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast;”

D. (:4) Devoted Worship

1. Worship of the Dragon

“and they worshiped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast;”

Sola Scriptura: The dragon gave the rule of earth to the beast and the people respond with worship to it.

2. Worship of the Beast

“and they worshiped the beast, saying,

‘Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?’”

Sola Scriptura: Since the composite beast is restored from the dead who would wage war with it. An enemy that cannot be killed cannot be defeated. War is useless.

Robert Mounce: The motivation for worship is not the beast’s moral greatness but the awesome power of his might. The authority he wields is the authority of Satan himself.

Daniel Akin: How like Satan! The one who “*disguises himself as an angel of light*” (2 Cor. 11:14) will provide the world with a copycat “christ” to match all their man-centered ideals of personality, politics, and power. No wonder the whole world will be swept off its feet by this attractive, persuasive figure (13:3)! In fact, we are told the world will worship the dragon through their worship of the Beast. In this rabid fit of hypernationalism that will make Hitler’s Third Reich look like a high school sporting event, the world will cry out, “*Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?*” (13:4). (*Insights*, 181) Satan desires to be worshiped and treated like God. He always has. He always will.

Kendell Easley: Following a human leader is one thing; outright worship is another. Now we learn that people worshiped the beast just as they worshiped the dragon. The verb for worship includes the notion of bowing down and acknowledging divine status, as the twenty-four elders had fallen before God (5:14; 11:16). Thus, the world’s people are so deceived that they worship Satan as God; they give the monster the divine status that belongs to Jesus. The monster is truly a pseudo-Jesus, an Antichrist.

II. (:5-8) THE ANTICHRIST ARROGANTLY BLASPHEMES GOD AND WAGES WAR AGAINST GOD’S PEOPLE

A. (:5-7) Delegated Satanic Functions

1. (:5a) Arrogantly Blasphemes God

“And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies;”

Sola Scriptura: A direct allusion to **Daniel 7:8, 20** where the little horn is given a mouth so that it can speak and say blasphemous things. However, here the composite beast has a mouth like a lion. That is, he is able to terrorize the people with its mouth. . . Since the dragon gave the composite beast everything else, it is safe to assume that he gave it the blasphemous language as well.

John MacArthur: Antichrist's **arrogance** will surpass that of anyone else in human history. He will be Satan's mouthpiece, voicing his master's frustrated rage against God. He will also be the supreme blasphemer in a world filled with blasphemers. So hardened will sinners' hearts be at that time that God's judgments will elicit not repentance, but more blasphemy. In **16:9**, John records a vision in which "*men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.*"

2. (:5b) Acts with Delegated Satanic Authority for a Limited Time
"and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him."

John Walvoord: The time of this universal sway is clearly indicated in **verse 5** as being forty-two months, namely the last three-and-one-half years preceding the return of Christ. This period is otherwise described as the **great tribulation**. It is apparent, however, that as the period moves on to its end a massive world war commences, continuing until the return of Christ. This war is a rebellion against the universal rule of the beast and comes at the very end of the tribulation. Though the beast enjoys tremendous power, he is apparently not able to suppress this eventual uprising against his authority.

James Hamilton: The beast will enjoy worldwide, universal reign, as we see in the rest of **13:7**: "*And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation.*" Clearly this period of time when the beast has universal authority over the nations is to be contrasted with the **millennium**, when the beast and false prophet are in the lake of fire and Satan is shut up in a pit so he can no longer deceive the nations (cf. **19:20; 20:1–3**).

3. (:6) Accuses and Blasphemes Everything Related to God
*"And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God,
to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle,
that is, those who dwell in heaven."*

John MacArthur: Antichrist will utter blasphemous words aimed directly and specifically at God's Person, His abode, and His people, both the redeemed saints and the holy angels.

4. (:7a) Attacks the Saints and Overcomes Them
"And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them;"

Richard Phillips: The beast goes even further than blaspheming God and Christians. His first agenda is to acquire worship for himself and for Satan, and his second agenda is to violently persecute Christians when they refuse to give the worship that belongs only to God: "*Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them*" (**Rev. 13:7**). Notice that it is against Christians as "*saints*," that is, "*holy ones*," that the beast makes war. This reminds us that it is not for our sins and many faults that the world hates us, but for God's saving work in our lives.

Sola Scriptura: Indicates that the saints will not be given a blanket protection from the composite beast. He will overcome or be victorious over the saints.

5. (:7b) Assumes Worldwide Authority

“and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.”

B. (:8) Devoted Followers

1. Everyone Will Worship the Beast

“And all who dwell on the earth will worship him,”

Buist Fanning: Whether this will be sincere devotion or a calculating submission to one whose rule cannot be resisted can be seen more clearly in **vv. 12–17** (probably a mixture of both).

Robert Mounce: John now describes the results of the work of the beast to whom such awesome power has been given. The whole world (apart from those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life) will join in worship of the beast. Jesus had foretold the coming of false Christs who with displays of signs and wonders would *“deceive even the elect—if that were possible”* (**Matt 24:24**). Once the Roman state had taken on a religious significance it was only natural that it should begin to demand worship. The worship of a satanically inspired perversion of secular authority is the ultimate offense against the one true God. The temptation rejected by Jesus at the outset of his public ministry (**Matt 4:8–10**) reappears at the end of history in its most persuasive form and gains the allegiance of all but the elect.

2. Except for the Elect = Redeemed by the Slain Lamb

“everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”

Daniel Akin: The **book of life** belonging to the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, is the registry in which God inscribed the names of those chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world. (This phrase is used as a synonym for eternity past in **17:8; Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20**; cf. **2 Thess. 2:13**; and **2 Tim. 1:9**.) Unlike unbelievers, the elect will not be deceived by Antichrist (**Matt. 24:24**), nor will they worship him ([Rev] **20:4**). Antichrist will not be able to destroy believers’ saving faith, for the Lord Jesus Christ promised, *“He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels”* (**Rev 3:5**; cf. **1 John 5:4**). Believers have been in the keeping power of God since before creation, and they will be there after the destruction of this order and the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth (**21:1ff.**).

Believers are doubly secure, because the book of life belongs to the Lamb who has been slain. Not only the decree of election, but also the atoning work of Christ seals the redemption of the elect forever.

III. (:9-10) THE ANTICHRIST CAN ONLY BE OPPOSED BY PERSEVERANCE AND FAITH ON THE PART OF GOD’S PEOPLE

Buist Fanning: A stark division of humanity will surface in the cataclysmic final days of the

tribulation, and this prompts the words of warning that follow in vv. 9–10.

A. (:9) Call for Spiritual Discernment

“If anyone has an ear, let him hear.”

Sola Scriptura: Scholars are somewhat agreed that this hearing formula is rooted in **Isaiah 6:9–10**, Isaiah’s message to Judah regarded their unwillingness to hear, understand and repent of their idol worship. For this, God refused to give His word, lest it fall upon those who despise it. God, in His wisdom, saw some faithful among the wicked. Those who were faithful still very much needed God’s word. Therefore, the Lord gave his word in parabolic sayings. This enabled those who were spiritually minded to be enlightened while those who were not remained in blindness. This is the significance of the hearing formula in the Gospels. It also serves as a textual indicator that figurative language is employed and the reader will need to see beyond the obvious.

B. (:10) Call for Godly Response

Kendell Easley: The exhortation is two couplets of poetry, and should be compared with **Jeremiah 15:2**: “*And if they [idolatrous people of Jerusalem] ask you, ‘Where shall we go?’ tell them, ‘This is what the LORD says: “Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.”*” The Jeremiah passage proclaimed the inevitable coming of God’s righteous judgment on Judah through the Babylonians.

The Revelation passage teaches the **inevitable coming of unjust suffering on the saints** through the Antichrist monster. As far as the saints are concerned, If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. This is similar to what Jesus had taught his disciples: “*You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me*” (**Matt. 24:9**). This is not fatalism but rather recognition and submission to the sovereignty of God.

[Alternate View:]

Robert Mounce: Two other less probable readings warrant our attention. One refers both couplets to the persecutors of the church by adding a verb that makes the first line read, “If any person leads [a believer] into captivity, into captivity that person [himself/herself] will go.” Thus the verse would be stressing that the enemies of God’s people would be requited for their persecution of believers in the same form they had employed (captivity for captivity, sword for sword).

The other reading is that of the Sinaiticus (followed by the NKJ) -- “He who kills with the sword, must be killed with the sword.” This corresponds to the words of Jesus in **Matt 26:52**, “**All who draw the sword will die by the sword.**” The first couplet would teach that the believer must accept what God has ordained, and the second would warn against any attempt on the part of the church to defend itself by the use of force. **Barclay** writes, “It is an intolerable paradox to defend the gospel of the love of God by using the violence of man.”

1. Submit to God’s Will

a. Accepting Captivity

“If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes;”

John MacArthur: This proverb contains important practical truth for those believers alive at the time of Antichrist's persecution. They are to depend on God's providence and not take matters into their own hands. Those believers destined by God's sovereign plan for captivity (imprisonment) are to accept that incarceration as God's will. They are not to resist or fight against Antichrist. Amazingly, the passage upholds the divine institution of capital punishment even by Antichrist's evil government, warning that if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed (cf. **Gen. 9:5–6; Matt. 26:52**). God's people must not retaliate against their persecutors; there is no place now, and there will be no place then, for militant, aggressive, violent believers terrorizing their persecutors. *"Those also who suffer according to the will of God,"* wrote Peter, *"shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right"* (**1 Pet. 4:19**).

b. Accepting Martyrdom

"if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed."

Sola Scriptura: While some saints are destined for captivity, others are destined for martyrdom. The *sword* is the instrument of death by the State (**Romans 13:4**). God has destined certain ones to be martyrs by the state/government of Antichrist. This is God's will. Those destined to die will die. This is the sense of the text. That believers will die by the sword is confirmed in **Revelation 20:4**. Both captivity and death by beheading is a part of God's sovereign plan.

2. Stand Fast in Perseverance and Faith

"Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints."

This **call for perseverance** supports the Pre-wrath Rapture position that Satan's wrath against believers will be unleashed during the **Great Tribulation** after the mid-point of Daniel's seventieth week. The church will be called to experience this trial instead of being raptured beforehand.

Sola Scriptura: For those God has destined to captivity – perseverance will win the day. For those God has destined to physical death – faith will win the day.

Buist Fanning: Christ's messages to the churches were filled with commendations and exhortations for steadfast faith (**2:2–3, 13, 19; 3:10**; also **1:9**), and such will be called for in the following chapters as well (**14:12; 17:14**). The circumstances John is about to portray will certainly require faithfulness to Christ even to death, and such allegiance will be worth it when his victory is finally won (**20:4**).

Grant Osborne: As the saints go through their terrible tribulation, the ethical requirement of **13:9–10** is tough. They are passively to accept their imprisonment and martyrdom and place their trust entirely in God. John calls for *"endurance and faithfulness"* (**13:10b**), which the saints are to exemplify by refusing to take action against the forces of evil but instead oppose it by continuing their proclamation of the gospel, following the lead of the two witnesses (**11:3–6**) and the angel with the eternal gospel (**14:6–7**). Their victory against Satan is seen in their deaths (**12:11**). The two beasts both persecute and deceive the saints, but God allows this to test them and to bring out their victorious response. To reciprocate evil for evil, violence for violence, is to fall into the hands of the enemy, to yield to the deceptions of the devil. This is the lesson Jesus told Peter when he drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant: *"Put your sword back in its place. For all who draw the sword will die by the sword"* (**Matt. 26:52**). This

does not mean we sit idly by and allow evil to triumph. Rather, we take a prophetic stance and warn evil rulers of the folly of their actions, but we do so as part of our gospel proclamation, not as part of a revolutionary plot to overthrow. When one is put to the sword as a result of that bold proclamation, it is “*endurance and faith*” that gives one the courage to face martyrdom.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some of the ways in which the Antichrist presents himself as a counterfeit Christ?
- 2) How does Satan empower the activities of the Antichrist?
- 3) Why does God allow the beast to deceive so many, to reign and to blaspheme His name?
- 4) How does the call for *perseverance and faith* inform our response today to persecution and oppression?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Craig Keener: The beast in **13:1–10** recalls **Daniel 7:3–8**, where four beasts arise from the “*sea*” (**Dan. 7:2**), as here; the sea may also be significant as the location of the mythical serpent God overthrew in the Exodus (**Ps. 74:13–14; 89:9–10; Isa. 27:1; 51:9–10**). Daniel’s four beasts are a winged lion (a griffin?) that becomes somewhat human, a devouring bear, a winged leopard, and finally a ten-horned beast fiercer than its predecessors (**Dan. 7:3–8**), apparently immediately preceding the Son of Man’s coming (**7:9–14**). The dominant ruler of the final beast will persecute the saints for three and a half years (**7:21, 25; cf. 9:25–27**). Jewish tradition understood the fourth beast as Rome, which most Jews believed would be the fourth world empire to subdue Israel (4 Ezra 12:10–11; 2 Bar. 39:7). Judeans (as well as an exile on Patmos or citizens of Ephesus) would perceive Rome as coming from “*the sea*” even geographically, and the sand of the seashore may represent “*the nations*” over whom the beast claims to rule (**Rev. 20:8**).

Yet the beast in Revelation differs from the fourth beast of Daniel, being a **composite** of different beasts: Besides ten horns (**13:1; cf. Dan 7:7, 24**) it is in some respects like a leopard, in others like a bear, and in others like a lion (**Rev. 13:2**). Composite descriptions can amplify the glory of a creature (**Ezek. 1:10**), but here they amplify its **hideousness**. Thus, though John makes his allusion by way of Rome, the point goes beyond Rome to the general threat of an “*evil empire*.”

Marvin Rosenthal: The issue at hand, and which to this author is undeniably clear, is that the apostasy and revealing of the man of sin to Israel must occur **inside the seventieth week**, not **before** it begins. That a remnant of godly believers will recognize the Antichrist when the covenant is made is certainly true and consistent with the teaching of the Lord (**Matt. 24:33; cp. vv. 4–28**) and the apostle Paul (**1 Thess. 5:4–5**). But what Paul is teaching is that Israel, the nation with whom the covenant is made, will not recognize the Antichrist until the abomination of desolation occurs in the middle of the week. According to the apostle Paul, the Day of the Lord judgment must take place after those events. Therefore, the Day of the Lord cannot

commence at the beginning of the seventieth week, and the Rapture, which occurs at the very outset of the Day of the Lord, cannot possibly be pretribulational.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The logical progression is the angry dragon looks out over the sea, a picture of the Gentile world powers which he dominates. He is looking for two things: (a) For the best method with which to persecute Israel, and (b) for the best way he can rise to greater power in order to be worshipped. **Chapter 13** describes the method he will choose, the end-time form of the old Roman empire which, by this point in the Tribulation, has developed into a ten nation confederation with a very subtle leader, one whom Satan will now use in the most hideous ways.

[One view of events] Before moving into **chapter 13**, a brief review of probable world conditions at this point will be profitable:

(1) **The white horse rider** who conquers (gains control) by peace tactics, power politics, and by his charismatic personality and persuasive language, has already risen on the scene (cf. **Rev. 6:1-2; Dan. 8:23-25; 1 Thess. 5:11f**). This brings about the **ten nation confederation of Europe**, a federation of nations that were once a part of the **old Roman empire** (cf. **Dan. 2:42-44; 7:7-8, 20-24**). We have the potential for this in NATO and in the European Common Market.

(2) The leader of this confederation will make a **seven-year covenant** with Israel designed to give Israel protection in the land and solve the very volatile Israel-Arab dispute of the coveted land of Palestine (**Dan. 9:27**). This treaty begins **Daniel's 70th week**.

(3) Three kings of the confederacy rebel, but the rising dictator defeats them (**Dan. 7:8, 20-25**) and emerges as the undeniable leader.

(4) It appears that the **King of the North** will at this point in the middle of the Tribulation [Daniel's seventieth week] attack Israel who will then be dwelling in the land in comparative peace and safety because of the covenant or peace treaty. This king of the North comes with his Arab allies, the Pan-Arabic block and her other allies (**Ezek. 38:1-9**).

(5) These armies (the King of the North and his allies) are destroyed on the mountains of Israel by the direct intervention of God (**Ezek. 38:21-23**). Regarding **Ezekiel 38:1** and this invasion, **Ryrie** writes:

Chapters 38-39 describe a future attack on Israel and God's deliverance of His people. The invading armies come out of the remote parts of the north (**38:15**) to invade Palestine but are destroyed by supernatural intervention (**39:3**). Seven months will be required to bury their corpses (**39:11-15**), and their weapons will supply fuel for Israel for seven years (**39:9-10**). The time of the battle is unclear. Israel will be living in security, whether real or imagined (**38:11-12**), which might indicate that the battle takes place before the middle of the Tribulation, while Israel feels secure under a treaty with Antichrist. But the consummation of the battle involves birds and beasts eating the flesh of the warriors, a scene similar to the description of Armageddon at the end of the Tribulation (**39:17-20; Rev. 19:17-18**). Also, at the conclusion of the conflict the nations will understand the judging hand of God, and Israel will know that the LORD (Yahweh) is their God (**Ezek. 39:21-22**). Perhaps the first thrust will begin just before the middle of the Tribulation, with successive waves of the invasion continuing throughout the last part of that period and building up to Armageddon. John envisioned a battle of Gog and Magog at the

conclusion of the millennial kingdom (**Rev. 20:7-9**), but this is different in time and characteristics from the one Ezekiel describes. The common use of Gog and Magog does not equate the two battles. Here those words refer to a definite area, but in Revelation they refer to enemies of Christ worldwide.

(6) This destruction of the King of the North will create a tremendous political vacuum in the world. Until now the head of the ten nation confederation has been a leader of the European Confederation only, but now with the dragon surveying the sea of nations, he sees the way open for **world domination** through this European dictator whom he has undoubtedly helped to bring to power. So now enters the system of the beast. The white horse rider who won his territory by peace tactics, now becomes the beast under the possession of Satan himself (**Rev. 13:2b**).

From the context, the dragon looks out over the sea of nations and then implements the system of the beast to carry out his desired goals—the persecution of Israel and his own worship (cf. **13:4-6**).

Joe Beard: Satan is standing dominantly in the midst of the nations as if they are his rightful possession. But in reality, he is a usurper who seeks the world's worship and adoration, this has been his goal since the day that he set himself against God, that day in his pride he said, "*I will make myself like the Most High.*" (**Isaiah 14:14b**)

John goes on to describe that next in his vision he sees a beast coming up out of the sea. This word translated "*beast*" is the same word used to describe the Antichrist in **chapter 11** and is a word in Greek that refers to a wild beast, a ferocious, vicious, wild monster. This beast like the beasts in Daniel's dream must be understood to represent both a kingdom and a person. This beast represents a kingdom because of the complex description of him in the second half of verse one, the kingdom the beast represents is the revived Roman empire. But this beast also represents a person because he is always described with personal pronouns.

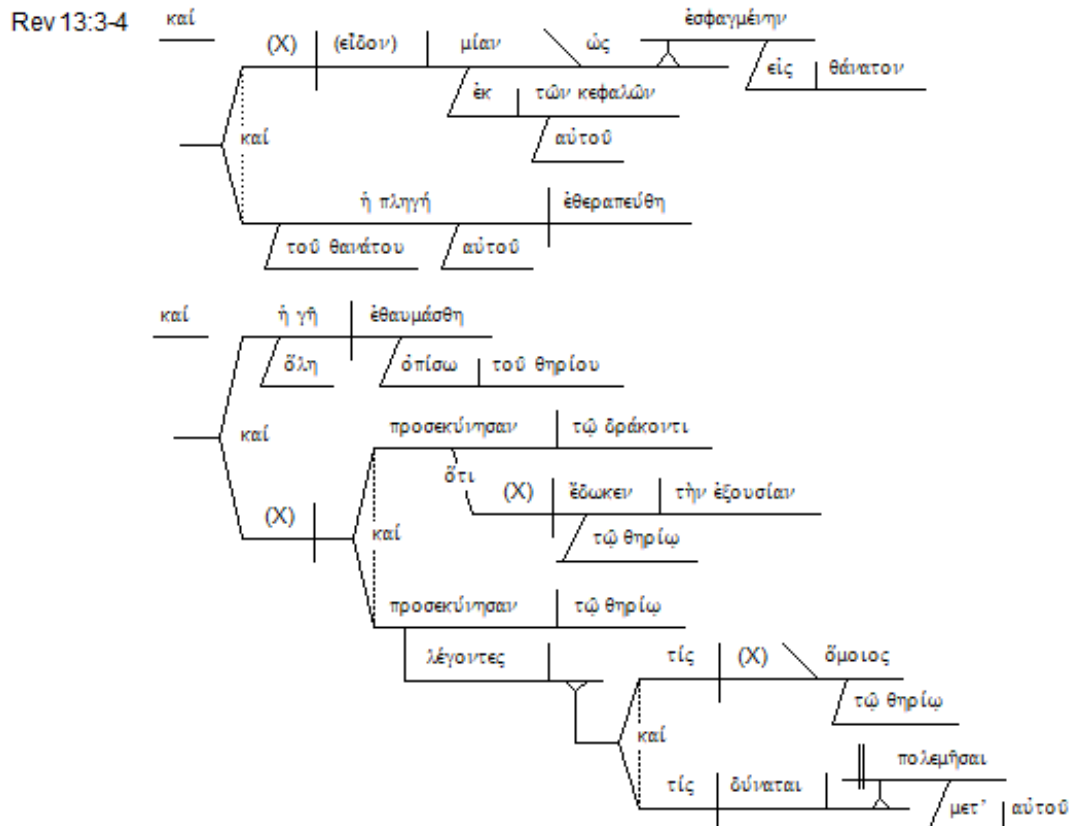
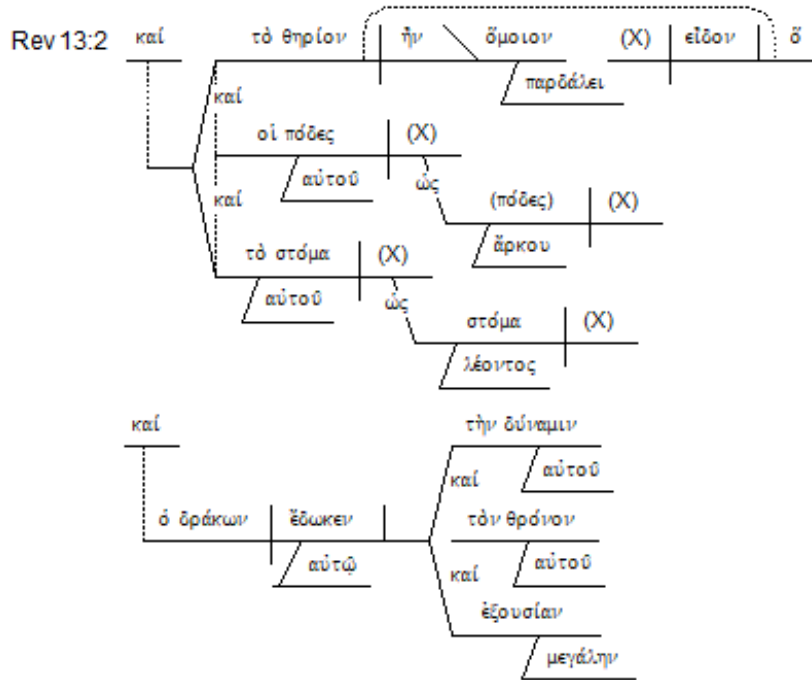
The Antichrist will be a man, but at some point he will be indwelt by Satan, being possessed by Satan he will be a gifted speaker, an intellectual genius, people will flock to him because of his great charm and charisma, this will give him great leadership power. People will see him as a savior.

There will never be another person in human history who will be completely the devil's own. Satan becomes the imitator of God the Father, and the Antichrist the imitator of God the Son, and next week we will see the imitator of God the Holy Spirit. These three will form the unholy trinity. The Antichrist's description here by John shows how much he is like Satan. John describes him as having ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems, royal crowns on the ten horns. Almost the same hideous description was given of Satan in **chapter 12**. In the description of the Antichrist the importance of the ten horns is emphasized by mentioning them first and associating the royal crowns with the horns instead of the heads.

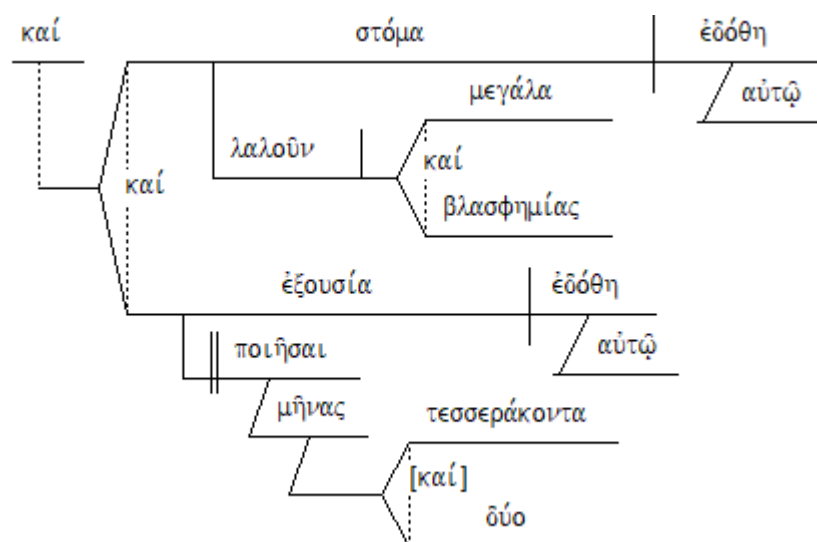
Horns in the Bible represent strength and power, both in defense and when attacking. These ten horns represent the ten kings who will rule under the Antichrist's authority. The beast that Daniel saw also had ten horns representing these ten kings. We learned in Daniel last week that the Antichrist will arise among these 10 kings and three of the ten will be overthrown. The Antichrist will not rule merely ten nations, but the entire world.

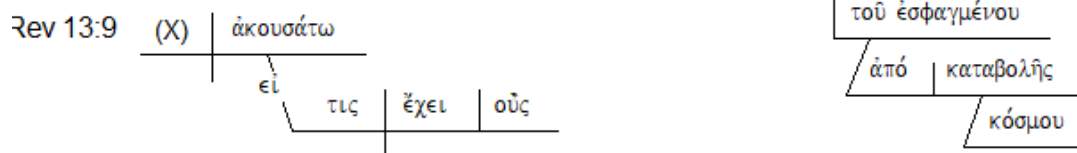
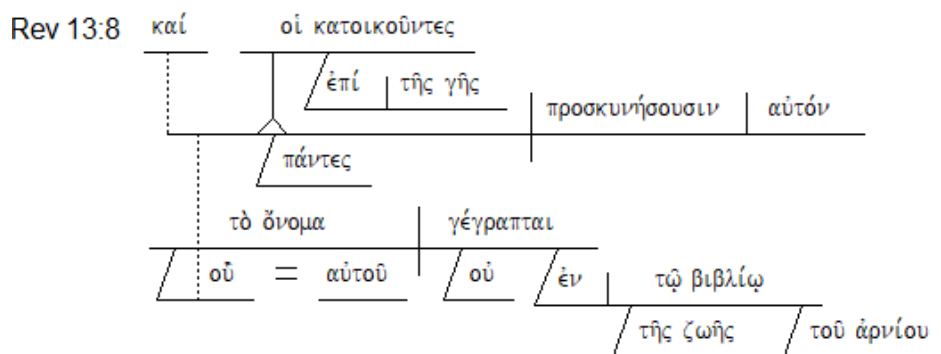
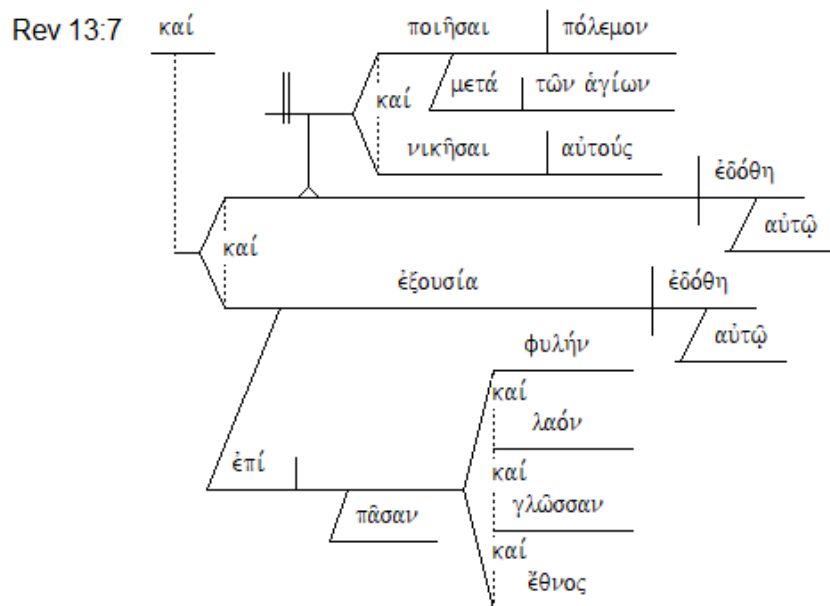
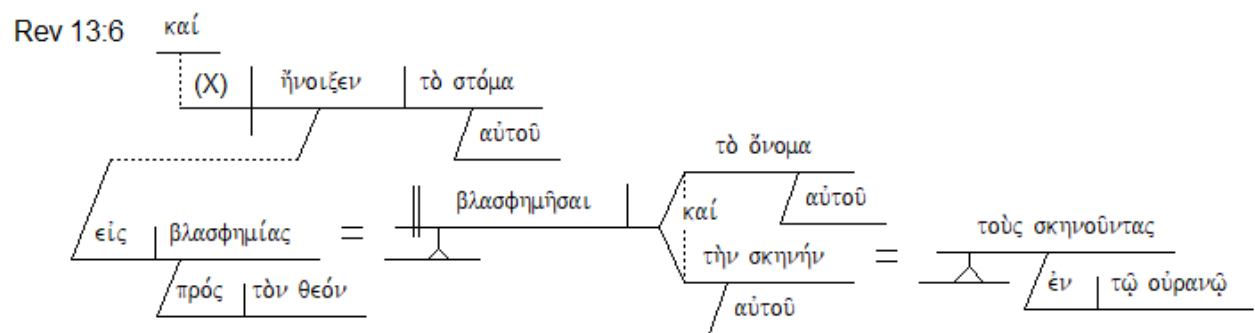
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Leedy Greek Diagram:

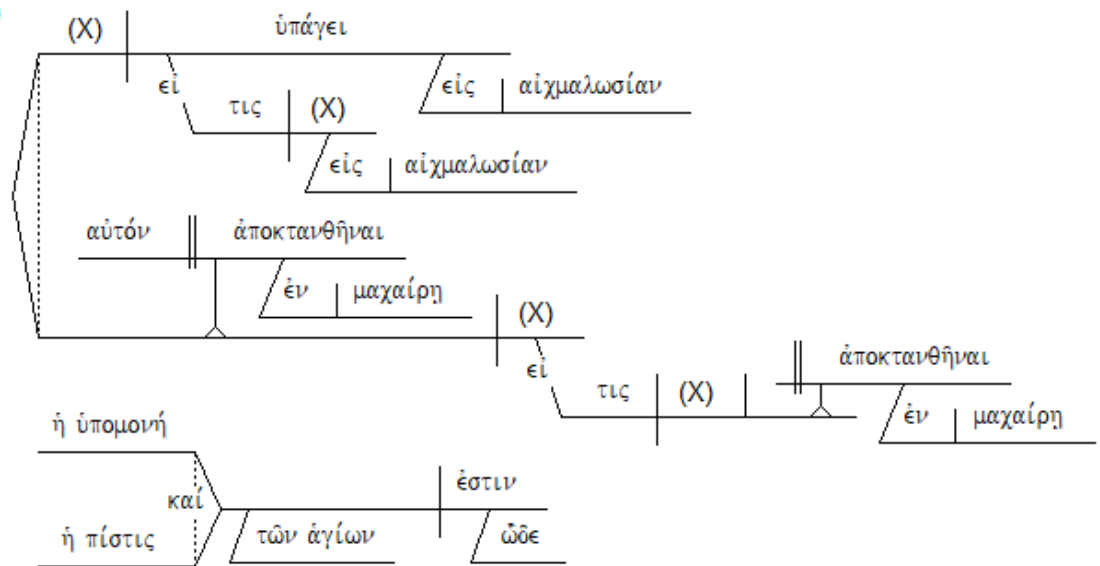


Rev 13:5





Rev 13:10



TEXT: Revelation 13:11-18

TITLE: *EMERGENCE OF THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH = THE FALSE PROPHET*

BIG IDEA:

THE FALSE PROPHET USES DECEPTION AND COUNTERFEIT SIGN MIRACLES TO ENFORCE RELIGIOUS LOYALTY (SEALED BY THE MARK OF THE BEAST) FOR THE WORSHIP AND DOMINION OF THE ANTICHRIST

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: Satan sends false prophets to deceive and coerce worship for himself, but at best he can only imitate the glory of the true Savior, Jesus Christ.

- I. The False Prophet Will Be a Deceiver (**13:11**).
- II. The False Prophet Will Speak the Words of Satan (**13:11**).
- III. The False Prophet Will Promote False Worship of Antichrist (**13:12**).
- IV. The False Prophet Will Use Miracles to Deceive the World (**13:13-14**).
- V. The False Prophet Will Persecute Those Who Follow the Lamb (**13:15**).
- VI. The False Prophet Will Mark Those Who Worship Antichrist (**13:16-17**).
- VII. The False Prophet Will Lead the World to Worship a Mere Man (**13:18**).

So as we navigate **verses 11-18**, we will discover that it will be through the instrumentality of this second beast empowered by Satan that a one-world government, one-world religion, and one-world economy will come to fruition. Humanity will willingly submit to it. This individual called the false prophet will be given power by Satan to perform miracles (**13:12-15**). He will apparently duplicate the miracles of that one who comes in the spirit of Elijah (**13:13**; see **11:5-6**), perhaps deceiving the world into believing that he is the one who fulfills the prophecy of **Malachi 4:5**. Further, he apparently will cause some type of lifeless image of the beast to come alive and to speak, and he will force the world to worship it.

James Hamilton: **Revelation 13:18** states that the situation set out in **13:11-17** “calls for wisdom,” and the wisdom in view is the **ability to distinguish between God’s truth and Satan’s counterfeits**. God’s truth is found in the Bible; it exalts Jesus and the good news of his death and resurrection; it calls us to trust in Jesus and live out the gospel by laying down our lives in service to others. Satan’s counterfeits claim to be God’s truth, but they contradict the Bible; they blaspheme Jesus by teaching that the cross isn’t necessary; and Satan’s counterfeits promote self-centeredness at the expense of other people.

Grant Osborne: While the first beast has a more **military function** (conquering the saints and taking over the world), this one has a more **religious function**, deceiving the world into worshipping the Antichrist. **Michaels** (1997: 164) relates the relationship to “the state and a state church. The beast from the sea is a secular political power, while the beast from the earth is a religious institution fostering worship of the first beast.”

Kendell Easley: Throughout the ages God has seen religious evil as a horrible earth monster, and in the final time of Great Tribulation this monster will become a personal False Prophet who brings about the loyalty of earth's people to Antichrist.

I. (:11-12) MISSION OF THE FALSE PROPHET IN SUPPORT OF THE ANTICHRIST

A. (:11a) Coming Up Out of the Earth

“And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth;”

David Thompson: The pronoun used here is *allos*, which means **another of the same kind**. So this will be another key Satanic beast that is like the first beast. Even though he is religious, he is another beast. Just because one is religious doesn’t mean one isn’t Satanic. . .

The first beast came up “*out of the sea*” (13:1). This beast comes up “*out of the earth*.” This is probably a reference to the fact that this second beast is Jewish or part Jewish, as opposed to being a Gentile.

In Scripture the “*sea*” people are often classified as **Gentiles**, that is those who are not Jewish (Rev. 17:1, 15). **The land people are the Jews.**

In fact, in other passages here in Revelation, this one is identified as the “*false prophet*.” This certainly lends itself to the fact he is Jewish as **the prophets were Jewish** (16:13; 19:20; 20:10).

Buist Fanning: all the references to him in later chapters call him “*the false prophet*” (Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10).

B. (:11b) Characteristics of the Beast

1. Lamb-Like (Pretending Meekness)

“and he had two horns like a lamb,”

Robert Mounce: The **horns like a lamb** may refer to the **seductive inducements** (considerations of loyalty, patriotism, self-interest, etc.) held out to Christians by the beast. It is unlikely that the two horns are intended to contrast with the two witnesses of **chapter 11**. Neither do they allude to the seven-horned Lamb of 5:6. In the parody that runs throughout this section it is the first, not the second, beast who corresponds to the Lamb. That the beast spoke like a dragon may mean either that he spoke with the roar of a dragon or that, as the serpent in Eden (cf. 12:9), his speech was deceitful and beguiling.

2. Dragon-Like (Presenting Fierceness)

“and he spoke as a dragon.”

Buist Fanning: The paradoxical mix of **weakness** (“*like a lamb*,” v. 11b) and **savagery** (“*like a dragon*,” v. 11c) masterfully captures the deceptive but demanding—and ultimately deadly—influence he assumes in his mission of compelling the whole world to worship the first beast. Taken together, the description of this beast “*from the earth*” and his association with the dragon and the first beast throughout as the third member of this infernal trinity shows that he takes the role of a **personal aide to the first beast**, who acts to deceive humans into worshiping and serving him.

Grant Osborne: This ultimate “false prophet” is probably the one who will arise from within the church and lead the “*great apostasy*” of 2 Thess. 2:3. **First John 2:18** and **4:1–3** speak of the

“*many antichrists*” or false teachers that have arisen to spread heresy in the church. This second beast will be the ultimate “false prophet” who will sum up all the others.

John MacArthur: The description of the first beast, with its ten horns, seven heads, ten crowns, and seven blasphemous names (13:1), was **grotesque and frightening**. In contrast, the second beast merely had two horns. That indicates that he is not characterized by the same massive might as Antichrist. And unlike the savage, ferocious, fierce, and deadly Antichrist, who is likened to a leopard, bear, and lion (13:2), the false prophet **seems as harmless as a lamb**. He does not come as a conquering dictator, but on the surface appears as a subtle deceiver, with meekness and gentleness, though not without great authority.

Despite his deceptively mild appearance, the false prophet is no less a child of hell than the Antichrist. That is evident because he spoke as a dragon—a strange voice indeed for a lamb. The false prophet, like Antichrist (13:2, 5), will be the dragon Satan’s mouthpiece, speaking his words. But he will not echo the blasphemous tirades against God that will pour from the lips of Antichrist (Dan. 11:36). Instead, he will speak winsome, deceiving words of praise about the Antichrist, luring the world to worship that vile, satanic dictator.

False prophets often appear meek, mild, and harmless. They offer hope and solutions to the problems troubling men and women. Yet they are ever the voices of hell, and when they open their mouths, Satan speaks. So it will be amid the unspeakable horrors of the Tribulation. The false prophet will come like a lamb, speaking false, deceptive words of comfort. He will promise the suffering, tormented people of the world that all will be well if only they will worship Antichrist. But those who fall for his subtle lies will face the terrifying judgment of God (cf. 14:9–11; 16:2).

C. (:12) Cooperation with the Antichrist

1. Partners with the Antichrist in Exercising Authority

“And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence.”

John MacArthur: What is being said here is that the false prophet will exercise the same kind of demonic power and authority as the Antichrist does, since both are empowered by the same hellish source. That he exercises his authority in Antichrist’s presence implies that Antichrist will have delegated that authority to him. The false prophet’s mission will be to use all the means available to him from the Antichrist to cause the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast. He will lead the worldwide cult of Antichrist worship.

2. Promotes the Worship of the Antichrist

“And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.”

Daniel Akin: Two affirmations are made about the false prophet in **verse 12**. First, “He exercises all the authority of the first beast on his behalf.” Second, he “compels the earth and those who live on it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.” The false prophet is empowered by Satan and loyal to the antichrist. With delegated authority, he is the representative of the beast. He is his witness and advocate. Further, he is the promoter of gross idolatry. He causes earth dwellers to worship the first beast who parodied our Lord’s sufferings, death, and resurrection. As **Kistemaker** says, “These two anti-Christian forces are united in their effort to overthrow the rule of Christ” (*Exposition*, 389).

Robert Mounce: By economic boycott and the threat of death he intends to make everyone worship the image of the beast. This priestly role identifies the second beast as a religious power.

David Thompson: We clearly see here that the false trinity operates in a similar way as the Divine Trinity:

- 1) The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to point people to Jesus Christ (**John 16:13-14**).
- 2) The purpose of the false prophet is to point people to the Antichrist.

II. (:13-15) MIRACULOUS DECEPTIVE SIGNS (DEMONIC ACTIVITY EMPLOYED BY DIVINE PERMISSION) TO PROMOTE WORSHIP OF THE ANTICHRIST

A. (:13-14a) Deceives People to Encourage the Worship and Dominion of the Antichrist

1. (:13) Performs Impressive Sign Miracles (e.g. Calling Fire down from Heaven)

“And he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.”

Grant Osborne: A major focus of his “work” (the third ποιῆι in the passage) is to perform σημεῖα μεγάλα (*sēmeia megala*, *great signs*), the **counterfeit miracles** that mirror those of Elijah and Christ as well as the two witnesses of **11:5–6**. Moses was described as a prophet who performed such miraculous signs (**Exod. 4:17; 7:9–10; 10:1–2**), and Elijah and Elisha were justly famed for the spectacular miracles God produced through them. Of course, Jesus was the archetypal messianic prophet, and John’s Gospel is built around his “sign” miracles (σημεῖον) which provided a theological pointer to the significance of Jesus as the Christ. Here it points to the pretension of the false trinity that the beast is the Christ. **Deuteronomy 13:1–4** and **2 Thess. 2:9** speak of the “*counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders*” that typify false teachers and prophets throughout history but especially the work of this paragon of evil at the end of history. This type of counterfeit miracles that deceive was part of Jewish apocalyptic tradition (Sib. Or. 2.165–69; 3.63–70; Asc. Isa. 4.4–10; Apoc. Dan. 13.1–13) as well as frequent in the NT (**Matt. 7:15; 24:5–6, 23–24; 2 Thess. 2:9; 2 Pet. 2:3**). In particular, the false prophet parodies Elijah, who called down fire from heaven both at Mount Carmel (**1 Kings 18:36–39**) and with the soldiers sent to arrest him (**2 Kings 1:10–14**). In Revelation this miracle is performed both by the two witnesses (**11:5**) and by God himself at the destruction of Satan’s army (**20:9**). However, the false prophet calls down fire from heaven ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀνθρώπων (*enōpion tōn anthrōpōn*, *in front of the people*), which the NIV rightly translates “*in full view of men*.” It is not a religious act but a public-relations performance intended to enhance the worship of the false trinity. One of the tests of a false prophet is to use prophetic power for self-aggrandizement, to be seen and worshiped by the people (e.g., **Jer. 23:9–14; Ezek. 13:1–23**).

These **counterfeit sign-miracles** in **Rev. 13:14** are first of all **under divine control** (the repetition of the divine passive ἐδόθη, *edothē*, *was given*, from **13:5–8** anchors the action in God’s control of the situation) and second have as their entire purpose to “*deceive*” the earth-dwellers. Satan is the great cosmic “*deceiver*,” the “*ancient serpent*” (**12:9**), and the “*deceiver of the nations*” (**20:3, 8, 10**). God “*gives*” the false prophet his power to “*delude*” the nations with counterfeit miracles (**13:14; 19:20**). In **Rom. 1:24, 26** we are told that due to their absolute depravity, “*God gave [the Gentiles] over to their shameful lusts*.” This is the same principle. Everything the beast and the false prophet do is under God’s control and only by God’s permission. Since the earth-dwellers have rejected God’s offer of salvation and refused to repent (**9:20–21**), God is “*giving them over*” to the very “*deception*” they have already preferred. They

have chosen to worship the same demonic powers who tortured and killed them (9:1–19), so God is now allowing them to experience their delusion in all its terrible force. In a sense, God is “*delivering them to Satan*” (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20). On the basis of the “*great apostasy*” noted above from Matthew and 2 Thessalonians, however, this deception probably also includes many from within the church who join the earth-dwellers.

As a result of the “*deceptive*” powers of this beast from the earth, the “*inhabitants of the earth*” obey his “*orders*”.

2. (:14a) Promotes the Worship and Dominion of the Antichrist

“And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast,”

Buist Fanning: The second beast will exploit to the full this potential of the miraculous to mislead gullible humanity (v. 14a): “*he deceives*” (cf. 12:9; 19:20) the mass of humanity, who are hostile to God anyway. God will allow him to perform miracles “*in the beast’s presence*” (v. 14b), apparently referring to demonstrations of power with the beast himself on hand, as a way of convincing people of his power and authority.

Charles Swindoll: Blinded by unbelief and sin, the world will easily fall prey to the second beast’s deceptive message and methods. Intellectually attracted to him, emotionally drawn by his appealing style, and convinced by his amazing signs, they will volitionally submit and obey.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: This should be a warning to all of us. **Miraculous signs are not in themselves a proof that whatever is going on is from God.** There are other issues that must be discerned with the Word of God as the final index and authority, never just our experience. However, we are living in an esoteric, mystic oriented age where reality is too often reduced to a personal experience or some kind of enlightenment. Just note the rise of the psychic “hotlines” and the emphasis in TV shows on the paranormal or on psychic phenomena. Even within the body of Christ, the emphasis has moved away from the Word of God as our authority to an emphasis on phenomena and subjective experiences, the kind promoted in many charismatic circles today.

B. (:14b-15) Designs an Idol Image to Intimidate People to Worship the Antichrist

1. (:14b) Generates an Idol Image to the Beast

“telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.”

John MacArthur: As the power of Antichrist and the persuasiveness of the false prophet grow, Satan will escalate the false world religion of Antichrist worship. Humanity will eventually come to be so completely under the influence of the false prophet that people will obey his command to make an image to the beast. The world will engage in the most shocking, blatant idolatry ever seen. Like Nebuchadnezzar before him (Dan. 3), but on a global scale, Antichrist, aided by the false prophet, will set up a statue of himself as a symbol of his deity and worldwide worship. This blasphemous image will probably be set up on the temple grounds in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Thess. 2:4) and will be connected with the **abomination of desolation** (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matt. 24:15). It will be a tribute to the awesome power of Antichrist, who had the wound of the sword and has come to life (cf. vv. 3, 12), to seemingly conquer death.

David Thompson: This false prophet will actually be able to **bring an idol to life**. He will have constructed an image of the Antichrist and he will have the power through Satan to bring the image to life. This will be an amazing deception. First, the Antichrist himself who was dead has come back to life. Now an idolatrous image of the Antichrist comes to life. **It will be able to speak.**

2. (:15a) Gives Life to the Idol Image

“And there was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast,”

Buist Fanning: Another deceptive—and destructive—miracle that God permits the second beast to perform is to **animate** the first beast’s image so that it can pronounce a demand for worship on penalty of death. This is an intensification of the pattern of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue of gold in **Daniel 3**; there the statue remains lifeless and mute, while the king’s herald shouts the royal command to bow down or face death (**Dan 3:4–6**). Here the statue itself is given “*breath*” to pronounce the demand for all to worship the beast (**v. 15b**). In the Greco-Roman world, people commonly understood images of the gods to be inhabited by the deities themselves rather than as simply inanimate statues, and sometimes it was claimed that they pronounced oracles. So here the beast’s ability to “*speak*” is focused on the proclamation that “*all who would not worship*” would suffer execution (**v. 15c**).

3. (:15b) Gives Speech to the Idol Image

“that the image of the beast might even speak”

4. (:15c) Galvanizes Worship of the Idol Image via Intimidation

“and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”

Robert Mounce: This shows plainly enough the terrible **insolence** of false religion: what began as following the beast inevitably led to worshipping the beast; in turn this led to killing those who rejected the beast.

John MacArthur: But though the death sentence may be decreed on all, not all believers will be killed. Some will survive until Christ returns and will enter His millennial kingdom as living people (cf. **Isa. 65:20–23; Matt. 25:31–40**). Nor will Antichrist and his henchmen kill all the Jews (cf. **12:6–7, 14**); two-thirds of them will perish, but the rest will be protected (**Zech. 13:8–9**).

III. (:16-18) MARK OF THE BEAST IDENTIFIES LOYALTY TO THE ANTICHRIST

A. (:16-17) Significance of the Mark of the Beast

1. (:16) Universal Identifying Mark

a. Leveling Function of the Mark

*“And he causes all,
the small and the great,
and the rich and the poor,
and the free men and the slaves,”*

Robert Mounce: The coupling of opposites (small, great; rich, poor; free, slave) is a rhetorical way of stressing the **totality of human society** (cf. **11:18; 19:5, 18; 20:12**). No one who would carry on the normal pursuits of everyday life (**v. 17**) is exempt.

b. Location of the Mark

*“to be given a mark on their right hand,
or on their forehead,”*

Buist Fanning: A more insidious exercise of the authority of the first beast and of Satan himself (vv. 2, 4, 12) is the “*mark*” that the second beast is able to compel people to accept before they can engage in the **commercial life** of their communities. No one is exempt from this requirement, as John emphasizes with the word “*all*” in v. 16a (also “*no one*” in v. 17a) and his recitation of all parts of society that must comply, privileged or unprivileged, without exception. They are all forced to accept a “*mark*” or identifying sign (perhaps on the pattern of the first-century branding of slaves or animals) that certifies their **loyalty to the beast**. This mark of the beast is mentioned five additional times in Revelation and is always cited together with “*worship*” of him on the part of those who receive the mark (14:9, 11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). This sinister “*mark*” contrasts with the divine “*seal*” that the one hundred and forty-four thousand receive on their “*foreheads*” as a sign of God’s protection (7:2–3; 9:4; 14:1; cf. Ezek 9:1–11). Its location on the hand or forehead may simply reflect the most obvious places for an identifying mark, but it could parody the reminders of God’s faithfulness or of his law worn by Israelites “*on the hand*” or “*between the eyes*” (Exod 13:9, 16; Deut 6:8; 11:18).

Robert Mounce: Whatever the background of the word, its significance in the present passage is to parody the sealing of the servants of God in **chapter 7**. As the elect are sealed upon their foreheads to escape the destruction about to fall upon the earth, so the followers of the beast are to escape his wrath against the church by bearing his mark. In the apocalyptic vision of John the mark is obviously visible. It symbolizes unqualified allegiance to the demands of the imperial cult. In the final days of Antichrist it will represent the ultimate test of religious loyalty. Only those who would rather die than compromise their faith will resist the mark of Antichrist.

2. (:17) Universal Authorization for Commerce

*“and he provides that no one should be able to buy or to sell,
except the one who has the mark,
either the name of the beast or the number of his name.”*

B. (:18) Secret of the Number of the Beast

1. Requires Wisdom

“Here is wisdom.”

Buist Fanning: The other godly virtues John calls for in this chapter are wisdom and understanding (v. 18). Such discernment is needed not only to decipher the number of the beast from the sea but to grasp his true character amid all that John’s vision has revealed about his role in the world. He is Satan’s savage point man, assisted by the beast from the earth in attacking humans both by frontal assault and by deceptive enticement to false worship. Satan and his agents have always used duplicity and coercion to subvert God’s work and hoodwink God’s people. Some of his tricks on display here are wiles that Christians at all times need to be on guard against. We must not assume that outward power and success are signs of what is good and right or that the majority must be right. We cannot blithely follow the dominant cultural influences and ideologies of our day no matter who vouches for them. We need to examine even seemingly miraculous events with godly wisdom and spiritual discernment. Even in the religious sphere large crowds and adoring followers are not always signs of a godly, doctrinally sound

ministry. We should be prepared if necessary to resist the power of the crowd, the tyranny of the majority. When faced with direct coercion, we must discern the most winsome strategy possible, being “as wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matt 10:16). Perhaps a gentle appeal will work better than belligerence. Even if gentleness and patience fail, faithful witness for Christ should be the goal rather than cowardly evasion or angry retaliation.

Richard Phillips: John says that understanding that we are opposed by a deadly triad of Satan, together with the tyrants and false prophets who serve him, calls for wisdom among Christians. The wisdom is not how to strike back at the beast with his own weapons but how to boldly declare the gospel message of Christ. The wisdom is not how to evade the beast’s tyranny but how to persevere in Christian courage and commitment. Having the beast’s number, knowing his limitations and his certain defeat, we can live without fear of his assault. Even his hammer blows can do nothing but send us into the loving arms of the victorious Christ. Knowing Jesus, calculating the infinite value of his cross, and trusting his perfection in glory and salvation, we are made bold to tell others about him. John’s intent is that what the angel said of the victorious believers in **chapter 12** would be said of us as we triumph in faith: “*They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death*” (**Rev. 12:11**).

2. Relates to the Number 666

“Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.”

Daniel Akin: I think the number is more of a description than an identification. **Six is the number of man.** He was created on the sixth day. He is to work six days. In contrast, the number of perfection is seven, and the superlative of seven is 777.

The beast is the greatest man but still a man. He is a six, not a seven. He, along with Satan and the false prophet, is a 666, a trinity of imperfection. Not now or ever will they be a 777! He is the best man can produce, but he is still just a man! He is “the completeness of sinful incompleteness,” the ultimate in “coming up short.” He is good enough to deceive many, but he is nowhere close to good enough to displace Jesus (**Beale**, “*Number of the Beast*”).

William Barclay: We might well, therefore, act on the assumption that the number has something to do with Nero. Many ancient manuscripts give the number as 616. If we take Nero in Latin and give it its numerical equivalent, we get:

N = 50
E = 6
R = 500
O = 60
N = 50

The total is 666; and the name can equally well be spelled without the final N, which would give the number 616. In Hebrew, the letters of Nero Caesar also add up to 666.

There is little doubt that the number of the beast stands for Nero and that John is forecasting the coming of the antichrist in the form of Nero, the incarnation of all evil, returning to this world.

Grant Osborne: In short, the best option is “**Nero Caesar**,” but it is no more than a tantalizing possibility. It is important to note that if the identification with Nero were to be adopted, this does not mean John believed the Nero redivivus legend and expected Nero to return shortly. Rather, the coming Antichrist would be a Nerolike figure who would be the antitype of that evil anti-Christian. In this sense, the use of 666 as the threefold counterpart (with 666 used similarly to “*holy, holy, holy*” in **Rev. 4:8**) to the completeness of seven and the absolute perfection of “*Jesus*” as 888 could well also be intended (so **Rowland** 1999: 355). He is “*incomplete incomplete incomplete*” compared to the ultimately perfect “*Jesus*” (888). In the final analysis, we must remain uncertain regarding the actual meaning of 666. The above discussion is as far as we can go; only first-century readers knew, though it is hard to say how much they knew.

Robert Mounce: The solution most commonly accepted today is that 666 is the numerical equivalent of Nero Caesar. It is held to be supported by the variant reading 616, which also yields the name of Nero when the Latinized spelling is followed. What is not generally stressed is that this solution asks us to calculate a Hebrew transliteration of the Greek form of a Latin name, and that with a defective spelling. A shift to Hebrew letters is unlikely in that Revelation is written in Greek and there is no indication that the riddle is to be solved by transposing it into another language. Further, the name of Nero was apparently never suggested by the ancient commentators even though his persecuting zeal made him a model of the Antichrist.

Sola Scriptura: Of all the verses in the Revelation, this is the **most difficult to understand**. The wild speculative articles written over the centuries can easily document that this is the case. There is no agreement among scholars concerning the meaning of this verse. I am content to leave it as it is. However, I am more convinced by this verse that Satan will pull off his greatest deception in connection with the eschatological beast/king.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does the counterfeit satanic triad of powerful beings compare to the trinity?
- 2) How can the whole world be galvanized to worship the same idol image in support of the Antichrist?
- 3) What type of speculation have you encountered regarding the number of the beast?
- 4) Why must we exercise spiritual discernment when confronted with apparent miraculous signs and wonders?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

William Barclay: The word for the mark of the beast is *charagma*, and it could come from more than one ancient custom.

- Sometimes domestic slaves were branded with the mark of their owner. But usually they

were branded only if they had run away or had been guilty of some grave misdemeanour. Such a mark was called a *stigma*; we still use the word in English. If the mark is connected with this, it means that those who worship the beast are his property.

- Sometimes soldiers branded themselves with the name of their general, if they were very devoted to him. This, to some extent, corresponds to the modern custom of tattooing upon one's person the name of someone especially dear. If the mark is connected with this, it means that those who worship the beast are his devoted followers.
- On every contract of buying or selling, there was a *charagma*, a seal, and on the seal the name of the emperor and the date. If the mark is connected with this, it means that those who worship the beast accept his authority.
- All coinage had the head and inscription of the emperor stamped upon it to show that it was his property. If the mark is connected with this, it again means that those who bear it are the property of the beast.
- When worshippers had burned the pinch of incense to Caesar, they were given a certificate to say that they had done so. The mark of the beast may be the certificate of worship, which Christians could obtain only at the cost of denying their faith.

Robert Mounce: Final Satanic Parody of God

Eternal Truth	Final Parody
Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit	Dragon, Water Monster, Earth Monster
Jesus Christ (Lamb)	Antichrist (Water Monster)
Holy Spirit	False Prophet (Earth Monster)
Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection	Antichrist's fatal wound and healing
"Who is like the LORD?"	"Who is like the beast?"
Worshippers in the Book of Life	Worshippers deceived
True miracles (fire from heaven)	False miracles (fire from heaven)
Sealed with the Lamb's name	Marked with the beast's name
Jesus = IHΣΟΥΣ= 888	? = 666

Charles Swindoll: We do know this for certain: the commerce of the future will revolve around the identifying mark, whatever it may be. Possessing the mark will prove one's allegiance to the Antichrist. Refusing the mark will demonstrate faith in Jesus Christ. At no other time in history will the identity of true Christians be made so clear. In that day, the questions and riddles revolving around the identity of the Beast, the nature of the mark, and the calculation of the number 666 will be answered for those who possess divine wisdom and discernment (**Rev. 13:18**). Until then, we must continue to contend with the various means of spiritual deception aggressively at work in our present age. Each of us must therefore equip ourselves for spiritual battle with reliable knowledge, keen discernment, and God-given wisdom.

John MacArthur: Just as the false christs who have plagued mankind will culminate in the final Antichrist, so also will the false prophets culminate in a final false prophet (cf. **16:13; 19:20; 20:10**). He will be Satan's last and most powerful lying deceiver. Along with Satan, the counterfeit of the Father, and Antichrist, the counterfeit of Jesus Christ, the false prophet will

form the **satanic false trinity**. He will be the counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. The false prophet will be Antichrist's partner in Satan's massive final deception of the world. While Antichrist will be primarily a political and military ruler, he will also claim to be God. The false prophet will be his high priest, the religious leader who will lead people into the satanic religion of worshipping Antichrist. The false prophet will deify Antichrist and convince unbelievers that he is the only hope for the world's salvation.

The false prophet will be able to deceive the unbelieving world because the power of religion over men's minds is so great. **People are incurable worshipers**; everyone worships someone, whether the true God, false gods, or themselves. There is in the heart of man the longing for someone transcendent, someone beyond himself that can deliver him from his troubling circumstances. The terrifying, unparalleled events of the Tribulation will intensify that longing for a supernatural deliverer. The false prophet will convince the unbelieving world that Antichrist is the solution to the world's pressing problems. He may well be the most eloquent, powerful, convincing speaker in human history, and his lofty oratory will persuade the world to worship Antichrist. **John Phillips** speculated:

The dynamic appeal of the false prophet will lie in his skill in combining political expediency with religious passion.... His arguments will be subtle, convincing, and appealing. His oratory will be hypnotic, for he will be able to move the masses to tears or whip them into a frenzy. He will control the communication media of the world and will skillfully organize mass publicity to promote his ends. He will manage the truth with guile beyond words, bending it, twisting it, and distorting it.... He will mold world thought and shape human opinion like so much potter's clay. (Exploring Revelation, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991], 171)

David Levy: Satan will infuse the second beast with the same great authority he will give to the first beast. "*And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast*" (v. 12). The word *exerciseth* (Gr., *poieo*) appears eight times in **verses 12 to 18** and means *to do, to cause, to make*. By exercising great power, the false prophet will consolidate worldwide religion, economy, and commerce (vv. 13–17) under his control. Notice the **chain of authority**:

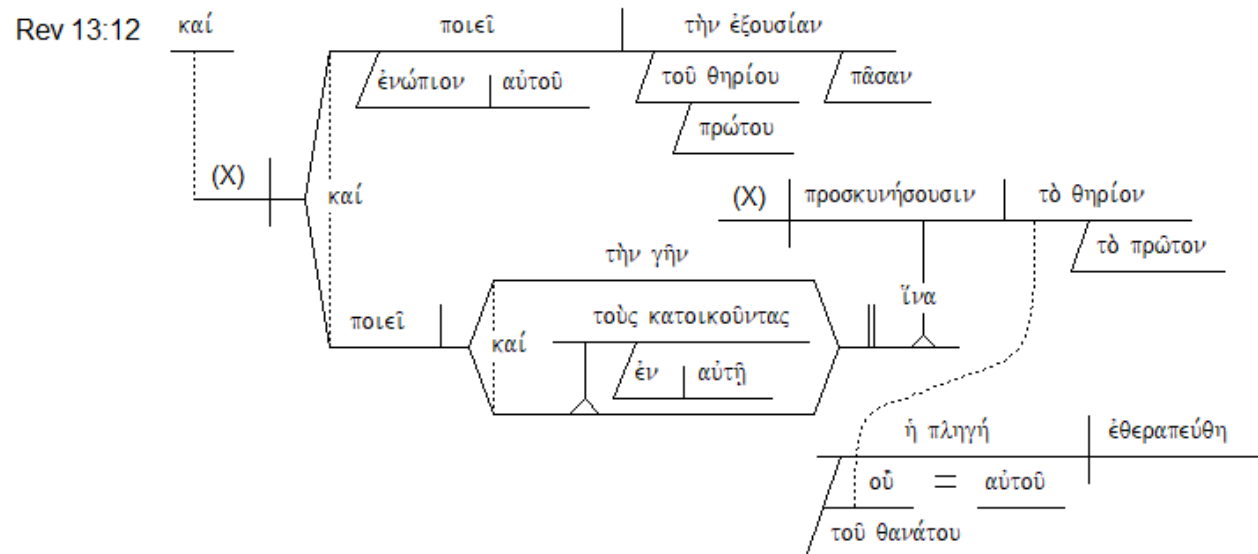
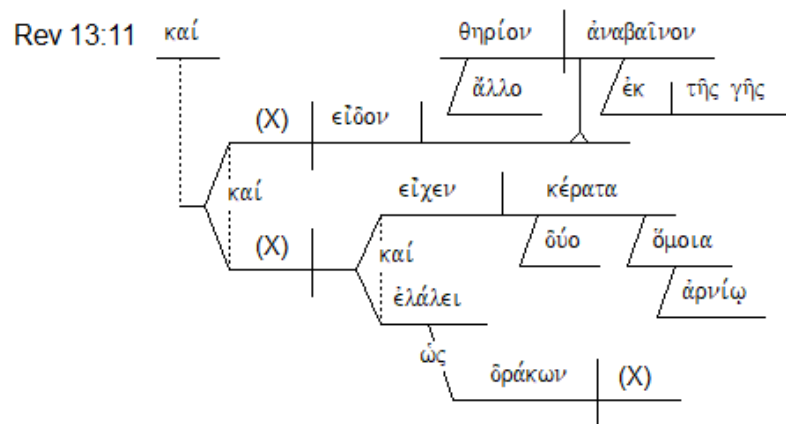
- The first beast will promote Satan's desire for worldwide domination and worship.
- The second beast will promote the first beast's desire for the same through the manifestation of "*great wonders*" (v. 13).

Through the manifestation of those "*great wonders*," the false prophet will use satanic deception (**2 Th. 2:9–11**) to lead unsaved humans to worship the first beast and his idolatrous image as God (**2 Th. 2:4**). His miraculous healing of the first beast from its "*deadly wound*" (v. 12) will help persuade humans to worship the beast. This will not include the remnant of Jewish people who will flee into the wilderness to escape the Antichrist's wrath (**12:13–17**) nor true Gentile believers. . .

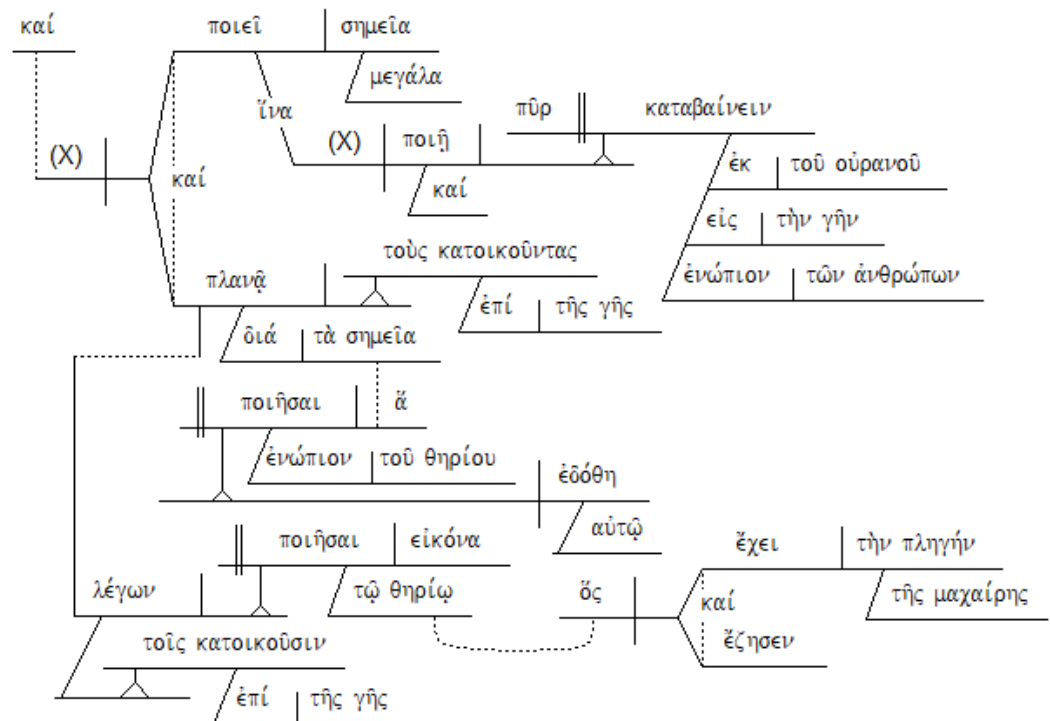
So convincing will be the miracle-working power of the false prophet that he "*deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast*" (v. 14). The unsaved world will be completely and continually captivated by his miraculous power, signs, and lying wonders. Jesus warned that these signs and wonders will be so compelling "*that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect*" (**Mt. 24:24**).

<https://israelmyglory.org/article/the-coming-world-prophet-revelation-1311-18/>

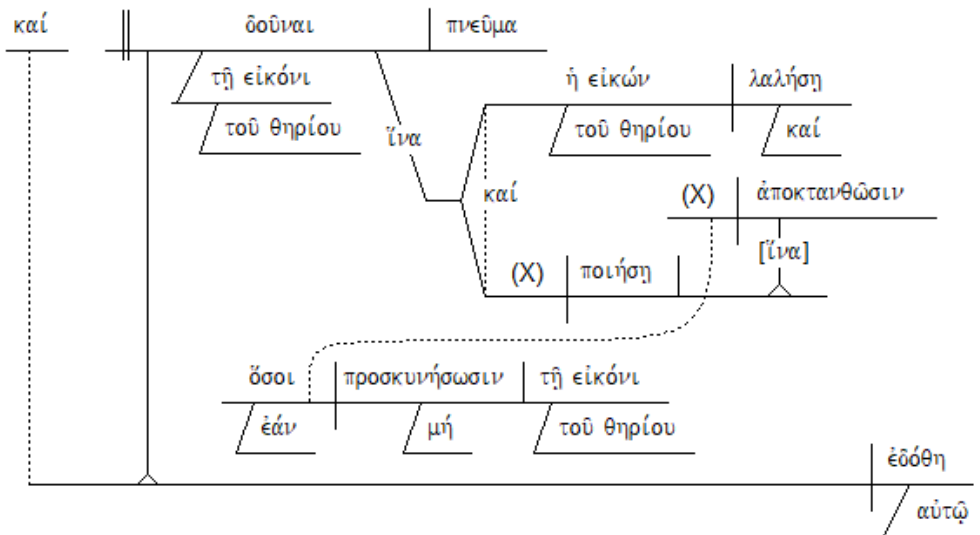
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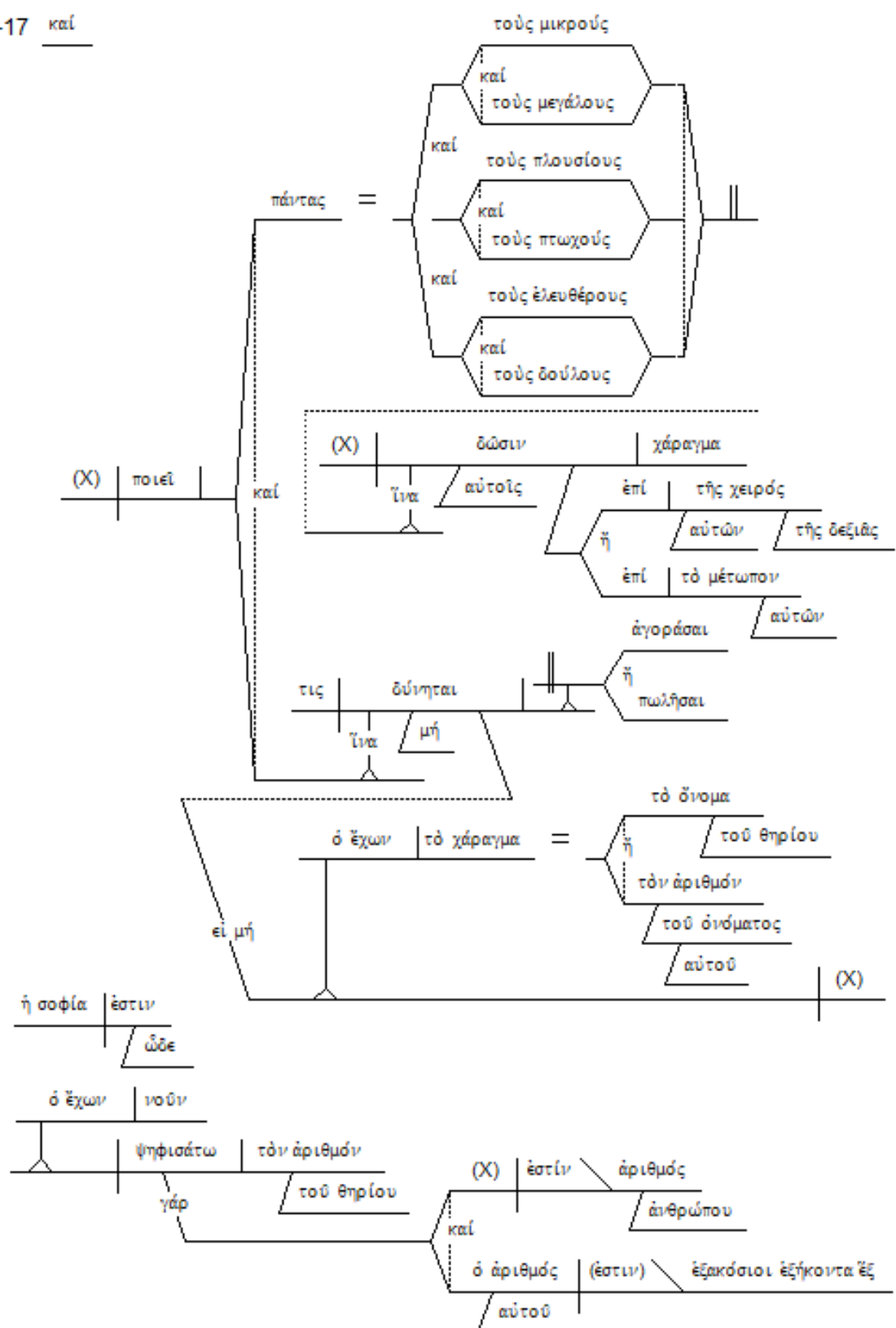


Rev 13:13-14



Rev 13:15





TEXT: Revelation 14:1-5

TITLE: *PREVIEW: THE VICTORIOUS 144,000 SING A NEW SONG OF PRAISE*

BIG IDEA:

IN A PREVIEW OF VICTORY, THE LAMB STANDS ON MT. ZION WITH THE TRIUMPHANT 144,000 WHO ARE LEARNING A NEW SONG OF PRAISE

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: Structure: The chapter clearly falls into three sections (vv. 1–5; 6–13; 14–20), with each section introduced as a separate visionary phase by the common expression “*and I looked/saw*” (καὶ εἶδον). The first section is **a joyful scene of victory**, while the second and third portray primarily judgment with brief messages of encouragement to the faithful and even to those who still need to turn in faith to the true God (14:6–7, 12–13). . .

Instead of the savage beast and those forced to bear his mark, we see the Lamb and those identified with him standing in triumph on Mount Zion and celebrated by the heavenly company in a preview of God’s imminent victory. . .

John’s anticipation of the regathering of Israel as a whole (not just a small remnant) is expressed in this vision, as in 7:1–8, through the appearance of the “*one hundred and forty-four thousand*” who stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion (v. 1b). In 7:3–4 twelve thousand from “*every tribe of the sons of Israel*” are sealed “*on their foreheads*” as a mark of God’s ownership and protection. Their number (12 x 12,000) is symbolic of their complete regathering as a people. Even though additional descriptions of these Israelites are given in 14:3c–5 that did not appear in 7:3–8, their total number and their marking with the names of God and the Lamb “*written on their foreheads*” (v. 1c) make clear that **this is the same group**, now standing in triumph with Christ.

Both passages (7:1–8 and 14:1–5) suffer in the commentaries from an **unfortunate neglect of ethnic Israel** in the interpretation of Revelation and a tendency to collapse Old Testament prophetic expectations about the future into a type of Christian eschatology that is either supersessionist or that effaces all ethnic differences among the redeemed. As a result, important clues for interpretation of what the text actually says in the context of its ancient background are missed or misconstrued.

Van Parunak: In view of John’s dependence on the OT, the most straightforward understanding of Zion here is as an anticipation of “*the beloved city*” (20:9) in which our Lord rules during the Millennium. **Chapters 12-14** thus carry us through the whole of human history on this present earth, from Eden in **ch. 12** to the coming kingdom in **ch. 14** that lies beyond the bowl judgments. Compare the role of the sixth seal in depicting the final return of the Lord, or the seventh trumpet in describing the Lord’s coming rule.

Robert Mounce: In order to keep before his readers the ultimate reward for their endurance, the author of Revelation intersperses **glimpses of final blessedness** among his presentations of judgment. The detailed description of the beast and the false prophet in the preceding chapter was a somber reminder of what lay in the immediate future, suffering and death, with a call to steadfastness. A **note of encouragement** is in order.

Charles Swindoll: I've titled this fourth episode of the book of Revelation "Vengeance of the Glorious Deliverer" (14:1–19:10). It begins with a **preview of coming events**. The blasphemous exploits of the two beasts give way to a series of visions that predict the final gathering of the earth for deliverance and harvesting of the earth for judgment (14:1-20). This forecast then dissolves into a new vision of the most severe plagues of the end times —the seven bowls of wrath (15:1–16:21).

Joe Beard: Chapter 12 introduced us to important characters of the Great Tribulation period. Chapter 13 which we looked at over the last two weeks introduced us to the two evil human characters of the Great Tribulation, the Antichrist and his false prophet, this morning we enter chapter 14 the theme is **ultimate triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ**.

It is important to understand that the material presented in these three chapters is not given to us in chronological order but prepares the way for the climax which begins in **chapter 15**. Chapter 14 consists of a series of declarations and visions that assure us of the ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ and the judgment of the wicked, those who led the rebellion against God and those who followed them.

<https://www.mcclearycommunitychurch.com/sermons/lamb-and-144000-revelation-141-5>

I. (:1) THE REDEEMED STAND VICTORIOUS WITH THE SLAIN LAMB ON MOUNT ZION AS HIS KINGDOM TRIUMPHS

"And I looked,"

A. The Victorious Lamb on Mount Zion

"and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion,"

Daniel Akin: They stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion. Some believe this is heavenly Zion, based on **Hebrews 12:22-24**. That is certainly possible. However, I believe it is better to see this as **earthly Jerusalem** and a reflection of the beautiful messianic hymn of **Psalms 2**. There in **verse 6** we read, *"I have consecrated My King on Zion, My holy mountain."* **Psalm 48:2** says that God's holy mountain, *"rising splendidly, is the joy of the whole earth. Mount Zion on the slopes of the north is the city of the great King."* **Isaiah 24:33** adds,

The moon will be put to shame and the sun disgraced, because the Lord of Hosts will reign as king on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and He will display His glory in the presence of His elders.

This is the mountain of the great King, and there He stands in triumphant victory. By glorious grace those who follow Him stand with Him. The reign of terror of the dragon, antichrist, and false prophet is already passing away. Their doom is certain. There is a new King on the scene! The beast is going down as the Lamb stands up (see **5:6-7**; see also **Ps 76**).

G.K. Beale: The fuller name **Mount Zion**, in distinction to "Zion" by itself, occurs only nineteen times in the OT, at least nine of which allude to a remnant being saved, in connection with either God's name or God's sovereign rule and sometimes both (**2 Kgs. 19:31; Isa. 4:5; 10:12; 37:30-32; Joel 2:32**, etc.). Against this OT background, Mount Zion in **Rev. 14:1** is to be seen as the

end-time city where God dwells with and provides security for the remnant who have been bought out from the earth.

John MacArthur: Strangely, some equate this passage with **Hebrews 12:22–24** and view it as a vision of heaven. But the former passage describes the heavenly Mount Zion, the abode of God. This passage describes the return of Christ to the **earthly Mount Zion**. The whole point would be lost if Mount Zion refers to heaven, because that would mean the one hundred and forty-four thousand had died. In that case, their sealing with the mark of God (**7:3–4**; cf. **9:4**) would be rendered meaningless. **Isaiah 11:9–12** and **24:23**, **Joel 2:32**, and **Zechariah 14:4** also support the identification of the Mount Zion in this passage with the earthly Mount Zion. That a voice comes out of heaven (v. 2) also suggests that this scene is on earth.

B. The Victorious 144,000 with the Lamb

1. Preserved Secure

“and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand,”

Richard Phillips: In **John 10:28**, Jesus promised that those who follow him in faith “*will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*” This doctrine is graphically depicted in the vision of the 144,000 gathered with the Lamb on Mount Zion. Last seen, this assembly was beset with many dangers in the great tribulation that is the church age, including the warfare of the dragon and his two beasts. From a worldly perspective, it might seem that none of them would arrive safely in heaven. Now on Mount Zion, we find that not one of them has been lost. John sees not 129,600, which would be a 90 percent success rate, or even 143,999, with only a single precious sheep’s having perished. Instead, **the exact number** of those who begin the journey of salvation through faith arrive safely in his presence. In the terms of **Psalm 23**, every one of those who begins by saying, “*The LORD is my shepherd*” does in fact “ *dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*”

John MacArthur: Nothing will be able to harm them, because God will seal them (**7:3–4**). They will be like the remnant of Malachi’s day: “*Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name. ‘They will be Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him’*” (**Mal. 3:16–17**). Throughout history, God has protected those who belong to Him. He preserved Noah during the Flood and kept Rahab safe when Jericho was destroyed. He preserved Lot from the destruction of Sodom and kept the children of Israel safe from the plagues that devastated Egypt. **Psalm 37:39–40** declares, “*The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; He is their strength in time of trouble. The Lord helps them and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in Him.*”

The 144,000 will not be the only ones redeemed during the Tribulation. A great host of others, both Jews (**Zech. 12:10–14; 13:1, 9; Rom. 11:26–27**) and Gentiles (**6:9–11; 7:9, 13–14; Matt. 25:31–46**) will be saved. Many, perhaps most, of them will **die as martyrs** during the savage persecution unleashed by Antichrist. The rest, however, who will live through the horrors of the Tribulation will enter the millennial kingdom (**Isa. 65:20–23; Matt. 25:31–36**). But the 144,000 Jewish evangelists are **unique** because **all of them** will survive. When Christ returns and stands on Mount Zion, they will stand with Him in triumph.

2. Proclaiming Visible Identification with the Lamb and His Father

“having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.”

II. (:2-3) THE REDEEMED SING THE NEW SONG TAUGHT BY THE HEAVENLY CHOIR

A. (:2) Heavenly Choir

1. Voice Origin

“And I heard a voice from heaven,”

2. Voice Characteristics

a. Impressive

“like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder,”

b. Melodious

“and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.”

Tony Garland: Harps were often used in worship in the OT (2S. 6:5; 1Chr. 25:1-7; Ps. 33:2; 43:4; 57:8-9; 98:5; 147:7; 149:3; 150:3-6). Here, the harps are probably played by a multitude in heaven.

B. (:3) Harmonious New Song

1. Special Audience

*“And they sang a new song before the throne
and before the four living creatures
and the elders;”*

Buist Fanning: To “sing a new song” reflects a number of Old Testament passages that indicate praise to the Lord inspired afresh by his gracious deliverance, especially culminating in his coming renewal of all things (cf. Isa 42:9–10 and discussion at Rev 5:9). Such a new song is an appropriate backdrop for the scene of victory on Mount Zion that v. 1 presents.

Warren Wiersbe: Because of the special experiences they had during the tribulation, they have a new song to sing that others cannot share (see Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1). They are accompanied by heavenly harps and other heavenly voices. It is encouraging to know that one day our sorrows will be transformed into songs!

David Thompson: There is obviously a tremendous worship service taking place in heaven that is focused on the judgment of God and these 144,000 are fully aware that the things happening on earth are part of the judgment of God that will lead to the glorious return of Jesus Christ. The 144,000 are not at the worship service in heaven, but they are very aware of it. They can hear this song and **they are able to learn it and sing it.**

Joe Beard: Who is this group that is singing this new song? In the same chapter where we were first introduced to the 144,000, **Revelation 7**, we also learned of an **innumerable multitude** from every nation, tribe, people and tongues that was standing before the throne and one of the elders told John that this multitude was the ones **who came out of the great tribulation**. They are the ones who were murdered by the Antichrist’s decree to kill those who refused to worship

him, they died as martyrs. I believe these are the voices that John hears singing this new song. What this new song is about we do not know, the words are not given to us, is it a song of redemption, is it a song of exultation that the tribulation has ended and the 1000-year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth is about to begin. John goes on to tell us that besides the ones that are singing the new song, no one else can learn it except the 144,000 that have come through the horrors of the Great Tribulation.

2. Special Song

“and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.”

III. (:4-5) THE REDEEMED SHOW OFF THEIR BLAMELESS CHARACTER

Van Parunak: Thus the four characteristics associated with the 144,000 whom we see with the Lamb on Mount Zion are those given in **Psalms 15** and **24** as the requirements for those who would in fact ascend to Mount Zion. In doing so, they summarize four guidelines for godliness to which we should pay attention: physical and spiritual purity, association with the Lord, separation from the world, and blamelessness in word and action.

5 Key Characteristics:

A. (:4a) Sexual Purity

“These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste.”

John MacArthur: The worship of Antichrist during the Tribulation will be unspeakably vile and perverse. As it did in the fertility cults of ancient times, **sexual sin** will apparently run rampant. Even in the current grossly immoral day, we can hardly imagine what the deviant sexual perversion of the Tribulation will be like. With all divine restraint removed (**2 Thess. 2:6–7**) and the unbelieving world judgmentally abandoned by God (cf. **Rom. 1:24, 26, 28**), sin will be released like a flood, inundating the world. And fanning the hellish flames of wickedness will be Satan and his demon hosts—both those cast from heaven with him (**12:9**) and those vile demons newly released from imprisonment (**9:1–11, 14–19**).

In the midst of the darkness of the Tribulation period, the 144,000 will shine forth like beacons of purity. Despite the rampant sexual sin that surrounds them, they will not be defiled with women, but will keep themselves **chaste**. **That the specific sin that they will avoid involves women indicates that sexual purity is in view here, not detachment from the corrupt world system.** That the 144,000 will be separate from Antichrist’s empire has already been made clear; they bear God’s mark, not the beast’s (**7:3–4**). Nor does this passage teach that they will all be unmarried, since sex within marriage does not defile anyone (**Heb. 13:4**). What it means is that they will stand apart from the sin of their culture; 144,000 **morally pure preachers** amid the defilement that surrounds them.

Tony Garland: These are **physical virgins**, for why else would it be said of this particular group of saints that they are virgins? All the saints are virgins in the spiritual sense of being set aside and dedicated to God. *“I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (**2Cor. 11:2**). Jesus explained, *“there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are*

eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it" (**Mat. 19:12**) "Not only is there virgin purity of life, but there is also virgin love—undivided heart affection for the Lamb." These are eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. By both choice and gifting, they were enabled to give their full focus to ministry at the time of the end.

[Alternate View:]

Daniel Akin: This, without question, is symbolic of their fidelity and allegiance to the Lamb whom they follow wherever He goes. In other words, they are **spiritually faithful** to their God in a world awash in idolatry and immorality (see **9:20-21**; see also **Jas 4:5**). They have remained morally and spiritually pure in their devotion of and love for the Lamb. No other God would they consider. No other lover would they entertain. They follow Christ and only Christ, for He redeemed them. He set them free from slavery to sin. He purchased them from the enslavement and bondage to sin. They continually follow the Lamb as "*firstfruits*." This could indicate they are the beginning of a greater harvest to follow. Based on **Revelation 7:9-14**, we know that many will come to Christ during the great tribulation even as God pours out His judgment and wrath on unrepentant humanity.

Robert Mounce: There is a **symbolism** in the description of the church as virgins that must not be overlooked. On many occasions throughout the OT, Israel is spoken of as a virgin. She is the "*Virgin Daughter of Zion*" (**2 Kgs 19:21**; **Lam 2:13**), "*Virgin Israel*" (**Jer 18:13**; **Amos 5:2**). When she lapsed into idolatry, she is said to have *played the harlot* (**Jer 3:6**; **Hos 2:5**). The figure is carried over into the NT when Paul writes to the Corinthians, "*I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him*" (**2 Cor 11:2**). The 144,000 are here pictured as the promised bride of Christ (cf. **21:9**) who, as they await the day of marriage, have kept themselves pure from all defiling relationships with the pagan world system. They have resisted the seductions of the great harlot Rome with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication (**17:2**). The apparent confusion of the sexes is of no moment since the entire figure is to be understood symbolically.

B. (:4b) Dedicated Disciples

"These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes."

Buist Fanning: They are dedicated disciples of Christ (v. **4c**, "*they follow the Lamb wherever he goes*"), a reference to their costly self-sacrifice and consecration to God and his gospel (cf. **Mark 8:34-38** and parallels).

Grant Osborne: The idea of "*following*" Christ is the heart of **discipleship** in the Gospels (**Mark 1:18**; **8:34**; et al.; seventy times in the Gospels), and John describes Christ as the Good Shepherd who "*calls his sheep by name and leads them out . . . and they follow him because they know his voice*" (**John 10:3-4**). Here the "*wherever he goes*" implies *imitatio Christi*, discipleship that involves suffering and death ("*take up his cross and follow me*," **Mark 8:34**). **Aune** (1998a: 813) gives an excellent overview of the background. To "*follow*" means both to adhere to Jesus' instructions and to promote his cause, a thrust found only in the Gospels and in **Rev. 14:4**. The idea of following to the point of death also occurs in **Matt. 10:38**; **Luke 17:33**; **John 12:25-26**; **13:36**; **1 Pet. 2:21**; **Rev. 12:11**.

C. (:4c) Redeemed as First Fruits

"These have been purchased from among men

as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.”

Buist Fanning: Second, they are the vanguard of God’s redemptive harvest in the final cataclysmic events of the end times (v. 4d, “redeemed from among humans as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb”). Just as the offering of the first portion of the harvest symbolized Israel’s grateful acknowledgment that all of it was from God (cf. “firstfruits” in **Deut 26:1–11**), so Christ’s purchase of ethnic Israelites by his blood (**5:9**), who thus experience spiritual and national renewal in fulfillment of God’s promises, will constitute the forefront of God’s salvation and renewal of all humanity and all of his creation in the end times.

Sola Scriptura: Since there are only 12,000 Jews from each tribe of Israel and they are specially identified as “first fruits,” naturally the salvation of more Jews will follow their conversion. We are not told when the salvation of the 144,000 occurred. However, we know it occurs between their sealing and their standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb. The salvation of the 144,000 guarantees the salvation of the nation of Israel, which must shortly follow this scene given the destruction of Jerusalem detailed in the seventh bowl (**Rev 16:19**).

D. (:5a) Integrity of Speech

“And no lie was found in their mouth;”

G.K. Beale: The reference to not lying is not speaking merely of general truthfulness but in context focuses on the saints’ **integrity in witnessing** to Jesus when under pressure by the beast and false prophet to compromise their faith and go along with the idolatrous lie (note references to the perseverance of the saints in **13:10; 14:12**; cf. **1 John 2:22**). As already briefly noted, the expression of integrity is an allusion to the character of the messianic Servant prophesied in **Isa. 53:9**: “nor was there any deceit in His mouth.” This is striking, because it comes immediately after mention of the Servant as “a lamb that is led to slaughter” (**Isa. 53:7**). The saints reflect both of these messianic traits. . .

The section closes with the observation that those who follow Christ will eventually become like Him (v. 5). Why is this so? Does it equally apply in a negative sense to those who seek money, power, or position for selfish purposes? Discipleship means following Christ “wherever He goes.” How characteristic is this of our Christian lives? What a tragedy it is when believers fail to follow Christ wholeheartedly and thus fail to exhibit His character to the watching world around them.

Joe Beard: The days of the Antichrist will be **days of deceit**. Last week we saw how the false prophet deceived them that dwell on the earth with his lies and his false wonders. The 144,000 will not believe the lies of the false prophet or the Antichrist and they will not repeat them. No lie was found in their mouth means that they speak the truth. They will speak the truth to those that dwell on the earth, but like we learned last week from **2 Thessalonians 2:8-12** the earth dwellers will perish because they will not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. Though the truth is spoken to them, and the love of the truth is modeled before them by the 144,000 they chose instead to believe the lies and deceptions of the evil one so that they might take pleasure in wickedness. But as we saw from the beginning of this chapter those who are saved through the Great Tribulation, are those who had a love of the truth. They spoke no lie, they spoke only the truth and they were blameless.

E. (:5b) Blameless in Character

“they are blameless.”

Buist Fanning: Finally in summary, they fully exemplify God’s redeemed people (v. **5b**, *“they are blameless,”* a frequent NT description of the moral condition that Christians will attain at the consummation of God’s sanctifying work in them; e.g., **Eph 1:4; 5:27; Col 1:22; Jude 24**).

John MacArthur: Because they will trust in God’s power and lead lives characterized by praise, purity, devoted loyalty, and singleness of purpose, the 144,000 will be blameless. That does not, of course, mean that they will be sinless (**1 Kings 8:46; Job 15:14–16; Ps. 143:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; 1 John 1:8–10**), but they will be **sanctified**. They will be above reproach, leading godly lives before all who see them.

Like the 144,000, all Christians are called to **holiness**. In **Ephesians 1:4** Paul wrote, *“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him”* (cf. **Col. 1:22**). To the Corinthians the apostle wrote, *“I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin”* (**2 Cor. 11:2**; cf. **Eph. 5:27**). Peter exhorted believers to *“like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’”* (**1 Pet. 1:15–16**). Jude reminded his readers that God *“is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy”* (**Jude 24**).

The 144,000 deserve a place in the “Hall of Fame” of the Christian faith (**Heb. 11**). They will lead holy lives and minister effectively for God during history’s darkest hour. Their exemplary efforts will spearhead the greatest spiritual awakening the world will ever see (cf. **6:9–11; 7:9**). The inspired account of their lives and ministry provides a pattern of triumphant Christian living for all believers to follow.

David Thompson: The word “*blameless*” is not the word sinless. What this means is that no valid charges may be brought against these 144,000. This is another indication that they are not martyred and they are not raptured. **They are obviously on this earth** because the term “*blameless*” is a classification of someone on earth and not one in heaven. These 144,000 will be **men of integrity**. They will live their lives free from immorality and deceit and they will be blameless during the Tribulation and they will have close fellowship with Jesus Christ.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we **celebrate** our victory with Christ as if we have already been glorified?
- 2) Are we committed to **following the Lord** wholeheartedly in discipleship?
- 3) Will there be **musical accompaniment** to our praise in heaven?
- 4) Why should every believer have the goal of being considered **blameless**?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Grant Osborne: As Jerusalem was the capital of Israel, Mount Zion is to be the capital of the renewed kingdom of God to be established by the Messiah (**Joel 2:32**; also **Ps. 48:2–11**; **Isa. 2:2**; **24:23**; **Mic. 4:1–8**; 2 Esdr. [4 Ezra] 13:35–40; 2 Bar. 40.1–2). As **Aune** (1998a: 803) notes, the idea of “*standing*” is a military metaphor and pictures the Lamb as a divine warrior ready to annihilate his enemy. The saints are seen as participating in that joyous victory (see **Rev. 2:26–27**; **17:14**). Thus, this is the place of deliverance and glory, celebrating the victory of the saints over the false trinity.

William Barclay: The Lamb’s company were able to learn the new song because they had passed through certain experiences.

(1) **They had suffered.** There are certain things which only sorrow can teach. As the English poet Shelley wrote about the work of poets in ‘Julian and Maddalo’: ‘They learn in suffering what they teach in song.’ Sorrow can produce resentment; but it can also produce faith and peace and a new song.

(2) **They had lived in loyalty.** It is clear that, as the years pass on, the leader will draw closer to his loyal followers and they to him; then he will be able to teach them things that those who are unfaithful or who follow only when it suits them can never learn.

(3) That is another way of saying that the company of the Lamb **had made steady progress** in spiritual growth. A teacher can teach deeper things to a mature student than to someone who has just begun to learn. And Jesus Christ can reveal more treasures of wisdom to those who day by day grow up into him. The tragedy of so many is static Christianity.

Albert Moyer: John returns to the topic of the 144,000 people as a means to assure the believers that God will faithfully save all his sealed servants (**7:4-17**). This group of redeemed holy people appears again in **Revelation 15:2-4** as those who were victorious over the beast, its image, and its number.

Here in **chapter 14**, the Lord’s protection of the 144,000 reminds readers of the **new exodus** by which God delivers his people from the oppression of a powerful, idolatrous beast. Instead of following the world in worshiping the beast, the 144,000 follow the Lamb wherever he leads, and they worship him. The entire passage resounds with **exodus imagery**. The 144,000 have been redeemed or purchased from all over the earth by the blood of Jesus just as in the exodus the Israelites were saved by the blood on their houses (**1:5**; **5:9**; **Ex 12:13**). The 144,000 now belong to God, as indicated by the name of Jesus and the Father written on their foreheads. Their singing a new song echoes the time when the Israelites sang after crossing the Red Sea (**Rev 14:3**; **Ex 15:1**). The 144,000 are servants of the Lamb, and they are also members of his army who victoriously triumphed over the beast through their faithful and sacrificial testimony to the Lamb (**Rev 12:7-12**). Their victory was not through military action but through faithfulness to Christ – they did not defile themselves with the beast in idolatry, immorality, or deception.

David Harrell: In our text this morning the Lord reintroduces to us the most godly, Christ honoring men the world will ever know, 144,000 faithful victorious men, men who will endure unprecedented and unparalleled hardships as they live out their lives in the harshest living

conditions that the world will ever see. We cannot even imagine how difficult life will be during the time of Daniel's 70th week, the time of the tribulation judgments, yet their lives, as we will see, transcend the pain. Somehow their lives transcend the heartache. You never see them giving up. They are never beat down. They never allow Satan's temptation as well as their own natural bent towards sin to defeat them. And we want to ask the question: Well, how does this happen? And we have a bit of an understanding here in this text. We have an understanding of how we, too, can live victorious lives.

The answer, of course, to how we can live a victorious life is found all through Scripture, but as we look at this unique passage of Scripture I find three categories that I think will help us if we approach it this way. We are going to see, first of all, that they had a *confident faith* and we must have a confident faith; secondly, a *celebratory song*; thirdly, a *committed life* and, as we will see, their lives will be committed to *sexual purity, to Christ, to truth and to holiness*. . .

May I remind you as well that once again we see **God's faithfulness to his covenant promises to Israel, to his covenant people**. You will recall that back in the first eight verses of Acts chapter one there is the discussion of Israel's national restoration. That was the theme of conversation between Jesus and his disciples just prior to his ascension on the Mount of Olives. And there we learn that after his resurrection the Lord spent a period of 40 days instructing his disciples regarding the things concerning the kingdom. And we know biblically that at the end of Daniel's 70th week, the time of the tribulation, the Lord will return and establish the earthly phase of that kingdom that will last for 1000 years. And these 144,000 Israelites will be preserved from the impending plagues that will fall upon an unbelieving world during the second half of the tribulation so that they can be instruments of saving grace in God's elected purposes for Israel and for even the lost Gentiles that will be left upon the planet during that time.
<https://cbctn.org/sermon/279/279/>

Jim Erwin: Seven Characteristics of the 144,000

- 1) They identify with Jesus (**Revelation 14:1**)
- 2) They have been protected from the persecution of the Antichrist (**Revelation 14:1**)
- 3) They sense the glory of God (**Revelation 14:2**)
- 4) They sing a new song of victory (**Revelation 14:3**)
- 5) They are pure. (**Revelation 14:4**)
- 6) They show us a true picture of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus (**Revelation 14:4**).
- 7) They are an example of true Christian character (**Revelation 14:5**).

Rev 14:1

καί (X) εἶδον

ἰδοῦ

καί τὸ ἀρνίον ἐστὸς

ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος

Σιών

καί

χιλιάδες (X)

ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες

μετ' αὐτοῦ

ἔχουσαι

καί αὐτοῦ

τὸ ὄνομα

τοῦ πατρὸς

αὐτοῦ

γεγραμμένοι

ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων

αὐτῶν

Rev 14:2

καί (X) ἤκουσα φωνήν

ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

ὡς

καί (X) (X) φωνήν

ὕδατων

πολλῶν

ὡς

(X) (X) φωνήν

βροντῆς

μεγάλης

ἡ φωνή (X) (X) ἤκουσα ἦν

ὡς

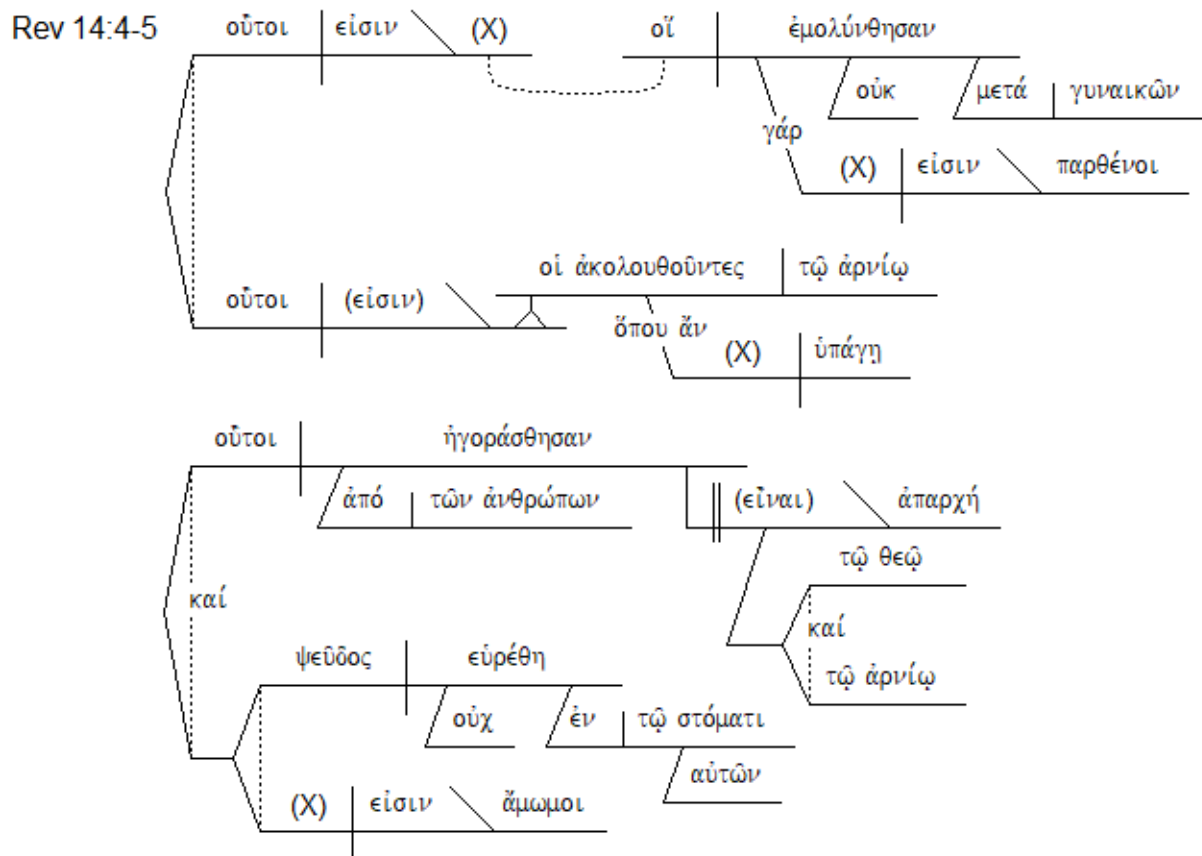
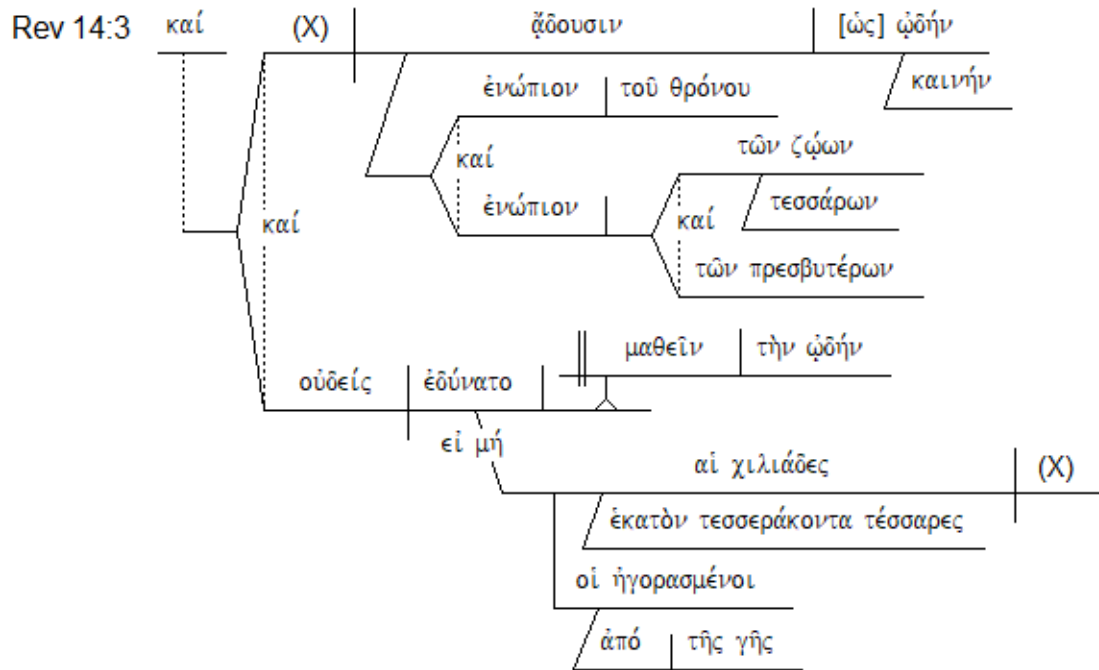
(φωνή) (X)

κιθαρῳδῶν

κιθαριζόντων

ἐν ταῖς κιθάραις

αὐτῶν



TEXT: Revelation 14:6-20

TITLE: ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE GRIM REAPER ARRIVING FOR ALL THE EARTH

BIG IDEA:

THE HOUR OF GOD'S FINAL WRATH HAS ARRIVED -- THOSE WHO WORSHIP THE BEAST WILL BE JUDGED WITH ETERNAL FIRE AND BRIMSTONE

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Akin: Beginning with **verse 6**, we are introduced to six angelic messengers who appear in the remainder of the chapter (**14:6, 8, 9, 15, 17, 18**). Their messages contain both blessing and cursing. There are words of **gospel** (**14:6**). There are also words of **judgment**. What is made crystal clear is there is no place in a biblical, orthodox theology for universalism (i.e., the belief that eventually all persons will be saved). A biblical portrait of hell and eternal torment is painted for us in **verses 10-11** that are simply too plain to be denied. **Revelation 14:6-20** could not be more politically incorrect for an age that tolerates anything and everything. However, one thing is certain: **the God of all the earth will do right (Gen 18:25)**. A day of reckoning is coming for all of us. We will not all be treated the same though we will all be treated justly and righteously. No one will stand before God at judgment and say, "You did me wrong. You were unfair." Such a day will never come.

John MacArthur: The Final Reaping of the Earth

We are looking at a text of Scripture that deals with the final harvest of the earth, the final reaping when the Lord Jesus Christ reaps the earth in judgment.

- The first time Jesus came to earth, He came as a servant.
The next time He will come as the sovereign King.
- The first time Jesus came, He came as one obeying.
The next time He will come as one commanding.
- The first time Jesus came, He came alone to live with a Jewish couple in a small obscure town.
The next time He will come with all His holy angels to take over the whole earth.
- The first time Jesus came He came in humility.
The next time He will come in glorious majesty and splendor.
- The first time Jesus came, He came to seek and to save the lost.
And the next time He will come to judge and sentence the lost.
- Or, to put the contrast in the terms of our text, the first time Jesus came He came as the sower.
Next time He will come as the reaper.
- He came in grace,
He comes in wrath.

The book of Revelation is written to give us a clear understanding of that coming of Christ that yet awaits human history. And no one need be confused. The revelation of Jesus Christ is near. Christ is coming. He will appear in sovereign glory, the very same Jesus the world crucified and rejects. He will come no longer like the first time, but to judge the ungodly. . .

There are two great aspects of judgment yet to come. And that's why I believe the Holy Spirit has ordained two visions. There are two significant final judgments to come. First, we are going to see in **chapter 16** the seven-bowl judgments. They come at the very end of the time of tribulation, a rapid-fire sequence of frightening, worldwide judgments that destroy the whole world system of Babylon, destroying the Antichrist's empire.

Then there is a second aspect to final judgment, and that is the battle of Armageddon when Jesus Christ actually returns to the earth. So in looking at the end, we still are going to see two phases of this final wrath. One will take the form of seven bowls, and the other will be the very direct intervention of Jesus Christ when He returns. One then is described in **chapter 16** and the second is described in **chapter 19**. And I believe that the reason you have two images here is to accommodate those two distinct aspects of final judgment.

I. (:6-11) THREE ANGELS WITH SIGNIFICANT PRONOUNCEMENTS OF IMMINENT JUDGMENT

A. (:6-7) First Angel: Proclaiming Good News to the World and Demanding a Response

1. (:6) Preaching Good News to the World

a. Angelic Navigation in Midheaven

*"And I saw **another angel** flying in midheaven,"*

b. Proclamation of the Eternal Gospel

"having an eternal gospel to preach"

Daniel Akin: He preaches the **everlasting gospel**. This is the only time an angel is said to preach the gospel! Generally this is our assignment. The "eternal" gospel is the same gospel proclaimed throughout all of history. It is the good news of forgiveness and eternal life made possible through the death of Jesus Christ for sinners. Old Testament saints looked forward to this day. All New Testament believers look back to what Christ accomplished.

Sola Scriptura: [Attempts to differentiate between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of Christ] The gospel of the kingdom does not concern the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A simple chronology of the Gospel of Matthew will demonstrate this.

Matthew 4:17 states, *"From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"* Accordingly, **Matthew 3:2** indicates that this is the same message preached by John the Baptist. **Matthew 4:23** declares, *"Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom"* . . . (similarly **Matthew 9:35**). However, **Matthew 16:21** indicates a **change in message** for Jesus. Matthew writes, *"From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day."* This clearly marks a new message for Jesus. It is the heart of the gospel of Christ: i.e., the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus for the sin. That this is a new message that Jesus had not preached before is confirmed by Peter's response. Notice, *"Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.'"* This can hardly be the response of a man having heard this message repeatedly.

The gospel of Christ is a message of grace. The gospel of the kingdom is a message of wrath. John the Baptist declared, *"who warned you to flee from the wrath to come"* (**Matt 3:7**). He also

stated that Jesus would baptize with “*the Holy Spirit and fire.*” This is spoken in a context of divine judgment against the wicked (**Matt 3:11-12**). **Matthew 24:14** indicates that God will declare to the whole world His intent. He is going to judge and remove everyone that is unlike Himself (both human and angelic) from the earth. The universal proclamation will remove any possible excuse by those found wanting. **Revelation 16:7** describes the fulfillment of **Matthew 24:14**.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Some expositors use the term “*gospel*” to include all the revelation God has given in Christ and hence conclude that there is only one gospel with various phases of truth belonging to this gospel. There are others who prefer to distinguish various messages in the Bible as gospel or “good news” even though they contain only one aspect of divine revelation, hence, the expression “gospel of grace,” referring to the goodness of grace, or to the gospel of the kingdom, dealing with the good news of the kingdom of God. The everlasting gospel seems to be neither the gospel of grace nor the gospel of the kingdom, but rather the good news that God at last is about to **deal with the world in righteousness** and establish His sovereignty over the world. This is an ageless gospel in the sense that God’s righteousness is ageless. Throughout eternity God will continue to manifest Himself in grace toward the saints and in punishment toward the wicked. To refer to the gospel of grace as an everlasting gospel is to ignore the context and usage of the term.

John MacArthur: The gospel is identified in various ways in the Bible:

- “*the good news of the kingdom*” (**Matt 4:23**)
- “*the gospel of Jesus Christ*” (**Mark 1:1**)
- “*the good news of God*” (**Mark 1:14**)
- “*the gospel of God’s grace*” (**Acts 20:24**)
- “*the gospel of the glory of Christ*” (**2 Cor 4:4**)
- “*the gospel of salvation*” (**Eph 1:13**)
- “*the gospel of peace*” (**Eph 6:15**)
- “*the glorious gospel*” (**1 Tim 1:11**)

William Barclay: The angel comes with an everlasting gospel. Everlasting could mean that the gospel is eternally valid, that even in a world which is crashing to its doom its truth still stands. It could mean that the gospel has existed from all eternity. Paul, in the great final hymn of praise in Romans, speaks of Jesus Christ as the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began (**Romans 16:25**). It could mean that the gospel is the eternal purpose of God for the world. It could mean that it deals with the eternal things.

Robert Mounce: It is an eternal gospel in that it sets forth the eternal purpose of God for people. It relates to judgment and salvation in the coming eternal age.

c. Worldwide Target Audience

*“to those who live on the earth,
and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;”*

James Hamilton: If you know the gospel, you know everlasting good news. And if you know the gospel, you should feel an enormous weight of responsibility. This is the only saving message, and so many people have never heard it. My prayer for the church is that our lives would be

given to the proclamation of the gospel and that our highest commitment will be to **make disciples of all nations**.

G.K. Beale: The gospel is called eternal because it is immutable and permanently valid.

2. (:7) Demanding a Response of Fear and Worship
“and he said with a loud voice,”

Kendell Easley: At the time of final judgment, everyone will acknowledge God, as expressed in three commands:

- **Fear God**. They must reverence him instead of the monster.
- **Give him glory**. They must honor him instead of the dragon.
- **Worship him**. They must fall before him instead of the beast's image.

a. Fear God and Give Him Glory – His Judgment Has Come
*“Fear God, and give Him glory,
because the hour of His judgment has come;”*

J. Hampton Keathley, III: “*Fear God*” -- refers to a holy reverence that recognizes the sovereign authority and power of God to deal with man in His holy wrath. It is to recognize the true God who can destroy the soul rather than just the body as with the beast.

“*Give Him glory*” -- refers to the praise and honor that should accrue to God from man due to man’s knowledge and high estimation of God as the sovereign Creator of the universe.

“*The hour of his judgment has come*” -- is a reference to the final judgments of the Tribulation, the **bowl judgments** which are about to occur. These will conclude with the return of Christ Himself (**Rev. 19**) and lead to the removal of all unbelievers. The emphasis then is to not delay because **the time is short**.

Grant Osborne: A final chance to repent is being given the nations. Everywhere that εὐαγγέλιον is found in the NT, it implies the gracious offer of salvation. **Lohse** (1960: 85) links this with the proclamation of the gospel in the end times in **Mark 13:10** and parallels. . . **Michaels** (1997: 173) notes rightly the parallel with the summary of Jesus’ kingdom message in **Mark 1:14–15**, “*The kingdom is near. Repent and believe the good news.*” Also, in **Rev. 5:9** and **7:9** the fourfold “*nation, tribe, tongue, and people*” is used for those who are converted from among the nations; and in **21:24, 26** the “*nations*” bring their “*glory and honor*” into the New Jerusalem. **Aune** (1998a: 825) calls this “an appeal for repentance and conversion to the God who created heaven and earth in the context of impending judgment.”

b. Worship God – He Created All Things
*“and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth
and sea and springs of waters.”*

J. Hampton Keathley, III: “*And worship Him*” -- The word “*worship*” means to show reverence or respect. This word emphasizes the external display as seen in obedience, prayer, singing, and formal worship, while the word “*fear*” emphasizes the mental attitude behind the worship. In the Tribulation men will be forced to fear and formally acknowledge the beast and his image. In this

message the angel is demanding that men reject the beast and formally turn to God to worship Him (cf. **Rev. 14:11**).

Grant Osborne: It is clear that the nations are forced to make a choice: worship God and receive salvation or worship the beast (**14:9, 11** below) and receive judgment. **Kraft** (1974: 193) calls the angel a heavenly herald calling the whole world to pay homage to the King. The description of God as “*the one who made the heaven and the earth*” occurs only here, but **creation theology** permeates the book (**3:14; 4:7, 11; 5:13; 10:6; 12:16**). The God who created and sustains this world will end it on the basis of his sovereign will. Moreover, the fourfold litany of “*heaven, earth, sea, springs of water*” as in **10:6** reiterates the victims of the first four trumpets (**8:6–12**) and bowls (**16:2–9**). As such these summarize the **effects of God’s wrath** and prove again that one of the purposes of the judgment septets is to prove the omnipotence of God, disprove the earthly gods, and give the nations a final chance to repent.

Richard Phillips: The first basis of our worship of God is his **glory as the Creator**: “*Worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water*” (**Rev. 14:7**). All creatures are obligated to give worship to the Maker of all things, and Scripture notes the offense that their spiritual indifference causes: “*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him*” (**Rom. 1:21**). In light of this, the angel issues “a call to the earth’s inhabitants to awake to the reality of God’s rule before it is too late.”

B. (:8) Second Angel: Proclaiming the Fall of Babylon the Great

“*And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.’*”

Daniel Akin: **Verses 8-13** reveal a tremendous contrast between those who follow the Lamb and those who follow the beast, between the saved and the lost. We see first the destiny of the unsaved. Their end can only be described as heartbreaking, sorrowful, and tragic. Their future is unimaginably dark and hopeless. . .

In Revelation, **Babylon** stands for that system that stands religiously, politically, and economically in opposition to all that is of God. It is the antichrist’s worldwide political, economic, and religious empire. Founded by Nimrod (**Gen 10:9**), Babylon was the site of the first organized system of idolatrous and false worship (**Gen 11:1-4**). The tower of Babel was its most pronounced expression. So certain is its demise that the word fallen is repeated. It is certain to be destroyed (**MacArthur, Revelation 12–22, 90**).

All nations have been intoxicated, deceived, and seduced by this false system headed by the antichrist. Like a seductive prostitute, the Babylonian system leads men into passionate maddening adultery with a god who is no god at all.

Those who drink Babylon’s wine and experience her passion will also drink another wine and experience another passion. Tragically, it will be the wine of the wrath of God. As the 144,000 follow the Lamb, so those on the earth follow Babylon and the beast (**14:9**). The result is that they will now drink the wine of the wrath of God in full strength and in full measure.

Buist Fanning: In an abrupt preview of the story that follows, the angel declares the final destruction of the great imperial city that has spread its idolatry and opposed God and his people for so long. The wording of this declaration is drawn from the Old Testament prophecies in

Isaiah 21:9 and **Jeremiah 51:8** of the ultimate fall of Judah's great oppressor and destroyer (586 BC), the great Babylonian Empire. The dramatic heavenly announcement (v. **8b**), "*fallen, fallen is Babylon*," is phrased with the double occurrence of a Greek aorist verb (ἔπεσεν, ἔπεσεν) to portray Babylon's destruction as having just been accomplished in its totality (also in **18:2**). John uses "*Babylon*" here and later in Revelation not to refer literally to the city in Mesopotamia but as a **typology of evil** drawn from the ancient and prominent imperial enemy of God's people in the Old Testament that destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and exiled its population. Ancient Babylonia was a cardinal example of a pagan empire that opposed God and his people, and such examples would be repeated throughout history (e.g., the Seleucids in the 160s BC). Rome was the replication of the type in the first-century world, most notably in its destruction again of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70 and its pressure on Christians to engage in idolatrous practices. It also united a variety of nations in its godless rule as Babylon had done. This evil pattern will appear in its greatest form in the end-time opposition to God portrayed in **Revelation 12–19**.

James Hamilton: Are you living as if Babylon has fallen? Are you living as if Babylon's fall is certain? To the extent that we are guilty of worldliness, we are not living like we believe Babylon will fall. And if we believe Babylon will fall and are still living in worldly ways, then we are guilty of trying to please ourselves with pleasures that God has condemned and will destroy.

Richard Phillips: We will learn more in chapters to come about Babylon as the great harlot of Revelation. For now, we learn that the evil world system not only oppressed people in bondage but also seduced them into soul-destroying sin. The original Babylon stood not only for power and violence, but also for luxury and sexual indulgence. If people could not beat Babylon, they would be easily led into imbibing the wine of its pleasure. Jeremiah described Babylon as "*a golden cup in the LORD's hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad*" (**Jer. 51:7**). In John's time, the same could be said of sexually indulgent Roman society. In our time, it is America and the other decadent Western nations that export sexually permissive values and provide the appetite that fuels a vast global network of prostitution and pornography. The fall of Babylon provides a sober warning of what will happen to America if it does not repent of its sin.

C. (:9-11) Third Angel: Proclaiming Judgment of God's Wrath for the Followers of the Beast

1. (:9) Cause for Judgment = Worshiping and Identifying with the Beast

*"And **another angel**, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice,"*

a. Worshiping the Beast

"If anyone worships the beast and his image,"

b. Identifying with the Beast

"and receives a mark on his forehead or upon his hand,"

2. (:10) Conditions (Characteristics) of Judgment

a. Defined as the Full Strength of the Wrath of God

"he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger;"

Buist Fanning: In declaring the consequences (v. 10) for anyone who accepts the beast's dictates, the angel reverses the imagery of Babylon's intoxicating enticements from v. 8 (implicitly revealing the alliance of the beast and the harlot of Babylon that ch. 17 will portray). The beast's follower will suffer God's wrath in full measure (v. 10a–b), expressed here as drinking from “*a cup of his wrath*” (cf. 16:19; 18:6; Isa 51:17–22) that contains “*the wine of God's anger*” (cf. Rev 14:19; 19:15) which is “*full strength*” or undiluted (cf. LXX of Ps 75:8 and Jer 25:15). Changing the imagery of what God's judicial anger will entail, the angel speaks of it as being “*tormented in fire and sulfur*” (v. 10c), a preview of the punishment of the beast and the false prophet in the lake of fire (19:20) as well as of the dragon (20:10) and unredeemed humanity (20:13–15; 21:8). This is said to be “*before the holy angels and before the Lamb*” as an allusion to its initial stages that will take place at the return of Christ to earth with his heavenly armies (19:11–14).

b. Described as Everlasting Torment with Fire and Brimstone
“*and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone*”

c. Directed by the Holy Angels and the Lamb
“*in the presence of the holy angels
and in the presence of the Lamb.*”

Van Parunak: This detail reminds us that God's judgment on sin will endure as a public memorial of his absolute holiness.

Daniel Akin: Verses 10 and 11 provide a terrifying picture of hell and eternal damnation. It is impossible to read these verses and come up with any kind of doctrine of universalism, annihilationism, or conditional immortality. The picture is one of conscious, eternal, and everlasting torment before the angels and the Lamb. Those in hell will have a constant awareness and knowledge of the God they rejected. This will only enhance the horror and torment they will experience. Fire and brimstone are often used in Scripture with respect to divine judgment. God used it to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24–25; Luke 17:29) (MacArthur, *Revelation* 12–22, 91). Our Lord spoke of hell as a place of “*eternal fire*” (Matt 18:8; 25:41), “*unquenchable fire*” (Mark 9:43), and where “*the fire is not quenched*” (Mark 9:48). In Matthew 25:41 Jesus taught that the everlasting fire or hell was “*prepared for the Devil and his angels.*” God does not desire that anyone would go to hell, but that all would come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). Those who go to hell choose their destiny, saying no to the grace of God made available to all through His Son, the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

G.K. Beale: those who have denied the Lamb will be forced to acknowledge Him as they are being punished in His presence (as in 6:16).

3. (:11a) Conditions (Characteristics of Judgment)

a. Described as Everlasting Torment
“*And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever;*”

Grant Osborne: At first glance, this idea of the eternal punishment of the unsaved as a sweet-smelling incense to God and a source of delight for the heavenly multitudes seems offensive. Yet we must remember the tone of the book. These are the ones who have killed the saints (6:9–11), worshiped the beast (13:4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9), and generally rejected the overtures of God's calling for repentance (9:20–21; 14:6–7, 9–10). The judgment of God is not only deserved but mandated

by the actions of the earth-dwellers. Moreover, this is the vindication of the saints promised in **6:11** and the answer to the imprecatory prayers of **6:9** and **8:3–4**.

- b. Destined to an Unending Restless Existence
“and they have no rest day and night,”

Buist Fanning: The idea of **unending torment** for those who reject Christ seems so horrendous that even several evangelical theologians have argued that such a harsh judgment cannot be squared with the biblical view of God, even of God’s justice. How just is it for temporal, earthly sin to be punished by eternal and conscious torment? Their alternative is **annihilationism**, the view that the wicked are destroyed (i.e., obliterated, removed from existence) in hell rather than eternally punished. But such a view is unsupportable even in the biblical texts that use the terms “*destroy, destruction*” (ἀπόλλυμι, ἀπώλεια), since in speaking of God’s punishment for sin the words do not mean “annihilate” but “ruin, take away all that is valuable; suffer ultimate loss.” The same texts that speak of “eternal” life refer also to “eternal” punishment (e.g., **Matt 25:41, 46**). Reference to the unending experience of suffering for humans who reject the infinitely glorious God are found throughout the New Testament (e.g., **Mark 9:43–48; Phil 3:18–19; 2 Thess 1:9; Heb 6:2; Jude 7**). A fitting appreciation of the infinite majesty of God puts into perspective in some measure the justice of such a judgment for those who spurn him.

4. (:11b) Cause for Judgment = Worshiping and Identifying with the Beast

- a. Worshiping the Beast
“those who worship the beast and his image,”
- b. Identifying with the Beast
“and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

II. (:12-13) TWO PRONOUNCEMENTS OF BLESSING FOR PERSEVERANCE

John Walvoord: The stern warning addressed to all worshipers of the beast is also an encouragement to those who put their trust in Christ in the time of great tribulation. Though some of them will face martyrdom and others will need to go into hiding, they are assured that their lot is far preferable to those who accept the easy way out and worship the beast.

A. (:12) Blessing Pronounced on Those Who Persevere in Obedience and Faith

*“Here is the perseverance of the saints
who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.”*

Van Parunak: “*have the testimony of Jesus Christ*” -- The parallel with **12:17** suggests that we should understand “*the faith of Jesus*” as “*the faith that Jesus teaches*,” “*the testimony of Jesus Christ*,” the witness that he is giving throughout this book. Compare **1:2**, which calls the book “*the testimony of Jesus Christ*.” Recall our earlier discussion of **12:17**. The testimony originates with the Jesus Christ. We have received it through John, and are now responsible to pass it on to others.

G.K. Beale: The fact of coming judgment against their persecutors also motivates Christians to persevere. This is a motivation arising not from revenge but from a desire that judgment will show their cause to be true and will therefore vindicate the righteous name of God, which has

been blasphemed by the beast and his allies.

Sola Scriptura: This verse is the key to why this announcement occurs at this point in the chronology of the Revelation. The reader should remember that we are within days of the final outpouring of the wrath of God – the bowl judgments. The battle of Armageddon is probably four to five weeks away, which adds to the importance of this warning.

B. (:13) Blessing Pronounced on End Times Martyrs

“And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Write,’”

1. State of Blessing

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!”

Richard Phillips: Christ’s blessing in death is directed to those who live in faith now. In fact, the only way to die in the Lord is to live in the Lord: dying in Christ is the final triumph of the believer who has lived valiantly for Jesus. **Charles P. McIlvaine** writes that dying in the Lord

is the enduring to the end, of a relation formed when the Christian life began. . . . It is the Christian going through the valley and shadow of death, precisely as he went through the dangers, and trials, and sorrows, and duties, of this mortal life, saying, *“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want”* It is faith overcoming, in the last conflict, precisely as it overcame in every previous conflict of the Christian’s pilgrimage—the same faith, resting on the same promises, embracing the same Saviour just as ever before. . . . It is the child of God falling asleep in the same arms of redeeming love in which he was always embraced, and where always he was safe in the peace of God.

One way to appreciate **the rest** that believers enjoy in death is to compare the Bible’s teaching with the abominable Roman Catholic doctrine of **purgatory**. The pope tells his followers to expect not rest in death but purging fires of torment. **McIlvaine** explains what Rome teaches the dead in Christ to expect:

Instead of resting from their labors, [they] have entered on labors and pains more severe than ever they knew before; instead of being blessed and happy with Christ, are suffering for their sins, in distant and dark separation from him; instead of finding that his blood *“cleanseth from all sin,”* are experiencing the pains of purgatorial flames . . . ; instead of being liberated from all terrestrial things, are now dependent on the prayers, and masses, and indulgences of the Church on earth, on the will of priests, on the charity of sinners, and the payment of money to buy the priest’s mediation, for the [shortening] of their years of suffering.

2. State of Rest

“‘Yes,’ says the Spirit,

‘that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.’”

Grant Osborne: Incredibly, the “*Spirit*” now adds a comment solidifying the exhortation and promise to remain true to Christ. Elsewhere the “*Spirit*” is seen as the revelatory source behind the seven letters (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) and prophetic activity (19:10) and the one breathing life into the two witnesses (11:11) and bringing the visions to John (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Only here and in 22:17 (“*The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’*”) **does the Spirit**

actually speak in the book. Thus, it is all the more important that the reader heed these words, for they begin with a direct “*voice from heaven*” and conclude with a message from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s *vaí* (*nai*, *yes*) is functionally equivalent to *ἀμήν* (*amēn*, *amen*) in **1:7** and **22:20** (so **Aune** 1998a: 839) and means the Spirit is affirming the truth of the special blessings awaiting those who “*die in the Lord*.”

Sola Scriptura: The rest of the believers follow the completion of his divinely appointed task on earth. The permanent record of the works of believers on earth is maintained. The nature of the suffering believers will experience during the final days of the Day of the Lord warrants special attention for them. It is not that others who have died before this point are not resting as well. This is an encouragement to those living at this very difficult time to remain faithful. No doubt many “*sheep*” will die during the thirty-day period following the Seventieth Week of Daniel as Antichrist attempts to put together his final army to prevent the reign of the Male-Son on earth (**Rev 20:4**).

III. (:14-20) TWO IMAGES OF CONTRASTING REAPING

Grant Osborne: There is debate as to whether these are two synonymous images for the judgment of the wicked (**Hendriksen; Morris; Beagley; Roloff; Fekkes** 1994: 193; **Michaels; Giesen; Aune; Beale**) or whether the first harvest is of the faithful and the second of the sinner (**Swete, Lohmeyer, Farrer, Ford, Prigent, Krodel, Bauckham** 1993b: 290–96).

James Hamilton: Some interpreters think that both sections of this passage are harvests that result in judgment. If **14:14–16** is depicting a harvest that leads to judgment, the ripening of the earth would be the filling up of transgressions (cf. **Genesis 15:16; Matthew 23:32; 1 Thessalonians 2:16**). This may be correct, but I’m inclined to agree with those interpreters who see a harvest of the righteous in **14:14–16**, followed by a harvest of the wicked in **14:17–20**. The wicked are definitely harvested in **14:17–20**, for the grapes are cast into the winepress of God’s wrath (v. **19**). I think the harvest in **14:14–16** contrasts with that judgment for at least three reasons:

- first, the 144,000 are described as the “*firstfruits*” in **14:4**, which points to a full harvest in **14:14–16**;
- second, the harvesters are different—Jesus harvests the righteous, then another angel harvests the wicked;
- third, this matches the judgment of the righteous whose names are in the Book of Life in **20:12**, followed by the judgment of the unrighteous whose names are not in the Book of Life in **20:13–15.3** So if **14:14–16** is a harvest of the righteous, the ripening of the earth might refer to the gospel going to all nations (**Matthew 24:14**), the full number of the Gentiles being brought in (**Romans 11:25**), people from every tribe being saved (**Revelation 5:9**), and the two witnesses finishing their testimony (**11:7**).

A. (:14-16) Reaping the Grain Harvest of the Righteous

1. (:14) Judgment Administered by Son of Man

a. Judgment Presence

*“And I looked, and behold, a white cloud,
and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man,”*

Grant Osborne: The question here is whether the white cloud signifies **judgment** (the cloud in **1:7**) or **salvation** (the cloud in **10:1; 11:12**). The emphasis on the “*white cloud*” could favor either (the white of purity or the white of victory). The theme of judgment even affects the saints, however, for they will also stand before the bema or judgment seat in **20:12**; and it is judgment that dominates this section, as seen in that Christ “*sits on*” this cloud. Thus, the “*white cloud*” signifies the glorious victory of Christ as he prepares to harvest the earth.

b. Judgment Accessories

1) Golden Crown

“having a golden crown on His head,”

Robert Mounce: The golden wreath designates the Messiah as one who has conquered and thereby won the right to act in judgment.

2) Sharp Sickle

“and a sharp sickle in His hand.”

James Hamilton: The fact that Jesus is coming in the clouds identifies him with the one “*like a son of man*” who will receive the kingdom from “*the Ancient of Days*” in **Daniel 7:13**. The fact that Jesus is “*seated*” identifies him with the one seated at the Lord’s right hand in **Psalms 110**. Jesus himself is described in terms that put Daniel 7:13 and **Psalms 110:1** together in **Matthew 26:64**: “*from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.*” John seems to allude to this connection in his description of Jesus in **Revelation 14**. This indicates that John (and Matthew) learned to interpret the Old Testament from Jesus. Jesus is wearing “*a golden crown.*” He has conquered and received what he promised to those who overcome in **2:10** and **3:11**. Jesus has “*a sharp sickle in his hand.*” **He comes to harvest the earth.**

Grant Osborne: The emphasis on the “*sharpness*” of the sickle brings out the finality and power behind the judgment.

2. (:15) Judgment Announced as Ripe and Ready

*“And **another angel** came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Put in your sickle and reap, because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.’”*

3. (:16) Judgment Accomplished by Process of Reaping

“And He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth; and the earth was reaped.”

[Alternative View:]

G.K. Beale: The Joel passage is the only one in the OT where both images of harvest (as in vv. 15-16) and of treading the wine press (as in vv. 17-20) occur, and there they are both images connoting **judgment** (for a similar OT passage, see **Isa. 63:2-3**). On balance, therefore, the passage probably refers to **judgment only**.

Buist Fanning: Given the background in **Joel 3** and the fact that nothing clearly signals the presence of the righteous in this grain harvest, it seems best to understand both passages as

symbols of God's judgment on the unrighteous. The first (vv. 14–16) is a more general and the second (vv. 17–20) a more detailed picture of the same action. The imagery of rebellious humanity being summarily cut down like stalks of grain at the edge of a sickle is a graphic and terrible warning of judgment to come. But just as anyone who is observant can tell that it is the season for harvest in a positive sense (John 4:35–37), so the world's inhabitants should be aware that the **time is drawing near for the harvest of God's judgment** to break in upon them. The warnings are clear; the time for repentance has come.

B. (:17-20) Reaping the Grape Harvest of the Wicked for the Wine Press of God's Wrath

1. (:17) Judgment Administered by an Angel with a Sharp Sickle

*"And **another angel** came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle."*

Charles Swindoll: While the wheat harvest represents the sudden, swift intrusion of God's judgment into human history, the grape harvest signifies the severity of that judgment.

2. (:18) Judgment Announced as Ripe and Ready

*"And **another angel**, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, 'Put in your sharp sickle, and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.'"*

Daniel Akin: The vision shifts from the "grain harvest" to the "grape harvest." I believe this is also our first glimpse of the battle or campaign of **Armageddon** (see 16:12-16; 19:17-21). The fifth and sixth angels of **chapter 14** appear in **verses 17-18**. The fifth, like the fourth, comes from the sanctuary. Like our Lord, he has a sharp sickle for reaping. The sixth angel comes from the altar, the altar of incense (6:9-11; 8:3-5). There is once more a connection between the prayers of the saints and judgment on earth. God hears and answers our prayers. The fifth angel commands the sixth to harvest the grapes "from earth's vineyard, because its grapes have ripened." Fully ripened is the idea. **The time is now.**

The angel responds immediately and decisively (14:19). There is no delay, no hesitation. In the ancient Near East in John's time, grapes were trampled or stomped by foot in a trough that had a duct leading to a lower trough or basin where the juice was collected. "The splattering of the juice as the grapes are stomped vividly pictures the splattered blood of those who will be destroyed" (MacArthur, *Revelation 12–22*, 117). Treading grapes in a winepress was a familiar figure of divine wrath and judgment. (Isa 63:3-4; Joel 3:13; Rev 19:15)

3. (:19-20) Judgment Accomplished by the Process of the Wine Press of God's Wrath

a. (:19) Gathering the Grapes and Throwing Them into the Wine Press

"And the angel swung his sickle to the earth, and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God."

Buist Fanning: The Old Testament picture of treading out grapes in the winepress as a figure for judgment (Isa 18:5; 63:2; Lam 1:15; Joel 3:13) now is added to the harvest imagery: "The winepress was trodden outside the city" (v. 20a). This is a preview of one of the descriptions of Christ's judgment of his enemies at his glorious return (Rev 19:15). Adding the detail that this is done "outside the city" locates this overpowering retribution near Jerusalem. Jerusalem or Zion

(cf. **14:1**), the locus of God's restoration of his people Israel (**14:1**) and the center of Christ's millennial reign (**20:4–6**), is the setting spoken of in many of the Old Testament prophecies that John has alluded to in this chapter, especially those that anticipate a final battle of the dragon and his minions against the Lord God and the Lamb (**Isa 62:6–63:6; 66:10–17; Joel 3:1–17; Zech 12:8–12; 14:3–5**; cf. **Rev 19:19–21**).

The final ghastly feature of the winepress imagery is the utterly exaggerated picture of “*blood*” running out from the winepress for “*sixteen hundred stadia*” (about 200 miles) at the depth of “*horses' bridles*” (v. **20b**). Again the vehicle and tenor of the metaphor are intermingled since “*blood*” is not generally a part of treading out grapes but of the defeat or killing of enemies in battle

b. (:20) Great Quantities of Blood Produced by the Wine Press

*“And the wine press was trodden outside the city,
and blood came out from the wine press,
up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.”*

William Barclay: It is said that the blood came up to the horses' bridles and spread for a distance of 1,600 stades or furlongs. No one has ever discovered a really satisfying explanation of this. The least unsatisfactory explanation is that 1,600 stades is almost exactly the **length of Palestine** from north to south; and this would mean that the tide of judgment would flow over and include the whole land. In that case, the figure would **symbolically describe the completeness of the judgment**.

Robert Mounce: The distance, 1,600 stadia (some 184 miles), has been variously interpreted. Geographically it is the approximate length of Palestine. Symbolically it squares the number four (the number of the earth: “*four corners of the earth*,” **20:8**; “*four winds of the earth*,” **7:1**) and multiplies it by the square of ten (the number of completeness; cf. **5:11; 20:6**). The judgment of God, portrayed ideally as taking place outside the holy city, extends to all people everywhere who find themselves beyond the pale of divine protection.

Judgment is certain. The followers of the Lamb are made to realize by means of the visions of **chapter 14** that not only will they ultimately enjoy the immediate presence of God and the Lamb but that their faith will be vindicated by the judgment brought upon their oppressors. The beasts of **chapter 13** employ every method at their disposal to gain the allegiance of the entire world, but those who belong not to this world but to the heavenly realm yet to be fully manifested successfully resist both the deceptive ploys of the Satanic beasts and all their attempts to bring about allegiance by force.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is God's coming wrath a motivation for believers to persevere in obedience and faith?
- 2) Why is it so important for Christians to maintain the biblical teaching of **creationism**?
- 3) How does this passage refute such doctrines as **universalism** (all will eventually be saved) and **annihilationism**?

4) Given the graphic images here of God's end time wrath, how can people maintain that the God of the NT is only a God of sentimental love?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll: After a glimpse of the remnant of Israel standing with Christ on Mount Zion, the stage clears and the backdrop changes as we read of another series of climactic announcements. Keep in mind, these proclamations do not appear in chronological order. Instead, they deal with themes and events that stretch across the Tribulation period and find their ultimate climax in its final days.

Richard Phillips: Knowing the truth creates a great longing for the evil powers somehow to be defeated. This is the situation depicted by three messenger angels who appear in **Revelation 14:6–12**. They pronounce the overthrow of evil powers, warning of judgment for those who reject Jesus Christ and eternal wrath for those who serve the beast. **William Hendriksen** writes that they “have one purpose, namely, to warn mankind with respect to the coming judgment in order that men may turn to God in true faith.”

D.A. Carson: When we come to **Revelation 14, verses 6–20**, it is important to remember the flow of the book, and it is important to remember how important the **theme of judgment** is in the entire Canon. In that sense, it is not anomalous. However unpleasant it is, it is not anomalous.

...

vv. 6-7 -- The term **gospel** is by the end of the first century so strong and univocal a term wherever it's used in the church that there is very little doubt of its content. In other words, it's used so constantly.... It's the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus Christ, his coming, his death, his resurrection. Salvation is brought from God by him and by him alone. That is so common a term it just is not used anywhere else in the whole Bible in any other way.

Therefore, when you approach this text and he says he had the eternal gospel to proclaim, I don't think any reader in the first century would see it as anything other than that. . .

That means, then, that the connection between **verses 6 and 7** is a little different. **Chapter 14, verse 7**, does not give the content of the eternal gospel. The content of the eternal gospel is already presupposed by the word itself. **Verse 7**, then, does not give the content of the eternal gospel but lays out the **obligation** of all humankind in the wake of the announcement of the gospel. . .

vs. 10 -- In the ancient world, although people drank an awful lot of wine, most people drank it cut, and to drink it uncut was to drink what we would call strong drink, which was frowned on much more. That's the way they did it. So now to use the language of the cup, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath, it's a way of saying that all the wrath God has demonstrated up until now has been like the wine that you drink. It has all been cut, but now you're getting the real McCoy. Now you're getting the uncut wine. **Now you're getting the uncut wrath.** . .

vv. 16-20 -- The brevity of **verse 16**, then, prepares for the enlargement of the next portrait.

Verse 16: “*And the earth was harvested.*” That’s all it says. It doesn’t say anything about where anybody went or about any final suffering. It doesn’t say anything about division of humankind. All it’s saying is, “There is an end. When the harvest comes, that’s it. The sickle is put in. Growing time is over. That’s it.” In other words, the whole focus in this first agricultural image is the **inevitability** and **finality** of the end. . .

By contrast, the agricultural image of the **treading of the winepress** is one of the most frightening images in Scripture. It emphasizes the violent thoroughness of God’s wrath when it is finally poured out.

Tony Garland:

Vs. 6 -- “*To announce good news.*” The angel gospelled the gospel to those below on the earth. Not only was his message one of good news, but the very fact of his delivery of the message was a manifestation of that good news. For this angel on his lonely mission above the ravaged earth below stands as a beacon to the grace and mercy of God. He has not left these on the earth during the final week of His wrath without recourse. In the midst of terrible devastation and turmoil, He has not left those who have not yet heard subject to the well-intentioned, but often ineffective, witness of men. He provides a supernatural messenger who will finally fulfill the gospel mandate to all the earth. “There is no record that it is believed or heeded. It may not be. Noah was a ‘*preacher of righteousness*,’ in view of the coming flood; but no one believed him except his own family.” . . .

While the majority of the Church’s teachers are loudly proclaiming that “*the day of the Lord*” will not come till the world’s conversion comes, the Spirit and truth of God are declaring that day shall not come until the apostasy comes (**2Th. 2:3**). While the majority of the Church’s teachers are maintaining that the world is not yet good enough for Christ, the Spirit is declaring in the Word that the world is not yet bad enough. . .

Vs. 7 -- “*worship Him who made heaven and earth*” -- The **Creator-creature distinction** is the basis for all worship (**Ne. 9:6; Acts 14:14**). Only the Creator is worthy of worship. Worship of all else is idolatry. The angel declares an important truth which great portions of the Church now compromise. Although readily admitting God as Creator, their Creator God is not that of the Scriptures, but a **god of their own creation**. They endorse the belief that both the universe and the earth are billions of years old and that God used, and continues to use, blind processes (accidental mutation and natural selection) to bring about His creative work. Instead of upholding the clear Scriptural teaching of a six-day creation (**Ex. 20:11**), they accommodate flawed science and relegate the need for a Creator God into a smaller and smaller sphere, even embracing unscriptural ideas such as the existence of soulless pre-Humans before Adam. These naively contribute to the ultimate state of godlessness of the earth dwellers at the end. The blindness of the earth dwellers to the Creator in the book of Revelation can already be seen in our own times. Great effort and expenditure are underway to find life on Mars and to search the far reaches of space for signs of intelligence. All the while, here on earth, advances such as those in microbiology, bioengineering, and genetics shout “**INTELLIGENCE!**” Lacking a belief in a Creator, the creature naturally seeks to elevate something else in His place. Such is the pattern of **idolatry** which will manifest itself in the last times as worship to the image of the Beast when he is brought to life (**Rev. 13:14-15+**). . .

Vs. 10 -- This passage explains why, in the sequence of seals, trumpets, and bowls, it is **the bowls which are last**. Each of the final seven bowls comprises a portion of the final cup of God's wrath. In "*the seven last plagues . . . the wrath of God is complete*" (**Rev. 15:1+**). They are "*the bowls of the wrath of God*" which are poured out on the earth (**Rev. 16:1+**). The wrath is manifest in Christ's treading of "*the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God*" (**Rev. 19:15+ cf. Isa. 63:1-6**). . .

Vs. 12 -- Here is *the patience of the saints* --The patience of the saints is found in their acceptance of God's sovereign control over their lives (**Rev. 13:10+**) and in the knowledge that God will avenge their blood at the hands of those who rejected Him (as here). As terrible as it might be, the awful experience of the saints at the hands of the Beast cannot compare with the doom which meets the Beast worshipers. . .

Vs. 18 -- "*power over fire*" -- This is the **baptism of fire** spoken of by John the Baptist. In his warning to the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming to his baptism, he indicated that the One following after him would initiate two baptisms. Every person living would receive one or the other.

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Mat. 3:11-12)

John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." (Luke 3:16-17)

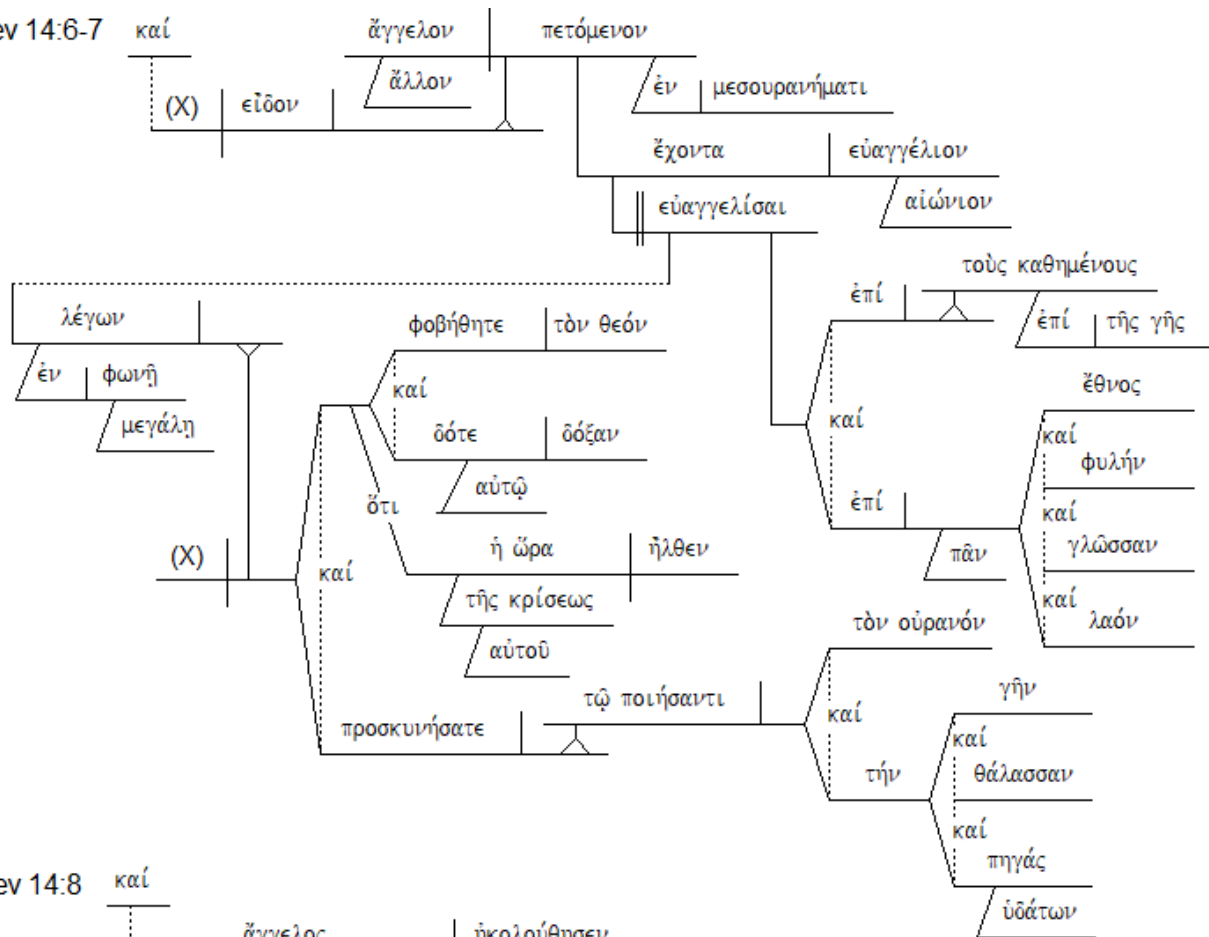
The term *and with fire* is better translated "*or with fire*." The immediate context certainly indicates that to be baptized with fire is the **result of judgment** (notice the reference to **purging** and **burning** in the next verse).

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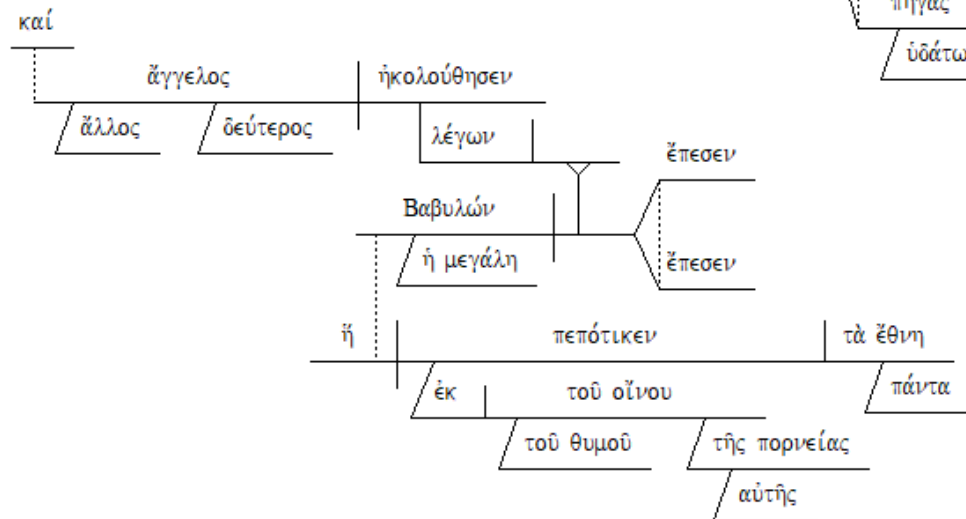
"*for her grapes are fully ripe*" -- God allows evil to have its full fruit for several reasons. First, He provides ample opportunity for the godless to repent and seek forgiveness and restoration. Secondly, He allows the depth of sin to have its full development in those who have forever turned their back on redemption. "*But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete*" (**Gen. 15:16**). Although His patience and mercy are abundant, He must eventually judge in order to vindicate His character: "*The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked, so that men will say, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely He is God who judges in the earth'*" (**Ps. 58:10-11**).

Leedy Greek Diagram:

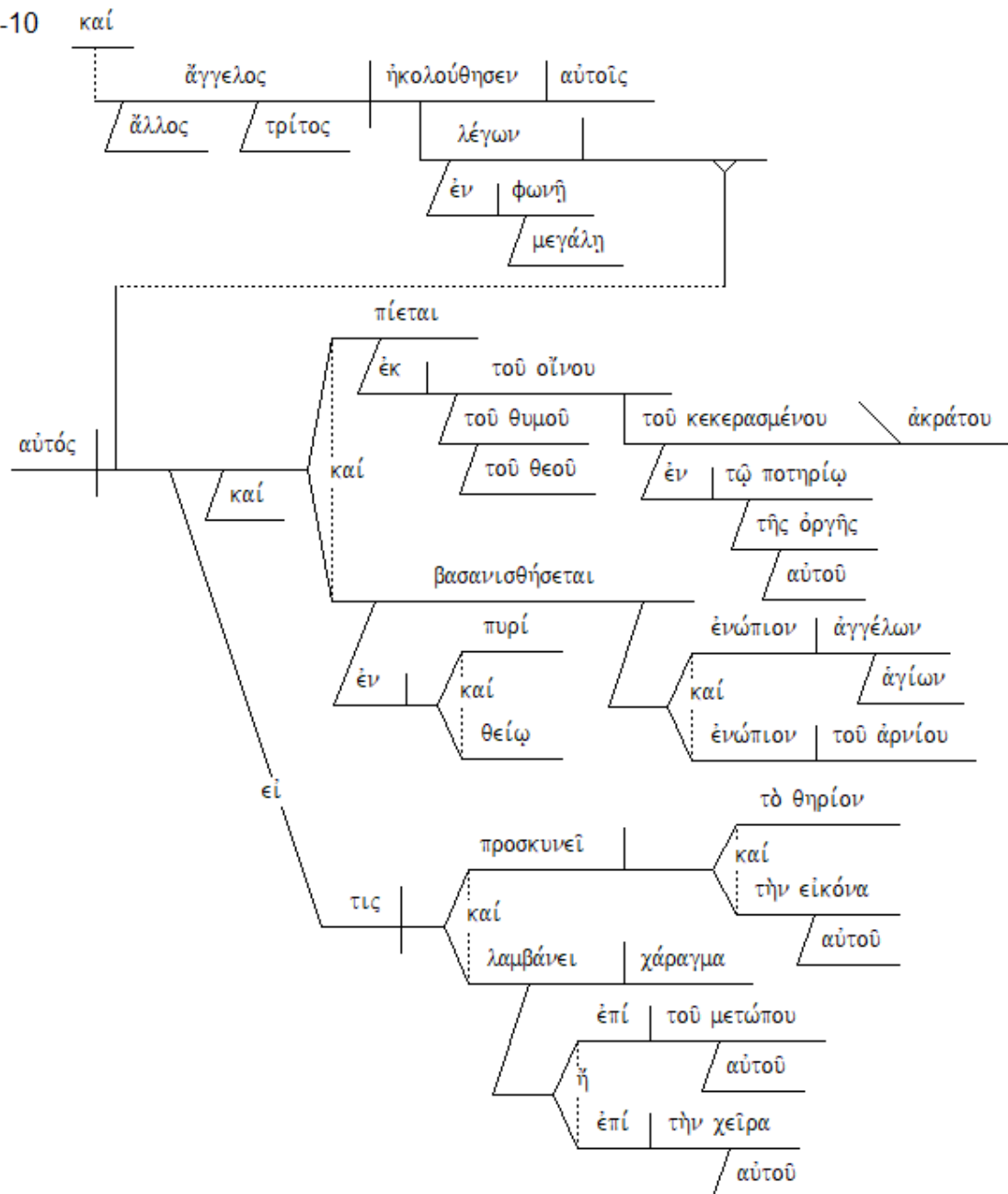
Rev 14:6-7

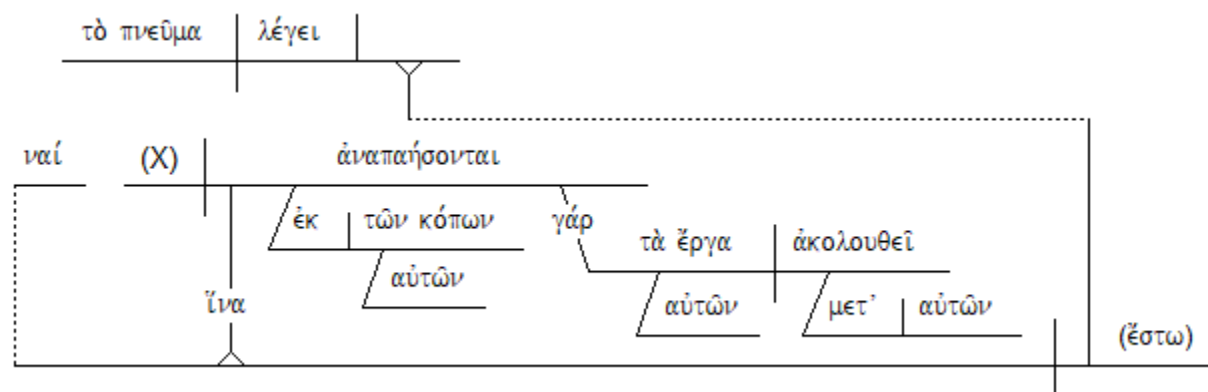
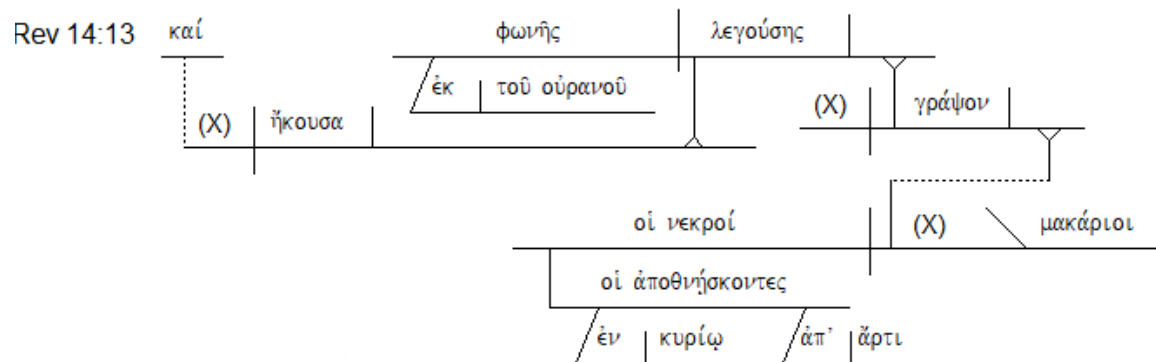
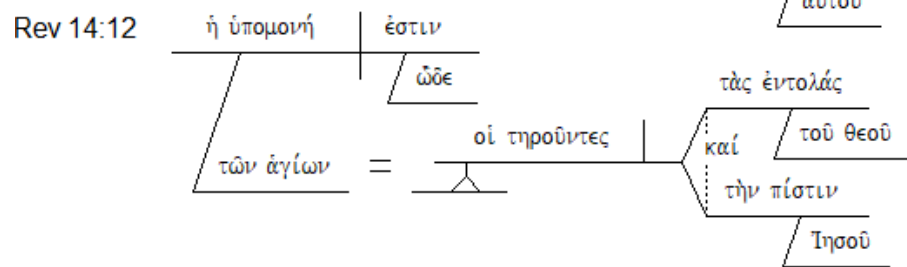
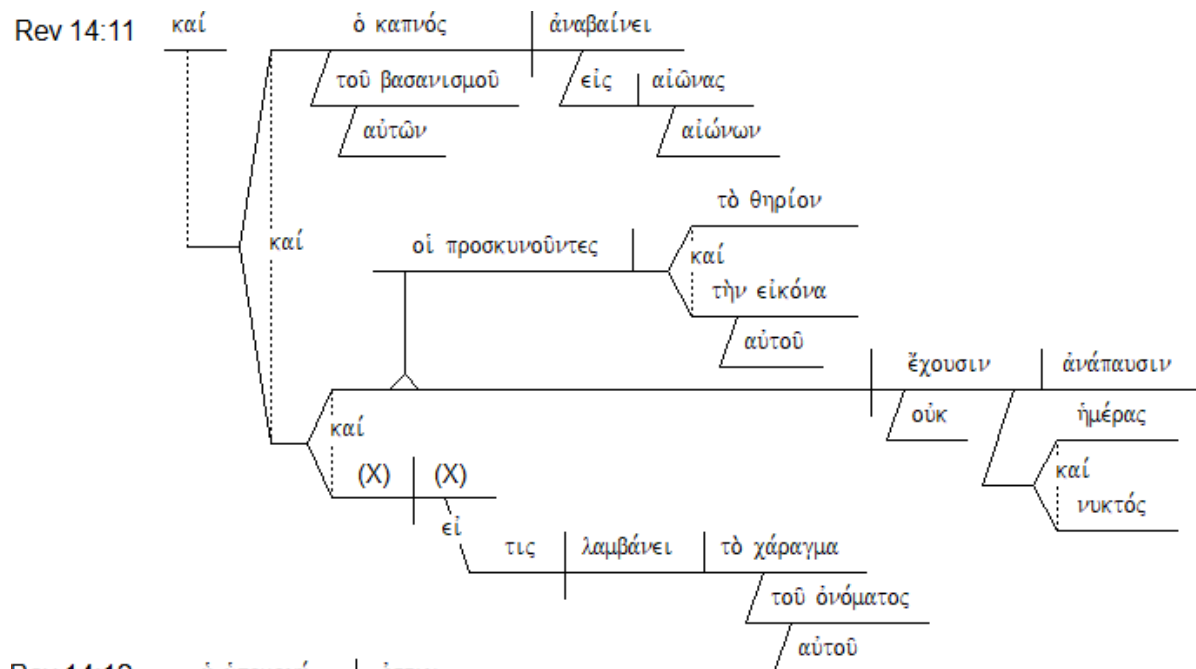


Rev 14:8

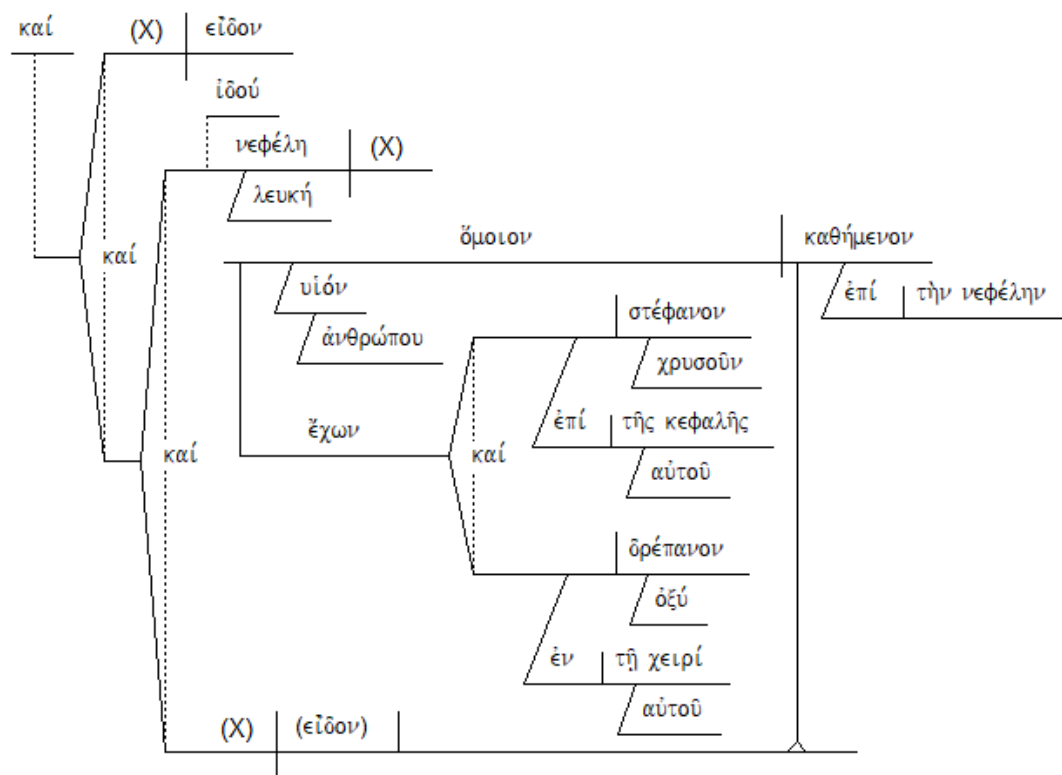


Rev 14:9-10

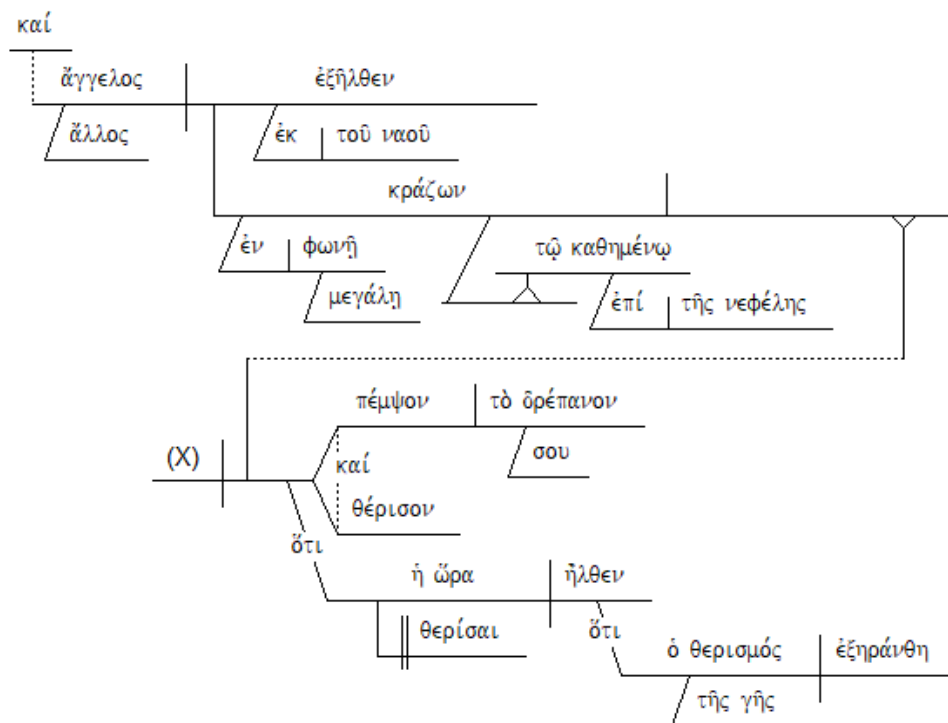




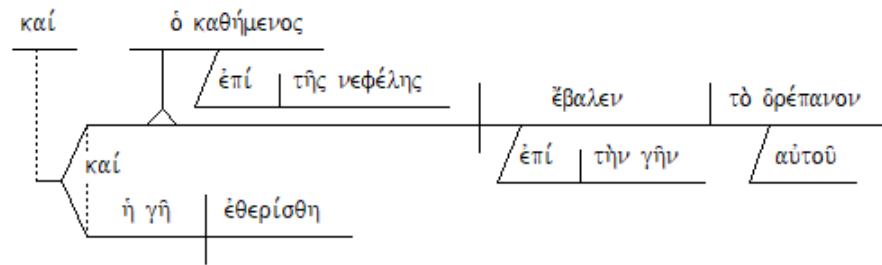
Rev 14:14



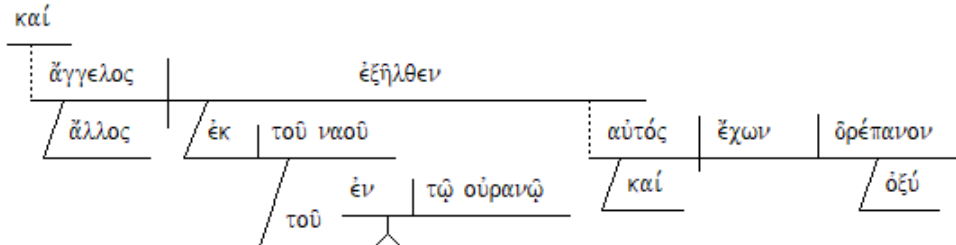
Rev 14:15



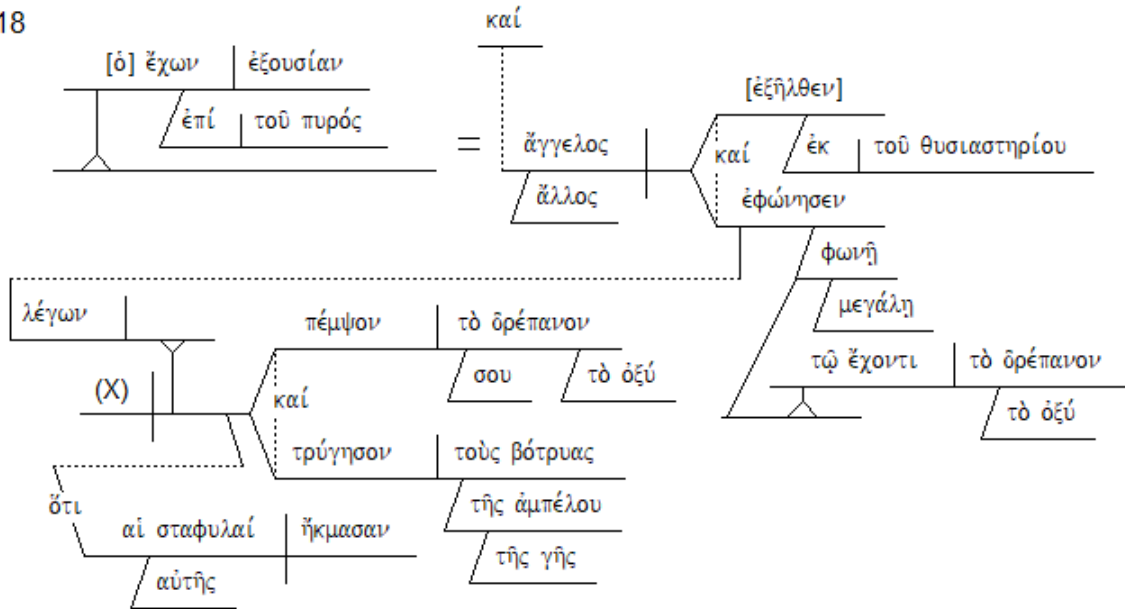
Rev 14:16

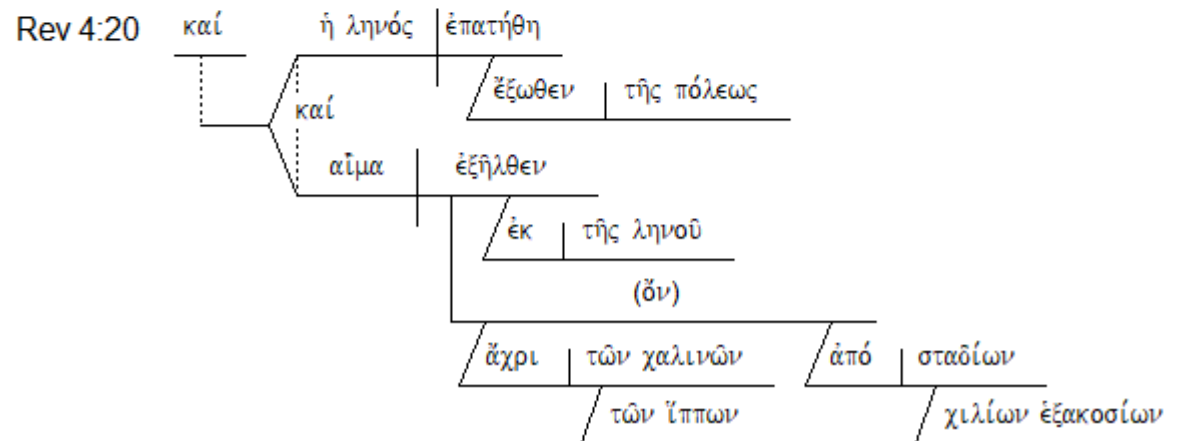
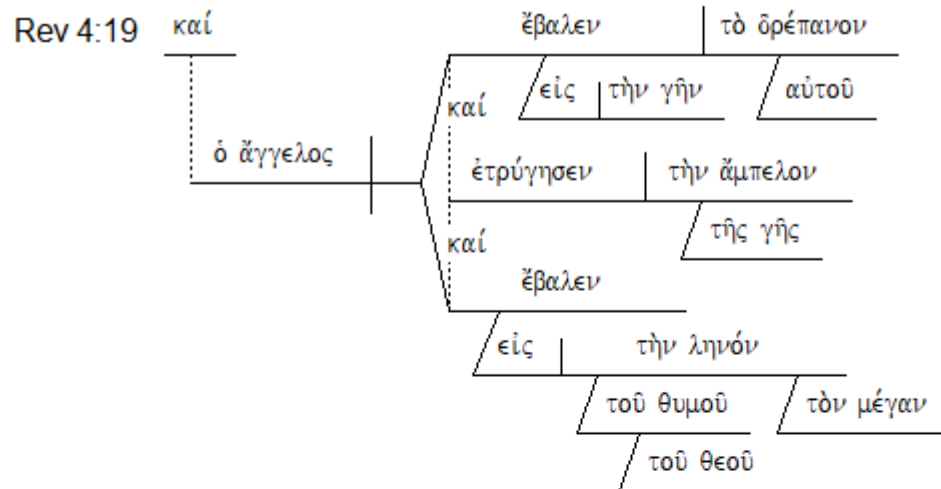


Rev 14:17



Rev 14:18





TEXT: Revelation 15:1-8

TITLE: PREPARATION FOR THE SEVEN BOWL JUDGMENTS

BIG IDEA:

THE OUTPOURING OF THE SEVEN BOWLS OF FINAL DIVINE WRATH WILL VINDICATE GOD'S HOLINESS, RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE AS CELEBRATED BY THE SONG OF THE MARTYRS

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: There are three parts to this vision with an **ABA pattern** (each with the typical formula Καὶ εἶδον, Kai eidon, *And I saw*). At the outset, **15:1** introduces the angels with the last plagues, then **15:5–8** show how the heavenly tabernacle is opened and the angels are readied for their deadly mission. Sandwiched between this is the song of the victorious saints as they thank the omnipotent God for his wondrous deeds (**15:2–4**). As in Mark's "sandwiching" episodes (**Mark 3:19–35; 5:21–43; 11:12–25; 14:1–11**), the two interpret one another. The joy of the victorious saints is the reason for and result of the angels' mission of judgment. The bowl judgments will vindicate the saints for all they have suffered (**16:5–7**).

John MacArthur: **Chapters 15 and 16** present the specific phenomena of the final outpouring of God's wrath before Christ's return. That wrath is expressed by the effects of the seventh trumpet (**11:15**), which are the seven bowl judgments described in **chapter 16**. **Chapter 15**, the shortest in Revelation, forms an introduction to those rapid-fire judgments, but this chapter is not written for the specific purpose of defending God's wrath. Since "*His work is perfect [and] all His ways are just*" (**Deut. 32:4**), God's actions need no defense.

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: God is directing history toward the day when He will finally pour out His wrath on His enemies, where His glory and majesty will be on full display. **Chapter 15** is easily structured around the phrase "*I saw/looked*" in **verses 1, 2, and 5**.

Kendell Easley: Main Idea: After he has harvested them, the victorious people of Christ will praise him with "The Song of the Lamb." Then the seven last plagues of God's wrath will be unleashed.

James Hamilton: Main Point: The display of God's justice in saving his people and winning him praise is meant to make us want to be among the redeemed, not the condemned. . . The mounting tension in **chapter 15** increases the magnitude of the display of God's wrath in **chapter 16**.

These are the **last plagues**. When they are poured out, the conflict will be over. The serpent's head will be crushed. The seed of the woman will be triumphant. God's justice will be fulfilled, and through that display of justice his people will be delivered to praise him, which is what we see in **verses 2–4**. The display of God's justice saving his people and winning him praise is meant to make us want to be among the redeemed, not the condemned.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: **Chapter 15** is introductory and prepares the reader for the execution of the judgments described in **chapter 16**. They are first described as the seven last plagues and

then as seven bowls full of the wrath of God (vs. 7; 16:1). These seven plagues will chronologically bring to an end the ordered events of the Tribulation judgments in a dramatic crescendo. The plagues described here are extremely severe and occur in rapid succession, which adds greatly to their severity. The plagues are culminated by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the final phase of Armageddon. The purpose of **chapter 15** is a **vindication of God's holiness**. It shows these judgments stem from the holiness of God and the perfection of His plan. Under the three figures of God's final judgment—the cup of wine (14:10), the harvesting of the earth (14:14-16), and the vintage (14:17-20), **chapter 14** has anticipated what is now more thoroughly developed under the symbolism of the seven bowls.

Remember, the seven plagues and seven bowls used in this chapter refer to the **same judgments**. The use of different terms is designed to display the different aspects and character of these last judgments. They are plague-like calamities, and each is poured out suddenly, all at once as the contents of a bowl when it is turned over.

David Harrell: After reviewing a chronology of things to come, this exposition examines four themes that emerge from the text, namely, a sign great and marvelous, a sea of consuming fire, a song of triumphant deliverance, and a sanctuary of holy vengeance.

I. (15:1) THE SEVEN PLAGUES WILL FINISH GOD'S WRATH

A. Sign in Heaven

“And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous,”

David Thompson: John begins by saying, “*then I saw another sign in the heaven.*” The conjunction “*then*” means there is a sequence to this. One thing happens and then another thing happens. One cannot see this and not realize that this book of Revelation is **chronological** and **sequential**.

Tony Garland: *Another* is ἄλλο [*allo*], another of a similar kind. This points back to the sign of the woman with the sun and moon, which was also said to be “*great*” (**Rev. 12:1+**). The fiery red dragon was also seen as a sign in the heaven (**Rev. 12:3+**).

Robert Mounce: John now sees another great and marvelous sign in heaven. Signs point beyond themselves and disclose the theological meaning of history. That there are seven angels having seven plagues speaks of the certainty and completeness of divine wrath against all unrighteousness. They are great and marvelous in their awe-inspiring effect² on all of nature, the human race, and the kingdom of Antichrist.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The sign is called “*great*” because of the awesome implication of these judgments in both extent and degree. “*Marvelous*” means “wonderful, awe inspiring,” and shows the effect this sign had on the heart and soul of John. It should have the same effect on us the same way as we think on the results these plagues will have. Not only will they result in the return of the Lord, but they also will lead to the establishment of His righteous rule on earth when God's will will be done on earth just as it is in heaven.

David Harrell: what is about to happen is great and marvelous because the unholy trinity of the dragon and of the beast and the false prophet, along with all who worship them are about to be judged.

B. Seven Angels with Seven Plagues

“seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last,”

G.K. Beale: A futurist perspective takes the bowls to be the last plagues which occur in history, after the woes of the seals and the trumpets have taken place. Some qualify this slightly by seeing the bowls as the content of the seventh trumpet or third woe, just as they believe that the trumpets are the content of the seventh seal.

Charles Swindoll: In **Revelation 15:1** we discover two important facts.

- First, the bowls represent seven plagues concentrated near the end of the future seven-year Tribulation period. The word translated “*plague*” (*plēgē* [4127]) in this verse literally means a “blow” or “wound.” These judgments are not long, drawn-out epidemics like influenza or HIV. Rather, these plagues come with **sudden impact** — swift, severe, destructive, and fierce.
- Second, the seven bowl judgments will be the final expression of God’s wrath toward the inhabitants of the earth. These judgments will climax at the Battle of Armageddon and the return of Christ.

John MacArthur: *Plēgē* (plagues) literally means “a blow,” or “a wound,” and is so used in such passages as **Luke 12:48; Acts 16:23, 33; 2 Corinthians 6:5, and 11:23**. In **13:3** and **12** it describes the beast’s fatal wound. Thus, the seven plagues are not really diseases or epidemics, but **powerful, deadly blows** (cf. **9:18–20; 11:6**) that will strike the world with **killing impact**.

C. Satisfaction of God’s Wrath

“because in them the wrath of God is finished.”

Buist Fanning: The verb translated “*will be completed*” is an aorist indicative in Greek (ἐτελέσθη), used here as a summary of the events about to be described in **16:1–21**—and yet to occur on the earth in events future to John’s time as well as our own.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: “*Is filled up*.” The combined force of the tense and the verb used here stress the concept of **culmination, completion**. The verb is *telew* and means “to complete, bring to an end” in amount, number, degree, effect or purpose. It is in these last plagues that **God’s wrath finds its culmination and accomplishes His purposes**.

Here we have the last and final judgments of the Tribulation, but they will also perfectly accomplish God’s righteous purposes through this seven-year period.

(1) *As the time of Jacob’s trouble*. The Tribulation is first of all God’s **discipline on the Jews** for their willful rejection of Christ as their Messiah and for their stubbornness. It will purge out the rebels and cause the rest to turn to Christ (cf. **Ezek. 20:33–44; Zech. 14:9–10**).

(2) The Tribulation will bring **God’s judgment on the Gentiles for anti-Semitism**. It will be a strong source of motivation for men to repent and turn to faith in Christ, and judge the rest for their unbelief and rebellion.

(3) As to Satan the Tribulation is to **demonstrate the true character and program of Satan** as the source of sin, misery, war and murder.

(4) It will demonstrate to mankind as a whole (Jew and Gentile) **the true rebellion and spiritually corrupt nature of man** and the depths to which he will go when given the chance. Remember, at this time the restraint of the Holy Spirit who is at work today through the church, the body of Christ, will have been completely removed. The Tribulation, without this special restraint, will be a time of unprecedented lawlessness and unrighteousness, which will demonstrate the failure of man and how desperately he needs the Lord Jesus Christ.

(5) As to God and Christ it will demonstrate their **absolute holiness, grace, faithfulness to their promises**, and that God is still on the throne and He is just in his decisions against Satan and unbelieving man.

So these last seven plagues will complete these purposes as well as bring an end to the judgments (16:9-11, 13-14, 21).

II. (15:2-4) THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB SUNG BY VICTORIOUS MARTYRS

Robert Mounce: Verses 2–4 form an interlude of victory and praise that stands in sharp contrast with the narrative that follows. The exultation of the heavenly chorus is as glorious as the visitation of wrath is somber. John sees those who have emerged from their final battle with the beast standing victorious upon the crystal surface before the throne. Carrying harps of God, they join their voices in an anthem of praise celebrating the holiness of God and the righteousness of his works.

A. (:2) Description of the Choir

1. Majestic Stage

“And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire,”

Robert Mounce: The “*sea of glass*” is mentioned twice in the Apocalypse. In 4:6 it was said to be as “*clear as crystal*,” while in the present passage it is “*mixed with fire*.” While several options are offered as to the intent of this image, most likely it is nothing more than a descriptive detail intended to **heighten the splendor of the scene**. While the larger context has much to say about wrath and judgment, the interlude itself (vv. 2–4) treats quite a different subject.

John Walvoord: Unlike the previous occurrence, here is the sea is **mixed with fire**, which speaks of divine judgment proceeding from God’s holiness. **Thomas** calls this mixed sea “a mighty reservoir of just judgments about to become realities.”

Tony Garland: The sea is clear like glass, but also sparkles or radiates brilliant light. Fire is πυρὶ [pyri]. A similar word elsewhere denotes “*fiery red*,” πυρρός [pyrros] (Rev. 6:3+; 12:3+). If red, it could reflect the purging and redemptive power of Christ’s blood. Or, like the purity of the glass, the fire may speak of purity. Having come through the flames of adversity, those standing upon the sea of glass have been refined (1Pe. 1:7; 4:12). A more ominous possibility is that the fire denotes the redness, not of Christ’s blood, but of the martyrs themselves, shed as part of their testimony. . .

Perhaps mingled with fire does not speak of red, but of **God's judgment**—the “*baptism with fire*” (**Mat. 4:11-12**), about to be poured out upon the earth.

2. Martyred Singers -- Victorious over the Beast

a. Faithful unto Death

“and those who had come off victorious”

Charles Swindoll: Who are these people? John identifies them as those who were victorious over three horrendous pressures to reject Christ during the Tribulation:

- political pressure through the first beast's compelling charismatic military prowess;
- religious pressure through the second beast's deceptively miraculous image;
- and economic pressure through the requirement of the number of the Beast in order to buy and sell.

These pressures, described earlier in **Revelation 13**, pushed all people to the edge of a life-and-death decision. They could either worship the Beast and save their lives or resist his regime and lose them. The redeemed standing on the sea of glass chose faithfulness to Christ, which looked like a foolish decision in the midst of unparalleled persecution. But to quote the famous line of missionary and martyr **Jim Elliot**: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Because of the reference to the beast and his work which sets the context, these are clearly the **martyred dead of the Tribulation**.

b. Freed from All Opposition

“from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name,”

John MacArthur: The beast's crony, the false prophet, will perform many lying wonders to deceive people. One of them will be to set up an image of the beast, which he will order everyone to worship on pain of death. The false prophet will also require everyone to receive a mark representing either the beast's name, or the number of his name. Those without that mark will face execution and will be unable to buy or sell. But the Tribulation believers will, by God's power, eternally triumph over the whole enterprise of Satan, the beast, and the false prophet.

c. Fixed on a Firm Foundation

“standing on the sea of glass,”

d. Favored with Heavenly Instruments

“holding harps of God.”

Buist Fanning: This group of “*conquerors*” would certainly include **Christian martyrs** now present in heaven who had resisted the beast on earth and been killed as a result (**13:10, 15**). But the essence of their victory was enduring faith in Christ in the face of idolatry and persecution (**1 John 4:4; 5:4-5; Rev 13:10; 14:12; 21:5-7**), so the group could include many who had passed on in death from other causes and were now rejoicing in heaven as well. The final phrase in **v. 2**,

“*holding kitharas of God*,” reinforces the heavenly character of the scene (cf. **5:8; 14:2**), but it also leads into the worship song presented in **vv. 3–4**.

Kendell Easley: Far from being a pie-in-the-sky, floating-on-clouds, playing-harps-after-we-die chapter, this passage can encourage us to be people of worship and singing today. When we look back on ancient Israel and ahead to the victorious saints in heaven, we realize that we have the privilege of standing in the unbroken line of people who worship God with their music and singing.

B. (:3a-4) Doctrine of the Song

Joe Beard: The song recorded here sung by the redeemed, tribulation saints exalts God’s character as the omnipotent, unchangeable, sovereign, perfect and righteous Creator and Judge. Because God is all these things just mentioned, He must and He will judge sinners; if God ignored the sin of sinners, then He would not be holy, righteous and true to His nature. All will come to fear the Lord and worship Him, because He alone is holy. The song closes anticipating the millennial reign of Christ on the earth when all the nations will come and worship before Him and will exalt Him for all His righteous acts. As God delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh and his army back in Exodus, so God had delivered these Tribulation saints from the Antichrist forever. This song of praise is in anticipation of the judgment that is about to be introduced, the prayers of the saints are about to be answered, the vengeance of God is about to fall on those who persecuted the saints.

<https://www.mcclearycommunitychurch.com/sermons/scene-heaven-revelation-151-8>

1. (:3a) Title of the Song

a. Song of Moses

“And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God”

G.K. Beale: Just as the Israelites praised God by the sea after He had delivered them from Pharaoh, so the church praises God for defeating the beast on its behalf. Like God’s people of old, so God’s new covenant people praise Him by singing the song of Moses the bond-servant of God. Moses is called God’s servant in **Exod. 14:31**, immediately before his singing in **ch. 15**. However, the song now is about the much greater deliverance accomplished through the work of the Lamb. The saints praise the Lamb’s victory as the typological fulfillment of that to which the Red Sea victory pointed.

John Phillips: The song of Moses was sung at the Red Sea, the song of the Lamb is sung at the crystal sea; the song of Moses was a song of triumph over Egypt, the song of the Lamb is a song of triumph over Babylon; the song of Moses told how God brought His people out, the song of the Lamb tells how God brings His people in; the song of Moses was the first song in Scripture, the song of the Lamb is the last. The song of Moses commemorated the execution of the foe, the expectation of the saints, and the exaltation of the Lord; the song of the Lamb deals with the same three themes. (*Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991])

Albert Mohler: The reference to the Song of Moses represents the climax of the exodus theme that runs throughout the Bible. God has fully liberated all his people from all their earthly oppressors. God’s people ascribe both truth and justice to him, thus affirming the appropriateness of his ways and judgments (**15:3; 16:7; 19:2**).

- b. Song of the Lamb
“and the song of the Lamb, saying,”

William Barclay: Heaven is a place where people forget themselves and remember only God. As **R. H. Charles** aptly puts it: ‘In the perfect vision of God self is wholly forgotten.’ **H. B. Swete** puts it this way: ‘In the presence of God the martyrs forget themselves; their thoughts are absorbed by the new wonders that surround them; the glory of God and the mighty scheme of things in which their own sufferings form an infinitesimal part are opening before them; they begin to see the great issue of the world-drama, and we hear the doxology with which they greet their first unclouded vision of God and his works.’

J. Hampton Keathley, III: These are **two distinct songs**. Note that “song” is mentioned two times and in both cases it has the article which specifies two distinct songs. However, they do seem to be **harmonized into one**.

2. (:3b-4) Theology of the Song

- a. (:3b) Extolling the Works and Ways of the Sovereign God

- 1) The Works of God – Great and Marvelous

“*Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty;*”

Grant Osborne: These acts of judgment are the work of the “*Lord God Almighty*,” the primary title of God in the book, occurring in **4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22**, with ὁ παντοκράτωρ (*ho pantokratōr, Almighty*) also found in **1:8; 16:14; 19:15**. Everywhere it appears it speaks of his **omnipotence** and **sovereign control** over all things in earth and heaven.

Tony Garland: Job wrote that God “*does great things, and unsearchable, marvelous things without number*” (**Job 5:9**), “*God thunders marvelously with His voice; He does great things which we cannot comprehend*” (**Job 37:5**). One of the marvelous things that God did was his division of the seas in the Exodus from Egypt (**Ps. 78:12-13**). Another is His creative work as manifest in marvels of the human body (**Ps. 139:14-15**). God told Israel, “*Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord*” (**Ex. 34:10**). These marvel especially at their preservation through death from the midst of horrendous persecution of the saints upon the earth.

- 2) The Ways of God – Righteous and True

“*Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations.*”

G.K. Beale: This emphasizes that God’s sovereign acts are not demonstrations of raw power but moral expressions of His just character. His redemption through Christ has brought to supreme expression how He demonstrates His justice.

Kendell Easley: The first line is similar to **Psalms 111:2–3**; the second like **Psalms 145:17**. Similar ideas abound in the original Song of Moses (**Exod. 15:6–8**). Although these saints have come through the fiery persecution of the beast, they celebrate God’s ways as altogether right. In both his attributes and actions, God’s perfections will be praised by his people forever.

Robert Mounce: The hymn begins by extolling God’s “*deeds*” and his “*ways*.” The first are cause for wonder and praise. The second emphasizes God’s justice and faithfulness. We need not limit

this ascription of praise to any particular event. All God's redemptive works are great and marvelous. They are **met with awe**, not simply because of their magnitude, but also because of their **intrinsic righteousness**. In keeping with the OT, God's righteousness is most often seen in his saving acts on behalf of his people.

b. (:4) Expecting God to be Given the Glory He is Due

1) Rhetorical Question Regarding Who is Worthy of Worship

"Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name?"

G.K. Beale: recall **Jer. 10:7**: *"Who would not fear Thee, O King of the nations?"* Surely they will fear Him, both texts suggest, because they have witnessed His great and righteous acts. **Jer. 10:1-16** contrasts God with humans and idols, affirming that **God alone is due worship**. The singing saints here likewise know worship is due God and the Lamb only, in contrast to the beast and his image. God is worshiped because He is holy: *For Thou alone art holy*, which again gives the basis or reason (*"for" = hoti*) for the saints' worship in **v. 4a**: God is worshiped because He is holy. The holiness of God refers not simply to a set of moral attributes but to the fact that God is **completely set apart in those attributes from His creation**.

John Walvoord: The futuristic view of the passage is indicated by the question of **verse 4**, *"Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?"* Though the nations neither fear God nor glorify Him in their mad unbelief during the great tribulation, the day is to come soon when they will both fear Him and be forced to acknowledge Him as God. A similar question is found in **Jeremiah 10:7**: *"Who would not fear you, O King of the nations?"* (cf. also **Rev. 14:7**). The prospect of all nations worshipping the Lord, a familiar theme of the prophets, is brought out in the statement: *"For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed"* (cf. **Ps. 2:8-9; 24:1-10; 66:1-4; 72:8-11; 86:9; Isa. 2:2-4; 9:6-7; 66:18-23; Dan. 7:14; Zeph. 2:11; Zech. 14:9**).

2) 3 Reasons Supporting the Worship of God Alone

a) Holiness of God (His Uniqueness)

"For Thou alone art holy;"

Tony Garland: *Holy* is ὅσιος [*hosios*], a term which speaks "of the inherent nature of God and Christ holy (**Heb. 7.26**).¹ Thus, Isaiah's seraphim cry with John's cherubim, *"Holy, holy, holy"* (**Isa. 6:3 cf. Rev. 4:8+**). He is *"the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy"* (**Isa. 57:15**). Although the term holy denotes **purity**, it also speaks of **uniqueness**. Holiness is that which is uniquely God's, which sets Him apart. It is an attribute which only the Creator truly has. All other creatures which are said to be holy, derived their holiness from their association with God and His righteousness. It is a reflected, secondary holiness, but not essential to their nature apart from God. Another way to express this phrase might be, "You are matchless, incomparable, peerless, unequalled, unparalleled, unrivaled!" There is no other like God because He alone is Creator, all else is creature. "So Jesus said to him, *'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God'*" (**Luke 18:19**). What would this world be like if God had been a capricious and evil personage who took pleasure in wickedness and loved iniquity? We are immensely blessed that He is otherwise (**Ps. 5:4**)!

b) Universality of Worship

"For all the nations will come and worship before Thee,"

G. K. Beale: The effect of God's unique holiness is that people from all nations will recognize it and stream to worship God, which repeats the primary thought of **v. 4a** that God is to be feared and glorified. The phrase *all the nations* is a figure of speech called **metonymy** (or, more specifically, **synecdoche**), where the whole is substituted for the part in order to emphasize that many will worship. It does not mean that every person in every nation (the whole) will worship the Lord, but that people from every nation (the part) will do so.

Grant Osborne: The message of the book is that by their reaction to the call to repentance (which is one of the primary purposes of the seals, trumpets, and bowls), the nations will face either judgment or salvation, either the wrath of God or his mercy.

c) Revelation of God's Righteous Acts

"For Thy righteous acts have been revealed."

Kendell Easley: as opposed to Antichrist's wickedness.

Buist Fanning: These obligations to give the Lord reverence and glory are grounded in three causal clauses that follow (**v. 4b–d**). Having three such clauses in a row is somewhat repetitive but understandable in such a context.

- The first ground is that the Lord "*alone [is] holy*" (**v. 4b**; cf. **Deut 32:4**; **Ps 144:17 LXX**), highlighting his uniqueness and perfection above all other creatures or supposed gods. He alone deserves the ultimate devotion and reverence of all humanity.
- The second reason is the prophetic anticipation that one day "*all the nations will come and worship*" the Lord (**v. 4c**; **Ps 86:9**; **Isa 2:2**; **60:3–5**; **66:23**; **Jer 16:19**; cf. **Rev 21:24**). This turning of the nations to the true God will be the positive outcome of the Lord's defeat of evil and its domination over the world of humanity.
- Finally, as a third reason, the song proclaims that the Lord's "*righteous acts have been made evident*" (**v. 4d**; **Ps 98:2**). What heaven knows of God's just and faithful character will soon be displayed on earth for all to see.

III. (15:5-8) THE SEVEN PLAGUES ARE DISTRIBUTED TO THE SEVEN ANGELS FOR THE POURING OUT OF GOD'S FINAL WRATH

A. (:5-6) Judgment Proceeds from the Heavenly Temple

1. (:5) Opening of the Heavenly Temple

"After these things I looked,

and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened,"

Buist Fanning: This opening of the heavenly temple itself (**v. 5**) repeats an image from **11:19**, and in both places it represents the **ominous appearance of God** himself, ready to exact his judgment on rebellious humanity (cf. **3 Macc 6:18–19**). Because the heavenly temple is a prototype of the earthly tabernacle and its later counterpart in Jerusalem's temple (cf. **Exod 25:9, 40**; **Heb 8:5**), it can be described as "*the tabernacle of testimony*" (τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου; cf. **Exod 29:42**; **40:34**; **Acts 7:44**). It bears witness to the Lord's presence in heaven, just as he was among his people Israel in the wilderness or in Jerusalem.

Kendell Easley: This time John draws attention to the heavenly temple by giving it a title he uses only here: *the tabernacle of the Testimony*. This was one of the names of the sacred tent the Israelites used in the wilderness. It was a “*tabernacle*” because it was portable, an elaborate tent. The term *Testimony* refers to the tablets of the covenant Moses brought down from Mount Sinai, the Ten Commandments (**Exod. 32:15**). They were deposited in the ark of the covenant. As we will soon see, what John saw in heaven was similar to what the Israelites saw when they dedicated their tabernacle in the wilderness.

William Barclay: It is from within the tabernacle that the seven avenging angels come forth. In the centre of the Holy Place within the tabernacle lay the ark of the covenant, the chest in which were contained the tablets of the ten commandments, the essence of the law. That is to say, these angels come out from the place where the law of God rests and come to show that no individual or nation can defy the law of God without having to suffer the consequences.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: This opening of the *naos* in **Revelation 15** symbolizes the parting of the veil, but in reverse order. Here, rather than access to God, it symbolizes the outpouring of God’s perfect justice and wrath for rejection of Christ. Here the veil is pulled back, not to let man in, but to **pour out God’s justice**.

“*And the seven angels ... came out of the temple.*” As the ministers and agents of God’s holy justice, these angels proceed from the presence of God acting on behalf of God’s holiness, righteousness, and justice.

Joe Anady: Remember that the tabernacle that Israel constructed in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses and after the exodus was constructed according to the heavenly realities shown to him on the mountain. **Exodus 25:40** says so. **Acts 7:44** and **Hebrews 8:5** emphasize this. So the earthly tabernacle and temple were not the originals but were earthy copies which represented heavenly realities. Here John is seeing the **heavenly reality**.

<https://emmausrbcc.org/2017/11/19/sermon-seven-angels-seven-plagues-last-revelation-15/>

2. (:6) Outgoing from the Heavenly Temple

a. Angels on a Mission

“*and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple,*”

Robert Mounce: That they come out of the temple points to the divine origin of their commission. Their robes of linen, clean and shining, denote the noble and sacred nature of their office (cf. **Ezek 9:2; Dan 10:5**). Golden girdles are symbolic of royal and priestly functions. John repeatedly pictures these moments in OT images. Here the angels (1) come from the presence of God, (2) are arrayed as priests, and (3) will now receive their “*censers*.”

b. Angels in Impressive Array

1) Garments of Pure Bright Linen

“*clothed in linen, clean and bright,*”

Buist Fanning: They are wearing garments of “*pure bright linen*,” a reflection of their heavenly glory influenced by the Old Testament accounts of angelic appearances (e.g., **Dan 10:5; 12:6–7; Ezek 9:3–4, 11; 10:2, 6–7**). The word “*bright*” (λαμπρός) denotes a shining appearance (**Acts 10:30; Rev 22:1, 16**), but also suggests impressive, resplendent robes indicating high position

(Luke 23:11; Jas 2:2–3; Rev 18:14; 19:8). Likewise, their “gold sashes” mark them out as important figures and emissaries of a powerful Lord (e.g., 1:13).

2) Girded with Golden Girdles

“and girded around their breasts with golden girdles.”

G.K. Beale: This description is almost identical to that of the Son of man in 1:13, which may imply that they are identified with Him in order to act as His representatives in carrying out judgment.

B. (:7) Judgment Distributed in Golden Bowls – Full of the Wrath of the Eternal God

“And 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.”

G.K. Beale: The image of “bowls” is also derived in part from Isa. 51:17, 22. Isaiah spoke of the “bowl of the cup of reeling; the chalice of My anger,” drunk first by Jerusalem but soon to be poured out on Israel’s tormentors, that is, Babylon (Isa. 51:22; cf. vv. 17-23). Now the same cup will be given to spiritual Babylon, as 16:19 reveals. The bowls here symbolize the wrath of God which comes to punish sinful people.

Charles Swindoll: The word translated “bowl” refers to a shallow, saucer-like dish used for boiling liquids as well as for “drinking or pouring libations.” One dictionary adds that the use of this term in Revelation is “suggestive of **rapidity in the emptying of the contents.**”

James Hamilton: These seven angels are commissioned by God, who commissioned the four living creatures to summon the events of history in chapter 6 (see vv. 1, 3, 5, 7). Now we read in 15:7, “*And 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.*” It seems that in the flow of events in Revelation, these bowls of wrath are full of “*the wine of God’s wrath*” (14:10), which was made from the grapes of wrath trodden in “*the great winepress of the wrath of God*” after the “*harvest of the earth*” (14:19, 20). These seven angels are given seven bowls, and the use of the number seven points to completion. This will be a **full outpouring of wrath.**

C. (:8) Judgment Associated with the Fearsome Presence of God

1. Smoke Speaks of God’s Glorious Presence and Power

“And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power;”

Daniel Akin: This imagery is familiar to students of the Old Testament. When God made a covenant with Abraham, He passed through the divided pieces of the sacrifice in the smoking fire pot and burning torch (Gen 15:17). When Moses received God’s law on Mount Sinai, God revealed His holiness with fire and smoke (Exod 19:18). After Israel placed the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle, God’s presence was symbolized with smoke and fire (Exod 40:34-35). In Solomon’s temple the glory of the Lord filled the holy place in the form of a cloud (1 Kgs 8:10-11). This is an ongoing reminder of God’s holiness. **God’s glory is always manifest during the time of His judgment.** Smoke from God’s glory made entering the temple impossible until His seething indignation was poured out. What a sign to the ungodly people on the earth who chose to shun the worship of a holy God and to follow the beast.

Grant Osborne: As the angels are commissioned for their mission of judgment and their bowls are “filled with God’s wrath,” ἐγεμίσθη ὁ ναὸς καπνοῦ (*egemisthē ho naos kapnou, the temple was filled with smoke*) in **15:8**. The parallel with **15:7** is obvious: the bowl is “filled with wrath,” and the temple is “filled with smoke.” This smoke comes “from the glory of God and from his power,” signifying his **majesty** and **sovereign omnipotence**. Throughout the OT, smoke symbolizes the **awesome presence of God**, as in the cloud of smoke at Sinai (**Exod. 24:15–16**, where the cloud is also linked with “*the glory of Yahweh*”) and the cloud that became the Shekinah presence of God at the exodus (**Exod. 13:21; 14:19, 24**). Four OT passages are especially fruitful here:

(1) When the tabernacle is set up in **Exod. 40:34–35**, “*The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.*”

(2) When the ark is brought to the temple in **1 Kings 8:10–12**, the “dark cloud” that symbolizes the presence of the Lord fills the temple with his glory. The last two are especially apropos in the context of judgment in **Rev. 15:7**.

(3) In the great vision of the enthroned God in **Isa. 6:1–4**, the seraphim acclaim the holiness of God and state, “*The whole earth is full of his glory,*” and at that time “*the temple is filled with smoke*” (**6:3–4**), signifying the glorious presence of God as he tells Isaiah to proclaim his message of judgment.

(4) Similarly, in the judgment of Israel as God’s glory departs from the temple in **Ezek. 10:2–4**, the cloud fills the inner court and temple with the glory of the Lord.

These three images—**smoke, glory, and power**—combine to make the outpouring of judgment in **Rev. 16** an **act of worship**. The name of God is vindicated, and his glory is demonstrated in these bowls of wrath.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Note that this smoke continues until the plagues are finished, until God’s holy character is satisfied and God deals with sin. This teaches us that God will so completely turn to anger and justice in these final moments that all else seems to cease. Absolute and undiluted wrath will be the business of these final days. It will be as the Psalmist says in **Psalms 76:7**, “*You, even You are to be feared; and who may stand in Your presence when once You are angry.*”

2. Sealing the Doors of the Temple until Judgment Was Finished

*“and no one was able to enter the temple
until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.”*

G.K. Beale: God’s presence is so awesome in expressing wrath that not even heavenly beings (the angels and four living creatures were outside the temple, according to **vv. 6–7**) can stand in His midst: no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished. The **unapproachability of God** in both the OT and Revelation texts could be due to the **awfulness of His revealed presence**. The priestly nature of the seven angels is suggested, not only by their attire (see on **1:13; 15:6**), but also because **1 Kings 8:10–11** and **2 Chron. 5:13–14** mention priests who cannot stand in the midst of the divine glory. No one, not even heavenly intercessory priests, is able to hold back the hand of God when He decides to execute judgments (cf. **Dan. 4:35**).

Robert Mounce: The smoke that fills the heavenly temple in Revelation indicates the presence of God in all his glory and power actively to carry out his judgment upon wickedness. Until the seven plagues are finished, no one is able to enter the temple. Once the time of final judgment has come, none can stay the hand of God. The time for intercession is past. God in his unapproachable majesty and power has declared that the end has come. No longer does he stand knocking; he enters to act in sovereign judgment.

Thus the stage is set. Because these are the “*final*” plagues, John has prepared his readers by stressing the awesome nature of the occasion. They have been reminded that the redemptive deeds of the Almighty God are great and marvelous. As King, his ways are just and true. Judgment comes from the temple in heaven that is his eternal abode. When the bowls of wrath are delivered to his angels of judgment, the temple is filled with the smoke of his glory. By such a breathtaking scenario John prepares his listeners for the actual outpouring of divine wrath.

Tony Garland: Here we have perhaps one of the most mysterious and wondrous verses in all of Scripture. It surely must indicate a period of great privacy and intensity in the mind of God attending the final outpouring of His wrath. It probably indicates an unwillingness to allow for even the possibility of distraction until what has been initiated finds its completion and likely signifies the holiness of the moment, as when Moses could not enter the tabernacle when the glory fell upon it (**Ex. 40:35**) and the priests could not minister in Solomon’s Temple (**1K. 8:11**). Perhaps the idea is that of the **finality of the action**: “*Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people. Cast them out of My sight . . . Such as are for death, to death*” (**Jer. 15:1-2**).

It may suggest that God will, at this point in history, **seal the doors of Heaven**, making it impossible for any who have not hitherto accepted Jesus as Savior to do so. In other words, from this time forth until God has executed the human race, no additional souls will be saved. This is reminiscent of the previous great judgment, for, in the age before the flood, God said, “*My Spirit will not strive with man forever*” (**Gen. 6:3**). What a fearsome prospect: God closeted in His sanctuary until His wrath is satisfied, and no one able to approach Him. Sin will cause this; sin is never a light matter. [**Monty S. Mills**]

Perhaps there is also great sadness in knowing that nothing further can be done, no more will turn (**2Pe. 3:9**). All that remains is the hand of judgment. Perhaps there is anguish on the part of the Father like that of the Son on the cross (**Mat. 27:46; Mark 15:34**)?

What insight we should have here of the **holiness of God**, and may we not be allowed to think that behind this hiding smoke the heart of God is weeping, even as the Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem, as He acknowledged that all the efforts of His mercy has been in vain, and that the city refused all of His offers of pardon and love? And as we shall be in Heaven at that moment, yet outside of the presence of God, shall we not know that he suffers alone for the horror of the sin that separates men forever from Himself and forces Him to send them away to outer darkness forever? [**Donald Barnhouse**]

To speculate further is to go where angels fear to tread. God has covered Himself with a cloud of darkness and we do well to respect His privacy in this matter (**Lam. 3:44; Rom. 11:33**). Such intense judgment to come! Such grief on the part of the Creator for the creature which refuses to acknowledge Him. Yet He must judge for **His very holiness and justice require it!** Every

person born will drink from one or the other of two cups. Either they will drink the cup of salvation:

Then He [Jesus] took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you." (Luke 22:17-20)

Or they will drink the cup of the wrath of God (Rev. 14:10+):

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your heart (Heb. 3:15), for now is the day of salvation (2Cor. 6:2).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is it essential to preach about God's wrath and judgment against sin?
- 2) What impacts you personally about the holiness and righteousness of God?
- 3) How should our singing and musical accompaniment enhance our worship of God and how important are the lyrics of what we sing?
- 4) Do we appreciate that it is a fearsome thing to fall into the hands of an angry God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

G.K. Beale: How does the interlocking **parenthesis of vv. 2-4** relate precisely to **vv. 5ff.**? As in **8:3-5**, so here the interlocking indicates a thematic literary connection, which functions as a **transition** from one sevenfold series to the next. The seven bowls are clearly modeled on the Exodus plagues, as will be seen, and the song of **15:3-4** is an imitation of the song of Moses after the Red Sea crossing. The reference to a new, final exodus victory in **vv. 2-4**, which concludes the segment of **12:1-14:20**, inspires a flashback in **ch. 16** to the latter-day plagues leading up to the final victory. Therefore, the parenthesis in **15:2-4** primarily continues the subject of the last judgment in **14:14-20** and secondarily links the following series of bowls to the preceding segment both literarily and thematically.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Chronologically speaking, remember that we are first given a graphic description of six seals (**6:1-17**), but the seventh (**8:1**) is never described. We are only told that when it is broken, there is silence in heaven (**8:1**). The implication is that the seven trumpets

come out of the seventh seal and actually express the content of the seventh seal (**8:1-9:21; 11:15-19**). This seventh trumpet takes us up to the return of Christ and includes within its judgments the events of the seven last plagues or bowls of **chapters 15 and 16**, which occur rapidly at the end. The final great event is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory (**19:11-21**).

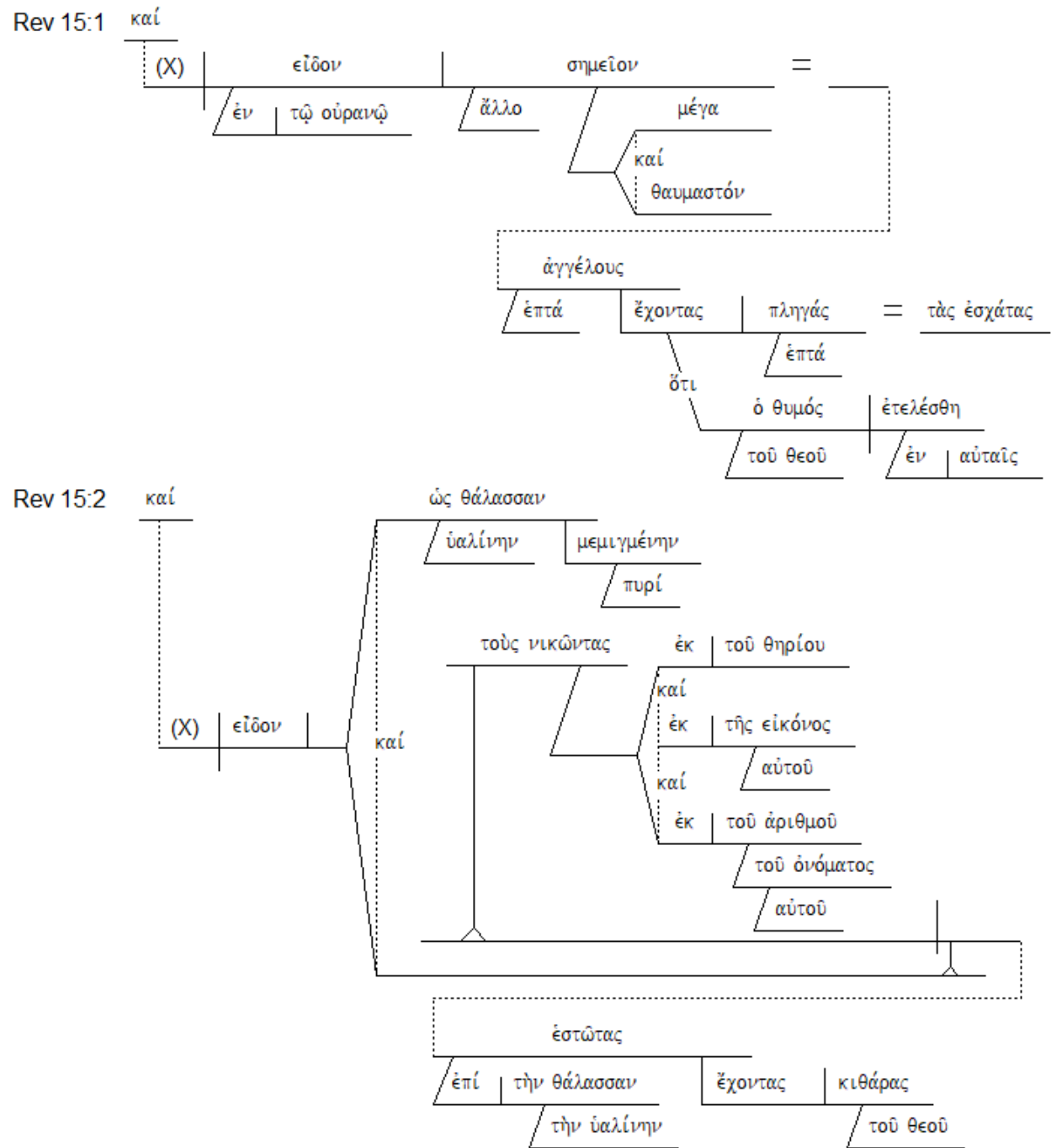
Again, let's not forget that **chapters 10:1-11:4; 13-14; and 17:1-19:10** are **interludes** and do not advance the Tribulation events chronologically. They simply fill in the picture of the Tribulation giving important details about key personages, events and concepts. **Alan** writes:

The inclusive series of bowl judgments constitute the “*third woe*” announced in **11:14** as “*coming soon*” [see comment on **11:14**]. Since the first two woes occur under the fifth and sixth trumpets, it is reasonable to see the third woe, which involved seven plagues, as unfolding during the sounding of the seventh trumpet, when the mystery of God will be finished (**10:7**) ... These last plagues take place “*immediately after the distress of those days*” referred to by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse and may well be the fulfillment of his apocalyptic words in **Mt 24:29**. Significantly, the **next event** that follows this judgment, the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds (**Mt 24:30-31**), is the same event John describes following the bowl judgments (**19:11**).

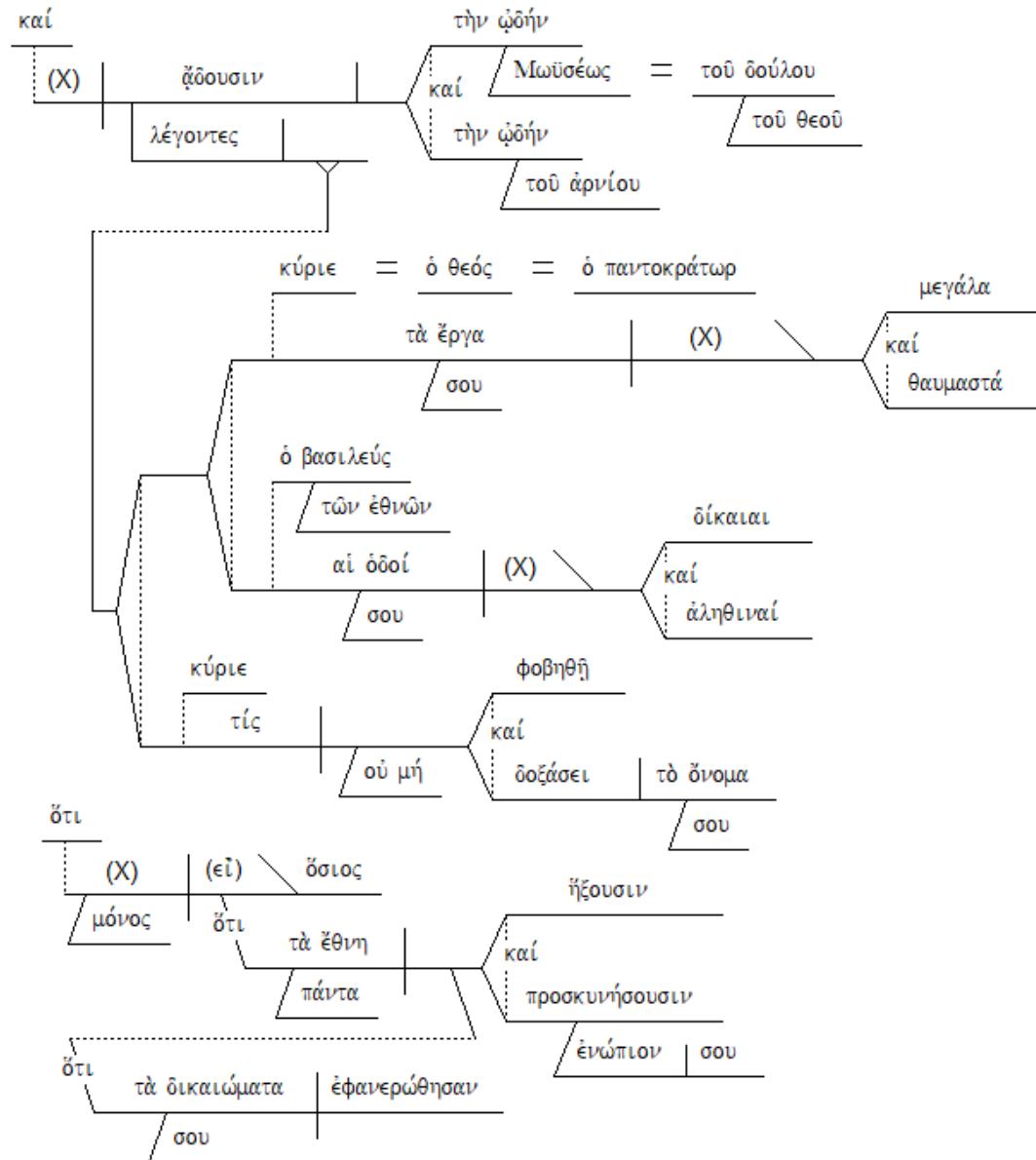
Grant Osborne: Now the narrative returns to the judgments by which God will accomplish the final destruction of evil. The emphasis once more is on the **sovereignty of God** as he controls even the plots of the satanic forces to his own ends. The introduction to the bowl septet (**15:1-8**) focuses both on the preparation of the seven angels, as they get ready to leave the heavenly temple and bring the final plagues to earth (**15:1, 5-8**), and on the joy of the victorious martyrs, as they celebrate the saving deeds of almighty God (**15:2-4**). The first four bowls parallel the first four trumpets but now affect the whole earth and prove finally the sovereignty of God over the earthly powers as well as the depravity of the people as they twice more reject God's offer of repentance (**16:9, 11**). The last three bowls continue the theme of depravity as they not only refuse to repent but curse God (**16:11**). The judgment on the throne of the beast (**16:10-11**) leads to the final act of defiance from the powers of evil as they call the nations to Armageddon (**16:16**). Finally, the storm theophany of **16:12-14** is intensified, and the cosmic portents show that the eschaton has arrived (**16:17-21**). The bowl judgments differ radically from the seals and trumpets in that there are no interludes to define the conflict and the place of the people of God in these events. Since the eschaton is here, there are to be no interruptions as God brings this age to a close.

John MacArthur: The scene described in this chapter establishes the background for the final, definitive judgments, poured out in **chapter 16**. Once the wrath of God was poured out on Jesus Christ because of what He did for sinners; in the future, wrath will be poured out on sinners because of what they did to Jesus Christ. It is true that “*The Lord is ... patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*” (**2 Pet. 3:9**), and that even in His wrath, He will remember mercy (cf. **Hab. 3:2**). Yet mercy refused brings judgment. By the time God pours out the seven bowls of His final wrath on earth, sinners will have been warned repeatedly to repent. They will have experienced numerous terrifying judgments, which they will acknowledge came from God (**6:16-17**). They will have heard the saving message of the gospel preached by the 144,000 Jewish evangelists, the two witnesses, other redeemed Gentiles and Jews, even from an angel flying in midheaven. Yet, tragically, they will harden their hearts and fall into calamity (**Prov. 28:14**). They will pay a fearful price for failing to heed the Scripture's warning: “*Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts*” (**Heb. 3:15; 4:7**).

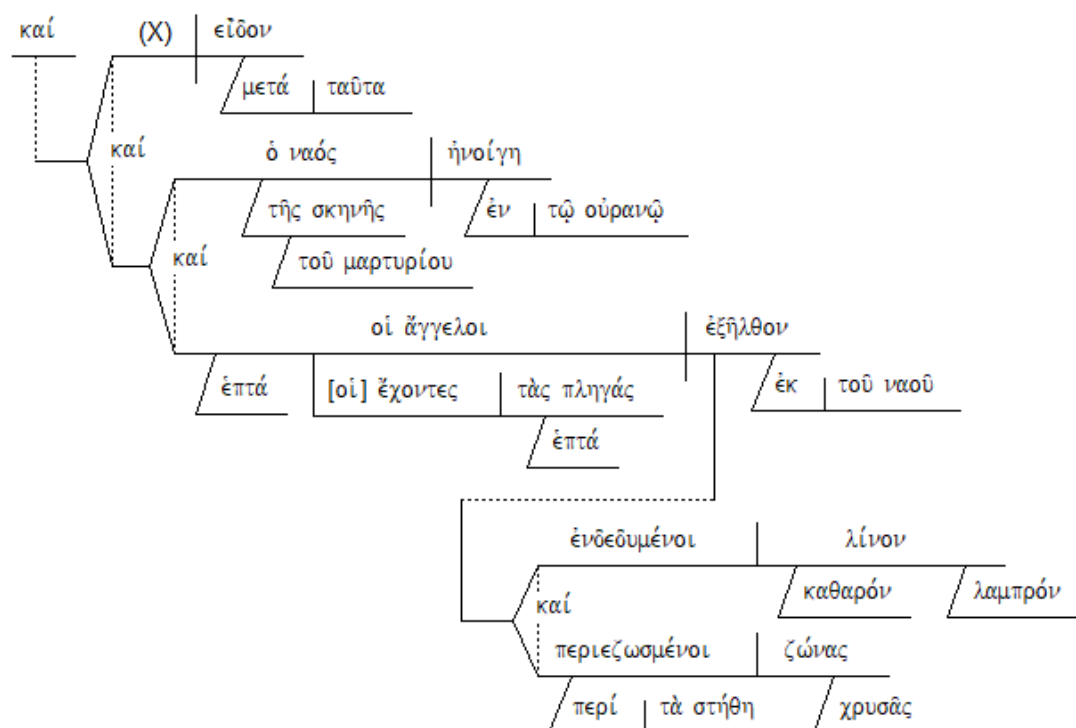
Leedy Greek Diagram:



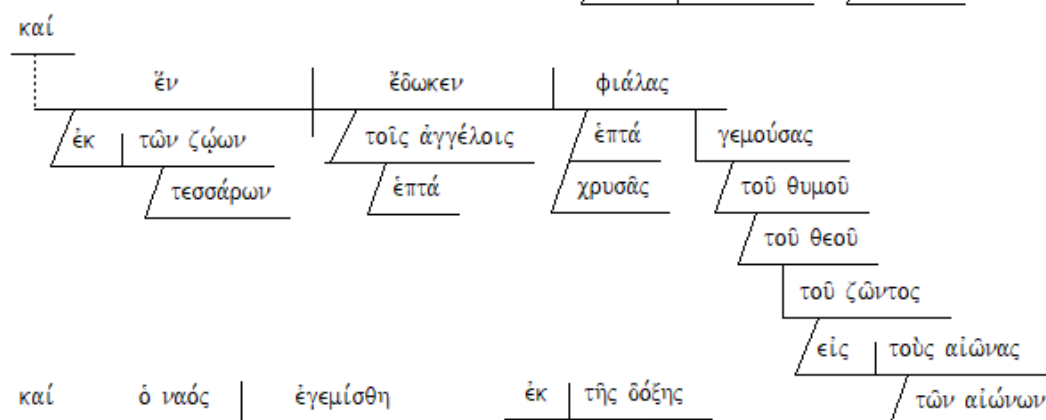
Rev 15:3-4



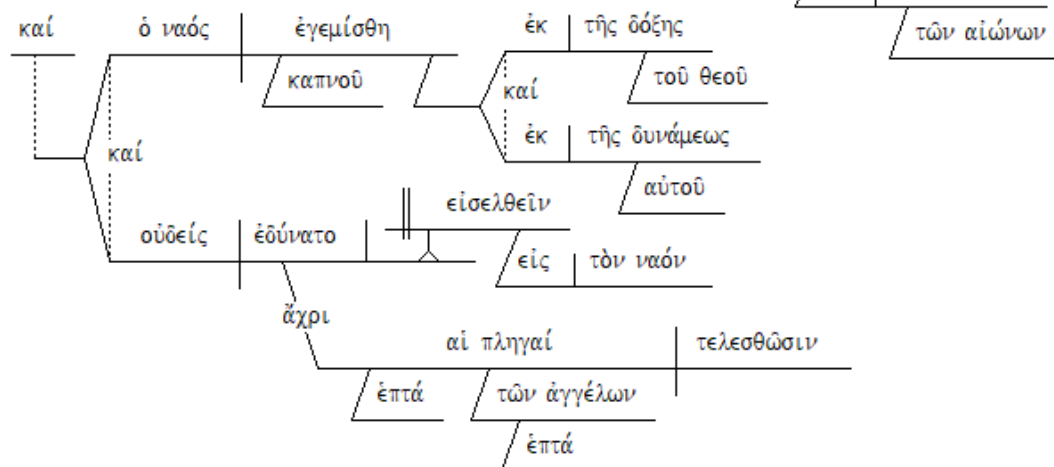
Rev 15:5-6



Rev 15:7



Rev 15:8



TEXT: Revelation 16:1-9

TITLE: FIRST FOUR BOWL JUDGMENTS ON ELEMENTS OF NATURE

BIG IDEA:

THE FINAL BOWL JUDGMENTS WILL BE WORSE THAN ANYTHING WE CAN IMAGINE AS GOD POURS OUT HIS WRATH ON DEFIANT HUMANITY AND VINDICATES HIS HOLINESS AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: After a very brief introduction (v. 1) the seven angels pour out their bowls in numbered sequence, steadily visiting God's wrath in the form of the most severe plagues seen yet: plagues on the beast's followers (v. 2), the natural world (vv. 3–9), and the beast's throne (vv. 10–11), preparing the way for the ultimate eschatological battle (vv. 12–16) and the destruction of Babylon itself (vv. 17–21). . .

The numbered sequence of seven angels pouring out bowls of judgment begins here in v. 2 and follows a **consistent pattern** of presentation until its conclusion with the seventh angel in vv. 17–21. The pattern is: “The [ordinal number referring to one of the seven angels] poured out his bowl [on a location] and [certain effects] came about or appeared [ἐγένετο] and [further effects] resulted with various verbs used.” In a few cases some of these elements do not appear and other elements are added, but the broad pattern is clear.

John MacArthur: Since they are the final outpouring of God's wrath, the bowl judgments will be **more severe** than all the earlier judgments. Their severity is strong proof of how God feels about those who persistently, willfully reject Him. This particular epoch in human history will be a fitting time for God's wrath to reach its apex, for mankind's rebellion against God will also then be at its apex. Despite years of horrific judgments (which they will acknowledge as coming from God—6:15–17), sinners will stubbornly cling to their sin and persist in their rebellion (9:21). Nor will the powerful preaching of the gospel by the 144,000, the two witnesses, countless other believers, and an angel from heaven bring them to repentance (vv. 9, 11). Instead, their rebellion, defiance, and rejection of God will increase until the final judgments fall. This worldwide rebellion of sinful mankind will bring the worldwide judgments of holy God.

These “*seven plagues, which are the last*” (15:1), had precursors in two other sets of plagues in Scripture: the plagues God brought upon Egypt (Ex. 7–12) and the seven trumpet judgments (chaps. 8–11). There are similarities and differences between the three sets of plagues. The first plagues were very localized, affecting only Egypt. The second set of plagues destroyed one third of the world (8:7–12; 9:15, 18). The final plagues will affect the **entire world**. All three sets of plagues include hail, darkness, water turned to blood, and an invasion from the east, whether by insects, demons, or men. The seven bowl judgments will gather together all the horrors and terrors from all the previous judgments of God. They will completely inundate the world, bringing it to the brink of utter ruin.

John Walvoord: The seven bowls have often been compared to the seven seals and to the seven trumpets, especially the latter. One interpretation has been to view the bowls as merely an enlargement on the trumpet judgments, corresponding numerically to them. There are

undoubtedly many similarities between the trumpet judgments and the judgments inflicted by the pouring out of the bowls. . .

The principle is often overlooked, however, that **similarities do not prove identity**. A careful study of the seven bowls as compared to the seven trumpets will reveal numerous differences. The first four trumpet judgments deal only with one-third of the earth, while the bowl judgments seem to be universal in their application and greater in intensity. Therefore, this exposition understands the bowl judgments as being subsequent to the trumpet judgments, proceeding out of and constituting the seventh trumpet.

John Miller: **Chapter 16** is perhaps not only the darkest chapter in Revelation, but it is one of the darkest chapters in the entire Bible. Not only do preachers not want to preach Revelation, but very few preachers who preach Revelation will preach **chapter 16**. They want to skip over that.

In **chapter 16**, we move from the parenthetical section of **chapters 10-15** to the chronological section of **chapter 16**. Then **chapters 17-18** will be the next parenthetical section. The narrative or chronological section picks up again in **chapter 19** with the **Second Coming of Jesus Christ**.
<https://www.revival.tv/sermons/revelation-2020/seven-bowls-of-gods-wrath/>

James Hamilton: The main point of this text is that God is glorified in justice as he brings awesome wrath that fits the crimes human beings have done. . . God is glorified in awesome wrath that shows the bankruptcy of the false gods people worship, and the punishments God brings on his enemies fit their crimes. This calls the wicked to repentance, and it serves to encourage the righteous as they persevere.

David Harrell: These seven bowl judgments can be divided into two parts.

- The first four target men directly through a specific plague as well as the eco systems of the earth, which will cause them to suffer even more.
- And the last three target the kingdom of the antichrist and the topography of the earth in preparation for God's final confrontation with man in the battle of Armageddon.

<https://cbctn.org/sermon/284/284/>

(:1) PROLOGUE – COMMAND TO POUR OUT THE SEVEN BOWLS

*“And I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels,
‘Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth.’”*

Daniel Akin: John hears “a loud voice,” a phrase occurring 20 times in Revelation. It is certainly the voice of God. He commands the angels to “go and pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth” (see **15:1,7; 16:19**). The fierce anger of God and His righteous judgment are to be poured out in full measure on an unrepentant world, a rebellious world.

John MacArthur: This *loud voice* is certainly that of God, since there was no one else in the temple (**15:8**). His loud cry of judgment is reminiscent of **Isaiah 66:6**: “A voice of uproar from the city, a voice from the temple, the voice of the Lord who is rendering recompense to His enemies.” *Megalē (loud)* appears half a dozen times in this chapter (usually translated “great”), again emphasizing the magnitude of the judgments recorded here. His loud voice is heard again after the seventh bowl is poured out (**v. 17**).

Donald Barnhouse: The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine, and the last of the grist is now to go through. The machinery of judgment has been set in motion, and the Creator Himself has said that it shall not be arrested until the last plagues of His wrath are finished.

I. (:2) FIRST BOWL JUDGMENT – ULCEROUS SORES IN THE EARTH

A. Target of Judgment = the Earth

“And the first angel went and poured out his bowl into the earth;”

B. Malady = Terrible Sores

“and it became a loathsome and malignant sore”

Daniel Akin: This recalls the sixth Egyptian plague (**Exod 9:9-11**) and the stories of Job (**Job 2:7**) and Lazarus (**Luke 16:21**). Only unbelievers experience this foul and loathsome plague. **Zechariah 14:12** teaches,

This will be the plague the Lord strikes all the peoples with, who have warred against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they stand on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

Grant Osborne: The judgment that comes in this first bowl is ἑλκος κακὸν καὶ πονηρόν (*helkos kakon kai ponēron*, a bad and evil sore), replicating the sixth Egyptian plague in which terrible boils broke out on both people and animals (**Exod. 9:9–11**). These terrible, painful sores are similar to the sores that plagued Job in **Job 2:1–13** (so **Mounce** 1998: 293; **Wall** 1991: 197), but here it is the unrighteous suffering them. A ἑλκος is an abscessed or ulcerous sore, often caused by infection, of the kind that Lazarus had in the parable of **Luke 16:19–31** (cf. **16:21**). The thought of such a plague in any literal sense is fearsome indeed. Medical supplies would be exhausted in a few days with such a universal disaster. Moreover, those inflicted would be unable to walk, sit, or lie down without pain, as anyone who has had a boil can attest.

John Miller: If you’re not worshipping the true and living God, whatever god you worship can’t help you in your time of need. If you worship money, there’s a point at which your money can’t save you. If you worship materialism, it can’t deliver you in your hour of need. So because they are not worshipping the true and living God, they get this horrible sore.

C. Identification of the Afflicted = Reason for the Judgment

“upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.”

John Walvoord: Confirmation that the bowl judgments **occur late in the great tribulation** is here in that this judgment falls on those who worship the **beast’s image**. This image apparently is established in the early part of the great tribulation, the last half of the seven-year period preceding the second coming (**13:14–17**). Almost everyone seems to comply with the demand that all people worship the beast and receive his mark. The bowl judgment, therefore, follows this edict. The only ones who escape the judgment are those who have refused to obey the edict, the few individuals who trust in Christ in those evil days. From **13:8**, it would appear that only a small fraction of the earth’s population resists the beast. The warning given in **14:9–11** is now reinforced in a preliminary judgment that anticipates the ultimate doom of the beast worshipers.

Charles Swindoll: You might recall that the Beast and false prophet don't even rise to power until the second half of the Tribulation (**13:5**), during which time they will begin a worldwide program of branding those who worship them and oppressing those who don't (**13:11-18**). The Beast-followers will join the war machine that will hunt down, persecute, and kill the nonconforming citizens who believe in Christ. Although those who receive the mark of the Beast and worship his image will think they have spared their lives and saved their families, the reality is that they will have bought themselves only about three years —and earned eternal death!

II. (:3) SECOND BOWL JUDGMENT – SEA TURNING INTO FOUL BLOOD

A. Target of Judgment = the Sea

“And the second angel poured out his bowl into the sea,”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The Greek text here is very graphic. Literally it reads, *“And it (sea) became blood as of a dead man,”* i.e., like a dead man wallowing in his own blood. Every living thing (sea creature) in the sea will die. Some would try to limit this to the Mediterranean Sea. However, these judgments are **global** and the same word *qalassa* would be used whether it was one sea or all the water masses.

Here the judgment is universal. This is global catastrophe. Under the second trumpet one-third was affected, but now, in keeping with the nature of this judgment, the rest of the sea and marine life is struck. It will wreck fishing and it is bound to affect ocean navigation, transportation and shipping.

B. Malady = Transformed into Putrid Blood

“and it became blood like that of a dead man;”

John MacArthur: The transforming of the world's seas into putrid pools of stinking death will be graphic testimony to the wickedness of man.

James Hamilton: There has never yet been an act of God like this in the world's history. The blood of a corpse is partially coagulated, thick, dead, and disgusting. Imagine the smell and the horror of the waters of the oceans of the world being made into something like the blood that remains in a dead body, and in the filthy liquid are the dead creatures of the deep. So in addition to the *“painful sores”* there is this worldwide stench, no doubt accompanied by heretofore unknown bacteria and infections and unexpected consequences.

C. Catastrophic Result

“and every living thing in the sea died.”

Daniel Akin: The oceans, which occupy 70 percent of the earth's surface, become a pool of death, a toxic wasteland of water. The term watery grave will take on a whole new and tragic meaning.

Andy Davis: We have no idea how many living creatures are in the sea. Billions? Trillions? Think of all the krill and plankton; the Great Barrier Reef, said to be the largest single living entity, if it is indeed single; all the beautiful tropical fish that swim in schools through the clear water of the Caribbean; all the stingrays and sharks and orcas. Biologists estimate 50% to 80% of all living creatures live in the sea — that is a wide range. How could they possibly give a more

precise percentage? We do not know what is in the depths of the sea, but they will all die because of human sin. Let me intensify, because of *our* sin, they will die. It is incalculable and unimaginable.

They did not die in the flood; in fact, they prospered. But at the end of history, they are the first creatures to die. After the sea dies, we die. This must be the end of human history. There is no way to survive if the ocean is dead. From the sea we get 70% of our oxygen and 83% of our rain water. Billions of people cannot survive long without that level of oxygen and rain water. Given the fact that God will soon pollute all the fresh water, we will have no water to drink, no rain, nothing. **The end will come quickly.**

<https://twojourneys.org/sermon/the-seven-final-plagues-revelation-sermon-30-of-49/>

III. (:4-7) THIRD BOWL JUDGMENT – FRESH WATER SOURCES TURNED INTO BLOOD

A. (:4) Target of Judgment = Fresh Water Sources

“And the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters;”

John MacArthur: The destruction of what is left of the earth’s fresh water will cause unthinkable hardship and suffering. There will be no water to drink; no clean water to wash the oozing sores caused by the first bowl judgment; no water to bring cooling relief from the scorching heat that the fourth bowl judgment will shortly bring. The scene is so unimaginably horrible that people will wonder how a God of compassion, mercy, and grace could send such a judgment. And so there is a brief interlude in the pouring out of the judgments while an angel speaks in God’s defense.

B. (:4b) Malady

“and they became blood.”

C. (:5-7) Doxology of Justification

Grant Osborne: Aune (1998a: 864–65, building on Deichgräber 1967: 56; see also Betz 1969: 139) calls this a “judgment doxology” that begins with an affirmation of the righteousness of God (Ps. 119:137; Jer. 12:1; Dan. 3:27 LXX; Tob. 3:2; Apoc. Mos. 27.5) and then focuses on the justice of divine punishment (Josh. 7:19–21; 2 Chron. 12:6; Ezra 9:15; Neh. 9:33; Ps. 7:11; 9:4; Jer. 46:28; 3 Macc. 2:3). The only problem is that there are no examples that combine the two elements apart from this one, so a form-critical designation is problematic. In 2 Chron. 12:6 and Neh. 9:33, the people declare the justice of God in a judgment context, but there is no hymn. The closest parallels are Ps. 7:11; 9:4, 8, where God “*judges righteously*” in destroying the wicked, but there does not seem to be a “judgment doxology” there. In reaction to the label “judgment doxology,” Staples (1972: 281) argues that this is not an apocalyptic motif but has a prophetic-theocratic origin and should be called a “vindication formula.” Yarbro Collins (1977: 369) responds that Staples overstates his case and that we have here an apocalyptic transformation of traditional forms that should be labeled an “eschatological vindication formula.” Yarbro Collins is largely correct, but it is still questionable how extensively “traditional forms” have been followed. Aune (1998a: 885) notes correctly that it is not so much a literary form as a “theological motif.” The purpose in this context is **theodicy** (see Osborne 1993: 63–77), **upholding the justice of God in pouring out his judgment on the evildoers.**

1. (:5-6) Voice of the Angel with Jurisdiction over the Waters

a. The Holy God is Righteous in Judgment

*“And I heard the angel of the waters saying,
‘Righteous art Thou, who art and who wast, O Holy One,
because Thou didst judge these things;’”*

J. Hampton Keathley, III: This apparently refers to an angel who has jurisdiction over the waters of the earth as one of the varied ministries of angels. As the one in charge of this area he makes an important statement vindicating the holiness of God and setting forth the reason in this judgment (**vss. 5-6**).

Robert Mounce: The lyric utterance of the angel closely resembles that of the overcomers in **15:2-4** who sang the song of Moses and the Lamb.

“You are just in these judgments”

“Just and true are your ways”

“you who are and who were”

“King of the ages”

“the Holy One”

“you alone are holy”

“because you have so judged”

“for your righteous acts have been revealed”

The judgment of God is neither vengeful nor capricious. It is an expression of his just and righteous nature. All caricatures of God that ignore his intense hatred of sin reveal more about human nature than about God. In a moral universe God must of necessity oppose evil.

“Righteous are you, O LORD,” declared the Psalmist, *“and your laws are right”* (**Ps 119:137**).

Andy Davis: These devastating judgments are displays of God’s perfect wisdom, justice and righteousness. Note how angels think. As Jesus taught us to pray in the Lord’s Prayer, *“May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* How is God’s will done in Heaven? These angels display how immediately and with great zeal the will of the king is executed in Heaven. There is **no hesitation**, no squeamishness, just vindication of God. The angel does not shrink back or question; he **celebrates what God is doing**. *“You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One...”*

b. (:6) God’s Judgment Is Fair Retribution

*“for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets,
and Thou hast given them blood to drink. They deserve it.”*

Daniel Akin: The eternal God (*“who is and who was”*) is just in bringing these judgments because He is the Holy One. The earth dwellers *“poured out the blood of the saints and the prophets”* so He gives them *“blood to drink”* in return. Indeed, **He gives them what they deserve (16:6)**. Verse 7 provides a word of confirmation: the judgments of the *“Lord God, the Almighty”* are *“true and righteous.”* **Genesis 18:25** teaches, *“Won’t the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”* **Psalm 19:9** says, *“The ordinances of the Lord are reliable and altogether righteous.”* The Apocalypse is fully in agreement: God is never arbitrary, capricious, or vengeful in His judgment. He is always fair, just, and true. His is the only bar of perfect justice. There is a logic and rightness in His judgment. We glorify Him in His righteous wrath.

Charles Swindoll: At this point you may be thinking, “How awful! What kind of God would do this? Do these people really deserve these extreme judgments?” So it’s fitting that the angel who had authority over the waters should break into a **brief doxology** to set the record straight (16:5-7). John heard him reaffirm that God will demonstrate His perfect righteousness and holiness through these judgments (16:5). The angel reminded everyone that God’s wrath was falling on those who had been personally responsible for a global holocaust against His people. They had martyred the saints and murdered the prophets (16:6), spilling these people’s holy blood upon the earth. Because justice means a person getting what he or she deserves, true justice will be served upon the wicked of the world. In fact, the angel’s praise concluded, “*You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.*” Like a responsive refrain, a voice from the altar reiterated this truth: “*Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments*” (16:7). Neither the angel nor those around the altar left any room for questioning the righteousness and goodness of God.

2. (:7) Voice of Affirmation

“And I heard the altar saying, ‘Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments.’”

Grant Osborne: The altar now responds by affirming the justice of God’s response (16:7). Yet it is not the personified altar itself that speaks (as **R. Charles, Kraft, Roloff, Mounce**, and **Giesen** believe), for the genitive τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου (*tou thysiastēriou, of the altar*) presupposes a voice, “(one) from the altar.” In 6:9 the saints under the altar cry out for vengeance, so it is fitting that the voice now comes from the altar. Thus, some (**Aune** 1998a: 888; **Beale** 1999: 820) think this is the voice of the martyred saints crying out. But this is very similar to “the voice from the horns of the altar” in 9:13, and there the voice is more likely the angel who presented the prayers of the saints to God in 8:3–5 than the martyrs themselves.

Robert Mounce: A second voice confirms the justice of God’s retributive act. The speaking altar is obviously a **personification** (cf. 9:13). It represents the corporate testimony of the martyrs in 6:9 and the prayers of the saints in 8:3–5. It is significant that throughout Revelation (except in 11:1) **the altar is connected with judgment** (6:9; 8:3–5; 9:13; 14:18; 16:7). The principles of **sacrifice and judgment are inextricably interwoven**. Like the angel in charge of the waters, the voice of the altar echoes the song of Moses and the Lamb (15:3–5), whose judgments are true and just. Both reflect OT passages such as **Ps 19:9** (“*The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous*”). God’s acts of judging are in accordance with truth and are absolutely just.

John Walvoord: This is further evidence that these final plagues must be poured out just before Christ returns, because the earth could not sustain life very long in this condition.

John Miller: In the book of Esther, Haman built a gallows to hang Mordecai on, but Haman and his own sons ended up dying on the very gallows he built for Mordecai. So we see that God judges righteously with equity and truth. “*True and righteous are Thy judgments.*”

IV. (:8-9) FOURTH BOWL JUDGMENT – SUN SCORCHING MEN

A. (:8a) Target of Judgment = the Sun

“And the fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun;”

B. (:8b-9a) Malady

*“and it was given to it to scorch men with fire.
And men were scorched with fierce heat;”*

Grant Osborne: The literal picture here is not simply one of massive sunburns but of actual tongues of fire “burning people.”

C. (:9b) Defiant Unrepentant Response

1. Continued to Blaspheme God

“and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues;”

2. Stubbornly Refused to Repent

“and they did not repent, so as to give Him glory.”

Buist Fanning: The godless humans who suffer this punishment, however, respond with **slandorous defiance (v. 9b–c)**. They “*blasphemed the name of God*” instead of repenting of their rebellion against the great God they themselves know to have judged them in this way (this seems to be the point of John’s description, “*blasphemed . . . God who had authority over these plagues*”; v. 9b–c). Mention of “*these plagues*” alludes also to the judgments on Egypt and to Pharaoh’s stubborn resistance against the God of Israel despite the blows he and his nation were suffering (e.g., **Exod 7:13, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34–35**). Like Pharaoh, the humans in John’s vision failed to repent before God and “*give him glory*” (δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν; an infinitive of result). To give God glory (i.e., to acknowledge him as God; cf. **Rom 1:21–23**) is the appropriate response in such a situation (cf. **Rev 11:13; 14:7**; also **Job 16:4**), but as we have seen (e.g., **Rev 9:20–21**), this will be rare in those future days.

John MacArthur: Until this point, only the Antichrist has been described as blaspheming (**13:1, 5–6**); here the world adopts his evil character. Neither grace nor wrath will move their wicked hearts to repentance (cf. **9:20–21; 16:11**). In **11:13** the earthquake brought some to repentance, but not in this judgment series. Such blind, blasphemous hardness of heart is incredible in the face of the devastating judgments they will be undergoing. But like their evil leader, Antichrist, they will continue to hate God and refuse to repent, which would give glory to God as a just and righteous Judge of sin (cf. **Josh. 7:19–25**).

Tony Garland: Here again is recorded the unrepentant nature of the earth dwellers of the time of the end. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence of the reality and power of God, their hearts are so set against Him in hatred that all they can do is continue their pattern of cursing in response to His intervention in their lives (**Rev. 16:9+**, **Rev 16:11+**, **Rev 16:21+**). Those who have taken the mark are irredeemable (**Rev. 14:9–11+**) for God knows that they, like Jezebel in the church of Thyatira (**Rev. 2:21+**) will not repent (**Rev. 9:20–21+**). Instead, they follow in the ways of the one whom they worship (**Rev. 13:5–6+**; **Rev 17:3+**). God’s testing is not always to elicit a repentant response. When those being tested have passed the point of return, God continues to test them to provide abundant witness of their unwillingness and inability to return (**Rom. 1:26, 28**). This is one purpose for this “*hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth*” (**Rev. 3:10+**). In the same way the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to show Who He was, so now God tests those who have already taken the mark and are beyond redemption (**Rev. 14:9–10+**). Like Pharaoh, their consistent response is not to change their mind but to harden their heart (**Ex. 8:15; 9:34–35**). Each time they respond in blasphemy, they unwittingly underwrite and testify of the justice of God’s judgment.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What differentiates the bowl judgments from the trumpet judgments?
- 2) Are you surprised by the variety of roles that angels play in God's program for earth?
- 3) How does this doxology of justifying God's true and righteous judgments compare with earlier hymns of praise in the book (cf. **15:2-4**)?
- 4) What does the stubborn defiance of unrepentant mankind demonstrate about how sin hardens hearts?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Charles Swindoll:

TRIBULATION JUDGMENTS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION		
"Seal" Series (6:1-8:5)	"Trumpet" Series (8:6-9:21)	"Bowl" Series (16:1-21)
1. Conquest 2. Warfare 3. Famine and poverty 4. Death (1/4 of population) 5. Mistreatment/ Martyrdom 6. Earthquake 7. Introduction of "trumpet" judgments	1. Hail and fire (1/3 of vegetation ruined) 2. Meteor shower (1/3 of sea life killed) 3. Water pollution (1/3 of water supply poisoned) 4. Darkness 5. Demonic locust attack 6. Demonic hordes (1/3 of humanity killed) 7. Introduction of "bowl" judgments	1. Malignant sores 2. Poisoned seas (death of all sea life) 3. Poisoned freshwater 4. Humanity scorched 5. Widespread darkness/misery 6. Vast military invasion 7. Most destructive earthquake/hail
Increasing Intensity. . . Culminating at Armageddon		

John MacArthur: The **cumulative effect** of the painful sores, fouled oceans, lack of drinking water, intense heat, all engulfed in thick blackness, will bring **unbearable misery**. Yet, incredibly, the wicked, unbelieving people of the world will still refuse to repent. John notes that

they gnawed their tongues (lit. “*kept on chewing*”) because of the most intense and excruciating pain, yet with those same tongues they blasphemed the God of heaven (a frequent Old Testament title for God; cf. **11:13; Gen. 24:3; Ezra 5:11–12; Neh. 1:4–5; Ps. 136:26; Dan. 2:18, 19, 37, 44; Jonah 1:9**) because of their pains and their sores (perhaps related to the lack of sunlight, as well as the effect of previous plagues) and they did not repent of their deeds—the **ultimate act of defiance** by those hopelessly engulfed in Antichrist’s satanic system. This is the last reference to their unwillingness to repent. The first five plagues were God’s final call to repentance. Sinners ignored that call, and are now confirmed in their unbelief. The final two bowls, containing the severest of all the judgments, will be poured out on hardened, implacable impenitents.

Brad Mills: Although **judgment** is a dirty word in our culture, it is biblical. The holiness of God demands his wrath. Liberal pastors minimize God’s wrath in order to be accepted by the culture. But this comes at a great cost to the truth and sufficiency of Scripture. Arguing against this tendency, **Richard Niebuhr** described the liberal gospel in this way:

A God without wrath bought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministration of a Christ without a cross.

When we remove the concepts of wrath and sin and judgment, we lose the ministry of a Christ who saves. Revelation is replete with the idea of God’s wrath as a righteous response to sin. . .

If you want to avoid the subject of God’s wrath, you have to avoid this book. Revelation repeatedly reminds us that God takes sin seriously. It is an offense to his very nature. Couple this with John’s numerous allusions to the OT and we conclude that the whole counsel of God’s Word speaks of his wrath. It is simply unavoidable. . .

God’s wrath is **natural**. It is completely **understandable** in light of his holiness and justice. We ought to be highly skeptical of anyone preaching a God who knows nothing of wrath. That is not the God of the Bible. The complete absence of God’s wrath in the face of rampant sin and rebellion would call God’s justice and holiness into question. God’s wrath is the just response to sin. It is giving sinners “*what they deserve*” (6).

God’s wrath also **protects his covenant community** from the gates of hell. Just as the Israelites were freed from Egypt, so God rescues his covenant community throughout this present age of darkness. No worldly system will ever conquer the church. Despite all the suffering faulty worldviews might bring into the Church, **we know who has the victory in the end!**

<https://gracefresno.com/sermons/the-seven-bowls-of-gods-wrath-revelation-16/>

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David Harrell: The Bible teaches that over the course of human history, over the course of God’s redemptive history there will exist four ecosystems upon the earth. You will recall the first ecosystem was that of the original creation in the Garden of Eden where everything on the earth was perfect. But because of Adam’s sin, all mankind was plunged into sin and God cursed man and he cursed the earth and everything was altered resulting in what you might call the second ecosystem. But the metastasizing corruption of sin continued on. And it became so severe that God finally destroyed the entire world in the flood saving only the remaining animals and Noah and his family to repopulate the earth. That resulted in the third ecosystem in which we live. But, once again, because of sin God is going to destroy this system and he will do this through the

seal and the trumpet and the bowl judgments that we read about in the book of Revelation and other passages of Scripture just before the Lord comes to establish his **glorious kingdom**.

When he returns we learn that God will **renovate the earth**. He will return it back to Edenic splendor and he will reign upon the earth for 1000 years. That will be the fourth ecosystem, the millennial age. But even there, because of sin's defilement and the need for absolute purification, at the end of the millennial age, the Bible teaches us that God has promised that he will utterly destroy the universe and he will create a new one. That will be the **eternal state**. And this dissolution of the earth will be the final judgment and we read about this in **2 Peter chapter three and verse 10** where Peter tells us, *"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up."* And in **verse 12** he goes on to say, *"The heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."*

Now, most people, of course, find this to be utterly absurd, even many so called Christian people and many who truly know Christ who I believe are confused about these things. In fact, many evangelical Christians have been seduced into thinking that human beings ultimately control the planet, not so much God, but that we are really in control.

Now, indeed, we have been commanded to subdue the planet and wherever we have failed to do so the world is uninhabitable and it is filled with poverty and disease. But many Christian people believe that it is our responsibility, one of our primary responsibilities to care for the planet, to take care of the planet because it is so terribly fragile. And if we don't do so the planet is in danger of collapsing.

Politically motivated pseudo scientists and politicians tell us that we must change our behaviors in order to preserve the planet and if we don't the polar ice caps will all melt and then the water will drown much of the land. If we don't take care of the planet all of the waters are going to be polluted and all the trees and the animals and even human beings are going to die. This is such a great distraction to the Church and this is why I wanted to share some of this with you before we come to this text because it all fits together. Rather than being busy about preaching the glorious gospel of Christ and warning those who are lost about a judgment to come, many Christian people have jumped on this environmentalist bandwagon. They've become preoccupied with these things.

We are constantly being told we need to **go green**. You have heard that, I am sure. Every time I hear that I see red. Our world is absolutely bombarded with this stuff today. A common phrase that we hear today is, quote, "The future is in our hands." Don't you hear that a lot? In fact, there is a movement that originated in Norway that I was reading about. It is called, quote, "Future in our hands." And here is what they say. "We are an international movement committed to safeguarding the environment for future generations and a fair distribution of wealth globally," end quote. And if you study these people you will find that **Socialism** and **Communism** are always the ultimate motivation behind what they do.

Beloved, may I remind you from the outset that this is utterly ridiculous. This is so foreign to the truth of Scripture. The future is in the hands of our Creator who sovereignly rules over his universe. The apostle Paul tells us in **Colossians 1:17** that, *"In Him all things hold*

together,” not in us, in him. We are told in **Hebrews 1:3** that, “*He... upholds all things by the word of His power.*”

Vaclav Klaus, president of the Czech Republic, a brilliant professor of economics and a very outspoken critic of global warming authored a book on environmental policies and maybe some of you have read that. He gave a very excellent speech recently—September 22nd—to the UN. And here is part of what he said, quote, “Contrary to the artificially and unjustifiably created perception, the increase in global temperatures has been, in the last years, decades and centuries very small in historical comparisons and practically negligible in its actual impact upon human beings and their activities.” He went on to say, “Contrary to many self assured and self serving proclamations, there is no scientific consensus about the causes of recent climate changes,” end quote.

In one interview Klaus said this, quote, “Global warming is a false myth and every serious person and scientist says so,” end quote. It is interesting that he survived Communism and knowing the deceptions of Communism, he believes that this myth is being foisted upon a naïve and hysterical populous in order to ultimately control them and promote a new wave of Socialism and Communism. In fact, the title of his 2007 book says it all, quote, “*Blue Planet in Green Chains: What is Under Threat Climate or Freedom?*” end quote.

Recently I read an article in *World Net Daily* and the title of the article caught my attention. Here it is, quote, “31,000 Scientists Reject Global Warming Agenda.” And part of what the article said, quote, “More than 31,000 scientists across the United States, including more than 9000 PhDs in fields such as atmospheric science, climatology, earth science, environment and dozens of other specialties have signed a petition rejecting global warming, the assumption that the human production of greenhouse gases is damaging the earth’s climate.”

The article went on to say, “There is no convincing scientific evidence that human release of carbon dioxide, methane or other greenhouse gases is causing or will in the foreseeable future cause catastrophic heating of the earth’s atmosphere and disruption of the earth’s climate.” The petition goes on to state, quote, “Moreover there is substantial scientific evidence that increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide produce many beneficial effects upon the natural plant and animal environments of the earth,” end quote. So scientist after scientist refute these claims yet it continues to gain momentum enjoying a cult like following even among many Christians.

Have you seen the new green letter Bible? The green letter Bible, if you read their advertisement on their website and in the book stores, will tell you this. Quote, “The green Bible will equip and encourage people to see God’s vision for creation and help them engage in the work of healing and sustaining it. With over 1000 references to the earth in the Bible compared with 490 references to heaven and 530 references to love, the Bible carries a powerful message for the earth,” end quote. Well, I would agree. It carries a powerful message, but something that is radically different than what they are promoting.

On several occasions over the last year and a half I have talked with other pastors and Christians who have asked if our church is part of the, quote, “Evangelical Environmental Network,” which is a massive movement of ostensibly Christian Evangelicals who make this, quote, “Declaration on the care of creation.” And here is a little of what they say. “As followers of Jesus Christ committed to the full authority of Scripture and aware of the ways we have degraded creation, we believe that biblical faith is essential to the solution of our ecological problems.” It goes on

to say, “Because we worship and honor the Creator, we seek to cherish and care for the creation. Because we have sinned we have failed in our stewardship of creation, therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted or destroyed so much of the Creator’s work. Because in Christ God has healed our alienation from God and extended to us the first fruits of the reconciliation of all things, we commit ourselves to working in the power of the Holy Spirit to share the good news of Christ in word and deed, to work for the reconciliation of all people of Christ and,” here you go, “to extend Christ’s healing to suffering creation.”

They go on to say, “Because we await the time when even the groaning creation will be restored to wholeness, we commit ourselves to work vigorously to protect and heal that creation.” They go on to say, “We and our children face a growing crisis in the health of the creation in which we are embedded and through which by God’s grace we are sustained, yet we continue to degrade that creation. These degradations of creation can be summed up as: one, land degradation; two, deforestation; three, species extinction; four, water degradation; five, global toxification; six, the alteration of atmosphere; and finally number seven, human and cultural degradation,” end quote.

Beloved, this is beyond bad theology. This is a **blasphemous distortion** of and distraction from the gospel of Jesus Christ and a staggering assault against the character of God. You see, this is the mindset of evolutionists; that we all exist by random chance and we have got to take care of this fragile planet. We have got to reduce our carbon footprint. I hear this all the time. Beloved, this is, perhaps, one of the greatest hoaxes of all history. That man’s actions can alter the temperature of the earth and ultimately bring about its destruction. This is such a lie. People that believe that it is man rather than God who is in control of his creation. This is pride gone wild.

May I remind you that after the flood God reestablished the cycles of the seasons and he promised in **Genesis 8:22**, “*While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease.*”

Beloved, please hear me. God created the heavens and the earth. We know that not only did he create it, but he cursed it. **He is the one that sustains it.** He is the one that will destroy it. He is the one who will renovate it again and ultimately he will be the one who will recreate it. **He is the one in charge, not us. The earth is his responsibility, not ours.**

But what is amazing to me, as we witness all around us, most of the leaders of the world have gone mad politically, economically, socially, militarily, morally, religiously. The world’s beliefs are beyond naïveté. It is even beyond being ignorant. They are **delusional** because they are **demonic**.

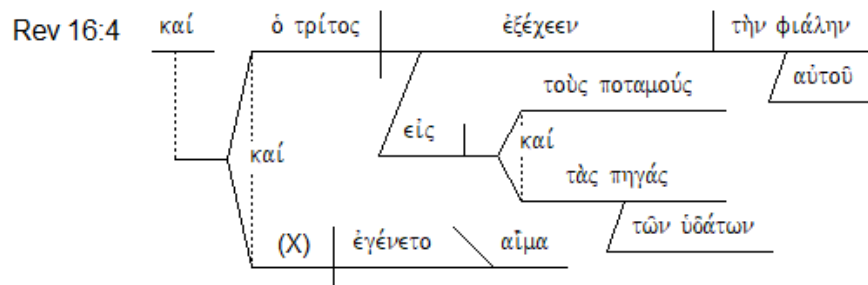
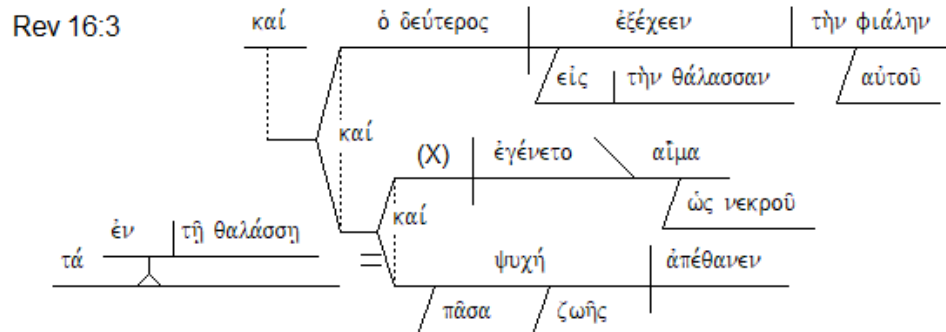
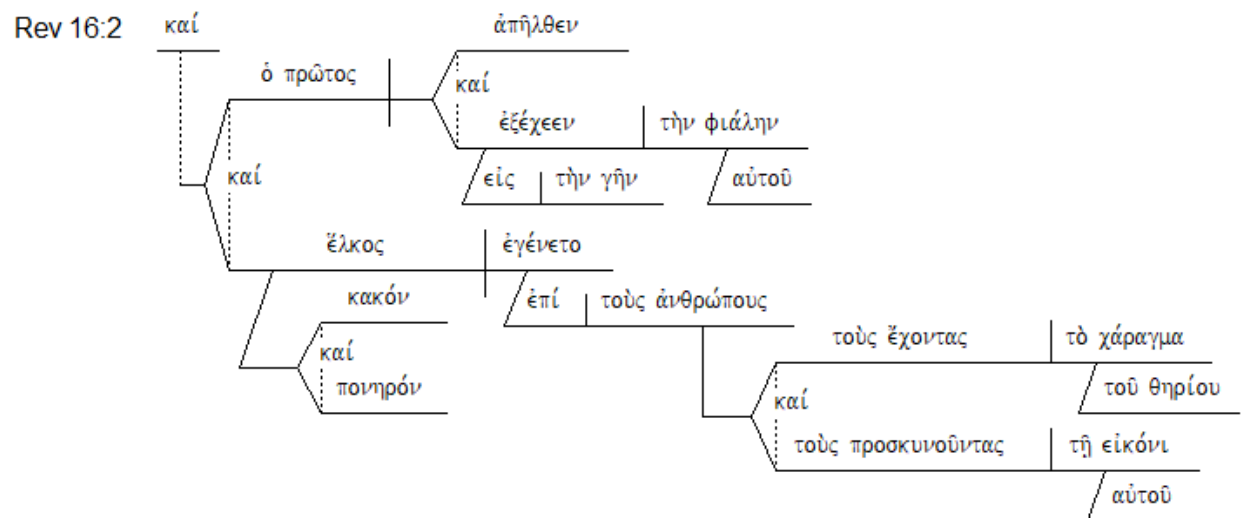
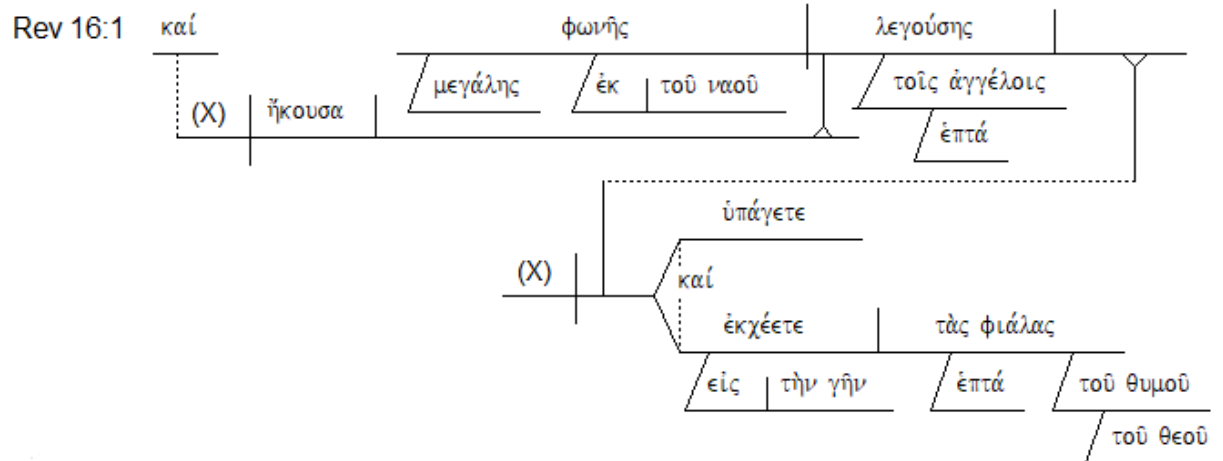
Tony Garland: The primary purposes of the seven bowl judgments are:

- (1) to pour out God’s righteous wrath in judgment of the earth dwellers;
- (2) to graphically demonstrate the unrepentant nature of the earth dwellers who are already doomed by the mark they have taken (**Rev. 14:9-11+**).

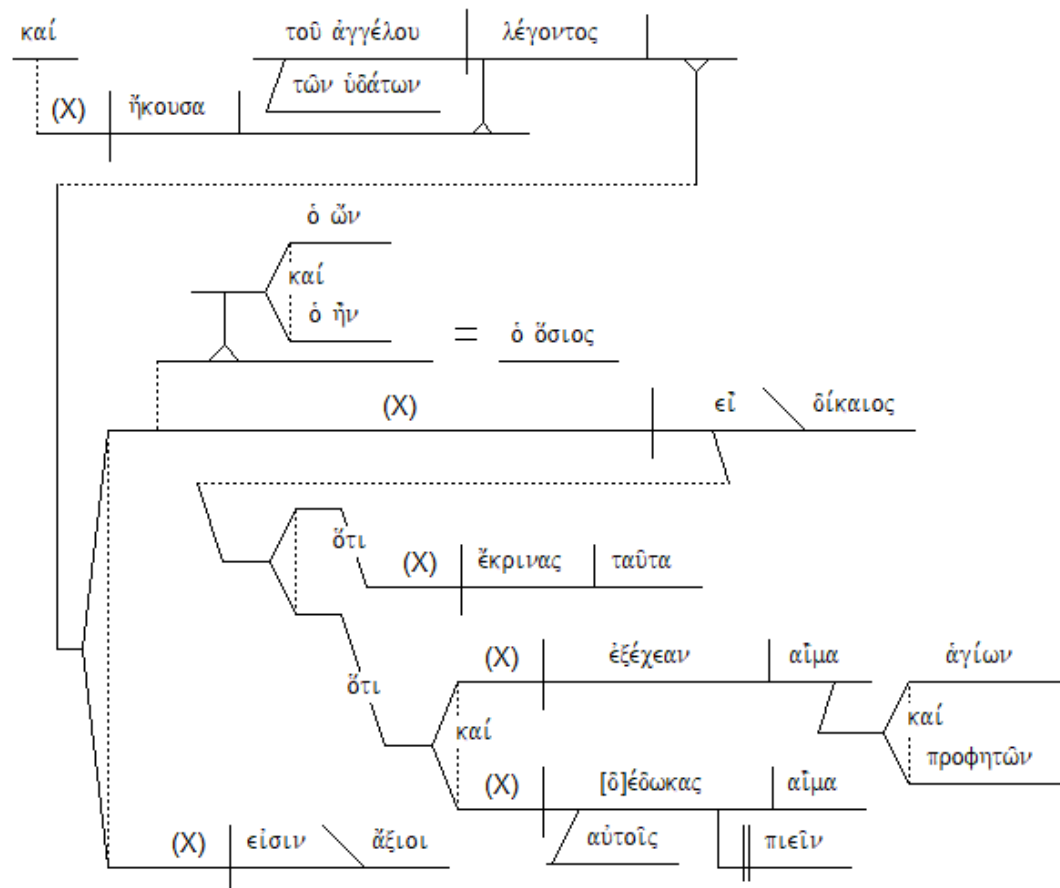
Whereas the trumpet judgments were partial and intended to produce repentance, the bowl judgments are completely **punitive**, the earth dwellers having passed the point of possible return.

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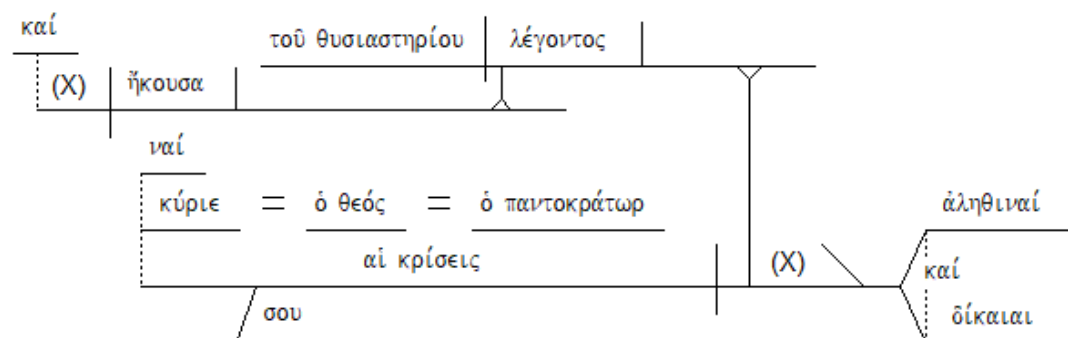
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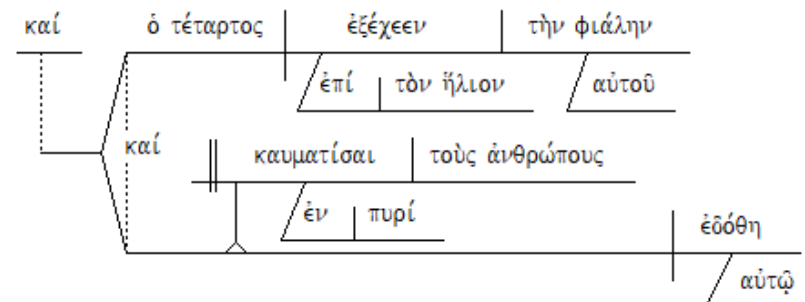
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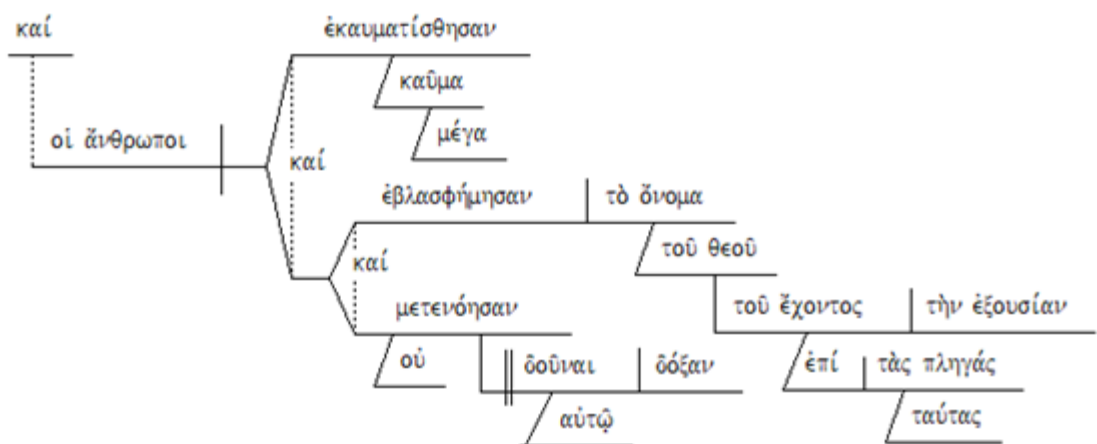
Rev 16:7



Rev 16:8



Rev 16:9



TEXT: Revelation 16:10-16

TITLE: *FIFTH AND SIXTH BOWL JUDGMENTS – DARKNESS AND PREPARATION FOR ARMAGEDDON*

BIG IDEA:

THE BOWL JUDGMENTS INCREASE IN INTENSITY AS DARKNESS NOW AFFLICTS THE BEAST AND HIS KINGDOM AND PREPARATION BEGINS FOR ARMAGEDDON

INTRODUCTION:

Brad Mills: Although judgment is a dirty word in our culture, it is biblical. The holiness of God demands his wrath. Liberal pastors minimize God's wrath in order to be accepted by the culture. But this comes at a great cost to the truth and sufficiency of Scripture. Arguing against this tendency, **Richard Niebuhr** described the liberal gospel in this way:

“A God without wrath bought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministration of a Christ without a cross.”

When we remove the concepts of wrath and sin and judgment, we lose the ministry of a Christ who saves. Revelation is replete with the idea of God's wrath as a righteous response to sin.

Grant Osborne: Repeated themes in Revelation

- The retribution of divine judgment, which reaches its high point in **Revelation 16** where God gives the earth-dwellers a taste of what they have done to His people. It's what they deserve – it's called *lex talionis* – you reap what you sow.
- The sovereignty of God over creation and the forces of evil are put vividly on display – He is in control of His world and will punish the rebellious and ungodly.
- God allows evil to come full circle and participate in its own destruction – the battle of Armageddon.
- The judgments of God throughout the book, culminating in the bowl judgments of **chapters 15-16**, provide yet more opportunity for repentance. Meaning, God's redemptive mission to the world continues to the very end.
- But yet again, the total depravity of humanity is also put on display as three times in **chapter 16**, instead of repenting, they curse God and blaspheme His name.
- And so finally, the progressive dismantling of creation continues to the end as God's creation is finally released from its bondage to decay – and participates in God's judgment of sinners – through scorching sun, earthquakes, hailstorms, and blood-polluted waters.

J.A. Seiss: The effects of these judgments overlap each other. The sores of the first plague are still felt during the second and third, and even here under the fifth. This proves that these plagues all fall upon the people of one and the same generation, and hence dare not be extended through centuries. The Antichrist has but 3 ½ years, and all seven of these last plagues fall upon him and his followers. Here his very throne is assailed, and his entire dominion is filled with darkness.

Albert Mohler: The fifth and sixth bowls are direct assaults against the beast's kingdom and include a plague of darkness and preparation for the final battle.

George Ladd: These plagues are not the expression of God's wrath against sin in general, nor are they punishments for individual wrongdoing. They are the outpouring of his wrath upon him who would frustrate the divine purpose in the world -- **the beast** -- and upon **those who have given their loyalty to him**.

James Hamilton: So the final warnings have been issued. The power of God has been displayed one final time. He has absolute authority over land, sea, rivers, and sun; he can afflict the throne of the beast, and his enemies can only gather against him because he gives them the opportunity by drying up the Euphrates. Rather than repenting, they have gathered for war. So now the seventh bowl will be poured out, and its results show that the time has come.

I. (:10-11) FIFTH BOWL JUDGMENT – DARKNESS OVER THE KINGDOM OF THE BEAST

A. (:10a) Target of Judgment

“And the fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast;”

Kendell Easley: So far the avenging angels have poured their bowls onto **natural elements**: land, sea, waters, and sun. The impact on human life as nature is destroyed can only be described as cataclysmic. Yet the monster is still in charge. Antichrist is proudly in control. All that begins to change with the next two bowls. The seventh and final bowl will conclude what these next two begin.

The fifth angel's bowl scores a direct hit on the **throne of the beast**, obviously meaning that Antichrist's center of power is under attack at last. This “*throne*” had been a gift from the dragon to the beast (**13:2**), and now for the first time something threatens it.

G.K. Beale: The throne represents the beast's sovereignty over his realm. Therefore, the bowl affects his ability to rule.

Donald Barnhouse: If the literal Babylon is to be rebuilt, it may already have become the place of the throne of Satan by the time that is in view here under the fifth bowl.

William Newell: The Beast is a man (**Rev. 13:18+**); therefore his throne is in a definite place: rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates, we believe,—Satan's ancient capital, in the ‘*land of Shinar*,’ where ‘*wickedness*’ is to be set on its base in the end-time (**Zec. 5:5-10**).

B. (:10b) Malady

1. Darkness

“and his kingdom became darkened;”

Buist Fanning: This darkness is not destruction itself but a frightening symbol of ongoing distress and impending cataclysmic judgment (cf. day-of-the-Lord texts like **Joel 2:2; Amos 5:20; Zeph 1:15**). In vv. **10c–11** John cites the ongoing severe distress that accompanies the darkness: their “*pain*” that causes them to “*gnaw their tongues*” is not due to the darkness per se

but the physical afflictions that come from the previous bowls of judgment. One of them is mentioned specifically in **v. 11a** (“*their sores*”) along with a repetition of “*their pains*.”

Daniel Akin: The fifth bowl judgment is reminiscent of the ninth Egyptian plague (**Exod 10:21-29**). It starts locally but extends worldwide. The throne of the beast, the antichrist, is the object of this judgment. He and his kingdom are “*plunged into darkness*.” We do not know precisely in what way this happens. It could be economic, physical, political, spiritual, or any and all of these (but see **Mark 13:24-27**).

BibleRef.com: This bowl judgment is unique in that it's specifically targeted at the “*throne*” of the beast. The fifth angel's bowl seems primarily to affect the center of the beast's kingdom, the **heart of his power**. While the other bowl judgments seem to be global, this one might be more localized. That opens up different possibilities for what it might actually be, in literal terms.

This judgment cloaks the beast's kingdom in darkness. The beast and his followers loved moral and spiritual darkness, now they experience a more tangible form of darkness. If this is a literal physical loss of light, it might mean all electrical grids fail, and environmental conditions combine to create a thick, noxious darkness. Without electricity, and in the grip of natural disasters, it would be nearly impossible to use a computer, drive a car, or conduct business. TV news would be silent. Business would fail. **Fear will grip people's hearts.**

When God smote the ancient Egyptians with darkness, people could not see one another and no one dared to move about (**Exodus 10:22–23**). The prophet Joel predicted that the tribulation would be a **day of thick darkness (Joel 2:2)**. Afflicted by “*harmful and painful sores*” (**Revelation 16:2**) and scorched by the sun (**Revelation 16:9**), people will not be able to obtain medical help in the total blackout. They will gnaw their tongues in pain. This darkness will preview the horrible outer darkness in which the wicked will spend eternity (see **Matthew 8:11–12**).

Donald Barnhouse: The transition from the fourth to the fifth bowls is most striking. The one had been the fiery, scorching, blinding brightness of the sun; the next is an impenetrable darkness.

Tony Garland: Although the throne of the Beast is empowered by Lucifer, the shining one, the son of the dawn (הֵלֶל בֶּן-שָׁחַר [hēlāl ben-šāḥar], **Isa. 14:12**), he is helpless to illumine the God-imposed darkness.

John MacArthur: As He did long ago in Egypt (**Ex. 10:21–29**), God will turn up the intense suffering of the sinful world by turning out the lights. After the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, his kingdom became darkened (cf. **9:2; Ex. 10:21–23**). Commentators disagree over where specifically this bowl will be dumped. Some think it will be on the actual throne that the beast sits on; others on his capital city of Babylon; still others on his entire kingdom. It is best to see the throne as a reference to his kingdom, since the bowl poured out on the throne darkens the whole kingdom. Regardless of the exact location of where the bowl is dumped, the result is that darkness engulfs the whole earth, which is Antichrist's worldwide kingdom. The beast will be as helpless before the power of God as anyone else.

2. Pain

“*and they gnawed their tongues because of pain,*”

G.K. Beale: God causes all who follow the beast to have times of anguish and horror when they realize that they are in spiritual darkness, that they are separated from God and that eternal darkness awaits them. The temporal judgment in **v. 10** is a precursor of the final judgment, when unbelievers will be “*cast into the outer darkness,*” where “*there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (**Matt. 8:12**; cf. **Matt. 22:13; 25:30**).

C. (:11) Defiant Unrepentant Response

1. Blasphemed God

“and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores;”

Thomas Constable: The title “*the God of heaven*” recalls the pride of Nebuchadnezzar and his successors (cf. **Daniel 2:44**).

Robert Mounce: Far from repenting of their evil, the followers of the beast curse God because of their pains and sores. They have become one in character with their evil master, whose most characteristic activity is to blaspheme God and his followers (**13:5, 6**; cf. **13:1; 17:3**). The term “*God of heaven*” may reflect **Dan 2:44**, where it is used of the One who in his sovereignty destroys the kingdoms of this world and establishes his universal reign. That people blaspheme because of their pains and their sores indicates that the discomfort of the previous plagues continues into the present. But punishment does not bring repentance. The decision to persevere in evil has permanently precluded any possibility of a return to righteousness.

Matthew Henry: The heart of man is so desperately wicked, that the most severe miseries never will bring any to repent, without the special grace of God. Hell itself is filled with blasphemies; and those are ignorant of the history of human nature, of the Bible, and of their own hearts, who do not know that the more men suffer, and the more plainly they see the hand of God in their sufferings, the more furiously they often rage against him. Let sinners now seek repentance from Christ, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, or they will have the anguish and horror of an unhumbled, impenitent, and desperate heart; thus adding to their guilt and misery through all eternity. Darkness is opposed to wisdom and knowledge, and forebodes the confusion and folly of the idolaters and followers of the beast. It is opposed to pleasure and joy, and signifies anguish and vexation of spirit.

Charles Swindoll: **Revelation 16:11** reminds us that the afflictions suffered by the enemies of God are cumulative. The sores brought on by the first bowl will continue to fester as the darkness closes in around them. The water that would have soothed their sun-scorched flesh will stand in stinking, stagnant pools; once-clean water will be polluted with decaying blood.

2. Stubbornly Refused to Repent

“and they did not repent of their deeds.”

Grant Osborne: The ἔργων are **evil deeds**; the deeds are spelled out in **9:20–21**: worshiping demons and idols, murder, sorcery, immorality, and stealing. In **16:11** this would particularly refer to worshiping the beast (cf. **15:2–4**) and murdering the saints (cf. **16:5–6**).

John Miller: The Bible indicates that you can reach a **point of no return**, where your heart spiritually atrophies. You were made for God. You were made to know God. You were made to be in fellowship with God. If you reject the Light, refuse to repent and harden your heart, then your heart will atrophy. You’ll reach the point where the Bible says, “*Therefore they could not*

believe.” These people who this judgment is coming upon are the people who have crossed that line. They’ve been deceived. They cannot be saved. There comes a time when God’s patience will run out. The wrath of God in the bowls is the last series of plagues poured out on mankind.

John MacArthur: This is the last reference to their unwillingness to repent. The first five plagues were God’s final call to repentance. Sinners ignored that call, and are now confirmed in their unbelief. The final two bowls, containing the severest of all the judgments, will be poured out on hardened, implacable impenitents.

John Schultz: We have the impression, however, that more happens than a mere physical event. The bowl that is poured out over the throne of the beast steepens his empire in darkness. All of a sudden the power of the Antichrist is taken away from him; he is cut off from his source of power. **The powers of darkness become darkness themselves.** The beast and its followers have become weak. Isaiah’s prophecy is being fulfilled here: “*You also have become weak, as we are; you have become like us.*” . . . This is what will happen with the glory and power of the Antichrist. God’s wrath will leave the powerful powerless. Even in their weakened condition people will not turn to the Lord.

II. (:12-16) SIXTH BOWL JUDGMENT – WATER OF EUPHRATES DRIED UP IN PREPARATION FOR ARMAGEDDON

A. (:12a) Target of Judgment

“And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates;”

Thomas Constable: The problem that this judgment poses for earth-dwellers is not a result of the judgment itself but its consequences, namely, war. It does not inflict a plague on people but serves as a preparation for the final eschatological battle. [Note: **Ladd**, p. 212.] The Euphrates River is the northeastern border of the land God promised to Abraham’s descendants (**Genesis 15:18; Deuteronomy 1:7; Deuteronomy 11:24; Joshua 1:4**). The Bible calls the Euphrates River (cf. **Genesis 2:14**), the eastern border of the Promised Land, the great river; and it calls the Mediterranean Sea, the western border of the Promised Land, the Great Sea. Now God dries up this river that had previously turned into blood (**Revelation 16:4**) so the kings of the East can cross with their armies (cf. **Daniel 11:44; Isaiah 11:15**). God earlier dried up the Red Sea so the Israelites could advance on the Promised Land from the west (**Exodus 14:21-22**; cf. **Isaiah 11:16**). He also dried up the Jordan River so they could cross over from the east (**Joshua 3:13-17; Joshua 4:23**). Elijah too parted the waters of the Jordan (**2 Kings 2:8**). Cyrus may have conquered Babylon by draining the Euphrates and marching into the city over the riverbed (cf. **Jeremiah 50:38; Jeremiah 51:36**). [Note: **Herodotus**, 1:191. But see **Edward J. Young**, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3:191.] All these previous incidents should help us believe that a literal fulfillment of this prophecy is possible. A figurative interpretation sees Babylon as the world system and the waters of the Euphrates River as the multitudes of Babylon’s religious adherents who, throughout the world during the inter-advent age, become disloyal to Babylon. [Note: See **Beale**, p. 828.]

Some interpreters believe this is an Oriental invasion of Babylon in the future that will be similar to Cyrus’ invasion of it in the past. [Note: E.g., **Swete**, p. 205.] However, these are probably the Oriental armies that will assemble in Israel for the battle of Armageddon referred to in **Revelation 16:13-16**. [Note: **Walvoord**, *The Revelation* . . . , p. 236.] The drying up of the

Euphrates will be an immediate help to these advancing armies, but it will set them up for defeat, as was true of Pharaoh's army.

John MacArthur: As the longest and most significant river in the Middle East, the Euphrates deserves to be called *the great river* (cf. **9:14; Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; Josh. 1:4**). Its source is in the snowfields and ice cap high on the slopes of Mount Ararat (located in modern Turkey), from which it flows some eighteen hundred miles before emptying into the Persian Gulf. In ancient times the Garden of Eden was located in the vicinity of the Euphrates (**Gen. 2:10–14**). The Euphrates also formed the eastern boundary of the land God gave to Israel (**Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:4**). Along with the nearby Tigris, the Euphrates is still the lifeblood of the Fertile Crescent.

B. (:12b) Malady

“and its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings from the east.”

G. K. Beale: The prophecy was fulfilled fairly literally by **Cyrus**, who diverted the waters of the Euphrates (**Isa. 44:27–28**). This allowed his army to cross the now shallow waters of the river, enter the city unexpectedly, and defeat the Babylonians. God executed judgment against Babylon by raising up Cyrus, who was to come “*from the east*” (**Isa. 41:2; 46:11**), or “*from the rising of the sun*” (**41:25**). **Jer. 50:41** and **51:11, 28** refer to “*kings*” whom God was preparing to bring against Babylon. The victory by Cyrus led to Israel's release from captivity (**Isa. 44:26–28; 45:13**). In the OT, God is always the One who dries up the water, whether for redemption or judgment. John understands this pattern typologically and universalizes it. As noted at **Rev. 14:8**, the symbolic interpretation of Babylon as representing the world system is assured beyond much reasonable doubt by the prophecies of God's judgment on historical Babylon, which foretold that Babylon will be desolate forever and never again be inhabited (**Jer. 50:39–40; 51:24–26, 62–64**; so also **Isa. 13:19–22**). As at the exodus and especially at the fall of historical Babylon, the drying up of the Euphrates in **Revelation 16** marks the prelude to the destruction of latter-day Babylon. . .

The idea here is that God, as He did in the days of Cyrus, will dry up the waters of the river protecting and nurturing Babylon to allow for the kings of the earth, under immediate demonic influence but ultimately under God's sovereign control, to gather together in order for Babylon to be defeated and for His eternal kingdom and the reign of His saints to be established.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: “*The kings from the east*” is literally “*the kings from the rising sun*.” This is a poetical expression signifying the kings from where the sun rises, as China, Japan, India, Persia, and Afghanistan. So here we see God's divine activity; God acting in His sovereignty using the wrath and rebellion of Satan and man to carry out his own purposes. Knowing the mind of Satan and man, the Lord will dry up this natural barrier to an invasion of the land of Palestine.

It is God's purpose to deal with the nations in judgment in the land of Palestine. Knowing Satan's purpose and objectives, God will use him and his demonic activity to inspire the nations to move into Palestine.

John MacArthur: God's drying up of the Euphrates is not an act of kindness toward the kings from the east, but one of judgment. They and their armies will be entering a deadly trap. The evaporation of the Euphrates will lead them to their doom, just as the parting of the Red Sea led

to the destruction of the Egyptian army. Why they will make the daunting journey that will take them to their doom, through the drought, scorching heat, darkness, and their painful sores, is stated in **vv. 13–14**.

John Walvoord: This final world conflict is clearly the **work of Satan**, since it is against God. We know this from the parenthetical section of **verses 13–16**, in which John has an additional vision of three unclean spirits that is related to the sixth bowl. Their source is the counterfeit trinity of the world ruler specified as the beast, his associate who is the false prophet, and the dragon himself, Satan (cf. **12:9; 13:1–8, 11–18**). These spirits are specified as demonic, and should be so interpreted. They are able (cf. **13:12–15**) and commissioned to gather the kings of the entire earth to do battle against “*God the Almighty*”—meaning they are doomed to defeat! In the battle **the omnipotence of God will be fully demonstrated**.

C. (:13-16) Demonic Galvanizing of the Kings of the Earth in Preparation for Armageddon

1. (:13-14) Forces of Evil Galvanize the Kings of the Earth

a. (:13) Demonic Spirits from the Anti-Trinity of the Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet

*“And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon
and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet,
three unclean spirits like frogs;”*

Robert Mounce: John sees three evil spirits coming out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The dragon is without doubt the seven-headed dragon of **chapter 12** (specifically identified as **Satan** in **12:9**), and the beast is the beast out of the sea as described in the first ten verses of **chapter 13**. The false prophet (appearing by that name for the first time) is surely the beast out of the earth of **13:11–17**. The evil spirits come out of the mouths of the unholy triumvirate, suggesting the persuasive and deceptive propaganda that in the last days will lead people to an unconditional commitment to the cause of evil. . .

That the three spirits looked like frogs emphasizes their **uncleanness** and perhaps their endless croaking. **Williams** takes the final phrase in an adverbial sense and supplies a verb—“*Then I saw three foul spirits leap like frogs from the mouths of the dragon.*”

Tony Garland: The three spirits correspond to the three personages of the “antitrinity” : the dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet. All three work together with a unified goal of drawing the nations to battle. The dragon is Satan and the devil, both names which indicate his slanderous accusations (**Rev. 12:9+**). “*When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it*” (**John 8:44**). The Beast is known for his blasphemous mouth (**Dan. 7:8, 11, 20, 25; Da 11:36; Rev. 13:6+**) and the False Prophet, although appearing like a lamb, speaks like a dragon—He tells those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast (**Rev. 13:11+**). Each of these would be highly influential on their own, but aided by unclean spirits, their deception is especially effective.

William Barclay: It is said that the unclean spirits were like **frogs**.

(1) Frogs are connected with plagues. One of the plagues in Egypt was a plague of frogs (**Exodus 8:5–11**). ‘*He sent among them ... frogs, which destroyed them,*’ says the psalmist

(Psalm 78:45). ‘*Their land swarmed with frogs, even in the chambers of their kings*’ (Psalm 105:30).

(2) Frogs are unclean creatures. Although not mentioned by name, they are included by definition in the list of unclean things in the water and the sea which begins in **Leviticus 11:10**. The frog stands for an unclean influence.

(3) Frogs are famous for their empty and continuous croaking – *brekekekex coax coax*, as Aristophanes transliterated it. ‘The frog’, said Augustine, ‘is the most loquacious of vanities’ (Homily on **Psalm 77:27**). The sound the frog makes is the symbol of meaningless speech.

(4) In Zoroastrianism, the Persian religion, frogs are the bringers of plagues and the agents of Ahriman, the power of darkness, in his struggle against Ormuzd, the power of light. It is fairly certain that John would know this bit of Persian tradition.

So, to say that frogs came out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet is to say that their words were like plagues, were unclean, were empty and futile, and were the allies of the power of the dark.

- b. (:14) Demonic Signs Deceive the Nations into Fighting against God Almighty
*“for they are spirits of demons, performing signs,
which go out to the kings of the whole world,
to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.”*

J. Hampton Keathley, III: “*kings of the whole world*” -- The **participants** in this war are: the king of the north and his allies (**Ezek. 38**). While there is some disagreement here, many believe this will include Russia, Persia (modern Iraq), Ethiopia (northern Sudan or maybe Arabia), Put (Libya and the African block), Gomer (Germany), Beth-togarmah (Turkey), and the king of the south consisting of Egypt and the Arab states. Then there will be the king of the west, the ten nation confederation of the Mediterranean states of Europe. Finally, it will include the kings of the east, the oriental block or nations east of the Euphrates.

John MacArthur: The mission of the demons is to gather not just the eastern powers, but all of the world’s rulers and armies to join the forces from the east for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. In their pride, arrogance, and folly, the demonically deceived nations of the world will converge on Palestine to do battle with God Himself at Armageddon. According to **17:12–14**, ten kings will be involved. Joel prophesied of this time in **Joel 3:2, 9–13** (cf. **Zech. 14:2-3; Ps. 2:1-3**).

The war will be over quickly: “*These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings*” (**17:14**). In fact, it will not be a war; it will be a slaughter, as **19:11–21** graphically portrays.

2. (:15) Parenthetical Exhortation to Believers to Readiness

- a. Return of Christ Will be Sudden and Unexpected
“Behold, I am coming like a thief.”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: “*As a thief*” stresses the fact that while the general time of Christ’s return in the Tribulation can be known because of the signs and specific events of the Tribulation

(like the drying up of the Euphrates), the exact moment cannot be known (**Matt. 24:36; Acts 1:7**). Therefore, Tribulation believers are warned to stay awake, producing righteousness for the Lord. They are to live with a view to His return. Some would try to apply this to the church, but though there is some similarity to **1 Thessalonians 4:13f** in the fact that Christ will come silently for believers, take what is His, and leave the world in disarray, the primary picture of Christ's coming for the church is that of a Bridegroom. The thief concept primarily deals with the Tribulation or the day of wrath (cf. **1 Thess 5:2-3**).

John MacArthur: Like a thief comes, Jesus will come quickly and unexpectedly. But unlike a thief, He will come not to steal but to take what is rightfully His.

b. Readiness of Believers Is Essential

“Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame.”

Joe Beard: Jesus promises that He is coming, but His coming will be like a thief, it will be unannounced and sudden. Jesus then gives the third of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation. He pronounces a blessing on those who stay awake, that is those who are prepared for His arrival even though it will not be announced. The imagery that Jesus uses is one of a soldier alert and on duty. Only a soldier who stays awake and keeps his clothes on is ready for combat. Jesus promises blessing for those whom He finds **prepared when He returns**.

3. (:16) Forces of the World Nations Gather at Armageddon

“And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called HarMagedon.”

Warren Wiersbe: The name **Armageddon** comes from two Hebrew words, *har Megiddo*, the hill of Megiddo. The word Megiddo means “place of troops” or “place of slaughter.” It is also called the Plain of Esdraelon and the Valley of Jezreel. The area is about fourteen miles wide and twenty miles long, and forms what Napoleon called “the most natural battlefield of the whole earth.” Standing on Mount Carmel and overlooking that great plain, you can well understand why it would be used for gathering the armies of the nations. . .

The outcome of the “battle” is recorded in **Revelation 19**: The Lord returns and defeats His enemies. Obviously, the assembling and marching armies create no problem for Almighty God. When the nations rage and defy Him, *“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure”* (**Ps. 2:4–5**).

John Miller: The **battle of Armageddon** will be in the **Valley of Jezreel**. The mountain there is called **Megiddo**. From it we get our word Armageddon or “hill of Megiddo.” It's a valley in the middle of Israel where all the armies of the world will gather together at the end of the tribulation just before and during the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This battle will be raging, and mankind will have the ability to kill himself off planet earth when Jesus Christ comes in His Second Coming. So we still have World War III ahead of us, but the church will have already been “caught up” to be with Christ and will come back with Him in His Second Coming.

The Valley of Jezreel or the plains of Esdraelon is in the central valley of Israel. It is inland a little ways from Haifa and from the Dead Sea. It runs for miles and miles and is surrounded by

mountains. Napoleon overlooked this valley and said, “What a great place to bring all the armies of the world together in a battle.” It was here that Barak fought his battle. It was here that Gideon fought his battle. It’s where King Saul was killed on Mount Gilboa. So there were many battles here in the past, and there will be a battle here in the future.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the time relationship between the outpouring of these final bowls of wrath and the second coming of Christ?
- 2) What are other passages in Scripture that associate darkness with God’s judgment?
- 3) What is the significance of the imagery of the frogs in **verse 13**?
- 4) If believers have already been raptured before God pours out His bowl judgments (per the Pre-Wrath Rapture position), who are these saints still on earth who are exhorted to be watchful and ready for Christ’s return?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Unger: The restoration from Babylon can scarcely be a fulfillment, because of four things:

- (1) There is the Kingdom-age context of this prophecy.
- (2) There is its accomplishment by direct, miraculous, and divine intervention—“*the Lord shall set his hand*” . . . like the Egyptian deliverance. . . .
- (3) There is the express inclusion of all the twelve tribes. At the return from Babylon, only Judah was restored with some few from the twelve tribes.
- (4) There is the fact that the regathering is the final one, eventuating in millennial Kingdom blessing.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Now suddenly at this point in the Tribulation, like a bowl poured out, a judgment of darkness is poured out on the beast’s throne, the very place of his rule, and neither Satan nor this man can alleviate this judgment. This will clearly illustrate that there is only one hope, the Eternal God and Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ whom the world has by-in-large rejected; the One who alone is the Light of the world. What irony strikes here (**John 1:3-5, 9-11**)!

This judgment also anticipates the doom and eternal prospects of the beast and his subjects; they will be cast into outer darkness because they have turned away from the true Light of the world.

The Effects of the Fifth Bowl

The first effect is seen in “*his kingdom became darkened*.” The verb “became” in the Greek text suggests suddenly. It looks at the sudden envelopment of the throne of the beast in total darkness.

Of course, we are reminded of the “*thick darkness*” in Egypt which was so thick it could be felt (**Exodus 10:21**). “*Darkened*” is an intensive perfect which stresses the existing results of the blackout over the earth. Since the beast rules practically the entire world, and since these are the last plagues of the Tribulation which complete the wrath of God to establish God’s rule on earth, this darkness is undoubtedly world-wide.

As you read this, do not lose sight of the fact that this is a brief forecast of the outer darkness, pain, and torment that men will face in the lake of fire (**Matt. 5:30; 22:13; 8:12**). It is a literal taste of hell. But it is also designed to symbolize the nature of the beast and his kingdom, his power, and Satan who gives him his power. It is a kingdom of great darkness (**Col. 1:13a; 2 Cor. 4:4; 11:13-15**).

The second effect: “*And they gnawed their tongues because of the pain.*” We have in this an accumulated effect of the preceding bowls, the sores, the seas smitten, the fresh water turned into blood, the scorching of the sun, and now total darkness. Men are shut up in their quarters with their sores and pain and there is no alleviation, no hope—only constant torment. Literally the Greek says “*they kept on gnawing their tongues out of agony.*” Here is a graphic picture of the most intense and excruciating agony and pain, and a pain that cannot be alleviated.

In **9:21** the word “*sorceries*” is the Greek *farmakeia* from *farmakeuw* “to administer drugs.” In connection with the witchcraft of that day there will be widespread use of drugs. Nearly everyone will have access to drugs to deaden their pain. But even this will have no effect to relieve their pain.

The third and final effect: “*And they blasphemed the God of heaven ... and they did not repent of their deeds*” (**vs. 11**). In these words we are clearly told that the world will be conscious that the “*God of heaven*” is the source of these judgments. There will, at this time, be no more atheists or agnostics. All men will know, like the demons, that God exists, but they remain stubborn in their rebellion. Oh, the hardness and stubbornness of the human heart! These verses clearly refute the idea of a final universal salvation of all men who will finally repent when faced with God’s judgment.

S. Lewis Johnson: Blasphemy is only possible **when men know truth**. In other words, blasphemy takes place when there is revelation of truth about God. These men are unmoved by the bounty of divine provision forgiveness of sins, justification of life, the permanent end dwelling of the Holy Spirit, and all of the other great blessings that are ours by the atoning work of Christ, they are unmoved by that when they have announced the message of the lamb of God who takes away their sin, they do not respond. They are impervious also to the severity of the judgment although they know of the existence of God.

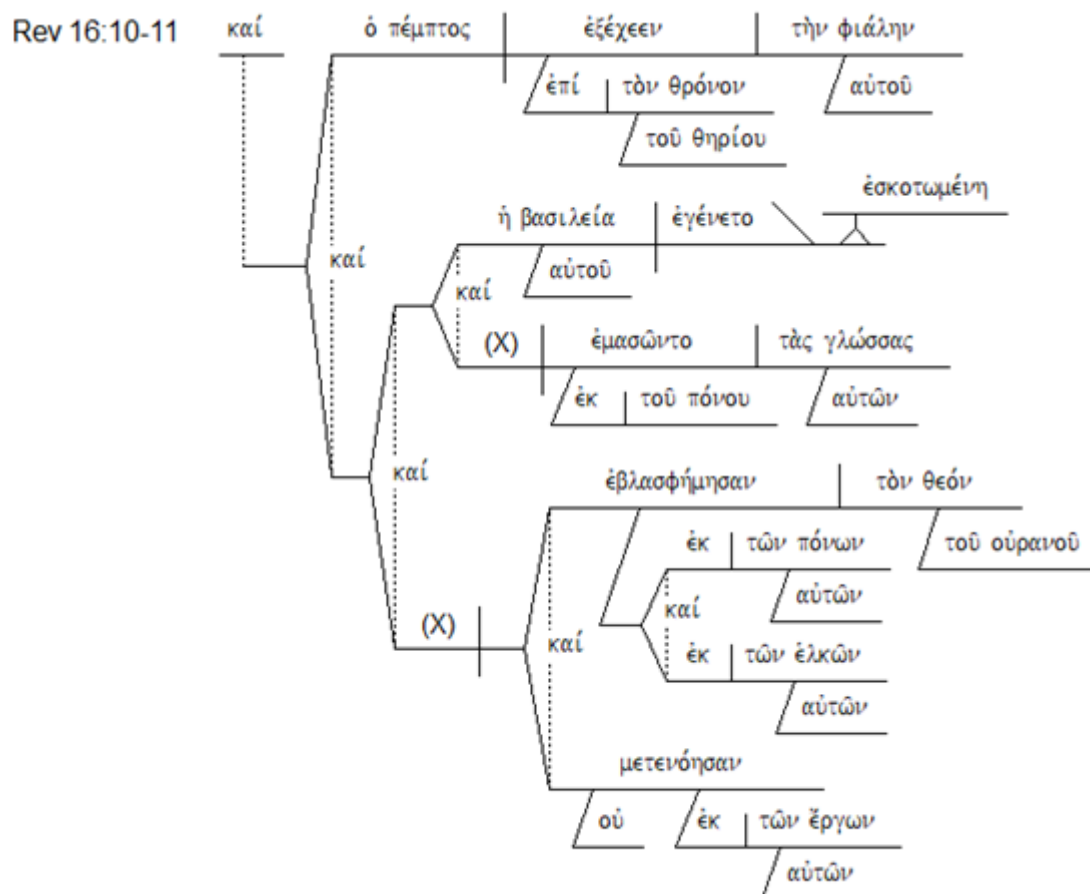
Blasphemy takes place **when men know God exists**, furthermore in the case of these individuals, they have the experience of the hand of God in history, and they still, even though they know of the existence of God and they know his hand in the events of history and even though they admit his power, they nevertheless blaspheme God. They blaspheme God because of the plague of hail. These great events they recognize as coming from the Lord God, and they blaspheme them because of them. The tragedy of life and of the world is not that men do not know God. “*All men deep down within their hearts, know God exists.*” That’s what Paul says. He says, “*That is theirs because of the fact that they were created in the image of God, but that which they know they seek to suppress.*” In fact as a Christian witnessing to a non-Christian,

when an individual tells you he does not believe that God exists, you can know that he is really suppressing the truth that is implanted upon his very being, and so the tragedy of life and of the world is not that men do not know God, but that in knowing him they insist on going their own way.

William Barclay: verses 9, 11 and 21, we have a kind of **refrain** which runs through this chapter. The people on whom these terrors fell cursed God; but they did not repent, impervious both to the goodness and to the severity of God (**Romans 11:22**). It is the picture of people who had no doubt of the existence of God and even saw God's hand in events – and who still went their own way.

We are bound to ask ourselves whether we are so very different. We do not doubt the existence of God; we know that God is interested in us and in the world which he has made; we are well aware of God's laws; we know his goodness and we know that sin has its punishment; and yet **time after time we go our own way.**

Leedy Greek Diagram:



Rev 16:12 καί ὁ ἕκτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην
 καί ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν = τὸν Εὐφράτην αὐτοῦ
 τὸ ὕδωρ ἐξηράνθη
 αὐτοῦ ἵνα ἡ ὁδὸς ἐτοιμασθῇ
 τῶν βασιλέων
 τῶν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς
 ἡλίου

Rev 16:13-14 καί πνεύματα (ἐκπορευόμενα)
 (X) εἶδον τρία ὡς βάτραχοι (X)
 ἀκάθαρτα
 γάρ (X) εἰσιν πνεύματα
 δαιμονίων
 ποιοῦντα σημεῖα
 ἃ ἐκπορεύεται
 ἐπὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς || συναγαγεῖν αὐτούς
 τῆς οἰκουμένης εἰς τὸν πόλεμον
 ὅλης τῆς ἡμέρας
 ἐκ τοῦ στόματος καί τοῦ δράκοντος
 ἐκ τοῦ στόματος καί τοῦ θηρίου
 ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου

Rev 16:15 ἰδοὺ (X) ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτης (X)
 τῆς μεγάλης
 τοῦ θεοῦ = τοῦ παντοκράτορος

ὁ γρηγορῶν καί τῶν τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια
 αὐτοῦ (X) περιπατῇ γυμνός
 ἵνα μή καί (X) βλέπωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην
 αὐτοῦ
 (ἐστίν) μακάριος

Rev 16:16

καί

(X)

συνήγαγεν

αὐτούς

εἰς

τὸν τόπον

τὸν καλούμενον

Ἄρμαγεδών

Ἑβραϊστί

TEXT: Revelation 16:17-21

TITLE: SEVENTH BOWL JUDGMENT TARGETS THE ATMOSPHERE

BIG IDEA:

THE FINAL OUTPOURING OF GOD'S FURY UNLEASHES UNPRECEDENTED CATASTROPHIC ATMOSPHERIC PLAGUES (ENORMOUS EARTHQUAKE AND HUGE HAIL) ON DEFIANT BABYLON AND THE GENTILE NATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

John Walvoord: With both the seal and the trumpet judgments, there was an interlude in time before the execution of the sixth and seventh judgments. But there is no such break with the bowls. They are relentless in their outpouring.

John MacArthur: This final judgment of the present era will take place during the time when “*the mystery of God is finished*” (10:7). It is the last of the “*seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished*” (15:1). The seventh bowl will be the worst calamity in the world’s history, the most complete and devastating catastrophe the earth will ever experience. Its effects carry all the way to the establishment of the earthly kingdom of Christ. Like the fourth angel, the seventh angel did not dump his bowl on the earth, but poured it out... upon the air. Its first effects were on the earth’s atmosphere, as if God were cleansing the former domain of Satan and his demon hosts (12:9). The earth (v. 2), the sea (v. 3), the waters (v. 4), the sun (v. 8), and finally the air are the targets of judgment.

Grant Osborne: The bowl judgments finalize the central section of the book (6:1 – 16:21) focusing on the judgments that accompany the opening of the scroll and detailing the final events of world history and the arrival of the eschaton. In it God’s earthly judgment is complete, and the purposes of these events as noted above are finalized. All that remains is the destruction of the evil empire (chaps. 17–19) and the final judgment (chap. 20). The day of Yahweh and of the Lamb is about to arrive.

Robert Mounce: It is not surprising that there are a number of similarities between the last trumpet and the final bowl: they both bring history to a close.

Charles Swindoll: The description that follows in the remainder of **Revelation 16** is a summary of what John will address in detail in **Revelation 17:1 – 22:5**. What he describes is nothing less than chilling if we read his words using our imaginations.

- Lightning flashes from one end of heaven to the other.
- Thunder roars through the atmosphere.
- The worst earthquake in history shakes the world.
- The Antichrist’s capital city is split into three parts.
- Islands sink into the ocean.
- Mountains collapse into the earth.
- Hundred-pound hailstones pummel the earth.

What's left of human civilization is shaken to its stone-age foundations, clearing the earth for an extreme makeover. What Revelation describes is nothing less than the end of the world as we know it. Everything about the earth, including its topography, will be prepared for a new regime, the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ.

Kendell Easley: The seventh bowl completes both the devastation of nature with the ultimate earthquake and the final devastation of the beast by destroying Babylon. . . God's final display of wrath will unravel the forces of nature and the forces of the Antichrist, climaxing in one final battle “on the great day of God Almighty.”

David Aune: The pouring out of the seventh bowl represents the **climax** to which the three heptads of seals, trumpets, and libation bowls have been leading, the last of the plagues sent by God to afflict humanity (**15:1**). For with the pouring out of the seventh bowl, God himself (identified as “*a voice from the throne*”) proclaims “*It is done!*” (**16:17**). As part of this final plague “*God remembered great Babylon*” (v **19**), which suggests that the punishment of Babylon treated in **17:1 - 19:10** must be included as an aftereffect of the seventh plague. The author has used a transitional passage in **16:7–20**, linking the series of seven bowls to the imminent destruction of Babylon.

I. (:17) FINALITY OF GOD’S WRATH

A. Target of the Judgment

“And the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air;”

John Walvoord: Some have compared this prophecy to **Ezekiel 38:9, 16**, where the host from the north is described as “*coming on like a storm*” and “*like a cloud covering the land.*” While this may imply an air attack, it is perhaps reading too much into the passage to assume this. In any event the seventh bowl, which is poured out in the air, has its principal result on the earth.

SonRise Community Church: From this we come to learn the seventh angel poured his bowl into the air. That might seem like a strange location to pour something as all the other bowls were poured into definitive objects or places or environments. But that this bowl is poured into the air suggests judgment being brought onto the Devil, or as he is referred to elsewhere “*the prince of the power of the air*” in Ephesians. And as it’s poured out we hear a loud voice coming out from the throne within the temple. This is none other than the voice of God, because remember back in **15:8** the sanctuary was filled with the glory of God and no one could enter it. So out God’s voice goes and we hear the pronouncement, “*Is it done!*” **15:1** already told us of this reality, that the seven angels would come and finish God’s wrath by pouring it out. Well, now the angels have done just that so we hear the **finality** of it being accomplished in this pronouncement.
<https://sonrisecc.com/2020/04/30/evening-revelation-1617-21-the-seventh-bowl/>

G.R. Beasley-Murray: The seventh bowl signifies the end of the end, but at the same time the beginning of the kingdom which knows no end.

B. Termination of the Judgment

“and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, ‘It is done.’”

Buist Fanning: The declaration itself, “*it has happened*” (γέγονεν; v. **17c**), should be understood in light of v. **1** and of other heavenly declarations recorded by John in recent chapters (**10:6–7**;

11:15; 12:10–12; 14:7–8; see also 15:1). The voice in v. 1 characterizes the seven bowl judgments as the pouring out of “*God’s anger*” on the earth, which in turn points back to 15:1 where it is said that in them “*God’s anger will be completed*.” So what “*has happened*” or taken place (v. 17c) is the sevenfold outpouring of God’s anger that has now reached its conclusion. As in other heavenly announcements in these chapters (see 18:2 in addition to the verses cited above), this is recorded as already accomplished from heaven’s point of view, even though it is yet to be fully portrayed in John’s account of all that it entails. Moreover, it is of course still future in terms of actual events that will consummate God’s coming judgment and redemption on earth.

Richard Phillips: Readers familiar with John’s Gospel inevitably associate the “*It is done!*” from our passage with Jesus’ cry of victory on the cross, “*It is finished*,” after atoning for our sins (John 19:30). After all, John was the writer of both books: if readers today connect the sayings, it is hard to imagine that John himself would not have done so. Moreover, the “*loud voice*” coming “*out of the temple, from the throne*” (Rev. 16:17), can only be Christ’s. We were earlier told that while the bowls of wrath were being poured, only God could be in the sanctuary (15:8), and parallel passages have named these judgments “*the wrath of the Lamb*” (6:16). By connecting this cry of divine judgment with the crucified Christ’s cry of salvation, we join **judgment** and **salvation** as the two sides of Christ’s double-edged gospel sword (1:16).

Grant Osborne: “*It is done*” -- God repeats this same statement in 21:6, at the creation of the “*new heaven and new earth*.” There is a certain *inclusio* between the two (16:17; 21:6), as 16:17 concludes the judgments that begin the eschaton, and 21:6 concludes the eschaton with the new creation.

II. (:18-19) FEROCITY OF GOD’S WRATH

A. (:18) Unprecedented Natural Phenomena

1. Lightning and Thunder

“And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder;”

Grant Richison: The last bowl judgment brings unprecedented natural disturbances. These disturbances reduce the shrines of men to shambles. The earth is the most stable thing we know. When the earth shakes, we have no point of orientation. There is nowhere to flee. This “*great*” earthquake is a **terrifying** experience.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: The lightning and thunder of the storm are separated from the hail in order to bring the series of plagues to a climax in a judgment which terrifyingly surpasses its counterpart in the exodus-narrative.

2. Great Earthquake

“and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.”

David Aune: The singularity and intensity of this occurrence is underlined by claiming that it is unique in the history of the world, or that an event of such magnitude had never before occurred.

Buist Fanning: Accompanying the announcement of v. 17 are the awesome phenomena of “*flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder*” as well as “*a great earthquake*” (v.

18a–b). These represent **God’s terrifying presence** originally experienced at Sinai (**Exod 19:16–19**) and repeated often thereafter in the Old Testament as typological symbols of God’s presence and as portents of coming judgment. They have been features of John’s visions of judgment at key places: as part of the grounding vision in **4:5**, then at **8:5** (related to the seventh seal), and then at **11:19** (related to the seventh trumpet). Here they signal the conclusion of the bowl judgments and God’s imminent appearance on earth through the return of his Messiah as king and judge (**19:11–21**). This will constitute a greater intensification of the pattern of judgment than has ever been seen before, as John explicitly notes regarding the earthquake (v. **18c**). The comparative phrasing (“*such as . . .*”) and reference to a range of past occurrences that are now exceeded (“*from the time when humankind came to be on the earth*”) are characteristic features of this typology and its escalation (most notably in **Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19**; but see also **Exod 9:18, 24; Jer 30:7; Joel 2:2**; cf. T. Mos. 8:1; 1QM 1:12). The “*great*” or violent (NRSV, REB) earthquake is specifically noted as completely unprecedented, and John reinforces its severity by adding two phrases at the end to reinforce what was already said, “*so mighty an earthquake it was—so great*” (τηλικοῦτος σεισμός οὕτω μέγας). The occurrence of a “*great earthquake*” is a notable parallel to **Ezekiel 38:18–20** (e.g., **38:19 LXX**: σεισμός μέγας) that describes an invasion of many nations against the land of Israel and the violent shaking of whole earth that is the Lord’s response to their attack.

Sola Scriptura: Unlike the previous earthquakes, this one is unparalleled in all of human history. This earthquake cannot be compared or thought to be one of the other earthquakes that has occurred in the Revelation. Those who attempt to make this point ignore the textual details. The author makes clear with the intensive nature of this earthquake that it is unparalleled.

B. (:19a) Horrific Damage

1. On the City of Jerusalem

“And the great city was split into three parts,”

Buist Fanning: The identity of “*the great city*” mentioned here is disputed, but given the earlier mention of “*the great city*” in **11:8** and its clear identification as Jerusalem in that context, it is evident that Jerusalem is in view in this verse as well. The importance of Ezekiel as a background to this vision makes this the most natural reading: **Ezekiel 5:1–13** (Jerusalem symbolically divided into threes to represent God’s discipline for her sins) and **Ezekiel 38:17–23** (great earthquake in response to invasion of Israel by pagan nations). The clear contrast in v. **19a–b** (*the great city* vs. *cities of the nations*, i.e., the gentiles) supports this identification from the passage itself. The fact that “*Babylon the great*” is mentioned in v. **19c** and is regularly described as “*the great city*” in the next two chapters (**17:18; 18:10, 16, 18 [2x], 21**) does not weaken this conclusion for **16:19a**. Babylon is added in v. **19c** as a specific (and greatest) example of “*the cities of the nations*” (v. **19b**), and from here on in Revelation it represents a **typological contrast to Jerusalem**: the dragon’s or the world’s city as opposed to God’s city (both viewed as women, either sinful or holy). Here John notes that, among all the pagan world’s cities, God has not overlooked Babylon’s sins.

John MacArthur: The first effect of this great and mighty earthquake was that the great city was split into three parts. The great city **cannot be Babylon**, as some think, because it is distinguished from “*Babylon the great*” mentioned later in **verse 19**. A comparison with **11:8** clearly identifies the great city as Jerusalem, “*the great city ... where also [the] Lord was crucified*.” That the great city is distinct from the cities of the nations offers further evidence that Jerusalem is in view. The massive earthquake will split Jerusalem into three parts, beginning a

series of geophysical alterations to the city and its surrounding region that will conclude when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. **Zechariah 14:4–10** describes these changes in detail. The Mount of Olives will split in two, and a new valley running east and west will be created (**Zech. 14:4**). A spring of water will flow year-round from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean and Dead Seas (**Zech. 14:8**), causing the desert to blossom like a rose (cf. **Isa. 35:1**). Jerusalem will be elevated, and the surrounding region flattened into a plain (**Zech. 14:10**). Thus, the purpose of the earthquake as it relates to Jerusalem is not to judge the city, but to enhance it. Jerusalem was judged earlier in the Tribulation by an earthquake, which led to the salvation of those who were not killed (**11:13**). Thus, there is no need for further judgment on that city. The physical changes will prepare Jerusalem for the central role it will play during the millennial kingdom, when Christ will reign there as King (**Ps. 110:2; Isa. 2:3; 24:23; Mic. 4:7**).

Joe Beard: The first effect of this mighty earthquake is that it will split the great city into three parts. The great city is the same phrase that John used in Revelation 11:8 as the great city of Jerusalem. That John sets this city off as distinct from the rest of the cities of the nations or Gentiles offers further evidence that this is Jerusalem. This severe earthquake will split Jerusalem into three parts, beginning a series of geographic changes to the city and the surrounding area that will be concluded when the Lord Jesus returns. The Old Testament prophet Zechariah and others talk about these changes. The purpose of the earthquake for Jerusalem is not to judge it, but to enhance it in preparation for the millennial kingdom.

Sola Scriptura: Scholars do not agree on the identity of “*the great city*.” However, the context is clear. Jerusalem is “*the great city*.” Jerusalem is explicitly identified in **Revelation 11:8** as “*the great city*.” Why the city is split into three parts is not stated. However, **Zechariah 13:8** declares, “*It will come about in all the land [of Israel], declares the Lord, that two parts in it will be cut off and perish; but the third will be left in it.*” This accords with the destruction of “*the great city*” indicated in **Revelation 16:19**. Also, **Zechariah 14:2** indicates that God will leave a segment of His people just prior to His arrival with His angels for the battle of Armageddon. The destruction of Jerusalem will be highlighted in **Revelation 17-18**.

Alternative View: Babylon

Kendell Easley: This is the end for the monster's kingdom. His city split into three parts, that is, into total ruin. His entire world empire fell too: the cities of the nations collapsed. Assuming this is literal, it is the end of all that human political and military might have ever accomplished.

Grant Osborne: There is debate as to whether the “*great city*” is **Jerusalem** (**Lohmeyer, Chilton**), on the grounds that Babylon is mentioned separately later in the verse (cf. **11:8**); **Babylon/Rome** (**R. Charles, Lohse, Prigent, Mounce, Aune**); or symbolic of **rebellious humanity** (**Kiddle, Bruce, Morris**). Yet **Babylon/Rome**, the “*great city*” in **17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21**, makes by far the best sense, and the mention in **16:19b** is meant simply as an identification of the “*great city*” here.

G.K. Beale: The background to the phrase *Babylon the great* is **Dan. 4:30** (cf. **14:8**), which is the only place in all the OT where the phrase “*Babylon the great*” occurs. Now the latter-day Babylon is about to face judgment, as did the proud Babylonian king who was so proud of his worldly and superficial “*Babylon the great*.” That the cities of the nations fell describes the universal extent of the last judgment to take place in history. It is not just Rome or some later

great capital of evil which is decimated, but all the world's cultural, political, and economic centers, because they are part of the great city and world system of Babylon.

John Walvoord: There does not seem to be any clear evidence that Jerusalem is destroyed with these judgments at the end of the great tribulation. Babylon, however, according to Scripture, is destined to be destroyed. Whether this refers to Rome, which is spiritual Babylon, or to a rebuilt city of Babylon on the Euphrates, it is clear that Babylon is the special object of divine judgment. **Charles Dyer** notes, "God says in Isaiah and Jeremiah and Zechariah, that ... Babylon, the place where evils started, is going to be around and be judged by God." This is the final judgment of this evil city. The fact that the judgment is an earthquake seems to indicate that a literal city is in view, and that the judgment results in its physical destruction just prior to Christ's second coming.

2. On the Cities of the Nations

"and the cities of the nations fell."

C. (:19b) Babylon Is Especially the Target of God's Wrath

*"And Babylon the great was remembered before God,
to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath."*

Warren Wiersbe: Satan's entire system is now about to be judged by God: his religious system (the harlot, **Rev. 17**), his political and economic system (Babylon, **Rev. 18**), and his military system (the armies, **Rev. 19**).

Grant Osborne: When God is reminded and remembers, he acts. In **14:10–11** we were told of *"the wine of the wrath of God that has been poured full strength into the cup of his anger,"* and this language is borrowed here: God *"gave her the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath,"* which is best translated *"God gave her the cup of wine, namely his furious wrath."* Similarly, in **18:5**, *"God remembers her crimes,"* leading to **18:6** that describes the absolute devastation as just retribution, saying that God will *"pay her back double for what she has done"* and *"mix her a double portion from her own cup."* Again the principle of *lex talionis* is found: the sins of Babylon the Great have come to God's attention, and he has reacted in kind. Since they have drunk *"the wine that leads to passion for immorality"* (**14:8**; cf. **17:2, 4; 18:3, 9**), God will give them a wine cup filled with *"his furious wrath."*

G.K. Beale: The picture here, give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath, develops the similar picture of the last judgment in **14:8, 10**, where Babylon the great has fallen and her patron nations are made to *"drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of his anger"* (**14:10**). Now we find that Babylon herself, the inducer of the nations' intoxication, will be punished in like manner, under God's judging hand, by being made to drink the wine that leads to her own destructive intoxication. On the OT background of the pouring out of wine as describing the unleashing of divine judgment see on **14:10**. The judgment highlights that Babylon's punishment fits her crime, a principle already illustrated in **16:6**. As she destroyed (**11:18**), so shall she be destroyed. **V. 19**, together with **vv. 17–21**, amplify the introductory statement of Babylon's fall (in **14:8**), which is expanded in detail in **17:1 – 19:10**.

Kendell Easley: The three words *God remembered Babylon* are sad beyond words. They look back directly to the first time Scriptures record that *"God remembered"* something or someone. In **Genesis 8:1**, *"God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and livestock that were with*

him in the ark”—the totality of earth's breathing creatures after the flood of judgment. The result had been his covenant of mercy with all living creatures, never to destroy the whole world with a flood again: “*Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth*” (**Gen. 9:16**).

Now at last, Babylon has provoked his wrath to the limit. Because of what she has done, she must drain the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. True to the promise made at Noah's time, water will not be the instrument of destruction. Nevertheless, God must send his final judgment. If he remembered Noah in mercy, then he must remember Babylon in wrath.

David Aune: Divine justice is often intimately linked with the motive of **divine remembrance**, for the ancient Israelite and early Jewish view of God is that he does not let those who do good go unrewarded, nor does he allow those who do evil go unpunished. God's “punitive remembrance,” somewhat surprisingly, is mentioned with relative infrequency in the OT and early Judaism (**Hos 7:2; 8:13; 9:9; Jer 14:10; Sir 49:9**). In prayer, God can be asked to remember past wickedness and to punish the perpetrators (**Ps 137:7; Neh 6:14; 13:29; 1 Macc 7:38; 2 Macc 8:4**).

III. (:20-21) FINAL EFFECT AND RESPONSE TO GOD'S WRATH

A. (:20) Removal of the Islands and Mountains = All that Seemed Permanent

1. Islands

“And every island fled away,”

2. Mountains

“and the mountains were not found.”

Richard Phillips: Objects that symbolize **permanence**—mountains and islands—are swept away in destruction.

John MacArthur: The final effect of the earthquake, as noted above, is to prepare the earth for the millennial rule of the Lord Jesus Christ. To that end, the earth's topography will be drastically altered; every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. Islands, which are undersea mountains, will disappear and the mountains on land will be flattened (cf. **Isa. 40:4**), completing the process that began during the sixth seal (**6:12–14**). “The gentle rolling topography of the world as originally created will be restored. No more will there be great inaccessible, uninhabitable mountain ranges or deserts or ice caps. The physical environment of the millennium will be, in large measure, a restoration of the antediluvian [pre-Flood] environment” (**Henry M. Morris, The Revelation Record**, 321). That may leave Jerusalem as the highest point on earth, making it a fitting throne for the Great King who will rule there during the Millennium (**Jer. 3:17**).

Craig Keener: The moving of islands and mountains, as in **6:14**, is merely part of the image of dramatic, cosmic judgment (**Isa. 42:15; 64:1–3; Nah. 1:5–6**), especially appropriate to the end time (; **1 En. 1:6–7; Ezek. 38:19–20; Mic. 1:3–4; Zech. 14:5**

B. (:21) Response to Severe Plague of Hail = Stubborn Blasphemy

1. Big Hailstones

*“And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each,
came down from heaven upon men;”*

Daniel Akin: The heaviest hailstone on record in modern times was a mere 1.93 pounds! The earth, what little remains, will be pummeled and pulverized. Tragically, but now expected, men curse God for His righteous judgment (16:9,11). Beaten, they again blaspheme. Conquered, they curse. One last time they shake their fist in God’s face and curse His name. Judgment day has come. The results are certain. The response of humanity is stunning. So great is their hatred for God, they curse His name with their final, dying breath.

2. Blaspheming God

*“and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail,
because its plague was extremely severe.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are you surprised to see this famous expression of Jesus *“It is done”* repeated here in this eschatological context?
- 2) How extreme are these final judgments of the seventh bowl?
- 3) What is your view of the identification of *“the great city”* in **verse 19**?
- 4) What are the similarities and differences between this judgment and Noah’s Flood?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Walvoord: Though we are not able to immediately understand all the details of these dramatic judgments, the unmistakable impression of the Scriptures is that the whole world is being brought to the bar of justice before Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. There is no escape from divine judgment except for those who receive the grace of God in that day by faith in Jesus Christ. The utter perversity and depravity of human nature, which will reject the sovereignty of God in the face of such overwhelming evidence, confirms that even the lake of fire will not produce repentance on the part of those who have hardened their hearts against the grace of God.

Matthew Henry: The seventh and last angel poured forth his vial, and the downfall of Babylon was finished. The church triumphant in heaven saw it and rejoiced; the church in conflict on earth saw it and became triumphant. God remembered the great and wicked city; though for some time he seemed to have forgotten her idolatry and cruelty. All that was most secure was carried away by the ruin. Men blasphemed: the greatest judgments that can befall men, will not bring to repentance without the grace of God. To be hardened against God, by his righteous judgments, is a certain token of sure and utter destruction.

Robert Mounce: With this vision, the Revelation might have come to an end—in terms of God’s judgments. But the vision does not end here. What follows is an extended description of Rome as a luxurious prostitute who meets a gruesome death at the hands of the scarlet beast she commands (**chap. 17**). The demise of the great city is then described in **chapter 18** as a great funeral dirge complete with the mourning of kings, merchants, and all seafaring people whose livelihood depended upon Rome’s insatiable appetite for extravagance. Both chapters spell out in detail what is involved in the final bowl judgment.

Craig Keener: That the world dies unrepentant in the face of God’s judgments (**16:9, 11, 21**) reveals their **obduracy** and the **depth of human rebellion** against God. Seeking to illustrate the same sort of point, **C. S. Lewis** hypothesized that those committed to sin throughout their life might not choose life even after they have been banished to eternal alienation from God. While this perspective does not match literally what we read about hell in Scripture, it does illustrate the point about those who seek to be alienated from God in this life.

Chuck Smith: This is the voice of God Himself who declares that this time of great judgment is over; the time of man’s rebellion against God is over. **Chaps. 17-18** give extra details of the religious and commercial Babylon. From a chronological standpoint, this brings things to the end. Tremendous cataclysmic upheaval of earth’s topography. The whole earth will be shaken to its core; accompanied by thunders and lightnings.

Parallel passages speaking of this earthquake: **Hag. 2:6ff.; Heb. 12:25ff.** – When God speaks from heaven and warns us, we had better listen. Not a single building will be left standing; total devastation around the earth; God removes the works of man’s hands; no way to protect yourself from this earthquake or prepare for it. All the dams will be broken there will be massive flooding. Rebuilding project required to prepare for messianic kingdom. Only that which cannot be shaken will remain. We should put more of our time and resources into things that cannot be shaken. We live in a very materialistic world. Cf. reaction against materialism by the hippy movement. Value of material things is of short duration. God will shake the whole system.

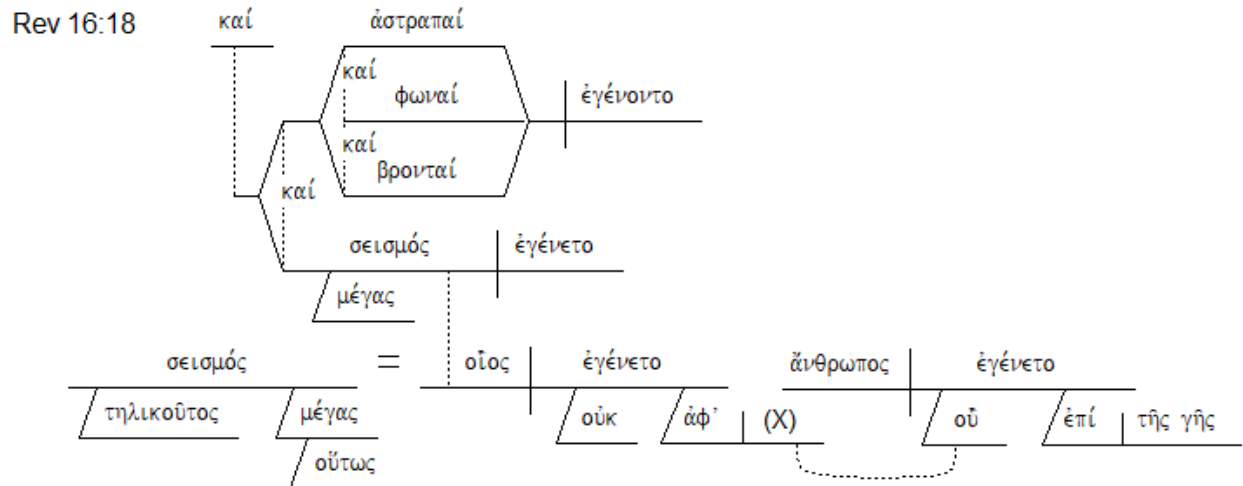
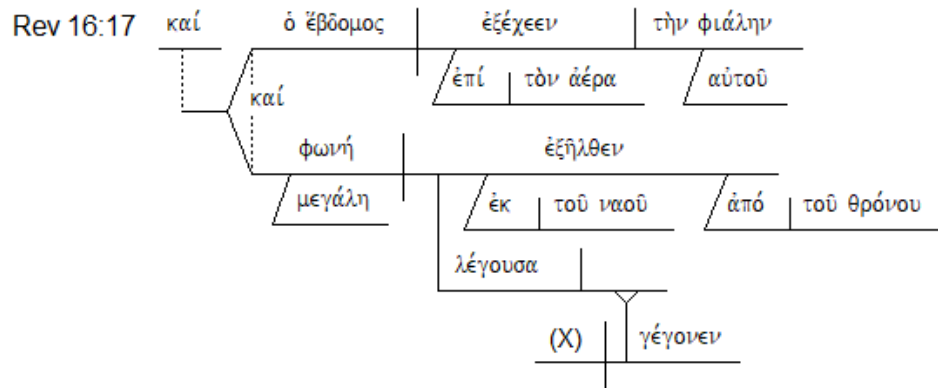
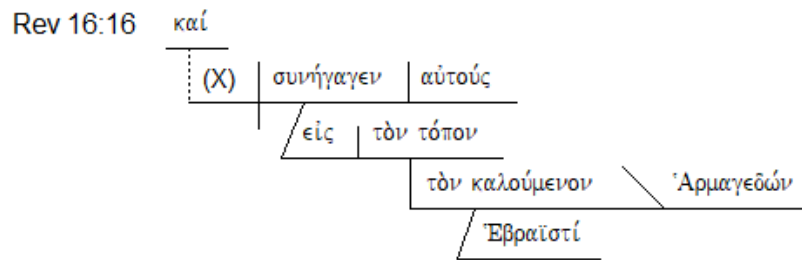
Discusses implications of the polar axis shift as studied by physicists today. Sounds a lot like the phenomena described in the aftermath of the seventh bowl judgment.

When Christ comes, He will set foot on the Mount of Olives; it will split; great valley will be formed; subterranean waters will be released and the Dead Sea will be healed so that fish can now live there.

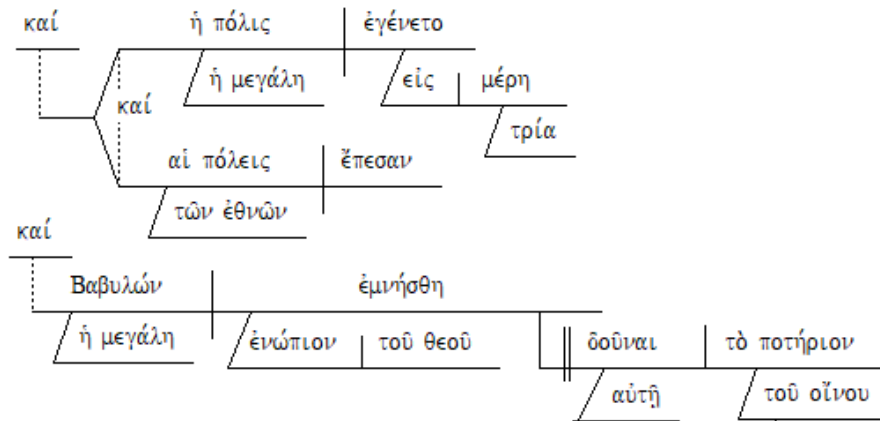
Great Babylon is in two parts: one commercial (**chap. 18**) and one religious (**chap. 17**). You don’t need all the clothes you have. We could get by with a lot less. The advertising industry is designed to make you thing you need extra things.

https://www.google.com/search?q=sermon+revelation+16%3A17-21&oq=sermon+revelation+16%3A17-21&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIGCAEQRRhA0gEJOTAxNmowajE1qAIAAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:01ef067c,vid:cYNzusW30AU,st:0

Leedy Greek Diagram:



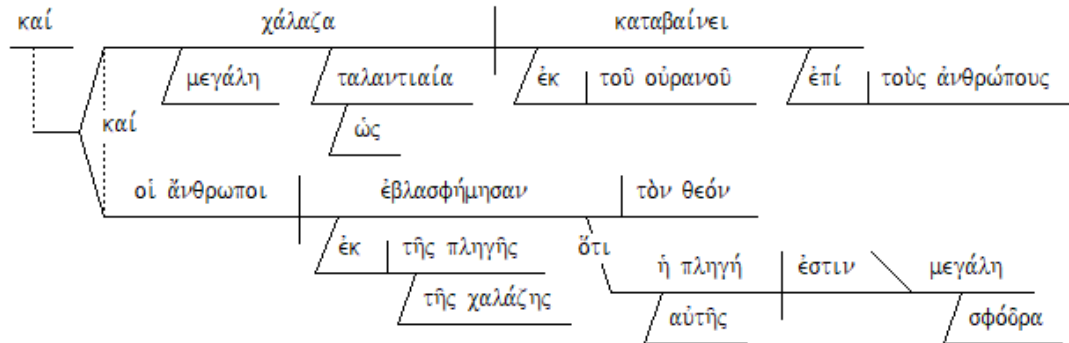
Rev 16:19



Rev 16:20



Rev 16:21



TEXT: Revelation 17:1-18

TITLE: THE JUDGMENT OF RELIGIOUS BABYLON

BIG IDEA:

APOSTATE, MAN-MADE RELIGION ATTEMPTS TO UNIFY THE WORLD UNDER THE ANTICHRIST VIA SEDUCTIVE IDOLATRY AND IMMORALITY BUT SELF-IMPLODES UNDER GOD'S APPOINTED JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: The phrase “*he carried me away in the Spirit*” in **17:3** (cf. **21:10**) mirrors the expression “*I came to be in the Spirit*” (**1:10; 4:2**) in signaling the third of four high-level transitions between major units in the whole book of Revelation. The intervention of a heavenly mediator who carries John away “*in the Spirit*” reveals a new phase in the complex of visions that began in **1:9–10** and was extended in **4:1–2**. Now in **17:1–3a** the vision is extended again (although its content was previewed in **16:19: God’s wrath on Babylon**). This third phase of John’s visions, **focusing on Babylon’s fall**, runs from **17:1** to **19:10**. In this section Babylon is portrayed as “*a great prostitute*” allied to the beast and leading the whole world astray, but devastated in the end by internal strife (**17:1–18**). Those who benefitted from her rich luxuries and misdeeds bewail her devastation and its effects on the world (**18:1–24**), but in heaven there is rejoicing over God’s just punishment on the prostitute and an introduction to the Lamb’s pure bride who contrasts with her (**19:1–10**). . .

In both **17:1–3a** and **21:9–10** we find one of the seven-bowl angels transporting John away “*in the Spirit*” to “*show*” him a notable woman who represents a city, either Babylon representing human society opposed to God, or the heavenly Jerusalem come to earth. Both sections conclude in remarkably parallel ways as well.

Daniel Akin: This harlot is said to lead the kings, the rulers of the world, into sexual immorality. The image is one of spiritual adultery and idolatry. Not only does she seduce the leaders of the world, but common people, “*those who live on the earth,*” are drunk with the wine of her sexual immorality (**17:2**). The lust for power, material possessions, sex, and pleasure has intoxicated the world. No one *under the sun* (see Ecclesiastes) has escaped her enticing allurements. The prostitute has captivated their hearts and taken over their lives. As **1 John 2:16** explains, “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride in one’s lifestyle*” have become our gods. This is a description of a world where the American dream is ultimate. And we must be careful because it is not hard to imagine that you and I will wake up on that day and realize that we have all become Babylonians!

Kendell Easley: John has a vision of human civilization, religious but independent of God, blossoming for one last time as a splendid city supported by Antichrist. The city is personified as a gorgeous prostitute drunk on the blood of God’s people yet doomed to be destroyed by Antichrist and his forces.

John MacArthur: Because **false religion** is so much a part of this fallen world, it is no surprise that it will play a major role in the end times. During the Tribulation, all the world’s diverse false religions will be reunited into one great world religion. That ultimate expression of false religion

will be an essential element of Antichrist's final world empire, in holding together his military, economic, and political structure. Only religion can unite the world in the most compelling way. Politics, economics, even military force are unable to overcome the world's cultural diversity. Only religion, with its appeal to the supernatural, can transcend the physical, geographical, historical, economic, and cultural barriers to world unity. **Chapter 17** reveals the spiritual nature of Antichrist's kingdom; **chapter 18** follows with its material aspects. God will destroy both aspects of Antichrist's kingdom. . .

The final world religion, depicted as a harlot, is the theme of this vision, which records

- the exposure of the harlot,
- the explanation of the harlot,
- and the extermination of the harlot.

The great harlot that will be judged is not an actual prostitute. The term harlot is a metaphor for false religion, spiritual defection, idolatry, and religious apostasy. Besides Babylon, several cities in Scripture are designated harlot cities because of their idolatry and pursuit of false religion. Nineveh (Nah. 3:1,4), Tyre (Isa. 23:15–17), and, sadly, Jerusalem (Isa. 1:21) are examples of cities that committed spiritual fornication.

John's vision exposes several aspects of the harlot city of Babylon: her authority, alliances, apparel, abominations, and accusation.

S. Lewis Johnson: We have on the one hand, Babylon, the apostate city, from whence have come all of the evils that have infiltrated true worship down through the centuries. And on the other hand, we have the holy city, the city of the new Jerusalem. So these things are obviously opposed one to another.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The subject of this section is the judgment of religious Babylon. The judgment describes her condemnation, sentence, and penalty passed. The emphasis is the particular character and nature of the penalty that God has in store for Babylon. . .

Babylon's description as "*the great harlot*" refers to the spiritual prostitution and fornication that categorizes the apostate church of the Tribulation which is unfaithful and rejects the Lord Jesus Christ as her husband (**2 Pet. 2:1-2**).

(:1-2) INTRODUCTION TO THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON

David Aune: **Rev 17:1–3a** should be understood as an introduction not to the vision of **Rev 17** only (as **Charles**, 2:55, assumes, but cf. 62) but rather to the entire unit of text from **17:3b to 19:10**. When the angel promises in **17:1** to show John the judgment of the great whore, that judgment is summarily predicted in **17:1** but is in fact delayed until **Rev 18**, where it becomes the focus of attention. In **Rev 19:2** there is a retrospective mention of this motif when it is said that "*he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication,*" referring to **Rev 18** while reflecting the vocabulary of **Rev 17:1**.

A. (:1) Mission of the Revealing Angel

1. Initiation of One of the Seven Bowl Angels

“And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying,”

Sola Scriptura: We are not told which one of the seven bowl-carrying angels is helping John, but one might guess that the angel carrying the bowl interprets that particular bowl. Since the seventh bowl-carrying angel unleashed the devastation that destroyed the cities of the world, we naturally suspect that this same angel now details the destruction for John of the capital of Antichrist’s satanically empowered city.

2. Invitation to Witness the Judgment of the Great Harlot

“Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,”

Buist Fanning: More broadly, sexual infidelity appears in the Bible as a metaphor of turning away from the Lord to worship a false god (e.g., **2 Kgs 9:22; 1 Chr 5:25; Ps 73:27; Jer 3:6; Ezek 23:19, 29–30**; cf. also **Rev 2:14, 20**). But the angel calls this one “*the great prostitute*” (τῆς πόρνῃς τῆς μεγάλης), the one who above all others is guilty of reprehensible conduct and of influencing others toward it, and he adds the significant description, “*who lives beside many waters*” (v. **1c**). This reflects a conventional description of the city of Babylon, situated on the Euphrates with its tributaries and canals (**Jer 51:13; Ps 137:1**).

G.K. Beale: Symbolizing Babylon as a harlot connotes her alluring and seductive nature in attempting to draw people away from Christ. . .

Babylon’s “*sitting*” on many waters speaks of her **sovereignty over the nations**, for “*sitting*” in Revelation (**3:21; 4:2, 4; 5:1; 14:14; 18:7**, etc.) indicates sovereignty, whether used of God, Christ, the angels, or evil beings. **18:7** confirms this, since there Babylon says “*I sit as a queen*.” At the least, the sitting implies the woman’s alliance with the world and the beast.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: “*That sits on many waters*” refers to world-wide **unification and control**. “*Waters*” refers to the “nations” and the many people of those nations. “*Sits on*” suggests the concept of control as well as unification. The nations are religiously united and politically affiliated with each other through the power and control of this religious system and its head.

B. (:2) Metaphorical Characterizations of the Wicked Impact of Babylon the Harlot

1. Metaphor of Sexual Immorality

“with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality,”

John MacArthur: The harlot’s alliances will be comprehensive. Her deadly embrace will encompass all the unredeemed, from kings and rulers to common people; all will worship and submit to her religion. Far from being separated, church and state will be united as never before in human history.

2. Metaphor of Sexual Intoxication

“and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.”

Buist Fanning: The **prostitution theme** continues in v. 2 with the added explanation of the significant influence she has across the whole world. The earth's kings "*committed sexual immorality*" (ἐπόρνευσαν) with her (v. 2a), a figure for drawing other nations into Babylon's profane behavior (repeated in 18:3, 9; interpreted as political and cultural domination in 17:18). The latter half of the verse rephrases this as **drunkenness** or moral incapacitation on the part of "*those who inhabit the earth*" (cf. 18:23, she misled all the nations). The world got drunk "*with the wine of her sexual immorality*" (v. 2b; ἐκ τοῦ οἴνου τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς; cf. 14:8; 18:3), and they with her will suffer punishment for it. In light of the Old Testament background mentioned above, these references to "*sexual immorality*" promoted by a sensuous "*prostitute*" should be read as symbolic for spiritual and moral sins: she leads the nations away from the true God into idolatrous worship, and away from what is just and decent into moral failings of various kinds. In the world of John's readers, this "*sexual immorality*" took the form of temptations to engage in emperor worship and other idolatrous associations that enticed them on a daily basis in their lives in Roman Asia Minor.

Kendell Easley: This harlot promised her clients the pleasures of the world and the flesh; she delivered the pain of drunken stupor. The prophet Jeremiah described the Babylonian civilization of his day in like terms: "*Babylon ... made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad*" (Jer. 51:7).

G.K. Beale: The nations' cooperation with Babylon ensures their **material security** (see on 2:9; 13:16-17). The intoxicating effect of Babylon's wine removes all desire to resist Babylon's destructive influence, blinds them to Babylon's own ultimate insecurity and to God as the source of real security and numbs them against fear of a coming judgment. For the OT roots, see Hos. 4:11-12: "*Harlotry, wine and new wine take away the understanding. My people consult their wooden idol ... for a spirit of harlotry has led them astray.*" Elsewhere in Revelation idolatry and immorality (Greek *porneia*) are closely linked (2:14, 20-21; 9:21; 14:8). The economic interpretation of the nations' intoxicating passion and the kings' immoral passion for Babylon is clear from 18:3, 9-19, where the same phrases for immorality and intoxication of 17:2 are equated with terms for economic prosperity, and the nations' loyalty to Babylon lies in her ability to provide economic prosperity for them (see also on 14:8). An economic interpretation of the verse is confirmed by the allusion to Isa. 23:17, where Tyre "*will play the harlot with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth.*" Tyre is called a harlot because she caused destruction and induced uncleanness among the nations by **economically dominating them** and influencing them by her idolatry. That idolatry is included together with an economic emphasis is clear from Isa. 23:18, where Tyre's illicit wages "*will be set apart to the Lord*" in the future instead of to any other false object of dedication as formerly. That Tyre is in mind at least as an analogy to Babylon is clear from the repeated reference in **Revelation 18** to the **Ezekiel 26-28** pronouncement of Tyre's judgment and the specific allusion in v. 23 to Isa. 23:8 (see on 18:23).

(:3a) TRANSITION – PROPHETIC COMMISSIONING OF JOHN

"And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness;"

G.K. Beale: The angel carried John away in the Spirit into a wilderness. "*In the Spirit*" is a **formula of prophetic commissioning**, based on the similar formulas expressing Ezekiel's repeated prophetic commissions, e.g., Ezek. 2:2: "the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet"; Ezek. 3:12: "*The Spirit lifted me up*" (likewise Ezek. 3:14, 24; 11:1; 43:5). Ezekiel is commissioned with prophetic authority to announce judgment to sinful Israel. Similarly, John's

transport into the realm of the Spirit underscores his prophetic commission and authority (see **1:10; 4:2** and especially **21:10**, where allusion to the Ezekiel commissions also occurs in the same manner). And as with Ezekiel, John's inspired message in **17:3ff.** is an **announcement of judgment**. . .

These verses present us with a nuanced understanding of the **significance of the desert**. Revelation consistently presents the desert as the place where, in spite of ever-present danger, **God provides security for His people**. It is in this place of attack upon God's people that God now declares His judgment of the attackers. John needed to be taken into the desert (understood as the place of God's security) in order to avoid being mesmerized by the harlot. How easily is it possible for God's people to be seduced by her attractive appearance and the economic and social advantages she offers to those who cooperate with her?

I. (:3b-6a) VISION OF RELIGIOUS BABYLON SEATED ON A SCARLET BEAST (ANTICHRIST)

A. (:3b) Descriptive Appearance of the Beast

1. Scarlet in Color

"and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast,"

Kendell Easley: Although a different Greek word than the one earlier translated "*red*" is used here, there is no more difference between them than the English words "red" and "scarlet" or "red as fire" and "red as blood." Earlier John had seen a red horse of war (**6:4**) and Satan as a giant red dragon. The red dragon had called up a sea monster whose color was not given (**13:1**). Now that its color is noted, once again **it is like its master**. Just so that we identify this scarlet beast correctly, it is described in identical terms to the one John saw earlier, having seven heads and ten horns like its master the dragon (**13:1**).

G.K. Beale: That the woman rides the beast connotes her alliance with it. She represents the ungodly world as it works with the state socially, culturally, and economically to persecute Christians (**17:6; 18:24; 19:2**). They are also mutually involved in deception of ungodly multitudes throughout the earth (e.g., **14:8; 17:2, 8**). . .

John Walvoord: The fact that the woman is riding the beast, and is not the beast itself, signifies that she represents ecclesiastical power as distinct from the beast, which is the political power. Her position as a rider indicates on the one hand that she is supported by the political power of the beast, and on the other that she is in a dominant role and at least outwardly controls and directs the beast.

2. Sacrilegious in Curses

"full of blasphemous names,"

Kendell Easley: Earlier, each head had carried a sacrilegious name; now the entire beast is covered with blasphemous names, no doubt claims to divine status that monarchs from Pharaoh onward have loved. The beast's utter rejection of God is symbolized by the extent of these tattoos. As we saw when this monster first appeared, it represents raw political-military power rampaging through history.

David Thompson: We are not told what the names are, but they are all names that slander God.

3. Satanic in Composition

“having seven heads and ten horns.”

John Walvoord: The significance of the seven heads and ten horns is revealed subsequently in this chapter—the seven heads apparently referring to forms of government that are successive, and the ten horns to kings who reign simultaneously in the end time. That the woman, representing the apostate church, is in such close association with the beast, which is guilty of utter blasphemy, indicates the depth to which apostasy will ultimately descend. The only form of a world church recognized in the Bible is this apostate form destined to come into power after the true church has been raptured.

B. (:4) Defining Seductive and Salacious Imagery

1. Images of Seductive Beauty

a. Seductive Clothing

“And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet,”

G.K. Beale: The parts of her attire are listed as products of trade in **18:12**. Therefore the woman, draped with these products, is identified with a **prosperous trading system**. Her clothing is scarlet, representing her **persecution of the saints**. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah speak of harlots with red attire symbolizing their spilling of the blood of the righteous (**Isa. 1:15-23; Jer. 2:34**).

David Thompson: The fact that this woman is clothed in purple and scarlet is no coincidence. This is the very color of the robe that was put on Jesus Christ just before His crucifixion. He was being mocked and mistreated while wearing this color of a robe (**Matt. 27:28; Mark 15:17, 20**). God has never forgotten about that moment. He never forgot about the history and the source of that evil that brought that moment into existence. God is holding this woman accountable for what happened to His own Son and she will pay the full brunt of His wrath for it.

b. Seductive Jewelry

“and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls,”

Kendell Easley: The gold, precious stones and pearls are not inherently evil. Here they show the garish but extravagant splendor of a **wealthy whore**, but later these same elements will embellish the holy splendor of the heavenly bride (**21:18-21**).

John MacArthur: Prostitutes usually dress so as to attract attention to themselves, and metaphorically the harlot Babylon will be no different. John saw her clothed in purple and scarlet, the colors of royalty, prosperity, nobility, and wealth (cf. **Judg. 8:26; Est. 8:15; Lam. 4:5; Ezek. 23:6; Dan. 5:7, 16, 29**). That she is adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls portrays her as a prostitute who is both attractive (cf. **Prov. 7:10**) and has plied her trade successfully and become extremely wealthy.

2. Images of Salacious Defilements

a. Salacious Abominations

“having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations”

G.K. Beale: The **abominations** in the woman's cup are also references to **idolatry**, for that word is used frequently in the OT to refer to idolatry (**Deut. 29:17; 2 Kgs. 23:24; 2 Chron. 34:33; Jer. 16:18**, etc.). The unclean things are associated with her **immorality**. "*Immorality*" (Greek *porneia*) and the related verb elsewhere in the book are figurative expressions for idolatry (so **2:14, 20-21**; cf. **9:21**; see on **14:8; 17:2**), as they are here. As we saw in the letters, there is a clear connection in Revelation between illicit forms of economic activity (including simply the worship of money) and idolatrous practices, and the woman represents both.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: "*Abominations and unclean things*" may refer to the various forms of **idolatry** involved in the worship of God through images, statues, and medals, etc. "*Unclean things*" refers not only to the nature of the doctrines taught, but what they lead to in the life, **immorality** and **impurity**. Man's religion offers no solution to the flesh. It's the flesh seeking to overcome the flesh and it profits nothing (**John 6:63; Col. 2:20-23**).

David Thompson: God holds Babylon accountable for causing His people to worship something other than Him. Babylon introduced horrible idolatry into religion and the world. She pulled Israel away from the true God of the Bible. Some of the idols she introduced went by various names:

- 1) Bel - **Jer. 51:44**
- 2) Marduk - **Jer. 50:2**
- 3) Nebo - **Is. 46:1**
- 4) Succoth - benoth- **II Kings 17:29-30**
- 5) Tammuz - **Ex. 8:14**

b. Salacious Immorality

"and of the unclean things of her immorality,"

Buist Fanning: The woman for her part is described in powerful images of both **royal beauty** and **revolting abomination** (v. 4). She appears in regal robes of "*purple and scarlet*" and jewelry of "*gold, precious stones, and pearls*," and she carries a fine "*golden cup*" in her hand. But the cup is brimming over with "*abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality*," a reference to the defilements and idolatries that she leads the nations into (vv. 2, 4; cf. **Deut 12:31; 2 Chr 28:3; Isa 2:8; Jer 13:27; Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14**).

C. (:5) Declared Identity

"and upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, 'BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.'"

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The practice of harlots in ancient times was to write their names on their foreheads for easy recognition, which showed the shamelessness of their character. It revealed a seared conscience from continual rejection of God's truth.

John Walvoord: Nimrod was the founder of Babel, later called Babylon, and leader of the rebellion against God in attempting to make a city and a tower that would reach to heaven (**Genesis 10-11**). In the ancient world it was a common practice to build huge mounds (ziggurats) of sun-dried bricks, of which the most ancient illustration was discovered at Erech, a place mentioned in **Genesis 10:10** and dated more than 3,000 years before Christ. The **tower of Babel** was apparently a forerunner of later towers dedicated to various heathen deities. This tower was a monument to human pride and an express act of rebellion against the true God.

Charles Swindoll: Origin of man-made religion at Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9)

Here we see the three foundations of man-made religion:

1. rejection of God's promises —faithlessness
2. rebellion against God's commands —disobedience
3. refusal of God's grace —legalism

J. Hampton Keathley, III. Take a close look at the text [Isa. 47:8-11]. Ancient Babylon had a spiritual religion built upon blasphemous premises:

- (1) The deity of man -- "*I am. And there is no one besides me.*"
- (2) A false belief in triumph over death -- "*I shall not sit as a widow, nor shall I know the loss of children.*"
- (3) Moral relativism -- "*Hear this, you sensual one.*"
- (4) Esotericism, or private enlightenment through mystical spiritual experiences - "*Your many sorceries . . . the great power of your spells.*"

G.K. Beale: The notion of "mystery" . . . refers to the ironic, mysterious way in which God will fulfill His prophetic words concerning Babylon's destruction — that kingdom will turn against itself (as the next verses will reveal) and begin to self-destruct even before the return of Christ, who will finally demolish Babylon. This was indeed a mystery not as clearly seen by Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, but is now made clearer to John. Fulfillment of prophecy always fleshes out details that were not contained in broadly-given OT prophecies.

Buist Fanning: Her primary name then is given as "*Babylon the great*" (v. 5b). Additional phrases describe her as "*the mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth,*" representing the widespread effect that her influence exerts. She is "*the mother*" in the sense that she produces others who engage in "*prostitution*" (i.e., misusing valuable or sacred things for personal gain; violating what is right and good for evil or self-centered purposes) as she herself does. So also she is the origin above all others of detestable, repulsive deeds—especially idolatrous acts. None of these names are likely to be what she would call herself (much like Jezebel in 2:20), especially not the additional phrases. These constitute the Spirit's characterization of her as given in John's vision.

Daniel Akin: Like the Roman prostitutes of the day, she has a **headband**, and here that headband is a mystery about to be revealed: "*Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and of the vile things of the earth.*" . . . This prostitute is "that great system of godlessness that leads people away from the worship of God and to their own destruction" (**Mounce, Revelation**, 311). It is an ever-present reality, a seductress that exists and entices in every age and every generation. It is a this-world perspective. Seduced by the sirens and idols of the day, we run madly down a path of spiritual and eternal suicide. **Proverbs 6:32-33** rings true for this mad, mad world:

"The one who commits adultery lacks sense; whoever does so destroys himself. He will get a beating and dishonor, and his disgrace will never be removed."

Kendell Easley: **The Mother of Prostitutes** means "source of idolatry and evil." If this woman is indeed "Dame Civilization," then from God's point of view much of the achievement of humanity through the millennia has amounted to evil. If John's original readers thought

immediately of the city of Rome, they would have recognized the luxury and corruption rampant in the great mistress of the world.

The Mother ... of the Abominations of the Earth finishes the secret name of the harlot. This confirms and expands the second part of the title. Whatever was detestable around the world issued from the great city. Again, Dame Civilization, especially as she is revealed in the world's great cities, has proven to be the source of every conceivable human atrocity.

John MacArthur: The harlot is called **mystery BABYLON** to indicate that BABYLON in this context does not refer to a geographical location. This is not ancient Babylon, the Babylon of John's day, or the rebuilt city of Babylon in the end times. The details of this vision can't be applied to any actual city. Here is a previously undisclosed Babylon, a secret reality to be revealed in the end times. This BABYLON is the symbol of all worldly resistance to God; it is described as THE GREAT because of its far-reaching influence. In fact, so great will be its influence that it is called THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. Babylon will be the source of all the false, idolatrous, blasphemous worship in the end times. Her designation as the MOTHER OF HARLOTS is appropriate, since harlotry in Scripture often symbolizes idolatry (cf. **Judg. 2:17; 8:27, 33; 1 Chron. 5:25; 2 Chron. 21:11; Jer. 3:6, 8-9; Ezek. 16:30-31, 36**). So Babylon, the city that spawned the system that corrupted the world with false religion, will do so again.

D. (:6a) Drunk with Blood

1. With the Blood of the Saints

"And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints,"

John MacArthur: Some commentators see the *saints* and the *witnesses of Jesus* as two distinct groups, the former being the Old Testament saints and the latter the New Testament saints. More likely, however, the two descriptions refer to the same group and describe God's people throughout history. The important point is that false religion, represented here by the harlot, is a **murderer**.

2. With the Blood of the Witnesses to Jesus

"and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus."

Daniel Akin: The notorious prostitute has set her sights throughout history on the people of God and the followers of Jesus. Indeed, this whore is "*drunk on the blood of the saints and on the blood of the witnesses to Jesus*" (**18:24**; see **Isa 49:26**). In the New Testament alone the seeds of martyrdom were planted by John the Baptist, Stephen, James, and Antipas. From those seeds has flowed the blood of saints for 20 centuries. And the more blood this world drinks, the more it wants. Its intoxicating effects consume it and drive it to want more and more and more. The twentieth century was the bloodiest in Christian history. We should expect the twenty-first to be worse. **Mounce** again is helpful: "Although the Neronian massacre after the great fire of AD 64 may have been in the back of John's mind, the drunken prostitute pictures the **final days of persecution at the end of the age**" (*Revelation*, 312). As we move toward the end of history, we can expect the blood of martyrs to flow like a river, even a flood, among the nations. It may be your calling and my calling. Are we willing to embrace it? **Philippians 1:21** is a wonderful reminder that it is worth it to die for Christ!

(:6b) TRANSITION – RESPONSE OF WONDERMENT

“And when I saw her, I wondered greatly.”

Buist Fanning: The final part of v. 6 begins the **transition** from the vision of the woman that John has been shown (vv. 1–6; reinforced here by the phrase, “*when I saw her*”; ἰδὼν αὐτήν) to the angelic explanation of the vision (vv. 7–18). The verb “*to be astonished*” (θαυμάζω) occurs in v. 6b and v. 7b to signal the change. The sense of “*astonished*” here is a mix of “appalled by fear and dismay” and “confused, perplexed.” This reaction is found frequently in apocalyptic texts at the literary seam where a symbolic visionary experience is followed by a heavenly interpretation. The response of “perplexed fear” (sometimes expressed by θαυμάζω or ἀποθαυμάζω, sometimes by their synonyms) is what typically characterizes the human recipient of the vision (e.g., **Dan 4:19; 7:15; 8:27**; cf. **4 Ezra 10:27–37; 12:4–9; 13:14–20**).

Kendell Easley: John knew that what he was seeing must point beyond anything happening in his own time. Further, he had been promised a vision of the prostitute's **punishment** (v. 1). So far, he had only seen her **power** and **prestige**. Thus he needed help from the angel who had initiated the vision.

John MacArthur: expressing that he was confused, shocked, astonished, and frightened by the ghastly vision of such a contrastingly magnificent figure of the woman and such a deadly intent.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: We should never be deceived by outward form or religiosity no matter how outwardly attractive or influential or powerful as is the case with this ecumenical and godless system.

II. (:7-18) INTERPRETATION OF THE VISION OF JUDGMENT ON BABYLON

Kendell Easley: Final Antichrist, an eighth and final head of the seven-headed (seven-kingdom) sea monster, will bring about the destruction of his own great city and will, in turn, go to destruction.

(:7) Introduction to the Angel's Interpretation

1. Inappropriateness of John's Response

“And the angel said to me, ‘Why do you wonder?’”

G.K. Beale: The angel is really asking why John should be afraid and troubled by the vision, as he was by earlier visions (e.g., cf. **1:17**). It is best taken as a rhetorical question whose implied answer is a **rebuke**: John should not be fearful and perplexed.

2. Interpretation Offered of the Harlot and the Beast

“I shall tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.”

John MacArthur: The **beast** that John saw is **Antichrist**, the satanic ruler of the last and most powerful empire in human history, who will serve as Satan's instrument to attack Israel, persecute believers, conquer the world for Satan, and oppose Christ. Scripture portrays him as an intellectual genius (**Dan. 7:8**); an outstanding orator (**Dan. 7:20**); a military leader without

parallel in human history (**Dan. 7:23**); a shrewd, calculating, manipulating politician (**Dan. 8:25; 11:21**); and the ultimate religious charlatan (**2 Thess. 2:4**).

A. (:8-14) The Significance of the Beast

1. (:8) Its Origin and Destiny

a. Ambiguity of the Beast

*“The beast that you saw was and is not,
and is about to come up out of the abyss and **to go to destruction.**”*

Kendell Easley: These descriptions obviously mock and mimic God, the one “*who is, and who was, and who is to come*”.

Buist Fanning: The beast “*was*” (ἦν; i.e., “existed in the past”) and “*is not*” (οὐκ ἔστιν; i.e., does not at the time John is writing exist in the world of the living) and “*is about to come up out of the bottomless pit*” (v. 8a; cf. 11:7, he will arise from the realm of the dead). All this is true because he had been put to death but was expected to return to life soon. He appears in 13:3 as one with a mortal wound (“*as though slain unto death*”), whose deathblow had been “*healed*” (13:3, 12), that is, he had “*the wound of the sword but came to life*” (13:14). The response of the non-Christian world (those not recorded in “*the book of life*,” v. 8c; 13:8; cf. 3:5) to this remarkable recovery is **worshipful amazement** (they “*will marvel*,” v. 8d; 13:3) at what appears to be a supernatural recovery. **Verse 8d–e** repeats 13:3, 12 in different words when it says they will worship “*when they see*” that the beast “*was and is not and will be present*” (ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ παρέσται; the first two verbs repeated from v. 8a). The only negative thing said about the beast here is the final clause in v. 8a, that he goes “*to destruction*” (repeated in v. 11b as an *inclusio* bracketing off vv. 8–11 as a unit). The career of the beast will seem wildly successful until he turns his satanic-inspired hostility against the returning Christ. His defeat at that point will be swift and overwhelming (19:19–21; cf. 2 Thess 2:8).

David Thompson: The emphasis of this statement is twofold:

- 1) When the beast surfaces out of the abyss he will be totally and completely demonic and Satanic because that is the place where demons are.
- 2) When he receives a mortal wound he will apparently go to this abyss until he is raised back out of it which will cause the world to marvel (**Rev. 13:1-3**).

b. Amazement of the Earth Dwellers

*“And those who dwell on the earth will wonder,
whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of
the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.”*

Kendell Easley: The **Book of Life** is a roster of heaven's citizens; otherwise, by default people are on the membership roll of Babylon. In **Revelation 13:8**, the Book of Life belonged to the “*Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world*,” emphasizing God's plan to redeem humanity. Here, the emphasis shifts slightly. Not only did God plan to redeem from the beginning, he planned who would be redeemed from the beginning. No stronger statement of the sovereignty of God in things pertaining to salvation is found in all the Bible.

2. (:9-11) Its Heads = Mountains / Kings

(:9a) Need for Discernment

“Here is the mind which has wisdom.”

G.K. Beale: The beast's imitation of Christ will be shown as a sham in the end. Whereas Christ's resurrection results in Him living for evermore (**1:18**), the beast's resurrection results in his **destruction**. It takes divine wisdom to discern the difference in the destinies of the Lamb and the beast (so **v. 9a**).

a. (:9b) Defined as Mountains in Terms of Location

"The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits,"

Buist Fanning: Part of the enigma is that the beast's "seven heads" are said to represent "seven mountains" (**v. 9b**) as well as "seven kings" (**v. 9d/10a**). The details added with each phrase help to differentiate their meanings. The beast's heads are "mountains" in that they show the woman's location (**v. 9b–c**), but they are "kings" in that they characterize his role and that of others associated with him in that role (**vv. 9d/10a–11**). . . What sitting on "seven mountains" indicates is that the woman is associated with **Rome**, widely known in the ancient world as "the city of seven hills."

b. (:10) Defined as Kings in Terms of Empires

1) Summary Definition of Seven Kings

"and they are seven kings;"

2) Specific Definition of the Seven Kings

*"five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come;
and when he comes, he must remain a little while."*

Daniel Akin: Efforts to identify these seven kings with seven Roman emperors have not worked. Viewing them as **seven secular empires** similar to **Daniel 2** and **7** is more promising in my judgment, though I hold my view with great tentativeness. In Israel's history five kings or kingdoms had fallen and passed off the scene: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece. The one who "is" would obviously be **Rome**. And the one that "has not yet come" is the **future kingdom of the antichrist**. His kingdom will draw from the characteristics of the previous six. Once again the number seven would communicate completeness or perfection in power. The manifestation of this kingdom "will remain only a little while." Yes, the beast as a man and kingdom will embody the brutality, greatness, splendor, strength, and wickedness of these great empires. But like all other worldly empires, it will have its day and come to an end. Brilliantly organized and with a plan for world domination, it will be impressive for a time, a very brief time, as it stands in pale comparison to the eternal and everlasting kingdom of God. The world has a plan, but God's plan will endure forever.

Marvin Rosenthal: The Antichrist is a man who lived before. He ruled one of the previous seven great empires which directly impacted Israel. The first six were (1) Egypt, (2) Assyria, (3) Babylon, (4) Medo-Persia, (5) Greece, and (6) Rome (**Rev. 17:10**). The clear identification of the seventh nation awaits further enlightenment. Not only has the Antichrist lived and ruled before, but he will live and rule again. He will literally be raised from the dead. Concerning this raised ruler and his kingdom the Word of God has much to say. "And I saw one of his heads as though it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed, and all the world wondered after the beast" (**Rev. 13:3**; cf. **17:9**). . . He apparently actually dies, descends to the abyss and returns to life. The world understandably wonders after him.

Kendell Easley: A review of Scripture indicates that, in fact, five great empires threatened the survival of God's Old Testament people Israel.

1. Egypt during the days of Israelite slavery tried to destroy the chosen people by ordering all male babies killed (**Exod. 1**). The prostitute city at that time, probably the sixteenth century B.C., was Memphis.
2. Assyria during the days of the prophets Hosea and Isaiah destroyed the ten northern tribes of Israel in 722 B.C. (**2 Kgs. 15**). The prostitute city of that time was Nineveh, the original “*great city*” of the Old Testament (see the Book of Jonah).
3. Babylon during the days of Jeremiah and Ezekiel destroyed the two southern tribes (the kingdom of Judah) and burned Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (**2 Kgs. 25**). The prostitute city was Babylon on the Euphrates.
4. Persia during the days of Esther the queen (about 460 B.C.) came very close to destroying every Jew because of the plotting of Haman, a true monster (see the Book of Esther). Modern Jews still remember this event with the annual Feast of Purim. The prostitute city was Persepolis.
5. The Seleucid Empire was successor to part of Alexander the Great's realm. Under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the “*abomination of desolation*” in 168 B.C. desecrated the temple of Jerusalem and outlawed the practice of Judaism (see **Dan. 8–12** and 1 Maccabees in the Apocrypha). The Maccabean Revolt spared the Jews and was remembered with the annual celebration of Hanukkah. Antiochus was a monstrosity (**Dan. 8:23–25; 11:21–35**). The prostitute city was Antioch.

These, then, are the five fallen kingdoms.

3) (:11) Supplemental Focus on the Beast

*“And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth, and is one of the seven, and **he goes to destruction.**”*

Buist Fanning: This beast who had been killed but was expected to come back to life (cf. **13:3, 12, 14**) would be the successor to the seventh emperor (the beast is “*eighth*”), a king in the same line (“*of the seven*”). As discussed at **13:18**, this beast pictures Nero as a type of the **future antichrist**. Here his apparent revival to life is associated with a return to Rome/Babylon accompanied by allies who will help him briefly gain power again, but at the cost of devastating results for the empire itself (**v. 16; 18:17, 19**). To be clear, John’s typology does not picture Nero himself returning but one in the end times who will be **like Nero**, characterized by even greater savagery and madness. But his terrible reign is destined not to last long. He “*goes to destruction*” (**v. 11b**), as **v. 8a** also declared, summarily defeated by the returning Christ (**19:19–21**). The victory that Christ will gain over the beast leads to the angel’s explanation of the beast’s ten horns that follows (**vv. 12–14**).

3. (:12-14) Its Horns = Ten Kings

a. (:12) Future Kings

“And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings, who have not yet received a kingdom,

but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.”

Buist Fanning: They symbolize “*ten kings*” (v. 12a), but not kings that rule one after another and stretch from the past into the future as represented by the heads (vv. 9–11). Instead, these ten exercise authority **simultaneously** “*with the beast*” for a short period of time, for “*one hour*,” and their rule has not yet begun: they “*have not yet received ruling authority*” (v. 12b–c; cf. “*ruling authority*” or “*kingdom rule*,” βασιλεία, in vv. 17, 18).

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Now remember, in prophecy we sometimes have difficulty distinguishing between the kingdom (governmental system) and the king. One verse will speak of the kingdom and the very next verse switches to the king. Such is the case here. The beast is sometimes the empire and sometimes the Satan-controlled man.

b. (:13) Faithful to the Beast

*“These have one purpose
and they give their power and authority to the beast.”*

c. (:14) Failing in Their Warfare against the Lamb

1) Opposing the Lamb

“These will wage war against the Lamb,”

Kendell Easley: Verse 14 focuses attention not on the entire period of the monster's reign, but on the very end. This develops further **Revelation 16:14**, in which the beast gathered the “*kings of the whole world ... for the battle on the great day of God Almighty*.” Already the seven bowl plagues have been unfolding even as worldwide military forces make war against the Lamb.

2) Overcome by the Lamb

*“and the Lamb will overcome them,
because He is Lord of lords and King of kings,”*

3) Observed by the Lord’s Army

*“and those who are with Him
are the called and chosen and faithful.”*

David Thompson: **The Lamb has a victorious army with Him.** When Jesus Christ returns, He is not coming alone. He will have His army with Him. Really, He doesn’t need them to win this thing, but He has decided to share this moment with His family. He promised the Church that they would participate in coming back to reign with Him (**Rev. 2:26-27**).

Daniel Akin: This description highlights the biblical balance of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Called and chosen is God’s part; faithful is our part. Thankfully, even our faith and faithfulness are kept by the power of God (**Jude 24-25**).

Kendell Easley: They were *chosen* before they were born when the Lamb had written their names in his Book of Life (**17:8**). They were *called* to be his disciples at the point of their conversion (**Rom. 8:30**). Then they demonstrated the genuineness of their commitment by living as *faithful* followers of the Lamb (**14:12**). For this reason they have the privilege of following the Lamb in his victorious war.

John MacArthur: The terms are rich in their definition of believers as the eternally elect, *chosen* in the Son before the foundation of the world (**Eph. 1:4**); the *called*, summoned in time by the Father to repentance and faith that saves (**John 6:44**); and *faithful*, demonstrating the true saving faith, the genuine eternal life that endures by the power of the Spirit (**Rom. 8:9**).

B. (:15-18) The Significance of the Great Harlot

1. (:15) Worldwide Coalition Dominated by the Harlot

“And he said to me, ‘The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.’”

Buist Fanning: This multinational character for the prostitute is not at odds with her identification as Babylon the great, since Babylon is typological of future world powers allied against God, but it more clearly identifies her as the center of a worldwide coalition or empire that she dominates (cf. v. 18).

Charles Swindoll: The Beast’s empire will be supported by an alliance of nations from around the globe, from “*peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues*” (**17:15**). All of the world powers will surrender their sovereignty to the Antichrist (**17:13**), who will reign over all the kings of the earth from his great capital city (**17:18**). That is, the original tower-of-Babel dream of a worldwide government with one ruler, one language, one religion, and one economy will finally be realized for a brief season —figuratively speaking, “*for one hour*” (**17:10, 12**).

2. (:16-17) Devastation of the Harlot by the Beast and His Allies

a. (:16) Reflects Hostility Towards the Harlot

“And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.”

Kendell Easley: Main Idea Review: The final product of civilization will be a great wicked city, capital of Antichrist, persecutor of God's people, destined for the wrath of God.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: For centuries the kings and the harlot have appeared as lovers, but there has been no real love between them. They each simply used the other to further their own ends. But now the religious system will have served its purpose, so the ten kings banish and completely destroy the harlot (the religious system). Her wealth, buildings, property will be confiscated, her leaders killed, and everything else destroyed.

G.K. Beale: The Babylonian harlot is also modeled on **Jezebel**, who represents the **spirit of idolatry**, a spirit still active in the churches (**2:20-24**). The object of this destruction includes the apostate church, which has “*committed acts of immorality*” by cooperating with the idolatrous economic system (see on **2:14, 20-22**). Their leader has even been referred to under the image of a harlot (**2:20-22**). Her followers will have the shame of their nakedness revealed (**16:15**; the reference to “*the shame of your nakedness*” in **3:17-18** may indicate the presence of Jezebelic activity in Laodicea). Strikingly, the phrase (they) will eat her flesh is reminiscent of Jezebel’s destiny: “*the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel*” (**2 Kgs. 9:36**). Jezebel’s destruction, according to the same verse, likewise happened according to the word of the Lord, just as is the case here.

Note the many other parallels between the OT Jezebel and the Babylonian harlot, which further link the latter to the false prophetess Jezebel active in at least one of the seven churches:

- Both were heavily adorned or made up (2 Kgs. 9:30; Rev. 17:4).
- Both were queens (1 Kgs. 16:31; Rev. 17:18; 18:7).
- Both controlled seductively (1 Kgs. 21:25; Rev. 17:2).
- Both were guilty of spiritual fornication or immorality (2 Kgs. 9:22; Rev. 17:1-2).
- Both engaged in witchcraft (2 Kgs. 9:22; Rev. 18:23).
- Both were greedy for wealth (1 Kgs. 21:7; Rev. 18:11-19).
- Both persecuted the saints (1 Kgs. 18:4; Rev. 17:6).
- In both cases a righteous remnant opposed her sinful ways (1 Kgs. 19:18; Rev. 17:14).
- God avenged on both the blood of His servants (2 Kgs. 9:7; Rev. 19:2).
- The destruction of both occurs quickly (2 Kgs. 9:33-37; Rev. 18:10, 17, 19).
- God judges the followers of both (1 Kgs. 18:40; 2 Kgs. 10:19; Rev. 2:23; 18:9-10; 20:15).

John MacArthur: Antichrist's alliance with the false religious system will not last. Eventually the ten horns (the ten kings who rule under Antichrist) and the beast (Antichrist himself) will come to hate the harlot. Having used the false religious system to help him gain control of the world, **Antichrist will discard it.** In his rampant megalomania, he will want the world to worship only him. He will also no doubt covet the vast wealth of the false religious system. Thus, he will turn on the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. That graphic language of extreme violence is used to make clear that Antichrist and his henchmen will utterly and completely obliterate all vestiges of the false religious system.

Antichrist's self-serving, satanically inspired actions are, however, precisely **in the scope of God's sovereign plan.** In fact, it is God who will put it in the hearts of Antichrist's followers to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast. God's power is behind the destruction and consolidation of the evil empire; as always, **Satan is the instrument of God's purposes.** The one-world unification government so long sought by the humanists will have finally arrived, only to be destroyed in one great act of divine judgment. All the words of God—every prophecy of Christ's return and the setting up of His kingdom—**will be fulfilled completely.**

b. (:17) Reflects Harmony with God's Sovereign Plan

*“For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose
by having a common purpose,
and by giving their kingdom to the beast,
until the words of God should be fulfilled.”*

Daniel Akin: The kings believe they are carrying out their own program for conquest, but actually they will accomplish **God's providential program.** Having destroyed the woman, the antichrist will unite the world's religious, economic, and political systems under his control. The 10 kings will agree to *“give their kingdom to the beast until God's words are accomplished”* (17:17). God's prophetic program will reach its intended goal as He sovereignly allows the kingdoms of this world to come under the beast's control until the end of the tribulation.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Verse 17 states the principle that God uses the blasphemous actions of world religions and governments to fulfill His own purposes. The plan of the ages unfolds

majestically and Scripture shows that God permits the increasing increments of wickedness until the cup of iniquity overflows, **then judgment comes**.

In the declaration “*God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose*,” there is another indication of God’s use of the forces of evil as instruments of his own purposes of judgment (**Jer 25:9-14**; cf. **Lk 20:18**). Nothing will distract them from their united effort to destroy the prostitute until God’s purposes given through the prophets are fulfilled (cf. **10:7**; **11:18**).

3. (:18) Summary Explanation

*“And the woman whom you saw is the great city,
which reigns over the kings of the earth.”*

Seems to refer to the anti-God, man-made religious system as **John MacArthur** argued up in **verse 5**.

Alternate Views:

Sola Scriptura: **Revelation 11:8** clearly identifies “*the great city*” as **Jerusalem**. The fact that the great harlot is called a city argues strongly for this conclusion. **Revelation 17:5** shows that Babylon is not referring to the literal city of ancient Babylon. Therefore, there is nothing in **Revelation 17** that disqualifies Jerusalem as a solution for this text.

The way the woman rules over the kings of the earth is through the Antichrist. This makes her a harlot. She prostitutes herself with Antichrist when she rightly belongs to God.

Tony Garland: Although this phrase is also used of Jerusalem (**Rev. 11:8+**) and of the heavenly Jerusalem (**Rev. 21:10+**), here it is to be identified with **Babylon** (**Rev. 14:8+**; **Rev 17:18+**; **Rev 18:10+**, **Rev 18:16+**, **Rev 18:18+**, **Rev 18:21+**). This is evident from numerous close parallels between what is said of the Harlot in this chapter and the city Babylon in the next chapter. The primary piece of evidence that “*the great city*,” in this instance, is to be taken to describe Babylon is the earlier name which was seen written upon the Harlot and clearly associates her with Babylon (**Rev. 17:5+**)

David Thompson: There have been all kinds of views concerning the identity of Babylon. All throughout history many have read this and have concluded it was some type of secret code for some other power other than Babylon.

It refers to Babylon that is Iraq. This view says that this location, modern day Iraq, is the place that is responsible for all things that pulled people away from God into immorality and idolatry. This part of the world will be revived and will take front and center stage until God wipes her out. She will be rebuilt. It is said that right now there are 250,000 people living in Babylon. This allows for a literal interpretation and not figurative or symbolic interpretation. We think that just as Jerusalem means Jerusalem, so Babylon means Babylon.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How has the spirit of Babylonianism crept into the Christian church in subtle ways?
- 2) What do we learn from the account in **Genesis 11** of the origin of Babel that informs us of the characteristics of the man-made religious system of the end times described in **Rev. 17**?
- 3) What has church history taught us about the dynamic tension between church and state down through the ages?
- 4) What comfort do you take from God's sovereign control over the wicked agendas of even the most powerful evil forces?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Buist Fanning: This passage may be awkward to preach to a typical Sunday congregation, but it is important not to be too quick to dispense with the powerful imagery in favor of the dry abstract principles that it represents. The symbolism gets our attention and shocks us into realizing what is really at stake in the verses. We'd rather not dwell on the repulsive image of prostitution, but no one can sugarcoat how wrong it is to trade on what is most personal and valuable in order to gain things that have little worth. Yet because of how deceptive and dazzling sin can be, we are prone to sell out what should be most sacred and personal, to betray the loyalties that are most intimate and should be most important to us, for the sake of cheap substitutes. This "*great prostitute*" has that outward look of respectability: she is opulently dressed in fine garments and dazzling jewels. But a closer look reveals sordid abomination and gross uncleanness. She represents the reversal of true values that Christians should resist vehemently. It is the benefit of God's revelation that we can see through sin's enticements and deceptions and grasp what they really represent: values that are depraved and idolatrous.

Marvin Rosenthal: The belief in Mary as the perpetual virgin and her co-mediatorship with Christ, her Son, as enunciated by the Roman Catholic Church, is the ultimate perpetuation of the false religious system begun by Nimrod, the great hunter of the souls of men. It is for this express reason that the apostle John identified Rome as "*THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS*" (**Rev. 17:5**). She seduces men to commit spiritual adultery with her rather than to experience true spiritual union with the Son of God (the *seed of the woman* promised in **Gen. 3:15**). Not without reason, then, John identified Rome, seated as she is on seven mountains (cf. **Rev. 17:9**), as "*MYSTERY, BABYLON*" (**Rev. 17:5**). She perpetuated the false religious system begun by Nimrod, founder of Babylon. At the end time, out of a revived Roman Empire or Western European confederation of nations, will come her most diabolical progeny, the Antichrist Empowered by Satan, whose offspring he will be, the Antichrist will be the ultimate hunter of the souls of men.

Charles Swindoll: Cast of Characters in Revelation 17

Phrase/Image	Scripture	Explanation
The notorious prostitute	17:1-8	The evil, satanically led, organized system that stands in constant opposition to God and His kingdom; the source of all false economies, governments, and religions, drawing its inspiration from idolatry, pride, self-sufficiency, and a denial of God's grace
Many waters	17:1,15	Nations and people groups around the world under the influence of this false system
The beast	17:3,8,11-14	The antichrist, ruler of the end-time worldwide empire and object of worship
"Was, and is not, and is about to come up from the abyss"	17:8,11	The antichrist will imitate Christ's death and resurrection in order to amaze the world and win its political and religion allegiance (13:3-4). This description contrasts with the divine Christ, "who is, who was, and who is coming" from heaven to rule forever (1:8).
Seven heads	17:3,7,9-10	Seven world empires that stood in opposition to God and His people—five that were in John's past (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece), one that existed in John's present (Rome), and one that will arise in the future (empire of the antichrist). Certainty here is not absolute—much debated.
Seven mountains	17:9-10	Ancient Rome built on seven hills. It came to represent the city of man in contrast to the city of God.
The eighth king	17:11	The antichrist, who is one of the preceding kings, is also an "eighth." This may refer to two phases of his rule—before his pseudo "death and resurrection" (the "seventh" king) and after this deceptive feat when Satan turns his local political career into a global empire (as the "eighth" king)
Ten horns	17:3,7,12	Ten political powers that will unite to empower the antichrist, turning all worldly authority over to him
"Called, chosen, and faithful"	17:14	When Christ returns as King of kings and Lord of lords to overcome the beast and the kings of the earth, He will be accompanied by the "called, chosen, and faithful." This same group is called the "armies that were in heaven . . . wearing pure white linen" (19:14). The New Testament commonly uses the terms "called," "chosen," and "faithful" to describe the Lord's saints.

Tony Garland: City of Man vs. City of God

Babylon	New Jerusalem
Built by Man (Gen. 10:10 ; 11:4 ; Rev. 17:18+ ; Rev 18:23+).	Built by God (Ps. 46:4 ; Ps. 87:3 ; Isa. 60:14 ; Gal. 4:26 ; Heb. 11:10 ; 12:22 ; 13:14 ; Rev. 3:12+ ; Rev 21:2+ , Rev 21:10+).
Shown by Angel with Bowl (Rev. 17:1+).	Shown by Angel with Bowl (Rev. 21:9+).
Seen from wilderness (Rev. 17:3+).	Seen from high mountain (Rev. 21:10+).
Great City (Rev. 17:1+).	Great City (Rev. 21:10+) ⁵⁵ .
Fornicator (Rev. 17:2+).	Holy (Rev. 21:2+ , Rev 21:10+).
A harlot (Rev. 17:1+).	A bride, wife (Rev. 21:2+ , Rev 21:9+).
Adorned with precious stones (Rev. 17:4+).	Adorned with precious stones (Rev. 21:18-20+).
Adorned with pearls (Rev. 17:4+).	Adorned with pearls (Rev. 21:21+).
Clothed with purple and scarlet (Rev. 17:4+ ; Rev 18:16+).	Clothed with light (Rev. 21:11+ , Rev 21:18+ , Rev 21:23-24+).
Believer's blood in her (Rev. 17:6+ ; Rev 18:24+ ; Rev 19:2+).	Believers in her (Rev. 3:12+ ; Rev 14:2+ ; Rev 21:24+ , Rev 21:27+).
Demons in her (Rev. 18:2+).	Saints in her (Rev. 3:12+ ; Rev 14:2+ ; Rev 21:24+ , Rev 21:27+).
Foundation has names of blasphemy (Rev. 17:3+).	Foundation has names of apostles (Rev. 21:14+).
Contains abominations (Rev. 17:4+ ; Rev 18:2+).	Contains no abomination (Rev. 21:27+).
King's fornicate with (Rev. 17:2+ ; Rev 18:3+).	King's honor (Rev. 18:3+).
Destroyed (Rev. 14:8+ ; Rev 16:19+ ; Rev 17:16+ ; Rev 18:17+ , Rev 18:19+).	Eternal (Heb. 13:14 ; Rev. 22:5+).

Kendell Easley: For a thousand years, the Christian thinker with the greatest influence was **Augustine of Hippo**. His longest book, *The City of God*, interpreted history as the story of two cities, the struggle between those who depend on God and those who rely on themselves. He traced the earthly city's origins to the city built by Cain (**Gen. 4:17**).

Genesis gives much less attention to Cain's city than to **Babel**, the first city after the flood of Noah. Settling on a plain in “*Shinar*” (Babylonia), the builders reasoned, “*Let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and*

not be scattered over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4).

The ruins of countless other ancient cities confirm parallels with Babel:

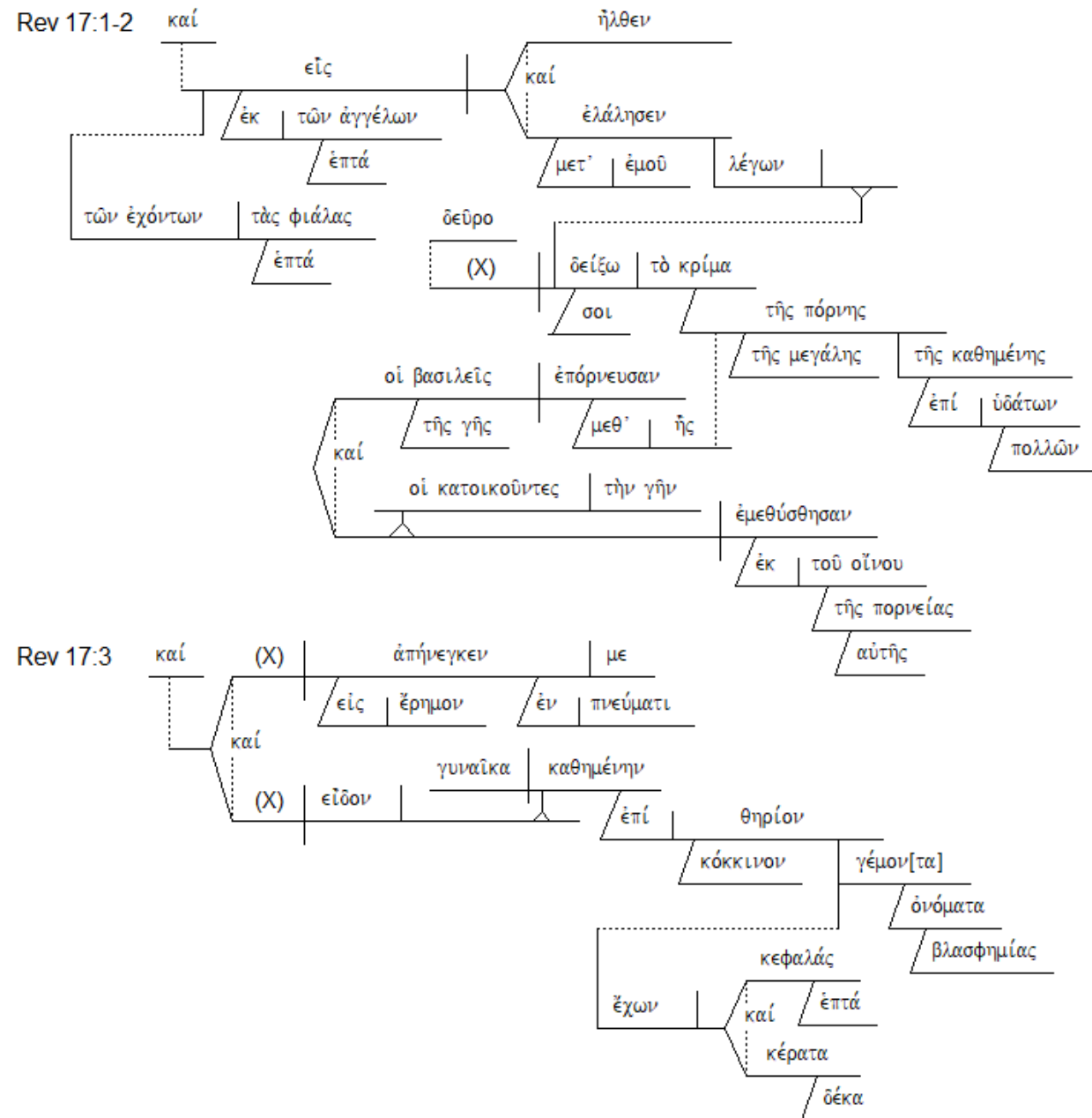
- intense human cooperative labor (“*build ourselves a city*”)
- humanly devised religion (“*tower that reaches to the heavens*”)
- desire to achieve greatness (“*make a name for ourselves*”)
- resolve to do things “my way” instead of by God's will (“*not be scattered*”)

In the case of Babel, God directly intervened, but he has not stopped humans from applying these same principles to their other cities and civilizations. Babel was the model. Consider a roll call of six great ancient cities and their civilizations:

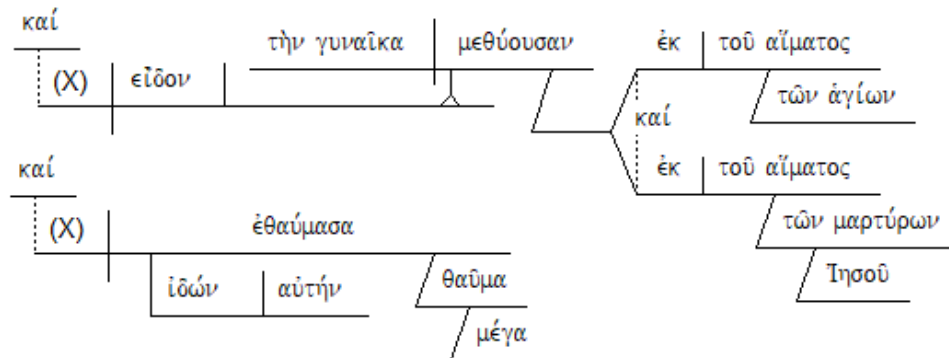
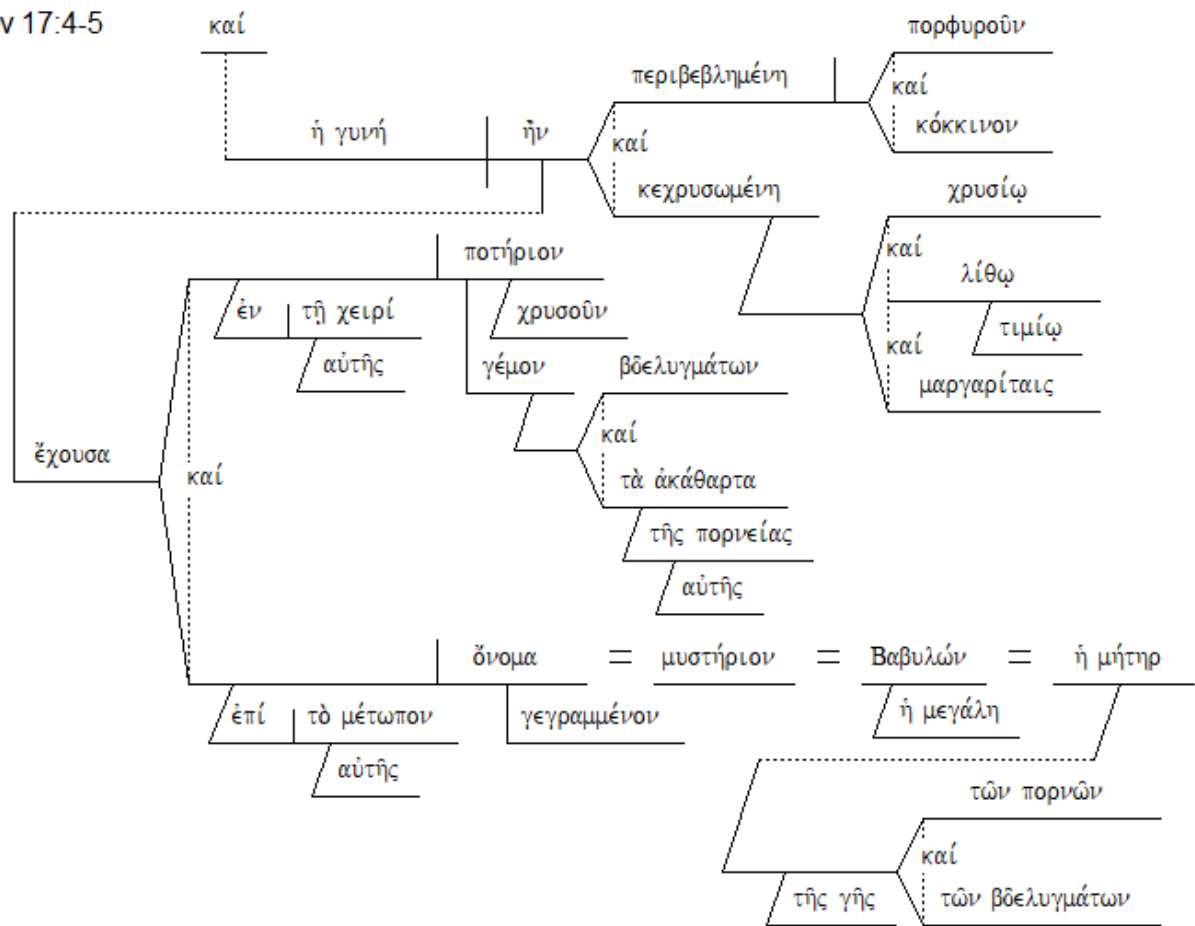
- Memphis of the Egyptian Kingdom
- Nineveh of the Assyrian Empire
- Babylon of the New Babylonian Empire
- Persepolis of the Persian Empire
- Antioch of the Seleucid Empire (Hellenistic power after Alexander the Great)
- Rome of the Roman Republic and Empire

Each was the Babel of its own day. Each rose as an expression of engineering ingenuity, supported by military might and political scheming. Each was a commercial, religious, and cultural center. Each proudly opposed God and the people of God. Roll them all together, and they become the perfect forerunner for one future final great city and civilization opposed to God -- “*Babylon the Great*,” mistress of the world. As with the world's first great city Babel, so with the last Babel: **God will judge her directly and dramatically.**

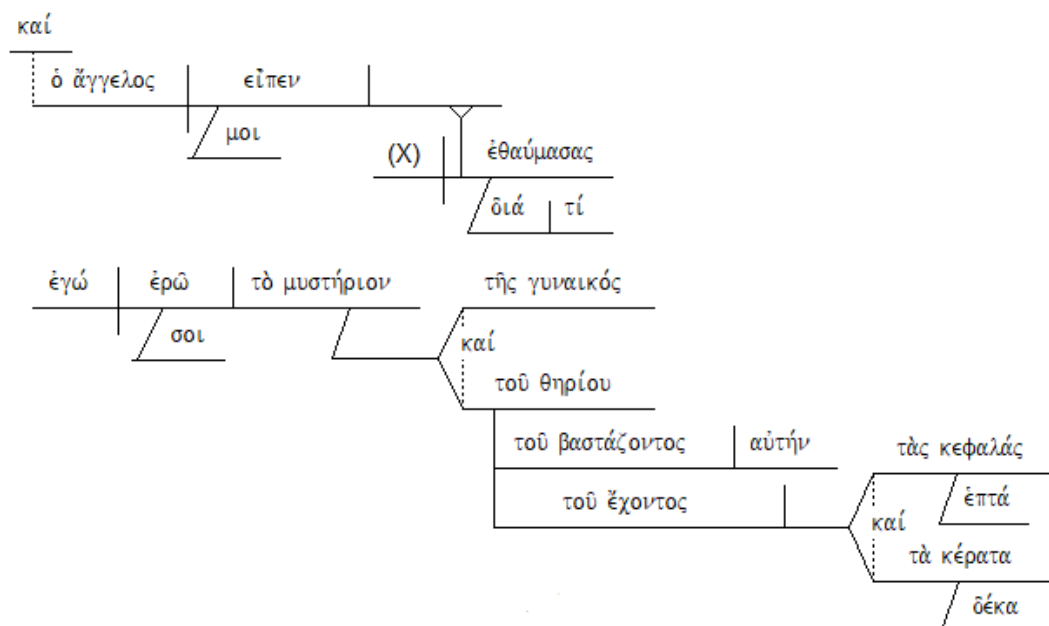
Rev 17:1-2



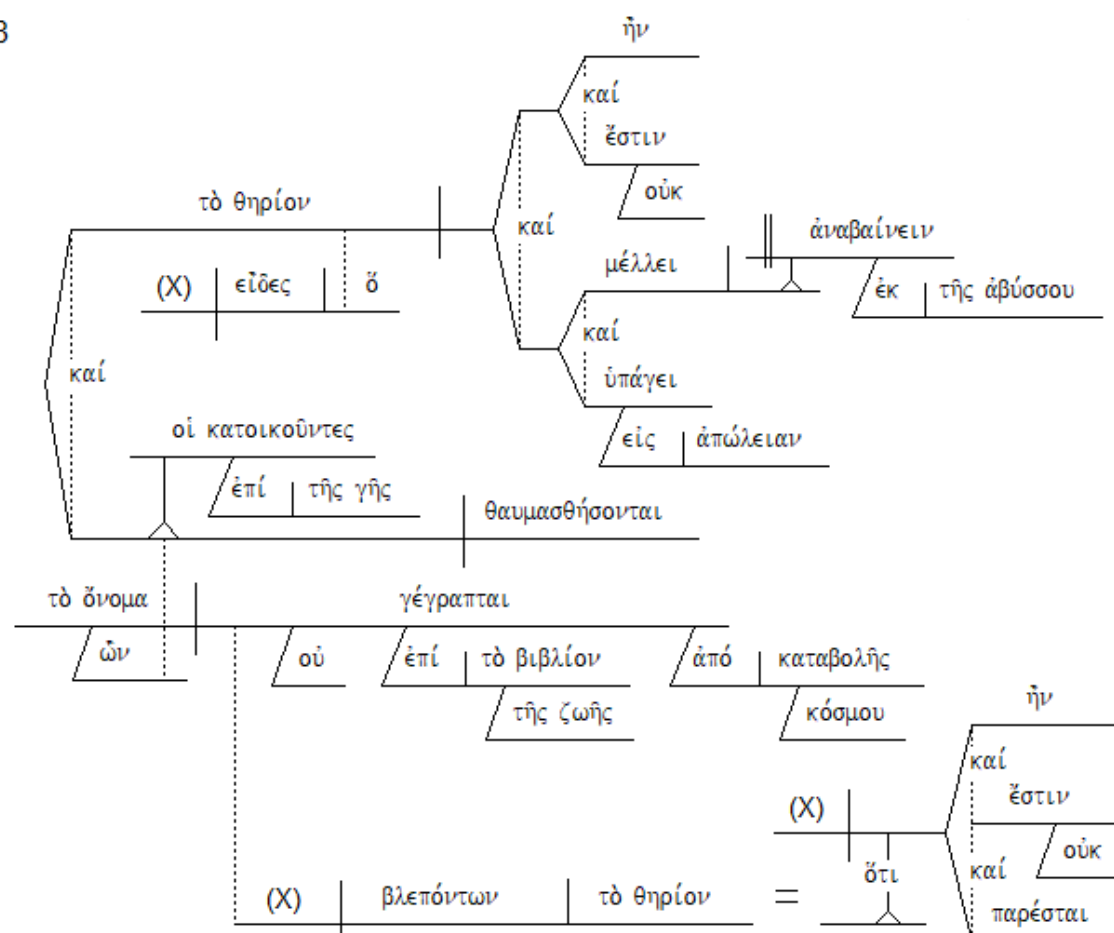
Rev 17:6



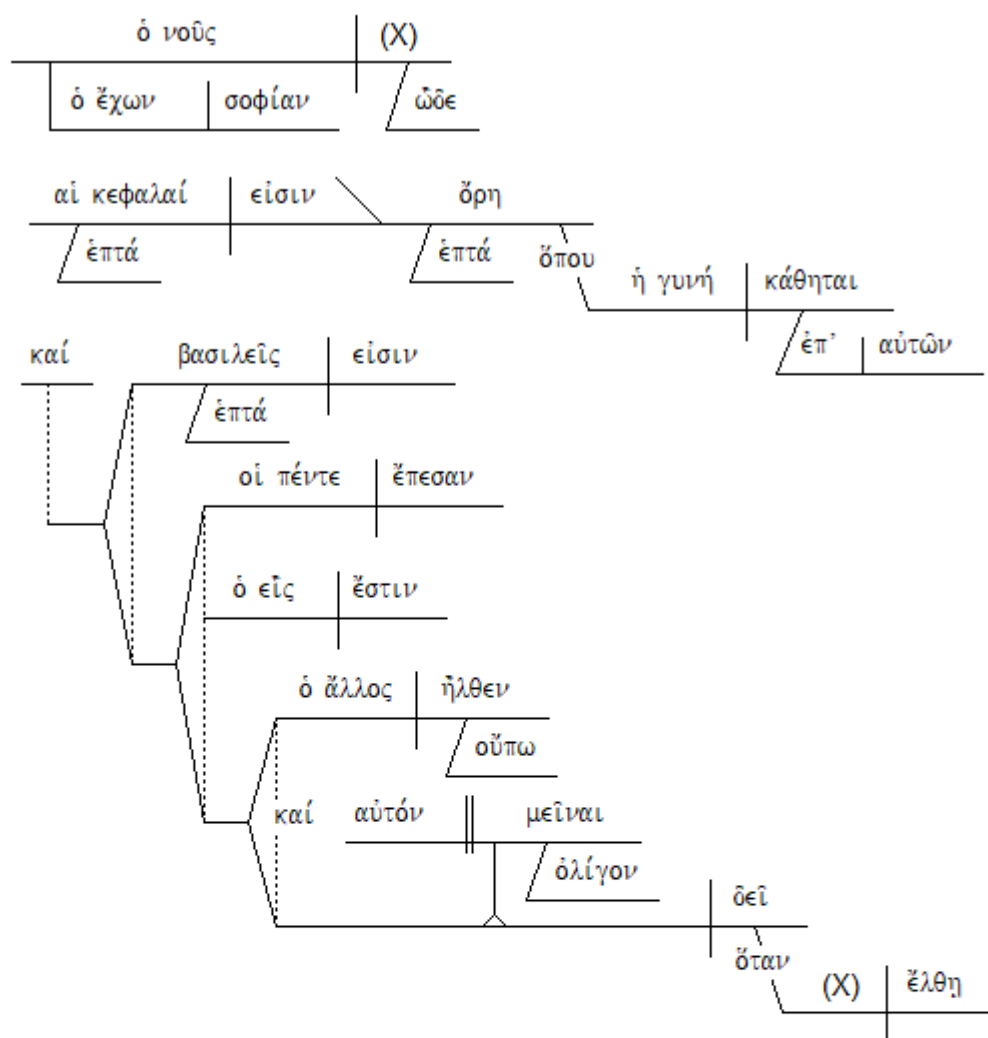
Rev 17:7



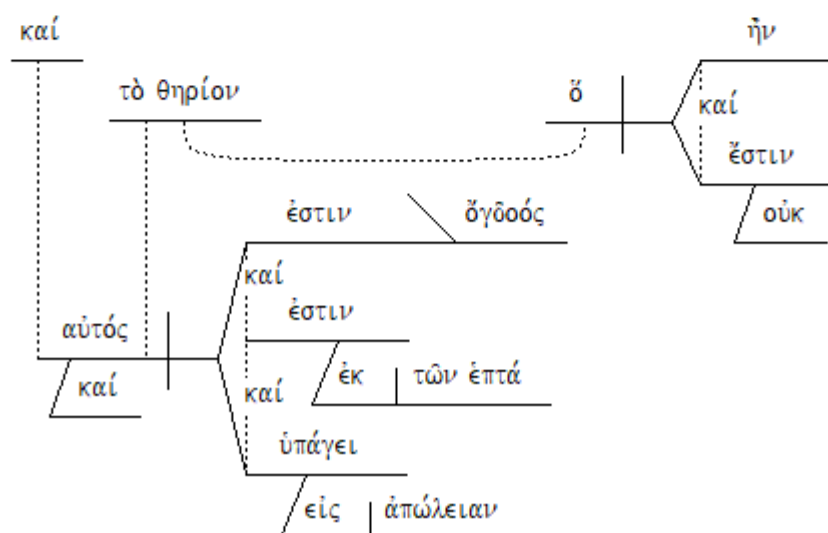
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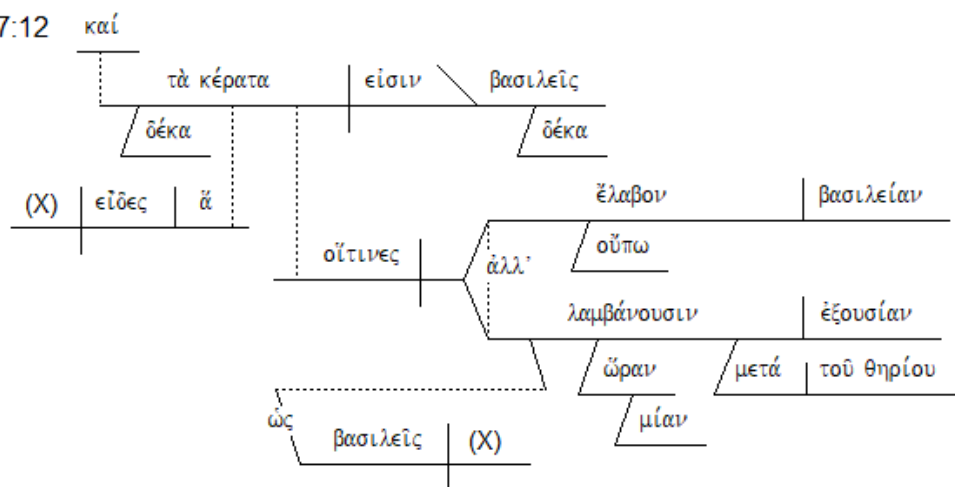
Rev 17:9-10



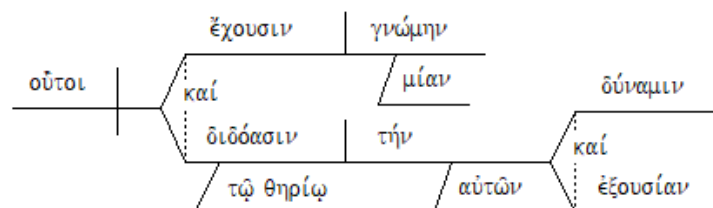
Rev 17:11



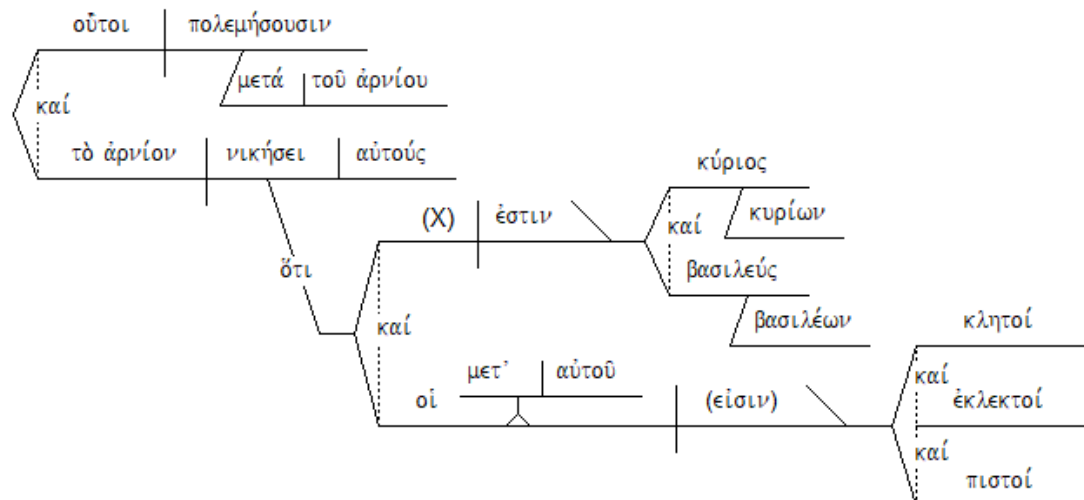
Rev 17:12



Rev 17:13



Rev 17:14



Rev 17:15

καὶ
(X) λέγει μοι τὰ ὕδατα εἰσιν εἶδες ἃ ἡ πόρνη κάθηται οὐ λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι ἔθνη καὶ γλώσσαι

Rev 17:16

καὶ τὰ κέρατα (X) εἶδες ἃ

καὶ δέκα τὸ θηρίον

οὗτοι μισήσουσιν τὴν πόρνην ἡρηνωμένην

καὶ ποιήσουσιν αὐτήν

καὶ φάγονται τὰς σάρκας αὐτῆς

καὶ κατακαύσουσιν αὐτήν

ἐν πυρί

Rev 17:17

γάρ

ὁ θεός | ἔδωκεν | ||

εἰς | τὰς καρδίας

αὐτῶν

καί

ποιῆσαι | τὴν γνώμην

αὐτοῦ

καί

ποιῆσαι | γνώμην

μίαν

δοῦναι | τὴν βασιλείαν

τῷ θηρίῳ | αὐτῶν

ἄχρι

οἱ λόγοι | τελεσθήσονται

τοῦ θεοῦ

Rev 17:18

ν 17:18 καί
 ἡ γυνή ἔστιν ἡ πόλις
 ἡ μεγάλη ἡ ἔχουσα βασιλείαν
 (X) εἶδες ἦν ἐπὶ τῶν βασιλέων
 τῆς γῆς

TEXT: Revelation 18:1-8

TITLE: *BABYLON THE GREAT FALLEN – PART I*

BIG IDEA:

THE CERTAINTY OF THE FALL OF BABYLON DEMANDS MORAL SEPARATION AND DISPLAYS THE APPROPRIATENESS OF JUDICIAL RECOMPENSE

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Akin: In this chapter we observe the world weeping over the death of a prostitute. However, this prostitute was using others just as others were also using her. The people of this world were glad to let her use them because they became drunk with the passion of her sexual immorality (18:3, 4, 9). In fact, she made them rich, provided them a life of luxurious living (18:3, 9). But with her death all was lost. All she gave them was suddenly, in a moment, taken away. When it was too late, they saw that the prostitute, this worldly system of desires and idols, was a deceptive mirage. Sensual pleasures, material possessions, a life of luxury, and the promises of power and satisfaction were completely, suddenly, utterly, and eternally destroyed. Sin is deceptive. It will destroy and it will be destroyed. Security is not found in this world. Security is found only in Christ.

Revelation 18 is a requiem, a **funeral dirge**, a song of lamentation and sorrow over the demise and destruction of Babylon. **Ladd** notes that the Old Testament “background for this section is found in the prophetic dirges over the fall of Tyre (**Ezek 26–28**) and of Babylon (**Isa 13–14; 21; Jer 50–51**)” (*Commentary*, 235). It is a song that has been sung through the ages by those who gave their all to this world, only to be sadly disappointed with the results.

John Walvoord: there are a number of reasons to believe the judgment of **chapter 18** is subsequent to that of **chapter 17**, and not two parts of the same event—although the two are described in similar terms. . .

It seems that **chapter 17** deals with the religious aspect and **chapter 18** with the political and economic aspects of Babylon.

Kendell Easley: MAIN IDEA: When God destroys the final product of civilization, a great wicked city, its commerce and culture will vanish forever because it enticed people away from true religion and holiness and into false religion and impurity.

Robert Mounce: A major poetic feature in this section is the **repeated sets of three lines**. Rome has become a home for demons, a haunt for evil spirits, and a haunt for unclean birds (v. 2). Nations drink her adulterous wine, kings commit adultery with her, and merchants grow rich from her excessive luxuries (v. 3). The voice from heaven issues the order to give back to her what she has given, to pay her back double, and to mix her a double portion (v. 6). The plagues that overtake her are death, mourning, and famine (v. 8). Those who listened to this prophecy as it was read must certainly have been caught up in the **rhythmic excitement** of these passages, to say nothing of the message itself.

John MacArthur: Although those judgments [of Daniel's seventieth week] will be worldwide in scope, they will focus particularly on Antichrist's **world empire of Babylon**. That empire will involve both a religious and a commercial aspect. At the midpoint of the Tribulation, Antichrist will destroy the false Babylonian religious system, which will be absorbed into commercial Babylon. Religion will not cease to exist, but will be restricted to the worship of Antichrist. The Babylon in view in **chapter 18** is Antichrist's worldwide commercial empire, which will rule the world during the last three and a half years of the Tribulation. That Antichrist will be able to build the greatest commercial empire the world has ever known in the midst of the devastating judgments of the Tribulation reveals his incredible power.

God's **destruction of commercial Babylon** is the theme of **chapter 18**. It is thus a very somber chapter; it is a requiem, a dirge for the funeral of humanity. With the destruction of the satanic last and greatest human empire, the stage is set for the triumphant return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Charles Swindoll: At the end of **Revelation 17** we learned that "*Babylon*" is the "*great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth*," the end-times capital of a godless worldwide empire under the Antichrist. That future Mecca of me-theism and Vegas of vanity will be the mother of evil and of all forms of false religion. Like Paris, she represents a lifestyle of high culture. Like Jerusalem, she's a crossroads of world religion. Like Washington, she's teeming with political power. In fact, if you were to take all the powerful cities of the world and merge them into one grand megalopolis, you'd have "*Babylon*." The identification of the actual city in the coming Tribulation is less important than the fact that it will be the nerve center of the Antichrist's final world system, which is directly opposed to God and His people.

I. (:1-3) ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE FALL OF BABYLON

A. (:1) Reliability of the Angelic Proclamation of the Fall of Babylon

1. Messenger from Heaven

"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven,"

Buist Fanning: In this vision John sees a glorious and mighty angel, different from the interpreting angel (one of the seven bowl angels) who guided him in **chapter 17** (e.g., **17:1, 7, 15**). Here the angel descends from heaven (cf. **10:1; 20:1**) to proclaim the effects of Babylon's judgment by God (**vv. 2-3**). This impressive messenger possesses "*great authority*" and "*glory*" that lights up the earth, reinforcing the credibility of his proclamation.

2. Messenger with Great Authority

"having great authority,"

Grant Osborne: in contrast to the beast, this angel has two characteristics.

- First, he possesses ἐξουσίαν μεγάλην (*exousian megalēn, great authority*), compared to the derived authority of the beast (from the dragon, **13:2**, and from God, **13:5**).
- Second, ἡ γῆ ἐφωτίσθη ἐκ τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ (*hē gē ephōtisthē ek tēs doxēs autou, the earth was illumined with his glory*), while the members of the false trinity do not possess "*glory*" in the Apocalypse. In fact, no celestial being, angelic or demonic, has "*glory*" in the book except here. Therefore, it is likely that the angel **reflects the glory of God**, implying he has come directly from the divine presence.

3. Messenger with Great Glory

“and the earth was illumined with his glory.”

Daniel Akin: Having come from God’s presence, he radiates the glory of God.

John MacArthur: He will make his dramatic appearance onto a **darkened stage**, for the fifth bowl will have plunged the world into darkness (**16:10**). Manifesting the flashing brilliance of a glorious heavenly being against the blackness, the angel will be an awe-inspiring sight to the shocked and terrified earth dwellers.

Sola Scriptura: *Glory (dosa)* is a term usually descriptive of the Godhead. Rarely are angelic beings assigned this characteristic (**Ezek 9:3** and **Heb 9:5**). In both cases, a cherub is described. This suggests that the descending angel is high in rank. His very person lights up the earth. The descent of this angel is important.

B. (:2) Reality of the Fall of Babylon

1. Startling Declaration

*“And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying,
‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!’”*

Tony Garland: The angel serves as a divine herald, announcing that which is about to take place. He signals that an event of great importance is about to transpire (**Rev. 5:2+; 10:3+; 14:15+**). . .

The word order is reversed in the Greek to emphasis her fall: *It is fallen, it is fallen, Babylon the great*. The time has finally arrived for the predicted destruction of Babylon to find fulfillment. . . She is called **great** because of her power and commercial splendor, but also because she thought herself to be great. She was built on **pride** (**Isa. 13:19; Jer. 50:29; Dan. 4:30**).

Robert Mounce: The aorist tense denotes the certainty of future fulfillment. It is the prophetic way of declaring that the great purpose of God in triumphing over evil is a *fait accompli*.

2. Surprising Desolation – Reduced to Demonic Habitation

Buist Fanning: According to Old Testament imagery, when a city is completely destroyed it is no longer suitable for human habitation but will become a haunt for savage creatures and possibly evil spirits (**Isa 13:21–22; 34:11–15; Jer 50:39; 51:37; Zeph 2:14**). So Babylon is seen as “*a dwelling place of demons*” (cf. **Jer 9:10**; also Bar 4:35) and a “*haven*” for every kind of “*unclean spirit*” (i.e., demons; cf. **Luke 4:33; 9:42; Rev 16:13**), “*unclean bird*” (regarded as undesirable due to the strictures of **Lev 11:13–19** or because they are **symbolic of demonic beings** that prey at night), and “*unclean and detestable beast*” (savage animals, hated because of the danger they pose; e.g., jackals, hyenas). These creatures typify **a great city laid waste**.

Robert Mounce: It is a prophetic picture of absolute desolation where the proud achievements of the human race become the demonic haunts of unclean and detestable creatures.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: In **verse 2** we get a clear picture of the demonic source, power, and control of this system as it rises up in the last days. The worldwide movement and conspiracy of the last days will involve a multitude of organizations, the super-rich in many countries, but it will not be the product of mere human ingenuity, but of **satanic agency**.

a. Dwelling Place of Demons

“And she has become a dwelling place of demons”

Craig Keener: Becoming a dwelling place of demons is a suitable judgment for a power once mobilized by demons (**Rev 16:14**; see **9:20**) (*Revelation*, 423).

b. Prison of Every Unclean Spirit

“and a prison of every unclean spirit,”

John MacArthur: It was in the vicinity of Babylon that 200 million formerly bound demons were released at the sounding of the sixth trumpet (**9:13–16**). They, along with the demons released from the abyss at the sounding of the fifth trumpet (**9:1–11**), those cast from heaven with Satan (**12:4, 9**), and those previously on earth, will be confined in Babylon. God will, so to speak, gather all the rotten eggs into one basket before disposing of them.

c. Prison of Despised Vultures

“and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.”

C. (:3) Reason for the Fall of Babylon:

Widespread Participation in the Immorality and Sensuality of Her Prostitution

Daniel Akin: Sexual immorality is often a picture of spiritual adultery. It communicates a love affair with the idols of this world. The nations are drunk in their passion for these idols. The kings or rulers of the earth have crawled into bed with these god-substitutes. The merchants of the earth were seduced by the alluring power of her luxurious lifestyle. The peoples of the earth consort with the whore of wealth unaware of her infections and fatal diseases. The idols of this life have cast a spell over the human race, and we bow and worship.

1. Nations

“For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality,”

Buist Fanning: In keeping with a structure repeated several times in this chapter (cf. **vv. 7b–8, 23**), the angel’s observations about Babylon’s desolate condition (**v. 2b–c**) are followed by a statement (**v. 3**) of why she deserved such a horrible judgment (*“because,”* ὅτι; **v. 3a**).

2. Kings

“and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her,”

Kendell Easley: In the last days this will mean that earth's leaders follow the Antichrist sea monster and worship him (**13:8**). Throughout the centuries political leaders around the world, more often than not, have followed the “harlot of civilization assisted by false religion” to enhance both their own agendas and their own pleasures.

3. Merchants

*“and the merchants of the earth have become rich
by the wealth of her sensuality.”*

G.K. Beale: The reference is not to literal immorality (Greek *porneia*; see on **2:14, 20; 14:8; 17:2; 18:9**), but to acceptance of Babylon's religious and idolatrous demands in return for economic security (cf. **2:9; 13:16-17**). The OT allusion is to **Isa. 23:17**, where **Tyre** is said to "*play the harlot with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth*." That Tyre is in mind is clear from the repeated reference to the **Ezekiel 26–28** pronouncement of Tyre's judgment in **vv. 9-22** and the specific allusion to **Isa. 23:8** in **v. 23**. The merchants who cooperated with Babylon became wealthy, but economic security would be removed from the faithful who lived in Babylon but were not "*of Babylon*," those who refused to cooperate with her idolatry. *To drink* here refers to **one's willingness to commit to idolatry in order to maintain economic security**. Once one imbibes, the intoxicating influence removes all desire to resist Babylon's destructive influence, blinds one to Babylon's own ultimate insecurity and to God as the source of real security, and numbs one against any fear of a coming judgment (for these metaphorical meanings of "*drink*" see above on **14:8**). **Babylon will be judged for this seductive activity**. As the chapter will reveal, coercing the nations to trust in her purported economic resources, as she herself does, is an expression of pride and a form of idolatry for which also condemnation occurs (see on **vv. 7, 23**).

Tony Garland: While kings wield political power, merchants wield great financial power. With rare exception, world leadership has generally been immersed in a tangled web of political, religious, and commercial interests which are impossible to isolate from one another.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: "*Sensuality*" is the Greek *strhnos*, a word meaning "arrogant or unrestrained luxury." Here is an important lesson. Commercial Babylon, with its worship of money and power, will promote and push unrestrained luxury, sensuality, and pleasure designed to develop an all-consuming power over the masses via their uncontrolled lust patterns. Babylon will promote the philosophy that happiness, significance, security, and fulfillment are attained by the abundance of the things people possess, in travel and luxury, in comfort and pleasure, etc. Frankly, this sounds exactly like America and much of the world today.

II. (:4-8) APPEAL FOR SEPARATION AND ADVOCACY OF JUDICIAL RECOMPENSE

A. (:4-5) Call for Moral Separation from Babylon to Escape Inevitable Judgment

1. (:4) Call For Separation

"And I heard another voice from heaven, saying,"

Buist Fanning: The command to God's people is, "*come out from her*" (ἐξέλθατε . . . ἐξ αὐτῆς; **v. 4b**), a pattern of instruction seen first in **Genesis 19:12–22** (Lot commanded to escape Sodom before God's judgment falls) and repeated in **Jeremiah 50:8–10; 51:6–10, 45–48** (Israel must flee Babylon before her fall at the hands of a devastating invasion by opposing nations). In both of those Old Testament books, the command to "*come out*" is quite literal, but similar texts in **Isaiah 48:20–22** and **52:11–12** appear to be metaphorical (cf. **2 Cor 6:17**), referring to rejection of the spiritual and moral values of the surrounding culture. This seems to be the point here as well, although the impending judgment (parallel to the setting in **Jer 50–51**) is quite literal in this context. The goal of this spiritual and moral exodus is similar to Jeremiah also: to escape complicity with Babylon's "*sins*" (cf. **Eph 5:11; 2 John 11**) and the "*plagues*" of judgment that such evil is about to bring upon her (**v. 4c**).

Sola Scriptura: This voice is not specially identified, but since the people belong to the voice, it must be **Christ** who speaks. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that the voice refers to God (the Father) in verse 5).

- a. Escape While You Can
 “Come out of her, my people,”

Daniel Akin: Share in her sins and you share in her punishment. Stay with her and you will suffer with her. Her sins are piled up to heaven. They have reached heaven’s doorstep. God is fully aware of what the sins and iniquities are and who has committed them. **Jeremiah 51:9** clearly is in the background of this oracle:

We tried to heal Babylon, but she could not be healed. Abandon her! Let each of us go to his own land, for her judgment extends to the sky and reaches as far as the clouds.

The time for healing is past. The time for fleeing is now.

G.K. Beale: Christians are not being called to withdraw from economic life or from the world in which they live, but they may be ostracized because of their refusal to compromise. They are to remain *in the world* to witness (**11:3-7**) and to suffer for their testimony (**6:9; 11:7-10; 12:11, 17; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24**), but they are not to be *of the world* (**14:12-13; 16:15**). . .

One of the lessons of these verses is that Christians should be **in the world but not of it**. To be “of” the world means that we have compromised our values to share in the world’s present wealth and advantages, but at the cost of also inheriting a share in its coming judgment. The worldliness both outside and inside our churches is always making godly standards appear odd and sinful values seem normal, so that we are tempted to adopt what the world considers to be “normal.” How do we practically avoid such contamination while we are holding down jobs, buying houses and cars, making prudent financial plans for retirement, and so on?

- b. Entanglement in Her Sins Leads to Certain Judgment
 - 1) Avoid Sin
 “that you may not participate in her sins”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: *“So that”* points to the purpose and reason for separation which is twofold:

(1) *“So that you may not participate in her sins.”* “Participate” is the verb, *sunkeinwnen*, “to fellowship with, partake, be connected with,” or even, “be a partner with.” The simple noun form, *koinwnos*, is used in **Luke 5:10** of those who were fishing partners with Simon in his fishing business. Rather than becoming partners with the Babylonian world system, we are to be partners with the Lord Jesus in His enterprise on earth. Literally, the Greek says *“the sins of her”* pointing to particular or specific sins, the sins of commercialism, the things which caused universal covetousness, destruction of the divine institutions, increase in crime, violence, and the search for happiness in luxurious living.

(2) *“And that you might not receive of her plagues.”* “Plagues” has the article which points to some specific plagues, those of **chapter 16** and the seventh bowl judgment. The warning is simply that those who fall in with the system will experience the results of misery and loss in their own lives.

2) Avoid Judgment

“and that you may not receive of her plagues;”

2. (:5) Certainty of Judgment

a. No Minimizing Enormity of Iniquities

“for her sins have piled up as high as heaven,”

John MacArthur: *Piled* is from *kolla?*, which literally means “to glue together,” or “to join.” Babylon’s sins will pile up like a new Tower of Babel (**Gen. 11:3–4**), but unlike the ancient tower, her sins will reach *as high as heaven*. Then the angel adds that God has *remembered her iniquities* (cf. **16:19**). He will take note of them as He did that earlier monument to man’s sinful, arrogant, prideful rebellion at Babel. The blessed truth is that God says of believers, “*I will not remember your sins.... I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more*” (**Isa. 43:25; Jer. 31:34**). But for defiant, unrepentant Babylon there will be **no forgiveness, only judgment**.

b. No Escaping Divine Accountability

“and God has remembered her iniquities.”

Tony Garland: Not that God could forget a single one of her iniquities, but that He now considers the sum total of their weight and the need to respond in righteous judgment. As the iniquity of the Amorites finally reached its full height (**Gen. 15:16**), the guilt of Babylon now requires God’s intervention in order to be true to His righteous character. “*And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath*” (**Rev. 16:19+**). Babylon had thought her wickedness would not be taken into account: “*You have said, ‘No one sees me’*” (**Isa. 47:10**).

B. (:6-7) Call for Judicial Recompense to Match Her Wicked Deeds

Buist Fanning: What the Lord desires is **judicial recompense** against Babylon according to the measure—and above the measure—that she meted out to others in her oppression and sin. The command to “*render to her as she too has rendered*” (v. **6a–b**) calls for equivalent payback, but the next two clauses appear to exact an additional penalty: “*Pay her double*” and “*mix her a double portion*” (vv. **6c–d**). . . The purpose seems to be to display how serious the violation is and to deter future offences.

George Ladd: The idea of rendering double for one’s deeds is an Old Testament idiom indicating **punishment in full measure** (**Jer 16:18; 17:18**) (*Commentary*, 238).

1. (:6) Punishment in Full Measure

a. Equivalent Pay Back

“Pay her back even as she has paid,”

b. Full Pay Back

*“and give back to her double according to her deeds;
in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.”*

Daniel Akin: Her sin demands righteous retribution because of her “self-glorification, sensuous luxury, and prideful arrogance, the very opposite of humble dependence on the Lord and

sacrificial love within a community (e.g. **Prov. 29:23; Isa. 5:15; 1 Pet. 5:6**)” (Duvall, *Revelation*, 234). Her boast recalls ancient Babylon’s boast in **Isaiah 47:7-8**:

You said, “I will be the mistress forever.” You did not take these things to heart or think about their outcome. So now hear this, lover of luxury, who sits securely, who says to herself, “I exist, and there is no one else. I will never be a widow or know the loss of children.”

Because of her boast, she will receive “*in one day*” the plagues of “*death and grief and famine. She will be burned up with fire.*” All of this is a certainty because “*the Lord God who judges her is mighty*” (see **Isa 47:9**). No one and nothing can prevent her certain destruction. Her pride truly is her downfall.

John Walvoord: The **enormity** of Babylon’s sin now brings the enormity of God’s judgment. The Greek verb here means literally “*to pay a debt*” or “*to give back that which is due.*” It is the law of retribution sometimes called *lex talionis*. Divine justice exacts the “eye for an eye” and the “tooth for a tooth.”

But the voice John hears demands that the law of retribution be doubled in payment of Babylon’s hideous sins. She mixes a “*cup*” of sin that the nations will drink down to the full, so she is given a double cup of divine judgment to drink (cf. **14:10**).

2. (:7) Punishment Based on Crimes of Self-Glorification and Self-Sufficiency

a. Appropriate Recompense for Self-Glorification

1) The Sin

“To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously,”

John MacArthur: Three sins call for Babylon’s judgment. First, she was proud; she glorified herself. God, who said, “*I will not give My glory to another*” (**Isa. 42:8**), hates pride (**Prov. 6:16–17; James 4:6**). Second, she pursued self-gratification; she lived sensuously. The Bible pronounces those who do so to be dead even while they live (**1 Tim. 5:6**). Third, she was guilty of self-sufficiency, of presumptuously overestimating her power; she said in her heart, “*I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning.*” That proud boast echoes that of ancient Babylon, who said “*I will be a queen forever.... I will not sit as a widow, nor know loss of children*” (**Isa. 47:7, 8; cf. Ezek. 27:3; 28:2; Zeph. 2:15**). Yet God’s devastating reply was that “*these two things shall come on you suddenly in one day: Loss of children and widowhood. They shall come on you in full measure in spite of your many sorceries, in spite of the great power of your spells*” (**Isa. 47:9**).

G.K. Beale: The **political and economic arrogance** noted in **v. 7b** is emphasized as the cause for her sudden destruction.

2) The Sentence

“to the same degree give her torment and mourning;”

b. Appropriate Recompense for Self-Sufficiency

“for she says in her heart,”

1) Exalted Status

“I sit as a queen”

2) Economic Sufficiency
“and I am not a widow,”

Tony Garland: Her haughty boastfulness is so great that she believes herself to be immune from God’s judgment. Not is the double negative, οὐ μὴ [*ou mē*], the strongest negation possible. She is absolutely convinced she will not see sorrow for her ways. She believes she is secure (**Isa. 47:8-9a**).

3) Emotional Security
“and will never see mourning.”

Kendell Easley: The last part of **verse 7** begins a new sentence, letting us know of the **arrogant self-sufficiency** of Babylon. Even the ancient Greeks had known that the greatest sin of all was **pride** (Greek *hybris*). There are three related statements:

- I sit as queen as the mistress of the world, the finest city of all time.
- I am not a widow, because all the world's kings are my lovers.
- I will never mourn for I am emphatically in control of my destiny.

These thoughts are modeled on old Babylon's pride, exposed in **Isaiah 47:7-9**:

You said, “I will continue forever—the eternal queen!” But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, “I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.” Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood.

C. (:8) Certainty of Severe Judgment on Babylon

J. Hampton Keathley, III: THE BASIS OF THE APPEAL FOR SEPARATION (5-8)

This appeal is substantiated upon three spiritual laws or principles:

(1) The Law of Remembrance (verse 5). God’s actions in history with Babylon teach us this system cannot escape—judgment must come. The principle is God does not ignore or forget sin. He permits the increment or build up of sin, but eventually judgment must come. The first Babel conspiracy attempted to build a tower into the heavens (**Gen. 11:4**); this last Babylon conspiracy piles up her sins to heaven in defiance of God and God remembers. Judgment is inevitable and so believers must flee.

(2) The Law of Retribution (verse 6). Because of the enormity of her sin and because of the holy character of God—judgment is doubled. The thing judged here is the system. The final judgment of unbelievers does not come until the great white throne of **Revelation 20**.

(3) The Law of Retaliation (verses 7-8). She has assumed the position of queen; she has glorified herself and so to the same degree that she has rebelled against God, He retaliates in holy and righteous indignation to dethrone her.

1. Speed of Judgment

*“For this reason in one day her plagues will come,
pestilence and mourning and famine,”*

John Walvoord: Like the church at Laodicea, Babylon’s wealth has brought a sense of false security (**3:17**). . . The fact that her judgment comes in *one day*, emphasized in the Greek by being placed first in the sentence, is reminiscent of the fall of Babylon in **Daniel 5**, which fell in the same hour that the finger traced its condemning words on the wall. Before morning, the ancient power of Babylon had been destroyed. In a similar way, the rich fool of **Luke 12:16–20** lost his barns and his soul in one night. When it is time for God’s judgment, it descends with unwavering directness.

Albert Mohler: God administers justice through rendering judgment warranted by the crimes committed (**Ps 137:8; Jer 50:29**; cf. **Isa 40:2**). The language of paying back double constitutes a metaphor for rendering a full recompense. Babylon unjustly condemned God’s people to death, and now God condemns her accordingly. God will bring about her destruction in one day because, as the mighty Judge, he is able to accomplish it (**Rev 18:8**).

2. Severity of Judgment

“and she will be burned up with fire;”

3. Strength of Judgment

“for the Lord God who judges her is strong.”

Buist Fanning: Her supposed invincibility is put in perspective by **v. 8c** that cites the surpassing might and power of the “*Lord God*” who is her judge. This is the reason (ὅτι) that her desolation will come so swiftly and surely.

Sola Scriptura: Explains how the judgment of God can be so successful against the boast of the harlot/city. She thought she was invincible because of her protection and position with the composite dragon-beast. God is stronger!

John MacArthur: Babylon’s doom is certain and cannot be avoided for the Lord God who judges her is strong. No one can frustrate God’s plans, or keep Him from accomplishing what He purposes to do. Job said to God, “*I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted*” (**Job 42:2**). Despite the “*plans [that] are in a man’s heart ... the counsel of the Lord, it will stand*” (**Prov. 19:21**). “*For the Lord of hosts has planned,*” declared Isaiah, “*and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?*” (**Isa. 14:27**). A chastened and humbled Nebuchadnezzar affirmed that God “*does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’*” (**Dan. 4:35**). God Himself declares that “*there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it? ... My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure*” (**Isa. 43:13; 46:10**). All the power of wicked men and demons will not be enough to deliver Babylon from God’s judgment.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do you think that the heavenly messenger in the opening verses was Christ or an angel?
- 2) Are we separating ourselves from worldliness?
- 3) How can men complain about the fairness of God's judgments?
- 4) Where do we fall into the sins of self-sufficiency and pride and arrogance?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Buist Fanning: Different schemes have been suggested for structuring the content of **chapter 18**, partly because it is difficult to sort out the different speakers and actors that appear in this dramatic chapter. The most likely organization centers on the three explicit introductions of heavenly actors or speakers that John provides at **vv. 1, 4, and 21**. The first and last sections are relatively brief, giving a heavenly announcement of Babylon's fall (**vv. 1–3**) and a dramatic enactment of her judgment with accompanying pronouncements (**vv. 21–24**). The middle section is the longest and most diverse (**vv. 4–20**), but in summary it addresses God's people (**vv. 4–8**), records lamentation over Babylon's fall by three groups who benefitted from her rule over the earth (**vv. 9–19**), and issues a final call for heaven and earth to rejoice over her demise (**v. 20**).

Daniel Akin: Stanza 1: God Severely Judges the Notorious Prostitute (18:1-8).

- A. This worldly system is judged for its demonic nature (**18:1-2**).
- B. This worldly system is judged for its idolatries (**18:3**).
- C. This worldly system is judged for its sinfulness (**18:4-5**).
- D. This worldly system is judged for its pride (**18:6-8**).

Robert Mounce: Drawing heavily upon prophetic oracles and taunt songs of Jewish scripture, the Apocalypticist records an **extended dirge** over the accursed city. The dirge is in three parts.

1. First, in **vv. 1–8** an angel invested with great authority comes down from heaven and declares that Babylon the Great is fallen. Another angel calls God's people out of the city and proclaims judgment against her many crimes and sins.
2. In the second part of the dirge (**vv. 9–20**) we hear the mournful lament of three different segments of society that had profited from Rome's voracious appetite for material abundance—
 - the kings of the world who had committed adultery with her (**vv. 9–10**),
 - the merchants who supplied her with anything and everything she wanted (**vv. 11–17a**),
 - and the maritime industry that brought her cargo from around the world (**vv. 17b–20**).

3. The third and final segment is the actual fall of Rome (vv. 21–24).

It is important to note that the entire dirge is poetic in language and form.

Joe Beard: **Revelation 18** deals specifically with a city that is essentially a political and economic entity. I believe that the ancient city of Babylon will be rebuilt as the capital of the final world empire and will be destroyed physically as well as politically and economically at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I come to this conclusion based on some Old Testament prophecies that speak of a sudden and catastrophic destruction of Babylon that was never fulfilled in history. When the Medes and the Persians took over Babylon in 539 B.C., they did not destroy the city and it continued to be a population center through and past the time of Christ. There was no sudden destruction, Babylon just gradually diminished as a city until today when it is largely ruins. The prophecy of a sudden, catastrophic destruction has not been fulfilled and on this basis, I believe Babylon will be rebuilt as part of the world empire system of the Antichrist prior to the second coming of Christ, so the Scriptures will be fulfilled and this chapter in Revelation fits very well because it describes a sudden catastrophic destruction of the city and with it the destruction of its political and economic power. . .

1) JUDGMENT PROCLAIMED (Revelation 18:1-3)

His message will add to the terror caused by his appearance. His message is a **word of woe** for the Antichrist and his followers. The angel cried out in a mighty voice: “*Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!*” Remember back in **chapter 14** this judgment was predicted, now it will be carried out. Isaiah had predicted in **Isaiah 21:9** that Babylon would fall and be taken by the Medes and the Persians, and it was but it was not destroyed. This judgment proclaimed here will be greater and will be a complete destruction of the city and its political and economic power. Scripture is not clear whether this destruction of Babylon is immediately before the second coming of Christ or immediately after. According to **Revelation 16:19** the great earthquake that is a result of the seventh bowl being poured out destroyed the cities of the Gentiles, it could be that Babylon is destroyed at the same time.

2) JUDGMENT EVADED (Revelation 18:4-5)

This is a message to believers on the earth to separate themselves from the world system. **Get away** from the lies and deceptions of the Antichrist, do not become entangled in the desires of the world for wealth, pleasures, material things.

3) JUDGMENT DESCRIBED (Revelation 18:6-8)

The phrase translated “*To the degree*” is a phrase that calls on God to **match the punishment to the crime**, which is a biblical principle.

This call to God’s people to **separate from the worldly system** can be taken and applied to our lives today. What in your life is keeping you from being fully devoted to God, seeking His kingdom, laying up treasures for yourself in heaven? Are you lured away from your devotion to God and to obedience to His Word by pleasures that are here and then gone. The pleasures of this world do not last, and you cannot take them with you. Why would you pursue things that are here and then gone? What lures you away from God? Wealth, worldly possessions, worldly pleasures, human love? If it is luring you away from total devotion to God and obedience to His Word, then you are called to come away from it and separate yourself from whatever it is so that you do not participate in the world’s sin. God will discipline those who are His children if they stray from Him, to bring them back. Cf. **Hebrews 12:4-11**

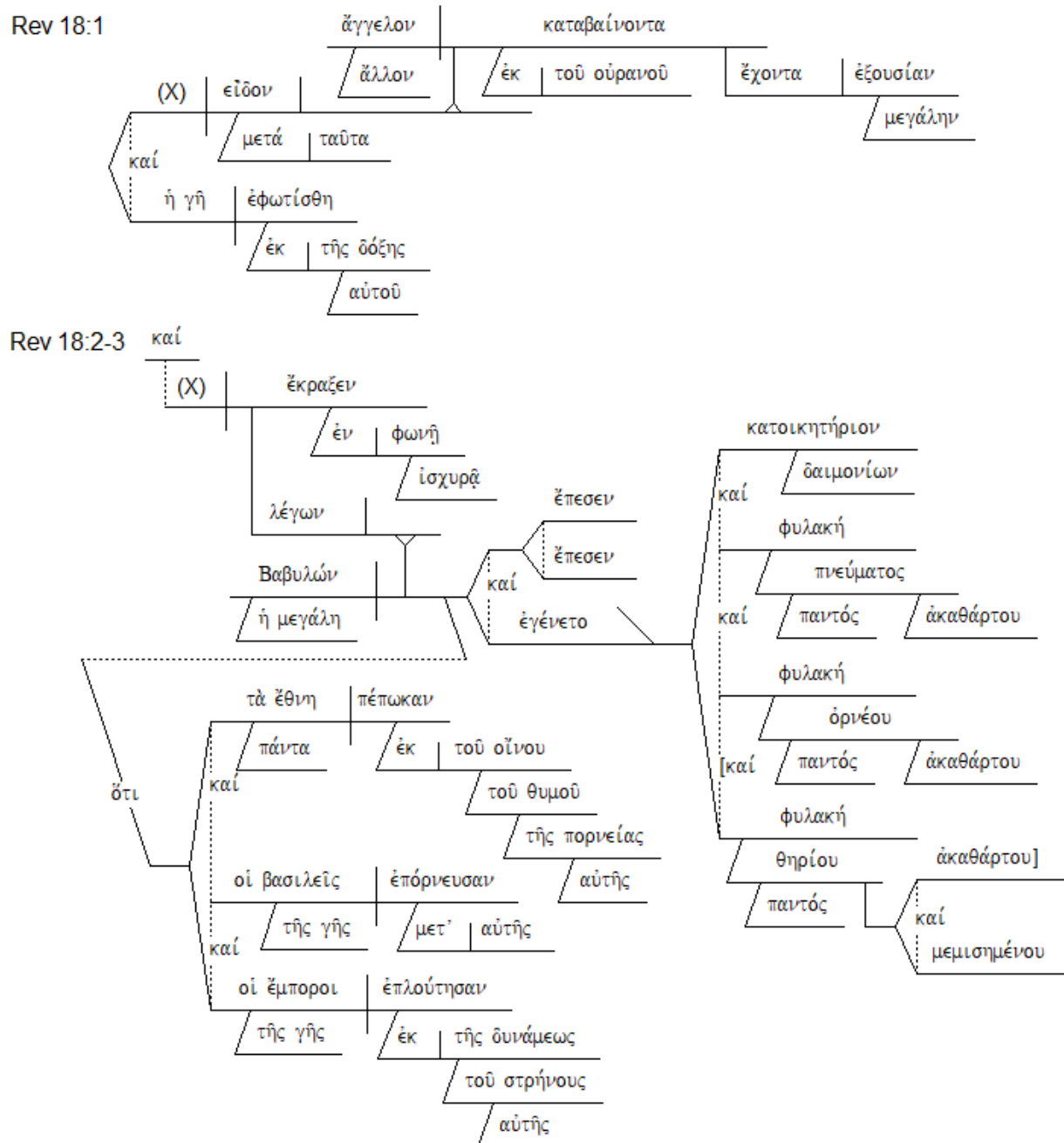
<https://www.mcclearycommunitychurch.com/sermons/babylon-fallen-revelation-181-8>

Greg Allen:

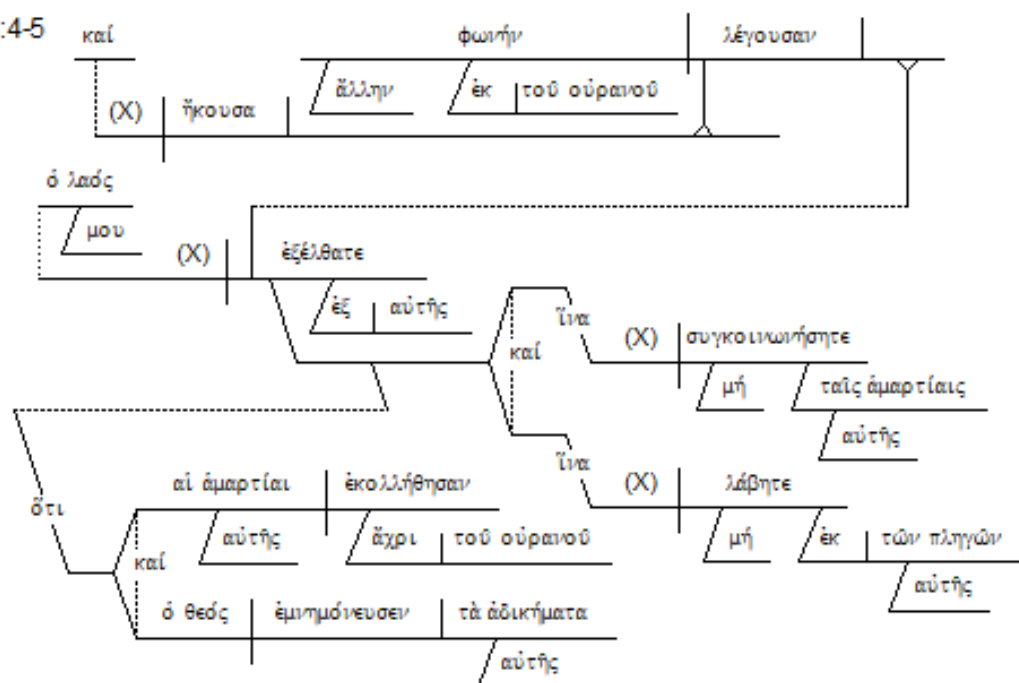
- A. The judgment of her wickedness (vv. 4-5)
- B. The judgment of her hostility toward the saints (v. 6)
- C. The judgment of her materialism (7a).
- D. The judgment of her pride (vv. 7b-8)

<https://bethanybible.org/new/bible-study/am/2016-08-31/babylon-the-great-is-fallen-is-fallen-%E2%80%93-revelation-181-8>

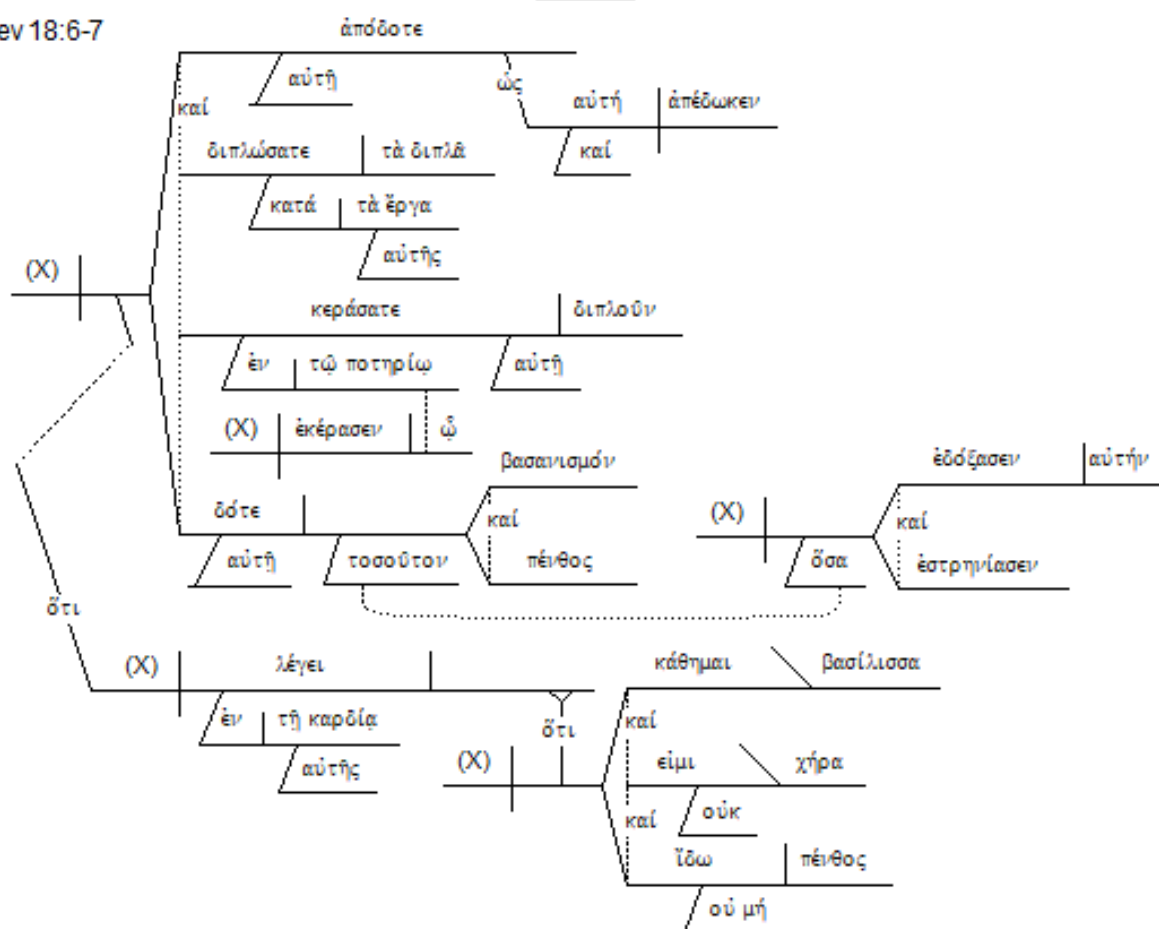
Leedy Greek Diagram:



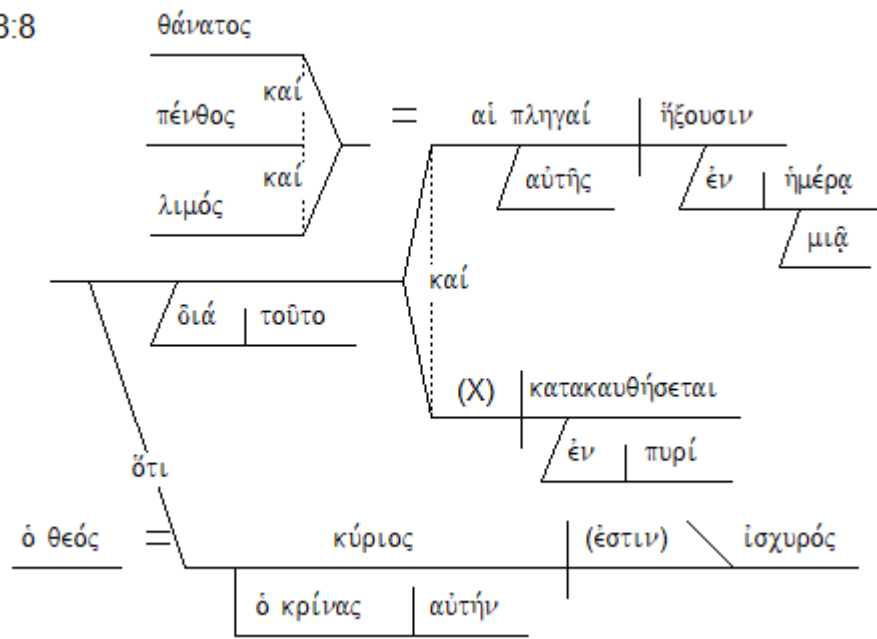
Rev 18:4-5



Rev 18:6-7



Rev 18:8



TEXT: Revelation 18:9-20

TITLE: *BABYLON THE GREAT FALLEN – PART 2 – THE LAMENT WHEN YOU LOSE ALL YOU HAVE VALUED*

BIG IDEA:

THREE FUNERAL DIRGES ARE SUNG BY THE KINGS, MERCHANTS AND MARINERS OVER THE RAPID AND COMPLETE DEMISE OF THE GREAT HARLOT CITY BABYLON AND HER COMMERCIAL SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Akin: Whatever we hate will also reveal what we truly love. The earth dwellers, those who lived for the priorities and values of this world, hated God and loved the prostitute. Consumed by greed and self-interest, their narcissism controlled their desires, their passions, their worldview. Suddenly, all that they have lived for is gone, taken in a moment. It is more than they can bear. Yes, they mourn the death of Babylon, but mostly they sorrow over their own loss. In the end, all of life is about themselves, not others.

James Hamilton: None of these responses have praised God for his justice. None have marveled at God's power to destroy Babylon. None have expressed repentance. None truly loved Babylon, for none moved to help her. All stood far off, and though they lamented Babylon, they were clearly most concerned about what Babylon's fall meant for their own self-interest.

Grant Osborne: The three funeral dirges are sung by three groups who profited most greatly from the largesse of Babylon/Rome: the kings who grew rich from her, the merchants who shared her expanding markets, and the shipping people who carried her cargo all over the world. Now they see her destruction and weep at the same time that they "*stand far off*" so they do not have to participate in her judgment. In other words, those who grew fat on her wealth now desert her in her time of agony. **Aune** (1998b: 978–79) points to four form-critical elements that the three laments have in common: each "*stands far off*"; each "*weeps and wails*"; each begins the lament with "*woe, woe*"; each exclaims on the suddenness ("*in one hour*") of the destruction. These laments are again built on **Ezek. 27**, the lament over Tyre, the great maritime and commercial giant of Ezekiel's day. Many of the details come from there, like the three groups of mourners themselves (**27:29–36**), their fear and sorrow, the list of cargo (**Rev. 18:12–13 = Ezek. 27:12–24**), and details in the lamentations. While Babylon was the great power during that period and a natural symbol for Roman might and glory, Tyre was the shipping giant and commercial power, thus a natural symbol for that aspect of Rome. The purpose is to show the **final end** of those who participate in evil, the **deep mourning** for all that will be lost. Yet in this as well is the terrible hardness that depravity produces. None of these groups mourns their sin, only all the luxurious living they have lost. In other words, they remain self-centered to the bitter end. **There is no true sorrow for Babylon, only sorrow for all they have lost.**

Charles Swindoll: Not surprisingly, when that great world empire begins to crumble, Babylon's lovers —those addicted to her power and pleasures —will begin to wail in anguish. The objects of their absolute devotion —the Antichrist and his empire —will be crushed before their eyes. At the same time the objects of their hatred —Jesus Christ and His people —will be poised to take control.

I. (:9-10) LAMENT OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH OVER FALLEN BABYLON

A. (:9) Bursting of the Prosperity Bubble

1. Subjects of the Lament

“And the kings of the earth,”

Robert Mounce: These are not the kings of **17:16** who turn upon Rome to bring her down to destruction, but the governing heads of all nations who have entered into questionable trade with **the commercial center of the ancient world**. They represent “the bankruptcy of an arrogant existence which believed that it was ‘secure’ because it was living in a perverted political order.” They have committed adultery (entered into illicit relations; cf. **17:2**) with the prostitute and lived voluptuously with her. Now their fortunes have changed, and they weep and wail as the rising smoke announces her destruction by fire. Like the princes of the sea who are “*clothed with terror*” at the fall of Tyre (**Ezek 26:16–18**), the world leaders lament the unexpected disaster that falls upon Rome.

2. Previous Connection to Babylon’s Worldly System

“who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her,”

3. Sorrow of the Lament

“will weep and lament over her”

4. Severity of the Judgment

“when they see the smoke of her burning,”

James Hamilton: The kings pleased themselves with Babylon, but when she falls they want no part of her punishment. Notice how their grief does not result from the injustice Babylon did. Their grief does not spring from the lives they ruined in alliance with Babylon. They do not grieve about the way they dishonored God and led others to do the same. They wail for Babylon, but their concern is not for Babylon—notice how they do not seek to help her. Rather, they “*stand far off, in fear of her torment*” (**18:10**). They are not about to risk themselves in order to help Babylon. This shows that they do not love Babylon. They love themselves. They are only mourning because Babylon will give them no more sensual and immoral favors.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The point is, when they see the object of their trust and the source of their happiness go up in smoke, they come unglued.

B. (:10) Emotional Response

1. Paralyzed by Fear

“standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying,”

Buist Fanning: Their vantage point, however, is not close at hand as though hoping to help her in distress; they are “*standing far away*” (**v. 10a**; also vv. 15, 17b) due to their fear of what she is suffering (cf. “*torment*” in **v. 7**) and their awareness of their own complicity in her evils. Nevertheless, they cry out, addressing Babylon directly with their repeated laments over her condition and their dismay that such a great power could suffer destruction so quickly (**v. 10b–c**). They are dismayed that her judgment came “*in one hour*.”

John MacArthur: This fearful scene supports the idea that Babylon is **an actual city**, not a symbol for the entire world system. Obviously, the entire world is not destroyed at this point, since those watching Babylon burn are safe for the moment. Babylon's destruction is, however, a precursor to the doom that will soon fall on the entire world.

2. Proclamation of Woe

"Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city!"

G.K. Beale: Calling her *great* and *strong* reveals further the idolatrous nature of Babylon, since these are words appropriately applied only to God, especially in describing His judgment of Babylon (**18:8**) and her allies (**6:17; 16:14; 19:17**).

3. Permanent Devastation in One Hour of Judgment

"For in one hour your judgment has come."

II. (:11-17a) LAMENT OF THE MERCHANTS OVER FALLEN BABYLON

A. (:11) Bursting of the Prosperity Bubble

1. Subjects of the Lament

"And the merchants of the earth

2. Sorrow of the Lament

"weep and mourn over her,"

John MacArthur: They weep and mourn, not out of some emotional sympathy for the decimated city, but because with its collapse they have been stripped of the key source of their financial resources. The merchants lament because their materialistic passions can no longer be fulfilled. The weeping that begins then will last for eternity in hell (**Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30**). These greedy merchants are the classic illustration of all those in all times who *gain the whole world, but forfeit their souls* (**Mark 8:36**).

3. Sense of Loss

"because no one buys their cargoes any more;"

Tony Garland: Not only was Babylon a great consumer of luxury goods, she also served as a center of trade. **Commercialism** is a key contributor to the materialism and godlessness which characterize the city at the end. Although material goods are not inherently evil, an abundance of material wealth often contributes to covetousness and idolatry. As people turn their attention increasingly towards making money and obtaining goods, they neglect the more important things of God. In her destruction, **God will destroy the idols of commercialism and materialism**. Tyre had suffered a similar judgment (**Eze. 27:27**). The merchants are like the **church at Laodicea**, whom the Lord threatened to vomit out of His mouth *"because you say, 'I am rich and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked"* (**Rev. 3:17+**).

B. (:12-13) Seven Categories of Merchandise in the Commercial System of Babylon

Robert Mounce: Fifteen of the twenty-nine commodities listed in **Rev. 18:12-13** are also found in **Ezek. 27:12-22**. The same three groups of mourners are all referred to in the Ezekiel passage,

although their reactions to the fall of the cities differ somewhat—the mariners cry bitterly (vv. 29-30), the kings shudder with horror (v. 35), and the merchants hiss (v. 36).

Buist Fanning: The list of specific cargoes, reflecting in many ways the recitation of Tyre's multifaceted commerce in **Ezekiel 27:12–25**, covers a remarkable array of fine goods as well as basic trade commodities. Beginning with precious metals and stones (gold, silver, gems, pearls; v. 12a), the list moves to luxury fabrics (linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet; v. 12b) and then to articles of various kinds made of precious materials (fragrant wood, ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron, marble; v. 12c–d). Various expensive aromatic goods are included (cinnamon, spice, incense, perfumed ointment, frankincense; v. 13a) as well as a full array of basic commodities and livestock (wine, oil, fine flour, grain, cattle, sheep, horses, and carriages [as closely related to horses]; v. 13b–c). Finally, at the end of this list of objects and animals, the term “*bodies*” (σωμάτων) appears, referring to slaves (v. 13c). This word was common enough as a reference to enslaved people, but it is a dehumanizing term (the value of these humans was only as a physical instrument for labor or service on behalf of the owner). The added description, “*that is, the souls of people*” (καὶ ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων), is intended to set the record straight: such mere “*bodies*” are actually human beings created by God as living souls (**Gen 1:26–27**; cf. 2:7 [“*man became a living soul*”]; **Ezek 27:13**).

James Hamilton: These merchants supply everything that people sell their souls to buy. These merchants provide the things that people choose to live for instead of living for God. . . This list is a summary of the adornments, luxuries, and conveniences that comprise a life of worldliness. These items are all about having your best life now. The merchants used these items to provoke people to selfish indulgence. These items were not used to glorify God, and the people buying what these merchants were selling were not using these things to benefit others. Living for Babylon is all about living for yourself.

1. (:12a) Precious Metals and Stones

“cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls”

Grant Osborne: “*Gold*” was the most important of the precious metals, imported primarily from Spain and then the Balkans in the second century A.D. In the first half of the first century, it was so prevalent as a sign of wealth (gold ceilings, shoe buckles, and jewelry) that wealthy Romans began to turn to silver. Possible sources of gold often determined nations that Rome would conquer, so voracious was their appetite. “*Silver*,” also from Spain, became the rage in the second half of the century, and couches and baths as well as serving plates were made of silver. It became a status symbol. “*Precious stones*” would include most in the lists of the book (**4:3; 21:19–20**) and came mostly from India. From the time of Pompey, who introduced them from his eastern conquests, they were used not only in women's jewelry but also in drinking goblets and men's rings. “*Pearls*” were considered the most luxurious of all jewels (along with diamonds) and came from the Red Sea (common pearls), the Persian Gulf (the most expensive), and India. Julius Caesar gave Servilia one worth \$18,000 in equivalent terms, and women began wearing them in such large quantities that they became a symbol of Roman decadence.

2. (:12b) Luxury Fabrics for Expensive Clothing

“and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet,”

William Barclay: Fine linen came mainly from Egypt. It was the clothing of priests and kings and was very expensive.

Purple came mainly from Phoenicia. The word Phoenicia is probably derived from *phoinos*, which means blood-red; and the Phoenicians may have been known as ‘the purple men’, because they dealt in purple. Ancient purple was much redder than modern purple. It was the royal colour and the garment of wealth. The purple dye came from a shellfish called murex. Only one drop came from each animal; and the shell had to be opened as soon as the shellfish died, for the purple came from a little vein which dried up almost immediately after death. As a result, purple was a very expensive dye. **Pliny** tells us that at this time there was in Rome ‘a frantic passion for purple’.

Silk may now be commonplace; but in the Rome of Revelation it was almost beyond price, for it had to be imported from far-off **China**. So costly was it that a pound of silk was sold for a pound weight of gold. Under Tiberius, a law was passed against the use of solid gold vessels for the serving of meals and ‘against men disgracing themselves with silken garments’ (**Tacitus**, Annals, 2:23).

3. (:12c) Costly Building Materials

*“and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory
and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble,”*

William Barclay: The most interesting of the woods mentioned in this passage is thyine. In Latin, it was called **citrus wood**; its botanical name is *thuya articulata*. Coming from North Africa, from the Atlas region, it was sweet-smelling and beautifully grained. It was used especially for table tops. But, since the citrus tree is seldom very large, trees large enough to provide table tops were very scarce. Seneca, Nero’s prime minister, was said to have 300 thyine tables with marble legs.

Ivory was much used for decorative purposes, especially by those who wanted to make an ostentatious display. It was used in sculpture, for statues, for sword hilts, for inlaying furniture, for ceremonial chairs, for doors, and even for household furniture.

Grant Osborne: “Ivory” was so popular that the Syrian elephant was driven almost to extinction. It was used for sculptures (and idols), plates, chariots, and pieces of furniture. “*Wood*” would refer to other expensive woods used for furniture, paneling, or sculpture, like maple, cyprus, or cedar. “*Brass*” or “*bronze*” was used for shields or furniture but especially for statues. Corinthian bronze was regarded as the best, and statues made of this were inordinately expensive. “*Iron*” from Greece and Spain was of course used for knives and swords but also for statues and ornaments. “*Marble*” came from Africa, Egypt, and Greece and was used not only for buildings and statues but also for plates, jars, and baths. It too was terribly expensive and came under imperial ownership to restrict it for Roman use.

4. (:13a) Spices and Fragrances

“and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense”

William Barclay: Cinnamon was a luxury article coming from India and from near Zanzibar. Spice is misleading here. The Greek is *amōmon*; in the fourteenth century, **John Wyclif** translated it simply as *amome*. Amōmon was a sweet-smelling balsam, particularly used as a preparation for the hair and as an oil for funeral rites. . .

Frankincense was a gum resin produced by a tree of the genus *Boswellia*. An incision was made in the tree and a strip of bark removed from below it. The resin then seeped out from the tree like milk. In about ten or twelve weeks, it coagulated into lumps which were then sold. It was used for perfume for the body, for the sweetening and flavouring of wine, for oil for lamps and for sacrificial incense.

Grant Osborne: “*Cinnamon*” came either from eastern Africa or the Orient and was also quite expensive, used for perfume, incense, medicine, and a flavoring for wine. “*Amomum*,” or “*spice*,” was a fragrant spice shipped in from India, often used to make hair fragrant. “*Incense*” was made from several ingredients and used both in religious rites (see **5:8; 8:3–4**) and for adding a sweet smell to rooms. “*Myrrh*” was imported from Somalia and was one of the most expensive and desired of the perfumes, also used as a medicine or a spice. It was used to anoint Jesus (**Luke 7:37–38; Mark 14:3–5** par.) and was taken to anoint his corpse (**Luke 23:56–24:1**). “*Frankincense*” also came from Somalia. It was half the price of myrrh (six denarii per Roman pound versus twelve) and was often used with myrrh at funerals to disguise the smell of the decaying body. Gold and frankincense and myrrh were given to the baby Jesus by the magi (**Matt. 2:11**), showing that they regarded him as a king worthy of such expensive gifts.

5. (:13b) Essential Food Commodities

“and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat”

Grant Osborne: For the most part, these were staples and not especially extravagant items. However, Rome was notorious for its extravagant banquets.

6. (:13c) Livestock

“and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots”

Grant Osborne: The *cattle* were used for work and for milk, the “*sheep*” to some extent for meat but more for wool. Thus, these animals were imported to improve the breeding stock of the wealthy estates.

William Barclay: The chariots mentioned here – the word is *redē* – were not racing or military chariots. They were four-wheeled private chariots, and the aristocrats of Roman wealth often had them silver-plated.

7. (:13d) Humans

“and slaves and human lives.”

Grant Osborne: The “*bodies and human souls*” (epexegetical καί, *kai*, that is, *souls*) certainly refers to **slaves**. The addition of “*human souls*” could be positive, emphasizing that they were not mere cattle but human beings (Bauckham 1993b: 370), or it could be negative, stressing that they were mere “human live stock” (Swete 1911: 235). On the basis of its place in the list (after cattle and sheep), the phrase more likely carries the negative connotation, for the Romans imported incredible numbers of slaves (estimated at 10 million, or close to 20 percent of the population of the Roman Empire), and the rich based their status somewhat on how many slaves they owned. Slaves were obtained through war, debt, parents selling their children for money, kidnapping, as punishment for criminals, or unwanted children exposed to the elements and left to die (common in the ancient world). While in the first century B.C., war produced the greatest number of slaves, during the Pax Romana, the others were the primary sources. Asia Minor was a primary

source of wheat and slaves for Rome, heightening the sense that the list emphasized items that reflected not only the Romans' lust for consumer goods but also their consequent exploitation and plundering of the other nations in the empire.

David Guzik: They sold the bodies and souls of men. This idea has many applications, none less so than today's widespread human trafficking, prostitution, and pornography.

C. (:14) Despair and Sense of Loss

1. Bankruptcy

"And the fruit you long for has gone from you,"

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Verse 14 gives us a striking **spiritual description** of these details of life: they are described as *"the fruit of the desires or lusts of the soul."* The soul here may well refer to the sinful nature within the soul which always seeks to dominate the life. In other words, this heaping up of the details of life is from the sin nature which seeks its happiness apart from God.

2. Barrenness

"and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you"

Grant Osborne: The first noun stresses the cost of the extravagant luxuries, the second the "bright, glittering" appeal of them to the senses. The result is that these luxuries *"will no longer be found,"* combining the emphatic future negative οὐ μὴ (*ou mē, never*) with the negative particle οὐκέτι (*ouketi, no longer*) to mean "will never be found any longer." They are gone forever, a warning to those in our society who have given themselves over to the folly of conspicuous consumption (which describes most of us). As Jesus said in **Matt. 6:19–20**, seek *"treasures in heaven"* rather than *"treasures on earth."*

3. Futility

"and men will no longer find them."

Daniel Akin: The fruit they longed and lived for, the **return on their investment**, is all gone! *"All your splendid and glamorous things are gone."* Indeed, all they have lived for is gone and lost; *"they will never find them again"* (**18:14**). This is the first of seven double negatives in the remainder of this chapter. This one is actually a **triple negative**. It literally says, "No more, not, they will not be found."

D. (:15-17) Emotional Response

1. (:15) Paralyzed by Fear

"The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning,"

2. (:16) Proclamation of Woe

"saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls;'"

Buist Fanning: The problem specified in this verse is the tendency to regard material goods, especially luxury goods, as the goal and focus of life. Human existence does not consist of the

material things people possess, even when they have the most or the best on offer (**Luke 12:15–21**). To make them the “soul’s desire,” as Babylon did, tragically misconceives what is most central in human identity and prosperity. It worships and draws meaning from a false god instead of the true One.

3. (:17) Permanent Devastation in One Hour of Judgment

“for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!”

III. (:17b-19) LAMENT OF THE MARINERS OVER FALLEN BABYLON

Grant Osborne: Nearly all the trade came to Rome **via the sea**. These merchants did not have high social status (the nobility did not sell but instead controlled the profits) but became quite wealthy. The amount of trade involved would be staggering, even by today’s standards. Rome was the first nation to develop a truly international market, with enormous profits coming from Africa, India, Arabia, and China in addition to the Roman world (see **Beasley-Murray** 1978: 267).

A. (:17b-18) Bursting of the Prosperity Bubble

1. (:17b) Subjects of the Lament

*“And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor,
and as many as make their living by the sea,”*

Buist Fanning: The third group witnessing Babylon’s demise and mourning over it is those who travel and work on the sea (**vv. 17b–19**). Like the earth’s rulers and merchants, they have a vested interest in her prosperity because her political and economic power was expanded through extensive contact and travel connections carried on mainly by sea in the ancient Mediterranean world (cf. **Ezek 27:3, 33**). This pattern of empire was reflected in God’s denunciation of Tyre’s evil in **Ezekiel 26–27**, and it is replicated in John’s day in the power of “Babylon” (Rome). The collapse of the central power would lead to worldwide disruption for seafaring interests, and here they lament her fall and their loss (e.g., **v. 19**). These seafaring interests are described in five overlapping phrases, and the first four are in **v. 17b**. “*Every ship’s captain*” and “*everyone who travels by boat*” cover the full range of involvement from most central to most casual: the “*ship’s captain*” (κυβερνήτης) would be the commander or pilot, while the one “*who travels by boat*” (ὁ ἐπὶ τόπον πλέων) would be an occasional traveler or even a tourist. The other two refer to seafaring occupations: “*sailors*” (a ship’s crew) and “*all who work on the sea*” (perhaps fishermen). All of these are portrayed as standing “*far away*” (**v. 17c**) in their mourning, like the rulers and merchants. In the narration of this scene their “*crying out*” is presented more vividly (imperfect verb here and in **v. 19**) to emphasize their dismay. As they witness the effects of her destruction (“*the smoke of her burning*”; cf. **vv. 8, 9; 17:16**), they are struck by the incongruity of such a reversal: “*Who was like the great city?*” (**v. 18c**; cf. **13:4**). This exclamation is drawn from **Ezekiel 27** (specifically **v. 32**), which influences several expressions in the next verse also.

2. (:17C-18a) Sorrow of the Lament

“stood at a distance, and were crying out”

3. (:18b) Severity of the Judgment

“as they saw the smoke of her burning,”

4. (:18c) Surprise over Babylon's Tragic Fall
"saying, 'What city is like the great city?'"

Daniel Akin: Who could have imagined this? She was glorious but now she is gone. She was rich but now she lies in ruins. She was everything but now she is nothing. Wealth is great while it lasts, but therein lies the problem: it does not last.

B. (:19) Emotional Response

1. Mourning

a. Physical Sign of Mourning

"And they threw dust on their heads"

b. Verbal Outcry

"and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying,"

2. Misery

a. Proclamation of Woe

"Woe, woe, the great city,"

Grant Osborne: All the glory, the magnificence, and the extravagance are gone forever, and the seamen realize their future has gone with it. As **Michaels** (1997: 207) says, "They do not know it yet, but before long the sea itself will be gone" (cf. **21:1**).

b. Previous Connection to Babylon's Worldly System

"in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth,"

c. Permanent Devastation in One Hour of Judgment

"for in one hour she has been laid waste!"

G.K. Beale: If the merchants have nothing to trade and sell because of Babylon's fall, then all maritime commerce will cease, and the need to carry goods by water will cease. All who make money from such sea commerce will be out of a job and face economic collapse.

(:20) EPILOGUE – EXHORTING THE GODLY TO REJOICE OVER FALLEN BABYLON

Grant Osborne: first glance, this verse seems out of place in a section focusing on the effects of the destruction of Babylon on her followers, but the **jarring effect** is intended. While those who participated in the sins of Babylon mourn her passing, those who were faithful to God rejoice that the name of God has triumphed and his people have been vindicated. Thus, both heaven and the believers are enjoined to *Εὐφραίνου* (*Euphrainou, Rejoice*), a strong verb used three times in the book (**11:10**; **12:12**; **18:20**), with a deliberate contrast between **11:10** (the joy of the earth-dwellers over the death of the two witnesses) and **12:12** and **18:20** (the joy of the saints over the defeat of the dragon [**12:12**] and his followers [**18:20**]).

A. Exhortation to Rejoice over Fallen Babylon

"Rejoice over her,"

Buist Fanning: A similar call for heaven to “rejoice” is found in **12:12**, spoken by a “voice from heaven” as here (v. 4), so it is better to understand v. 20 as a final interjection by the heavenly voice that provided the account of Babylon’s judgment from vv. 4–20. Invoking joy in heaven (εὐφραίνω) is found in Old Testament contexts celebrating God’s rule and redemption (**Ps 96:10–11; Isa 44:23; 49:13**), but here it is also an invitation to rejoice concerning his vindication against a persecutor (cf. **Jer 51:48**, rejoicing over Babylon’s demise), and it addresses not heaven alone but God’s servants who have suffered at her hand. The vocative in v. 20a, “heaven” (οὐρανέ), is followed by three nominatives used as vocatives: “the saints” (i.e., God’s people, set apart for him; cf. **5:8**), “the apostles” (meaning the Twelve; cf. **21:14**), and “the prophets” (including NT era prophets like the two in **11:10**, but also probably OT prophets who in various ways foretold these days of fulfillment; cf. **10:7; 22:6, 9**). In fact, in view of the reference in v. 24 to Babylon’s killing of “saints and prophets” (also **16:6**; cf. **11:18**), it is likely that in typological terms both “saints and prophets” should be understood to include God’s people and his spokespersons from all the ages of salvation history.

John MacArthur: Heaven will have quite a **different perspective** on Babylon’s judgment than that of Antichrist’s earthly followers. The angel who began speaking in **verse 4** then addressed the redeemed in heaven: the saints (a general term for all believers) and apostles and prophets (the special class of saints given to the church, as indicated in **Eph. 2:20; 4:11**). He calls on them to rejoice over Babylon’s fall, because God has pronounced judgment for them against her. The long-awaited moment of vindication, retribution, and vengeance, for which the martyred Tribulation believers prayed (**6:9–10**) and for which all the redeemed hoped, will have arrived. Heaven rejoices, not over the damnation of sinners, but because of the triumph of righteousness, the exaltation of Jesus Christ, the elimination of His enemies, and the arrival of His kingdom on the earth.

B. Exhortation Directed to the Godly

“O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets,”

C. Reason for the Rejoicing

“because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.”

James Hamilton: In the end God will vindicate his name and his people by judging Babylon. God’s people will rejoice in God. They will celebrate his justice. They will extol his mighty power. They will praise him for his mercy and forgiveness. They will exult in him because he has vindicated them.

G.K. Beale: The **reason for rejoicing** is that God has given judgment against Babylon (v. 20b). It is best to see the suffering saints who cried for vengeance in **6:9–11** at the center of the heavenly throng who are exhorted to rejoice in **18:20**. This is confirmed by the continuation of the **ch. 18** narrative in **19:1–2**, where the basis for the “Hallelujah” (“because His judgments are true and righteous; for ... He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her”) is formulated in explicit allusion to **6:10** (“How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”). Together with **19:5, 18:20** is the climax of the saints’ cry for vindication from **6:10**, though anticipated in various ways also in **11:18; 14:18; 15:4**; and **16:5–6**. The focus is not on delight in Babylon’s suffering but on the successful outcome of God’s execution of justice, which demonstrates the integrity of Christians’ faith and God’s just character (see further on **6:10**). God will judge Babylon just as severely as she persecuted others in order to make the punishment fit her crime. The presence of this “eye

for eye” judgment is apparent from noticing that those commanded to rejoice over her judgment are the very same people who suffered from her persecution.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?
- 2) How do these descriptions of unbridled commerce and materialism sound like our culture?
- 3) Why is it appropriate for the righteous to rejoice over such catastrophic judgment?
- 4) How can such a seemingly secure system of commerce and power be destroyed so quickly?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kendell Easley: In this section we hear the lament of three groups impacted by the final judgment of God on wicked civilization. The structure of this section is a striking example of a literary device called a **chiasm** in which parallel points balance each other not in sequence (a a1 b b1) but in inverted order (**a b b1 a1**). In such cases a single center element, not balanced by its parallel, often contains the **main point** of the chiasm. That proves to be the case here. The following outline will serve as a guide to these funeral orations—all still reported by the heavenly voice of **verse 4**.

- a. Monarchs of the world mourn (vv. 9–10)
 - b. Merchants of the world list their losses (vv. 11–13)
 - c. The city hears her death announcement (v. 14)
 - b1. Merchants of the world mourn (vv. 15–17a)
- a1. Mariners of the world mourn (vv. 17b–19)

John Walvoord: Some believe that **ancient Babylon** is to be **rebuilt** as the capital of the world empire in the great tribulation and that Babylon in this chapter refers to ancient Babylon rather than to Rome. According to **Isaiah 13:19–22**, Babylon was to be completely destroyed and not inhabited. This seems also the teaching of **Jeremiah 51:24–26, 61–64**. It is argued that ancient Babylon as a city was not destroyed for hundreds of years after the fall of the empire, and therefore these prophecies have not been literally fulfilled.

The destruction of Babylon according to **Jeremiah 51:8** was to be **sudden**. This is confirmed in **Revelation 18**. This was not true of ancient Babylon, as it continued for many years after its political downfall. Further, it is pointed out that the prophecy of **Isaiah 13:6, 9–11**, which forms the context of **verses 19–22**, indicates that the destruction of Babylon would be in the day of the Lord. Thus, some expositors believe that Babylon will be rebuilt and then destroyed by Christ at His second coming.

Others identify Babylon as Rome, the seat of the apostate church as described by the seven mountains of **17:9**, and also the political city as elsewhere described. It is possible that Rome might be the ecclesiastical capital, and rebuilt Babylon the political and commercial capital. It is also conceivable that Rome might be the capital in the first half of the last seven years and Babylon in the second half in the world empire phase.

Those who deny that Babylon will be rebuilt do so on the principle that the prophecy of destruction refers to ecclesiastical and political power symbolized in Babylon but not embodied in an actual city. The city of Babylon politically, therefore, is now destroyed historically. The power and religious character of Babylon are destroyed at the second coming. The ultimate decision depends upon the judgment of the expositor, but in many respects **it is simpler to postulate a rebuilt Babylon as fulfilling literally the Old Testament prophecies as well as those embodied in this chapter.**

Regardless of its location, the burning city is a symbol of the fall of its political and economic might, and the kings marvel at the destruction of the seemingly infinite power of the world empire's capital. Their lament involves both words and, possibly, beating their breasts, a common act of distress.

Greg Allen: Theme: **This passage describes the mourning that will characterize the unbelieving world at the destruction of the great 'harlot' city Babylon.**

Our passage continues the Bible's astonishing look at the destruction of the future city Babylon—the center-point of the philosophical, materialistic, political and religious system of the Antichrist. His ungodly system -- "*the spirit of the Antichrist*" -- is already in operation in this world (**1 John 4:3**); but it will one day become summarized by the Antichrist in this "*great city*" which will be suddenly destroyed. The particular focus of this passage is the mourning that the world will express over the sudden and complete destruction of this city in judgment. (This passage has much in common with the description of the destruction of the ancient city of Tyre in **Ezekiel 27:12-36**; and it may be that the destruction of that ancient city by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar was meant to **prefigure** the even greater destruction of this even greater city.)

Several common elements can be detected in the description of their mourning over the city:

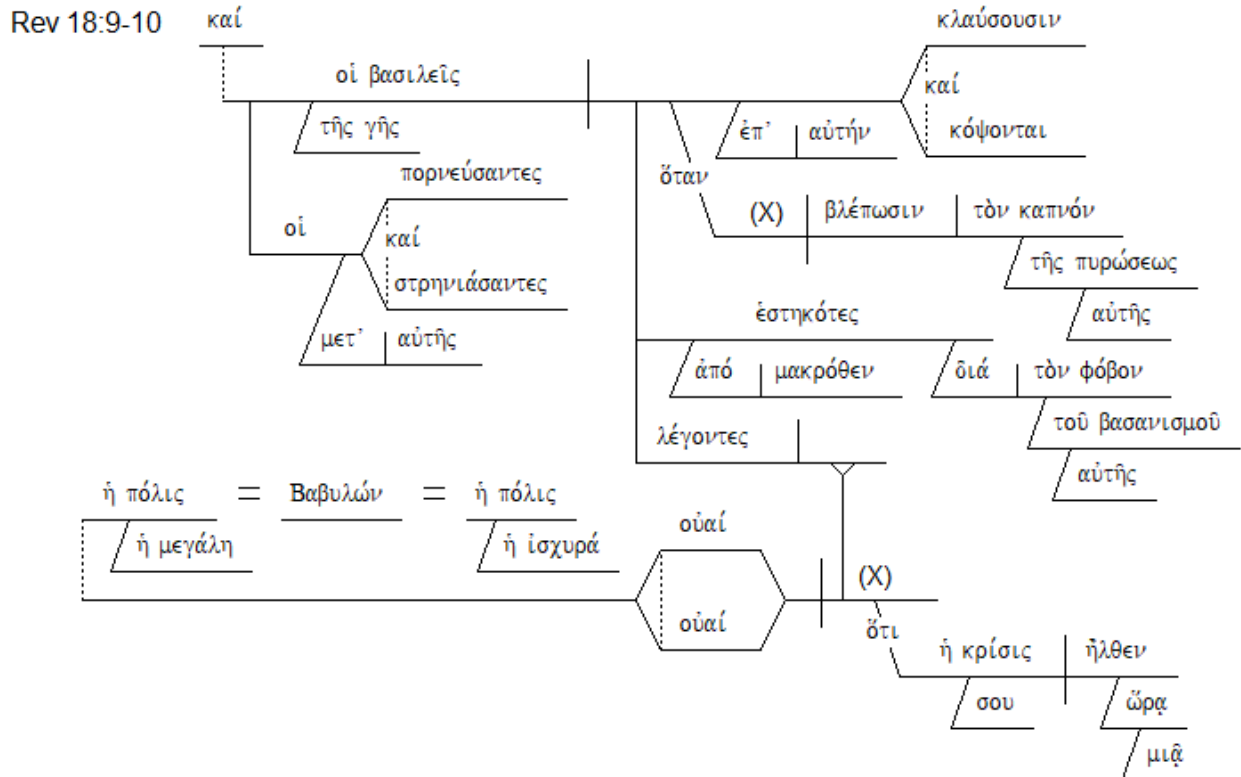
1. They all witness the destruction (**vv. 9, 18**). The merchants stand at a distance from it; but as **vv. 11, 14** and **16** make clear, they feel its destruction—if not literally see it.
2. They all stand at a distance out of fear over its destruction (**vv. 10, 15, 17**).
3. They all see the smoke of its burning (**vv. 9, 18**; again, with the exception of the merchants who don't see the smoke but clearly suffer the consequences of its burning).
4. They all weep (**vv. 9, 11, 15, 18, 19**).
5. They all say essentially the same thing: "*Alas, Alas, that great city . . .*" (**vv. 10, 16, 19**).
6. They all behold and bemoan a sudden desolation of the city. They say, "*in one hour*

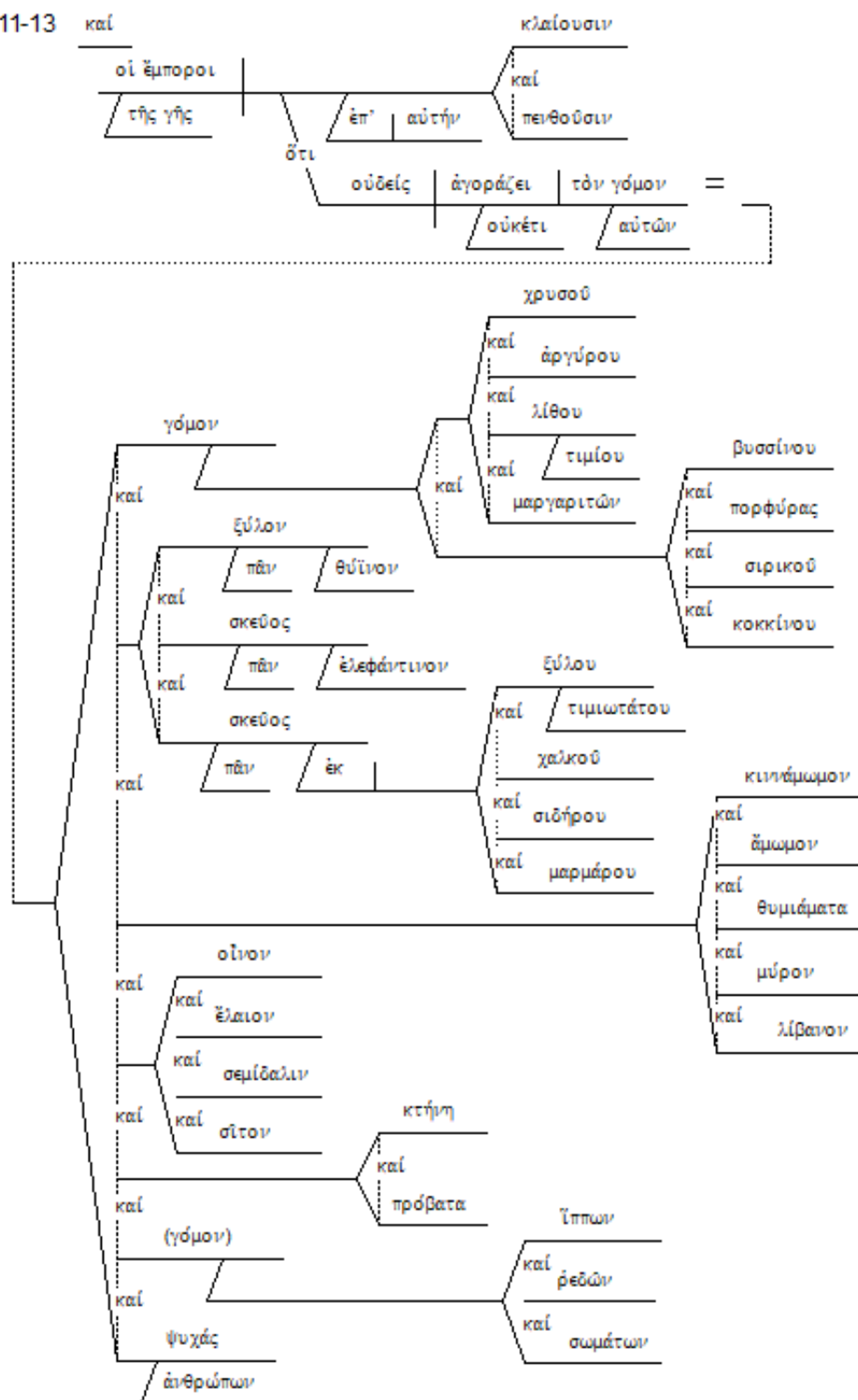
your judgment has come” (v. 10); and “*in one hour such great riches came to nothing*” (v. 17); and “*in one hour she is made desolate*” (v. 19).

7. They all experience a sense of irretrievable loss at its destruction (vv. 9, 11-14, 17, 19).

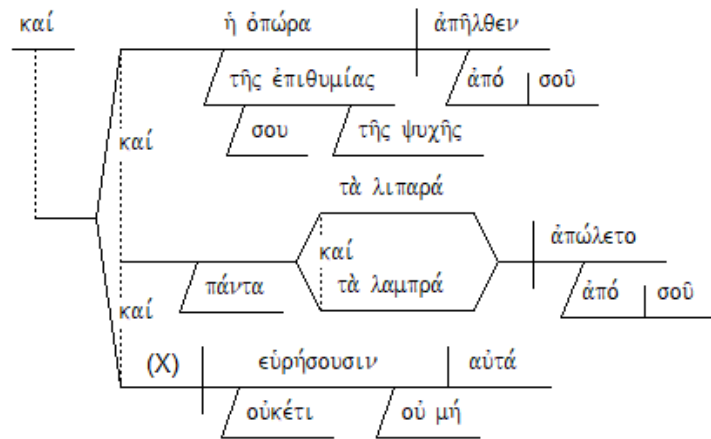
<https://bethanybible.org/new/bible-study/am/2016-09-07/the-mourning-for-the-city-%E2%80%93-revelation-189-20>

Leedy Greek Diagram:

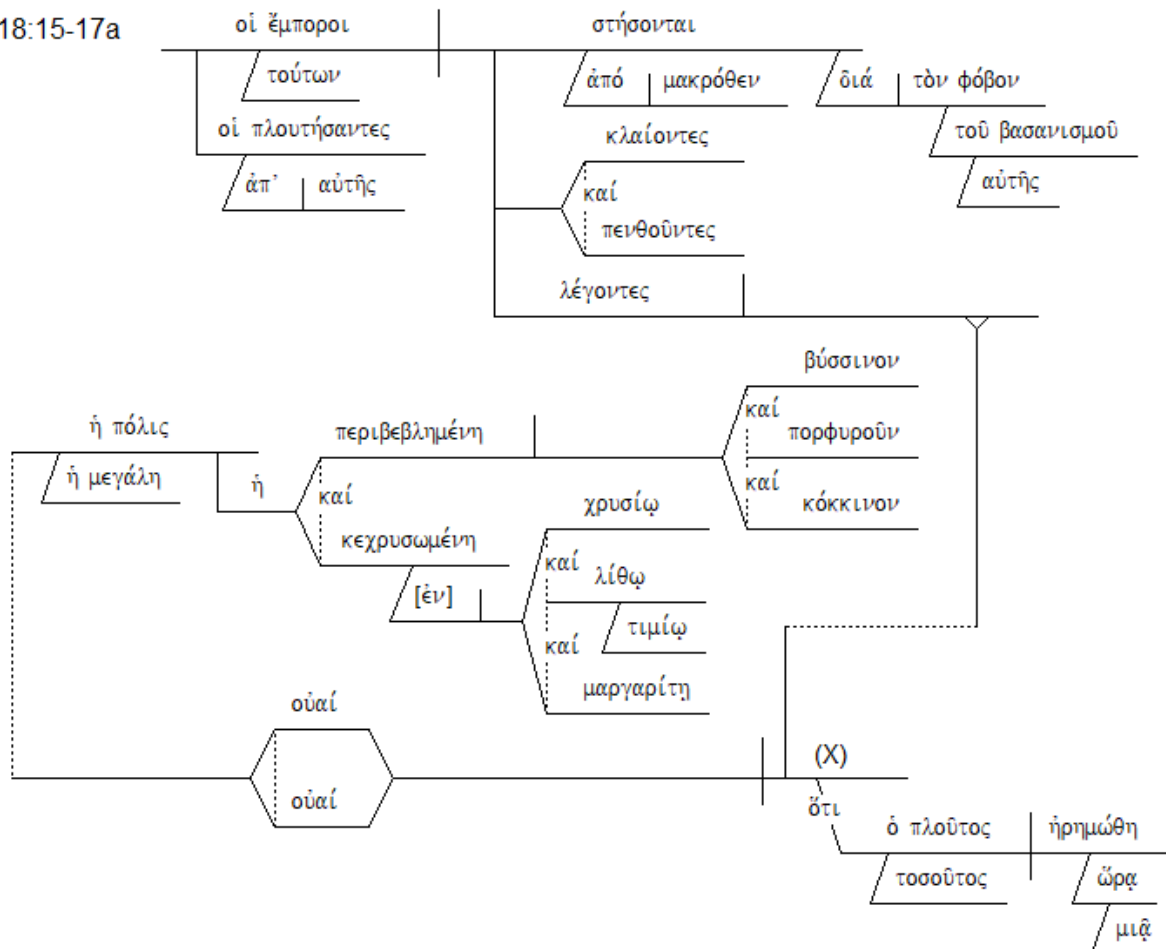




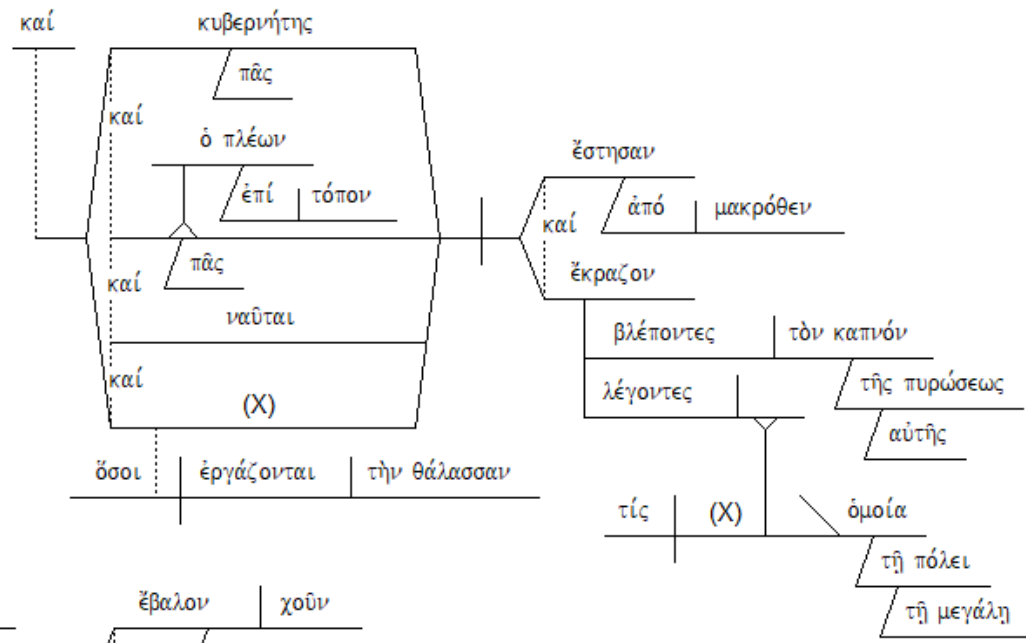
Rev 18:14



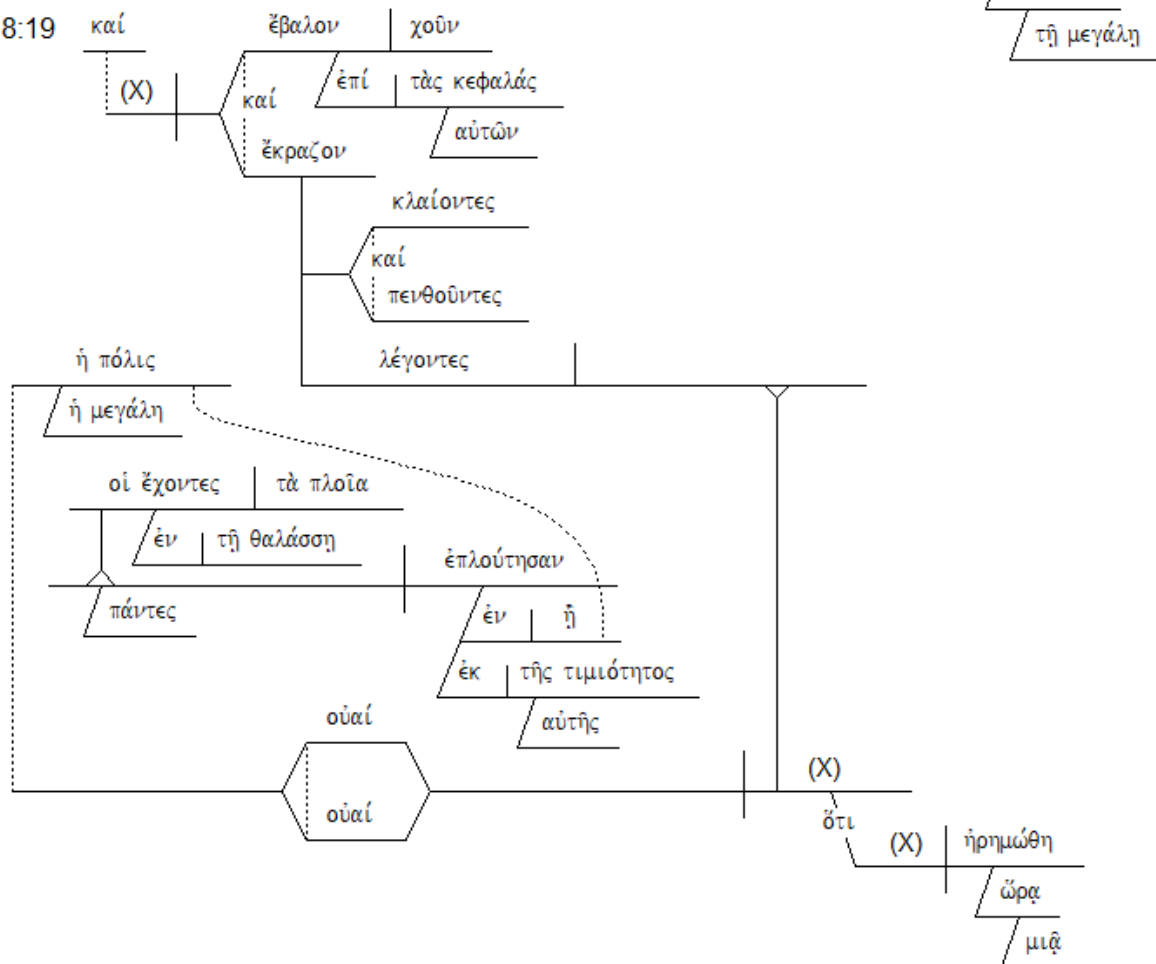
Rev 18:15-17a



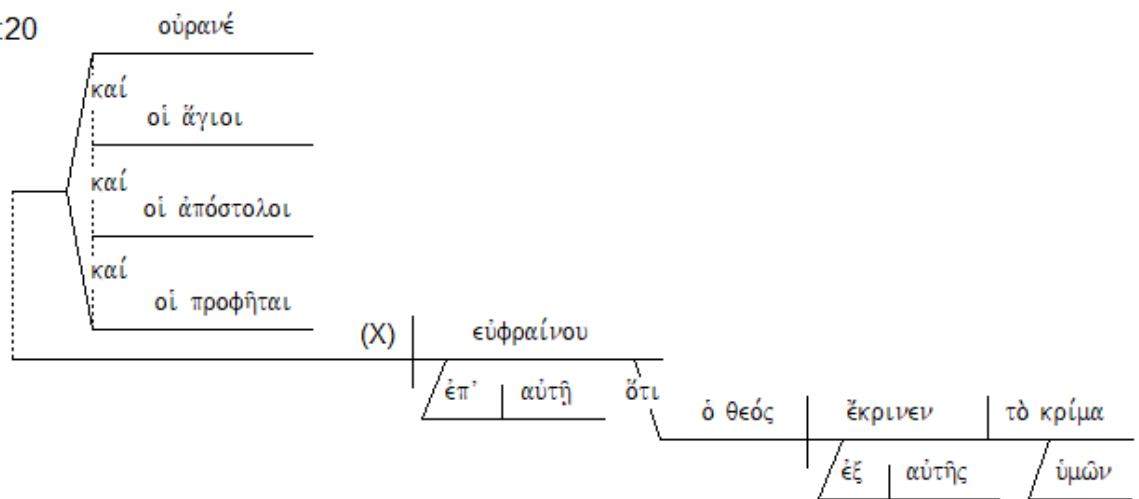
Rev 18:17b-18



Rev 18:19



Rev 18:20



TEXT: Revelation 18:21-24

TITLE: *BABYLON THE GREAT FALLEN – PART 3 – GONE FOREVER*

BIG IDEA:

GOD WILL DESTROY ALL TRACES OF BABYLON THE GREAT DUE TO HER GRANDIOSE PRIDE, SEDUCTIVE INFLUENCES AND DEADLY PERSECUTIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: In a final climactic section “*a mighty angel*” (cf. **5:2; 10:1**) symbolically enacts Babylon’s fall and declares repeatedly her irreversible destruction and the reason for it (**vv. 21-24**). The angel adapts a script set forth in **Jeremiah 51:63-64** for this dramatic representation (**v. 21a**). The “*rock*”, perhaps better a “*boulder*” because it is the size of a large millstone, is thrown into the sea with the declaration (**v. 21b**) that Babylon’s future judgment will be like this: violent and forceful as well as irrevocable and eternal. The strong denial (**v. 21c**), “*she will never be found again*,” is reminiscent of **Ezekiel 26:21** and launches a series of five additional statements like this in **vv. 22-23b**. . .

The first of these strong denials in **v. 21c** gives the summary statement (Babylon herself will disappear forever as a result of God’s judgment). The remaining clauses in the series take up **specific aspects of her everyday life**—the beautiful and the mundane—that will be gone forever. First, pleasing music “*will never be heard in you again*,” with mention in **v. 22a** of those who play the kithara (cf. **5:8; 14:2; 15:2**), general music (cf. **Ezek 26:13**), the flute (**Matt 11:17; 1 Cor 14:7**), and the trumpet (**1 Cor 14:8; Rev 8:2**, etc.). Also gone forever (**v. 22b**) will be artisans and their useful crafts or trades (cf. **Acts 17:29; 18:3; 19:24–25**) and one of the background sounds of basic life: “*the sound of a mill*” to grind grain for bread (**v. 22c**; this feature is clearly drawn from **Jer 25:10**). . .

The two remaining features, also under the direct influence of **Jeremiah 25:10**, are “*the light of a lamp*” and the sounds of joy from a “*bridegroom and bride*” at their wedding celebration. These poignant reminders of the everyday as well as the special days of life reinforce the tragic loss that stubborn resistance to God ultimately brings upon itself. The causal clauses that begin in **v. 23c** (cf. two uses of *oti*) bring reminders of the worldwide impact of Babylon’s evil hostility against God and his ways. They give the grounds for the destructive effects on Babylon described in **vv. 21-23b**.

Kendell Easley: Main Idea: Because she persecuted God's people, all activities in Babylon will cease as quickly and totally as a boulder thrown into the sea sinks from view. . .

When God destroys the final product of civilization, a great wicked city, its commerce, religion, and culture will vanish forever because it enticed people away from true religion and holiness and into false religion and impurity.

John Walvoord: With the graphic description of Babylon’s fall contained in chapters 17 and 18, the way is cleared for the presentation of the major theme of the book of Revelation, the second coming of Christ and the establishment of His glorious kingdom.

Richard Phillips: While this verse no doubt contains a condemnation of occult magic, more generally Rome cast a spell of temptation that lured all around her into the grossest depravity.

I. (:21) SYMBOLIC PORTRAYAL OF THE FALL OF BABYLON – GONE FOREVER

A. Imagery of the Fall of Babylon = Hurling a Millstone into the Sea

“And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea,”

Charles Swindoll: A stone of that size makes a huge splash with rippling waves as it sinks forever into oblivion. In the same way, the destruction of the world system under the Antichrist will shake heaven and earth as it vanishes from the world scene, never to be recovered (**18:21**).

Kendell Easley: Now an angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone (several hundred pounds) and threw it into the sea, symbolizing the conclusion of the judgments. A similar action had symbolized the fall of ancient Babylon (**Jer. 51:59–64**; note particularly **Jer. 51:64**, “*So will Babylon sink to rise no more*”).

Grant Osborne: This millstone is not the small stone used by women “*grinding [grain] with a hand mill*” (**Matt. 24:41**) but the “*large millstone*” of **Mark 9:42** (and par.), a stone so large it had to be driven by a donkey. It was used to grind large amounts of grain and **weighed several tons**.

B. Impressions from the Fall of Babylon

1. Fall Characterized by Violence

“saying, ‘Thus will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence,’”

2. Fall Characterized by Finality

“and will not be found any longer.”

Daniel Akin: The great city will be violently thrown down “*never to be found again*.” She is gone forever. There will be no record of her.

II. (:22-23b) FIVE NEGATIONS OF THE PLEASANT THINGS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

John Walvoord: The angel now expounds on the cessation of Babylon’s activity. The vocal and instrumental music that characterized the city’s life and luxurious existence is now silent. Similarly, the craftsmen who produced the ultimate in luxurious goods are no longer to be found. The sound of the millstone grinding out the grain is silent. In like manner, the light of the candle is now out, the city cold and dead, and no longer do its streets ring with the voices of the bridegroom and the bride. Of the nine different features mentioned, seven are described by the Greek word *phōnē*, literally “*sound*.” The very silence of the city is a testimony to God’s devastating judgment.

G.K. Beale: **Vv. 5-7** and **20** have asserted that **Babylon’s judgment is suited to its crime**, and **vv. 22-23** reveal how the punishment fits the crime, which continues to depict the effects of Babylon’s destruction, especially most immediately from the millstone portrayal in **v. 21**. The point of **vv. 21b-23** is to show that the persecutor will be punished by means of her own sin. Babylon’s economic system persecuted Christian communities by ostracizing people from the

various trade guilds if they did not conform to worship of the patron deities of the guilds. This usually resulted in loss of economic standing and poverty (so **2:9**). Christian craftsmen were removed from the marketplace, and the common pleasures of life enjoyed in normal economic times were taken away from them. In answer, God will remove Babylon's loyal tradesmen: and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer, and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer. Even as the blood of the saints "*was found*" in her (**v. 24**), Babylon's economic basis will no longer be found, and in fact Babylon herself will "*not be found*" (**v. 21**). The daily pleasures taken from Christians through economic, social, or political persecution (**2:9-10; 6:10; 13:16-17; 16:6; 17:6**) will be taken from the world system:

Grant Osborne: The utter desolation is depicted in the complete absence of all that makes life in this world worthwhile—**music, work, food, light, and weddings**.

A. (:22a) No More Joy from Harmonious Music

"And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer;"

James Hamilton: **Revelation 18:22, 23** details all the **pleasant things** that filled Babylon but will never be enjoyed by her again, **beginning with music**. . . Music should be used to praise God, to enjoy God, and to point people to God. Babylon has abused the refreshing and inspiring gift of music and used it for pride and sensual indulgence. The good gift of music will be taken from Babylon and replaced with the howls of unclean birds and detestable beasts (**18:2**).

Daniel Akin: Song and dance stop because there is nothing for the earth dwellers to celebrate.

Grant Osborne: These are the artists who brighten everyday life and make the simple moments joyous. Any city without them would be desolate indeed. This builds on Isaiah's bleak picture in **24:8** ("*The gaiety of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the revelers has stopped, the joyful harp is silent*"; and on Ezekiel's diatribe in **26:13**, "*I will put an end to your noisy songs, and the music of your harps will be heard no more.*" Music has always been the special provenance of the wealthy class, and so this is an economic judgment as well.

William Barclay: The harpists and the minstrels played and sang on joyous occasions; the flute was used at festivals and at funerals; the trumpet sounded at the games and at the concerts; but now all music was to be silenced.

Richard Phillips: The contrast with heaven is obvious and severe: whereas the glorified choirs above sing hallelujahs to the Lord, the music of earth that glorified idolatry and sin will be silenced forever.

B. (:22b) No More Beauty from Skilled Builders

"and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer;"

David Aune: The presence of various crafts was an essential feature of the ancient city. The crafts typically included metalworking, brick-making, glassmaking, carpentry, perfume-making, tent-making, spinning, weaving, tanning, dyeing, pottery-making, carving, sculpture, and stonemasonry.

Robert Mounce: The entire economy has abruptly ceased.

James Hamilton: We are capable of art and skillful workmanship because we are like God, the ultimate Creator. The right use of these gifts is to honor him. If we do not honor him with his gifts, he takes them away.

Richard Phillips: This judgment may in part represent God's rebuke on the trade guilds of Asia from which Christians were barred because they would not render worship to Caesar and to the patron idols (see **2:9**).

C. (:22c) No More Prosperity (or Food Preparation)

"and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer;"

Grant Osborne: Not only is there to be no economy, **there will not even be food**. That primary staple of life in the ancient world, **grain**, will also disappear forever, for there *"the sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again."* It is difficult to know whether this refers to business (the large millstone spoken of in **18:21**) or the normal affairs of the home (the *"hand mill"* used by women in **Matt. 24:41**). In light of the transition from business in the second line (craftsmen) to the home in the fourth (the lamp), either is possible. In light of the centrality of economics in this chapter, however, the broadest interpretation is better, namely, the production of food for the populace with the *"large millstone."* [Ed: Disagree – I favor the interpretation by **Aune** below]

David Aune: The dual form *rēhayim* indicates that these handmills consisted of two implements (KB3, 1134), a concave bottom stone (*pelah tahtit*, **Job 41:24**[MT 41:16]) and a small loaf-shaped "rider" stone (*pelah rekeb*, **Judg 9:53**; **2 Sam 11:21**), which was moved back and forth by hand to crush the grain in the bottom stone (ADB 4:831–32). Because meal and flour were staples, **milling was a daily activity** performed by slaves (**Exod 11:5**; **Judg 16:21**) or the woman (and daughters) of the household (**Isa 47:2**), and the possession of a handmill was absolutely essential (**Deut 24:6**; Jos. Ant. 4.270). This **incessant scraping sound** of the handmill, a normal and frequent sound coming from all homes, is referred to here.

D. (:23a) No More Light from the Darkened City

"and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer;"

Grant Osborne: These are not the torches that lit the way for groups traveling at night (there were no street lamps in the ancient world) but rather the small lamps of the home (see **Thomas** 1995: 346, building on **Swete** and **R. Charles**).

David Aune: Lamp light in the early evening, seen through the windows of homes in a city, indicates the presence of people and of life.

Richard Phillips: Whereas God promised to make *"his face to shine upon"* his people in the blessing of grace (**Num. 6:25**), there is only darkness for those under his curse. Lights bathed the streets of wealthy Tyre, luxurious Babylon, and glorious imperial Rome, just as garish lamps assault the eyes in today's New York City and Las Vegas. Without light, who could enjoy, or even notice, the lavish wealth symbolized by gold, silver, and precious jewels? **William Hendriksen** writes: "Utter darkness reigns supreme, a darkness that can be felt, a darkness which symbolizes the final and complete effusion of God's wrath upon this wicked, pleasure-loving, seductive world!"

E. (:23b) No More Falling in Love and Creating New Households

“and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer;”

Kendell Easley: This, too, signals the **total collapse of domestic life** in the dominion of secular civilization. (By contrast, there will be a great wedding in the holy city of the Lamb, **19:7–9**.)

Robert Mounce: Jeremiah describes the years of Israel’s exile as a time when God will banish from them *“the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp”* (**Jer 25:10**). The parallels in these two passages are not accidental. John writes out of an extensive acquaintance with the prophetic literature of his Jewish predecessors.

Richard Phillips: Finally, Babylon will hear no more of *“the voice of bridegroom and bride”* (**Rev. 18:23**). The blessings of love and merriment, the covenant bonds of human fidelity, and the voice of tender romance will be stilled in the great city (see **Jer. 25:10–11**), for even love, man’s highest blessing, will have ended for those consigned to hell.

III. (:23c-24) THREE REASONS FOR BABYLON’S JUDGMENT

Grant Osborne: Once more the reasons for such judgment are made known (**18:23b–24**). In the ancient law court, the crimes were always read as the sentence was carried out. Thus, in addition to the other lists of her crimes in **18:2–3, 7**, one final enumeration is given. In summary there are three primary sins: **economic tyranny, sorcery, and murder**.

James Hamilton: This statement [Regarding the merchants] seems to imply that Babylon’s great merchants could have been used for good. They could have communicated truth, goodness, beauty, and love for the glory of God. Instead they were used for godless, selfish purposes that rob God of glory and rebel against his truth. They used their power for “*sorcery*” and deception rather than for the worship of God in truth. Not only that, **18:24** tells us that Babylon actively opposed God’s people and his word: *“And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who have been slain on earth.”* Murderers of the martyrs, Babylon would not tolerate those who told her what the world was for. She would not extend protection and life to those who championed the true cause and purpose of the universe. She would hear nothing of those who told her how she could have her sins of prostitution forgiven by the blood of Christ. She was so offended by the message of how she could have the stains of her sin washed away that she killed those who told her the good news.

A. (:23c) Humiliation of Her Grandiose Pride (and Economic Exploitation)

“for your merchants were the great men of the earth,”

Daniel Akin: There Will Be No Respect for Her

The prostitute’s judgment is just. Her merchants were filled with **arrogance** and **pride** as *“the nobility of the earth.”* Not anymore! And all nations were deceived and led astray by her sorcery, her magic spells. She bewitched the nations and led them into destructive foolishness. Now that she is exposed, no one has any regard or respect for her. Her merchants were great but not anymore. Her sorceries worked for a time but never again.

John MacArthur: Three final reasons are given for Babylon's judgment. First, her merchants were the great men of the earth, using their wealth to ascend to positions of power, prominence, and influence. The abuses of the proud, arrogant rich are well documented in Scripture. "*Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?*" asked James (**James 2:6**). Later in his epistle James further indicted the rich for their abuse of the poor:

*Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you. (**James 5:4–6**)*

Isaiah (Isa. 3:14–15; 5:8) and **Amos (Amos 4:1; 5:11; 8:4–6)** also condemned the rich for their self-aggrandizement and maltreatment of the poor.

G.K. Beale: Babylon's judgment because of **self-glory** has already been announced in v. 7. One expression of that was the overwhelming pride of her merchants, the great men, who will be laid low. The point is that the chief purpose of humanity according to Revelation is to glorify God and to enjoy Him, not to glorify oneself and enjoy one's own achievements (e.g., **4:11; 5:12–13; 7:12; 15:3–4; 16:9; 19:1, 7**). **Self-glorification necessitates judgment in which a forced humbling occurs.** It is **idolatrous** for Babylon and her allies to see themselves as "*great*" (**11:8; 14:8; 16:19; 17:5, 18; 18:2, 10, 16, 19, 21, 23**; even though it is angels or men who use the word with reference to Babylon, they do so with reference to Babylon's self-understanding). In truth, **only God is truly great** (see on v. 10). This title is reserved only for the true God (cf. "*the great God*" in manuscripts 051 and 8 of **19:17**, as well as "*great*" in descriptions of various attributes of God in **6:17; 11:17; 15:3; 16:14**). To focus on humanity as the center of everything and to forget God is the greatest sin — it is **idol worship**.

Robert Mounce: [They] had become the "*magnates of the earth*" (NRSV)—a title scarcely able to conceal **considerable arrogance**. Through their places of business had passed into the capital city enormous cargoes of extravagant and luxurious goods from around the world. The merchants' personal fortunes had grown alongside the insatiable appetites of their patrons. Wealth had made them "*the great ones*."

B. (:23d) Negation of Her Seductive Influences

"because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery."

John MacArthur: A second reason for Babylon's being judged is that all the nations were deceived by her sorcery. Sorcery is from *pharmakeia*, the root word of the English words "pharmacy" and "pharmaceuticals." The word is used in the New Testament to refer to magic and occult practices (**9:21; Gal. 5:20**). Babylon's hold on the world will not be entirely due to her military and economic power, but also to her **occult influence**.

Kendell Easley: She and they had every opportunity to use their influence for good. Instead, by your magic spell all the nations were led astray into false religion and the seductive belief that security can be found in the multitude of possessions.

Buist Fanning: Babylon's businessmen ("*your merchants*") carried great influence across the world: they were "*the great ones of the earth*". In world trade they were the "*magnates*"

(NRSV) or “*tycoons*” (NET), which in itself would not be objectionable. But **v. 23d** adds the **evil influence** that their elite stature produced: leading “*all the nations*” away from God and his ways. This evil deception (cf. **13:14**) was accomplished through Babylon’s “*sorcery*”, a word that with its cognates refers to the practice of magic, the use of potions, spells, or related rituals to gain power over spirits or humans.

G.K. Beale: By magic Babylon deceived the nations into worshiping idols instead of the true God. Sorcery, immorality, and idolatry are very closely related. In **Rev. 9:20-21**, idolatry, sorcery, and immorality (Greek *porneia*) are linked together (as also in **Gal. 5:19-21**). Immorality (Greek *porneia*), as we have seen, is a common term for idolatry in Revelation (**2:14, 20-21; 14:8; 17:1-2, 4-5; 18:3, 9**). Sorcery and idolatry are also linked in the OT (**2 Chron. 33:5-7; Mic. 5:12-14**; sorcery, idolatry, and immorality in **Isa. 57:3-7**). The OT Jezebel was judged for immorality and sorcery (**2 Kgs. 9:22**). Jezebel’s similar operation in **Rev. 2:20-21** is why she is associated with Babylon and why her punishment is described as “*death*” (**2:22-23**), as is Babylon’s in **18:8**. Earthly Babylon was judged for her sorcery and immorality (**Isa. 47:9-15**), where sorcery is linked with seeking guidance from astrologers, rather than the Lord. In **Rev. 21:8** and **22:15**, sorcery is placed in close conjunction with immorality and idolatry.

Robert Phillips: While this verse no doubt contains a condemnation of occult magic, more generally Rome cast a spell of temptation that lured all around her into the grossest depravity.

C. (:24) Retribution for Her Bloody Slaughter of the Righteous (Deadly Persecutions)

*“And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints
and of all who have been slain on the earth.”*

John MacArthur: A final reason given for Babylon’s judgment is her murderous slaughter of God’s people. . . The heavenly rejoicing over Babylon’s downfall also mentions this: “*After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her’*” (**19:1-2**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do you make of the contrast between God’s long patience and forbearance with wicked behavior and His sudden and violent judgment at the point of execution?
- 2) What is it about worldly materialism that mankind finds so seductive and deceptive?
- 3) How can we develop greater appreciation for the normal activities of daily living which God by His grace allows us to enjoy?
- 4) Why is it so important for God to avenge and vindicate the shed blood of His faithful messengers and saints?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kendell Easley: What Is Seen Is Temporary

It is easy for us to believe that life as we know it will go on forever. We are, of course, aware of the ebb and flow caused by war and natural calamity. By and large, civilization as a whole seems to make progress. The Renaissance gave way to the Age of Reason. The Enlightenment paved the way for the Industrial Age. The twentieth century—interrupted by two world wars—ultimately reaped great harvest in areas such as medical and communications technology. Despite problems such as crime and terrorism, world civilization appears able to march on forever.

The message of **Revelation 18** is that **what is seen is temporary and subject to the judgment of Almighty God**. On the one hand, Babylon the Great provides power, privilege, and prestige to those willing to be seduced by her spell. Monarchs, merchants, and mariners are among those who taste her pleasures and lament her demise. On the other hand, Babylon moves forward on the misery of human slavery, moving people away from true religion into impurity. She is always hostile to the things of God; in fact, the blood of all Christian martyrs drips from her hands.

If this is true, then Christians of every age need to evaluate the call to “*Come out of her, my people*.” Only those who refuse to share her sins will not receive any of her plagues. Two exclamations summarize the two opposing responses to Babylon's death. On one hand are those who cry “*woe*,” because they, too, have been condemned. On the other hand are those who cry “*hallelujah*,” (19:1) because the martyrs have been avenged at last. The choices we make now will determine whether one day we cry “*woe*” or “*hallelujah*.”

James Hamilton: So how does this message affect you? Will you lament when the movie theaters are gone, when the most trendy and popular clothing chains have all closed, and when the pornography industry is shut down once and for all? Will it make you sad when those who exploit women can no longer enable you to use them for your pleasure? Will it make you sad when all the ways that people take pride in themselves are shown to be bankrupt? Will you lament with the kings, merchants, and men of the sea?

Or are you going to rejoice when God finally brings justice, when he shows his power, and when he vindicates his servants? This is really a question about where your heart is and what you really enjoy. Do you enjoy the world, or do you enjoy God? Do you long to be with God, or would you really rather go to a nice restaurant, the mall, or maybe a football game and enjoy yourself?

Let me ask it another way: do you live for what you were made to live for—God? Or do you live for what you were not made to live for and what will never satisfy you—yourself?

I want to ask the same question in John's terms: will you go to the world's spiritual red-light district to seek your pay-per-pleasure with Babylon the whore? Or will you seek to enjoy the good gifts that God freely gives by thanking him and praising him for those gifts and enjoying them within the boundaries he has set for them?

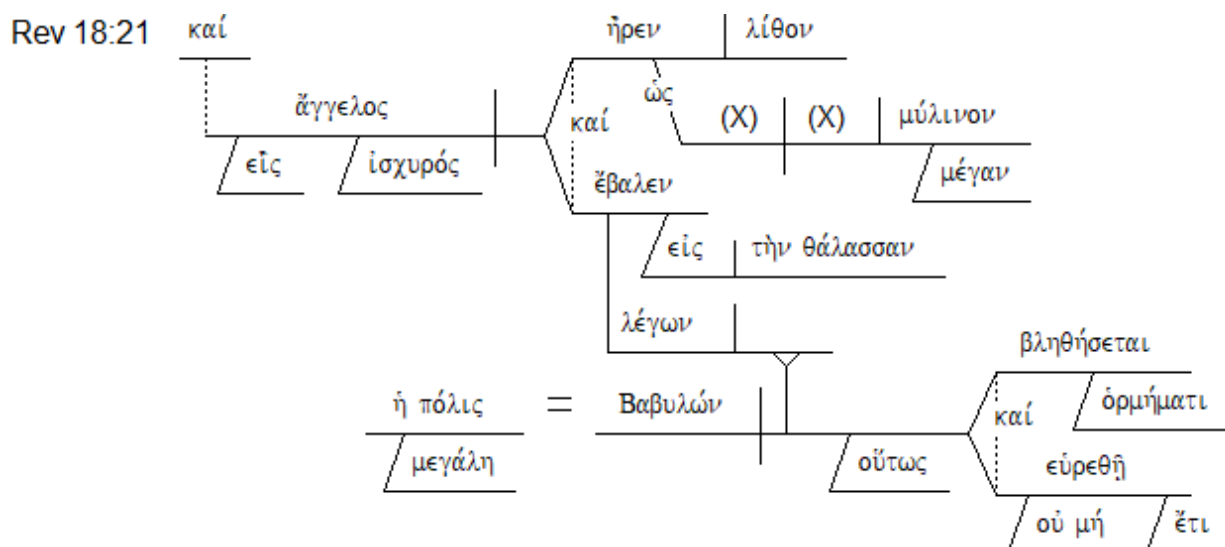
Richard Phillips: We may conclude with three lessons from Babylon's judgment and fall. The first is that Christians must **learn how to use the things of the world rightly**, enjoying God's good gifts without falling into the world's idolatry. Just as the kings, merchants, and seafarers stood far off from Babylon in fear, Christians must keep distance from the **materialism** that characterizes Babylon's spirit.

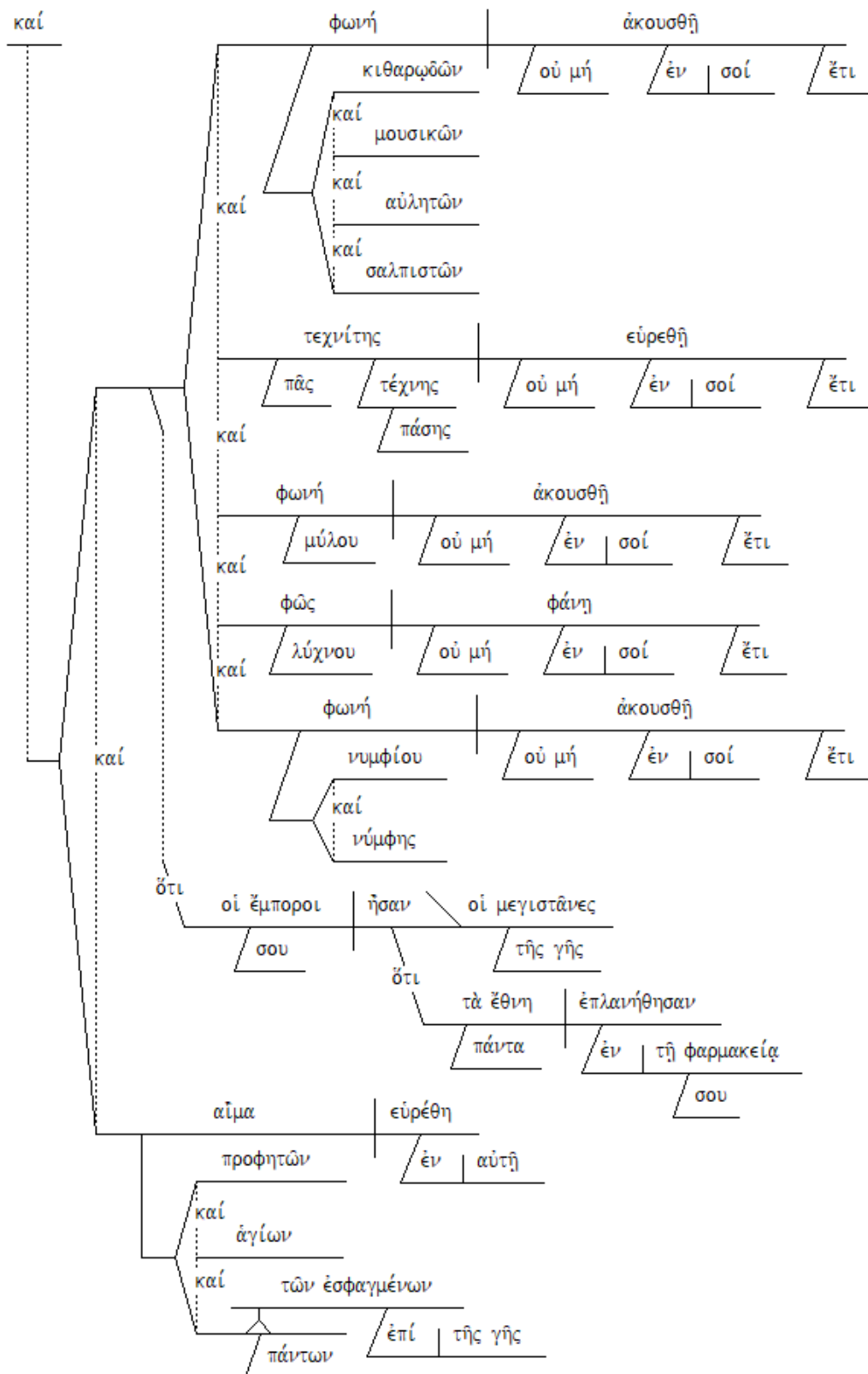
Christians are perfectly free, of course, to enjoy good things in the world and even to appreciate luxuries, so long as we do so in gratitude to God and with generosity toward those in need. We will find, for instance, that when we see the radiant bride of Christ in **Revelation 19** and **21**, she is also clothed in “*fine linen*” (**Rev. 19:8**) and is adorned with jewels (**21:11–14**). There is nothing drab about the glory of Christ’s people, and the church’s beauty actually excels that of harlot Babylon (see **12:1**). If we have money, or high position, or pleasant activities, let us be grateful to God for them and be stewards of them for God’s work in the world. Let our true treasure always be God and his blessings in Christ. John warns us, “*Do not love the world or the things in the world. . . . For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world*” (**1 John 2:15–16**). Let us therefore not be proud in possessions or boastful about worldly things, but content like the apostle Paul. He wrote: “*I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. . . . I can do all things through him who strengthens me*” (**Phil. 4:12–13**). Jesus adds, “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (**Matt. 6:21**).

A second lesson from this passage is that we should **never doubt the certainty of God's judgment** on the wicked. . .

Finally, Christians should realize that in the midst of this very world, with its history moving forward to certain judgment, **Christ is building his church** that will endure eternally in glory. Jesus promised, “*I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*” (**Matt. 16:18**). These judgments display God’s **sovereignty** and **power**. Those same almighty attributes ensure that the work he is doing now in our midst through the gospel is certain to succeed. Knowing this, we labor in the world for eternity. We seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, as Jesus said, confident that all other things will be given to us with him (**6:33**).

Leedy Greek Diagram:





TEXT: Revelation 19:1-5

TITLE: HALLELUJAH CHORUS -- PRAISE FOR GOD'S JUDGMENT OF THE GREAT HARLOT

BIG IDEA:

HALLELUJAH! FOR GOD IS GLORIFIED IN THE SALVATION OF HIS PEOPLE THROUGH HIS TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION:

Kendell Easley: In 1712, the brilliant hot-tempered German composer **George Frideric Handel** moved to London, where he lived until his death in 1759. He achieved great fame as a composer of Italian opera, but abandoned opera for the oratorio in 1741. The oratorio originated as a musical drama to be played without staging in an “oratory” or meeting room. Principal singers represented biblical characters or saints from Christian history, with a chorus interpreting the events.

Handel began to work on *Messiah* in 1741, using words from Scripture compiled by his friend Charles Jennens. He composed the music for all fifty-three numbers in an unbelievable twenty-four days. Handel conducted the first public performance for *Messiah* in Dublin on April 13, 1742. He gave his last presentation the day before he died.

The thrilling “**Hallelujah**” Chorus is Handel at his best, and the tradition of the audience standing while it is sung began in Handel's own lifetime. He brilliantly divided the choir into two groups that sing different themes. *Messiah* has remained the most frequently performed and highly regarded oratorio ever written. While audiences in the United States associate it with Christmas, in Handel's day *Messiah* was an Easter presentation, for the “Hallelujah” Chorus is really not about Christmas but **about Christ's final victory**. Jennens' words were taken directly from the only chapter in the New Testament that uses the word *hallelujah*, **Revelation 19**. “*For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth*” will come true in its fullest and most complete sense only at the mighty return of Jesus Christ in triumph.

Buist Fanning: All of heaven rejoices over Babylon's judgment and over the coming marriage supper of the Lamb (**19:1-10**). . . This chapter is divided into two sections that bridge between major divisions of the book. . . The first section (**19:1-10**) consists of two units signaled by the words “*I heard something like the voice of a great multitude*” (**vv. 1, 6**). These contain praise to God centering on his judgment of Babylon the prostitute (**vv. 1-5**) and then praise to God centering on the preparation of the Lamb's bride and ending with a beatitude and John's interaction with the angel who revealed these things to him (**vv. 6-10**).

The second section consists of three units signaled by “*and I saw*” (**vv. 11, 17, 19**). John describes Christ as he comes in judgment (**vv. 11-16**), hears an invitation to feast on the evil armies (**vv. 17-18**), and records Christ's decisive victory over them (**vv. 19-21**).

Daniel Akin: A single word captures the heart of this text: “*Hallelujah*.” It appears in **verses 1, 3, 4, and 6**. Surprisingly, the word appears nowhere else in the New Testament. In 1741 **George Friederich Handel** (1685–1759) wrote *Messiah*, the most famous oration of which is the

“Hallelujah Chorus.” It is a tradition around the world that when it begins the congregation stands and remains standing until its completion. In heaven, however, they respond differently. There they fall down and worship (19:4). They worship “*God, who is seated on the throne*” because He has judged “*the notorious prostitute*” (19:1-5), prepared the bride (the church) for the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:6-8), and directed all of heaven and earth to keep their attention on Jesus (19:9-10). Heaven’s “**Hallelujah Chorus**” is a response to the command of 18:20, and it anticipates the second coming of Jesus (19:11-21), His millennial reign (20:1-6), Satan’s final judgment (20:7-10), the great white throne judgment (20:11-15), and the establishment of the new heaven, new earth, and new Jerusalem (Rev 21–22).

Craig Koester: The multitudes praise God for the “*salvation*” that he has brought (19:1). In this context, salvation refers to **deliverance from the oppressive power of Babylon**, whose smoke goes up forever and ever as a sign that its demise is permanent (19:3). Some readers may be troubled by the idea of celebrating such a victory, preferring a gentler version of the gospel; but the context suggests that joy is appropriate. Babylon was responsible for corrupting the earth and shedding the blood of the saints (19:2). Those who have been subjected to this corruption and whose lives have been threatened by the city’s oppressive power will find blessed relief when oppression is lifted. Moreover, the justice of God, as celebrated here (19:2), consists in directing the beast to turn its rage away from the saints and toward its own ally, the harlot. Justice is done when evil self-destructs. Babylon’s fiery end comes when the demonic power that it uses against others ends up destroying Babylon itself (17:16).

Albert Mohler: This passage is the **heavenly response to God’s justice**. John hears the sound of a massive multitude praising God. The multitude certainly includes all angelic inhabitants of heaven, but it specifically includes the entirety of the redeemed people of God (cf. 7:9). The elated mood expressed by the heavenly multitude is the opposite of the grievous laments of the kings, merchants, and sailors (18:9-20). The reason the heavenly multitude shouts “*Hallelujah!*” is because God has judged Babylon and avenged the blood of his servants (19:2). Therefore, the heavenly multitude worships God accordingly for all his righteous acts of judgment.

John MacArthur: (vv. 1-10) -- The praise seen in heaven throughout Revelation (4:8–11; 5:9–14; 7:10–12; 11:15–18; 15:3–4; 16:5–6) reaches a **crescendo** in this text. The heavenly rejoicing is not over the damnation of those who reject God (cf. Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11), but because Jesus Christ will soon remove those obstinate sinners from the world. God will then be properly honored, the Lord Jesus Christ enthroned, and the earth restored to its lost glory. Heaven rejoices because history is finally going to reach its culmination as the true King establishes His kingdom on earth.

As the text unfolds, five reasons for heaven’s joy become evident. Heaven rejoices because full salvation has come, because justice is meted out, because rebellion is ended, because God is in control, and because the marriage of the Lamb is completed.

I. (:1-2) PRAISE FOR GOD’S JUST JUDGMENT

A. (:1) Refrain of Praise

1. The Choir = Heavenly Multitude

*“After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice
of a great multitude in heaven,”*

G.K. Beale: The phrase *after these things* refers primarily to the vision of Babylon's demise, especially as portrayed in **18:20-24**.

Sola Scriptura: "*After these things*" - indicates the final vision unit in the Revelation. This vision conclude the eschatological judgment of God and moves through the millennial kingdom of the Son of Man to the final eternal kingdom of God on a new earth.

John MacArthur: The text does not identify those whose composite voices make up the loud voice John heard, but they are likely **angels**. This great multitude does not appear to include the redeemed saints, since they are encouraged to join in the praise later (**vv. 5-8**). The uncounted millions of holy angels make up a majestic, awe-inspiring choir.

Kendell Easley: Just as three earthly groups lamented Babylon's fall, so three sets of heavenly voices shout hallelujah for Babylon's fall.

2. The Content = Hallelujah

"saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God;'"

Robert Mounce: The Hebrew form of "*Hallelujah*" introduces a number of Psalms (**106, 111-13, 117, 135, 146-50**). . . *Salvation* is more than personal deliverance. In this context it refers to the **safeguarding of God's entire redemptive program**. It stands first in the sequence in that it is the fundamental aspect of God's redemptive work (cf. **7:9**). *Glory and power* follow and refer respectively to the majesty and the might revealed in effecting a deliverance of such magnitude.

John MacArthur: The angelic chorus opens with the important word **Hallelujah**, an exclamation of praise to God. The Greek word *Allēlouia* is a transliteration of a Hebrew phrase comprised of the verb *halal* ("to praise") and the noun *Yah* ("God"). It appears only in this chapter in the New Testament (cf. **vv 3-4, 6**). The Hebrew phrase first appears in **Psalms 104:35**, "*Let sinners be consumed from the earth and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!*" In its first Old Testament appearance, as in its first New Testament appearance, Hallelujah expresses **praise for God's judgment on the wicked oppressors of His people**. The Hebrew phrase is associated with God's deliverance of His people from Egypt in **Psalms 113-18**, which are known collectively as the **Egyptian Hallel**. It is a word often associated with both the judgment of the ungodly and the salvation of God's people.

Heaven rejoices specifically because **salvation** has come for God's people, and with it the glory and power that belong to God (cf. **1 Chron. 29:11**) have been put on display. The word **salvation** does not focus on justification or sanctification, but celebrates the final aspect of salvation history, the glorification of the saints in the kingdom of Christ. The imminent coming of Jesus Christ prompts this praise as the angels anticipate the glory of His kingdom.

Richard Phillips: We can grasp the significance of **God's glory** by considering the two Bible words used for this attribute. The Hebrew word for glory is *kabod*, which originally meant that something is "weighty." To speak of the glory of God, then, is to celebrate his weightiness. We live in a time when thoughts of God exercise little influence. Secular people do not consider God to be very consequential, so that one may believe whatever one wants about God and do whatever one desires without fear of God's judgment. The events at the end of history will display both the folly of this attitude and the infinite weightiness of God! God is the true heavyweight, and those who have ignored him will suffer a great fall in the last judgment. The

Greek word for glory is *doxa*. This comes from the verb *dokeo*, which means “to seem.” It came to be used for something that we esteem or that is especially impressive. It is rightly used of God, since he is the most seemly of all beings. The events at the end of the age will prove that nothing is more significant than our relationship with God. Nothing is more important now than that we should live in God’s favor through faith in Jesus, the Savior whom he has sent.

William Barclay: God is praised because salvation, glory and power belong to him. Each of these three great attributes of God should awaken its own response in human hearts. The salvation of God should awaken our gratitude; the glory of God should awaken our reverence; and the power of God is always exercised in the love of God and should, therefore, awaken our trust. Gratitude, reverence, trust – these are the elements that make up real praise.

B. (:2) Reasons for Praise

1. Barometer of God’s Judgment

“because His judgments are true and righteous;”

Richard Phillips: The end of history will see God glorified not only in saving his people but also in **judging the wicked**. The angels thus praise God’s holy justice: *“for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute” (Rev. 19:2).*

God is glorified in his wrath for sin, since *“his judgments are true and just.”* God is not capricious or unfair in judging, but exercises perfect justice in accord with his law. Even those who reject God’s Word tend to agree in the punishment of murderers, thieves, and cheats. God enforces the entirety of his law, upholding it perfectly in his judgment of sin. Especially in places where injustice widely prevails and evil goes unchecked, the cry goes up for justice to be done. At the end of history, when Christ has returned and put an end to the sinful world, this cry for justice will be satisfied to the praise of God.

Grant Osborne: God’s justice is *“true”* because it is based on his own covenant faithfulness and *“just”* because it is based on his holy character. In other words, his judgments are both morally true and legally just (see on **15:3; 16:7**). Babylon is being destroyed because her evil deeds demand such an extreme punishment. This is expressed further in the second ὅτι clause, stating the basis of the *“judgment”* of *“the great prostitute.”* This fulfills the promise to John by the angel in 17:1, *“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute.”* That judgment was carried out in 17:16; 18:2, 8, 9–19, 20, 21, and here it is celebrated.

Warren Wiersbe: The song emphasizes **God’s attributes**, which is the proper way to honor Him. We do not rejoice at the sinfulness of Babylon, or even the greatness of Babylon’s fall. We rejoice that God is *“true and righteous” (Rev. 15:3; 16:7; 17:6)* and that He is glorified by His holy judgments. As we discovered in **Revelation 8:1–6**, God’s throne and altar are related to His judgments. **Revelation 19:3** should be compared with **Revelation 14:10–11**, and **Revelation 19:4** with **Revelation 5:6–10**.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: God’s perfect and holy character, His perfect righteousness and justice, cannot act unfairly or unjustly. He has perfect knowledge (omniscience) and, therefore, He has all the facts so that all His judgments are in accord with the truth. There is no hearsay evidence in the court of God. In this case, the ground of God’s judgment demonstrated in the fall of Babylon was the immorality by which the great harlot seduced and corrupted the earth.

2. Basis for God's Judgment on Babylon

a. Seducing Others to Sin

*“for He has judged the great harlot
who was corrupting the earth with her immorality,”*

Buist Fanning: Babylon's role in leading the people of the earth to moral ruin or “*corruption*” by her evil and profane deeds (“*her sexual immorality*”; cf. **14:8; 18:3**, “*all the nations*”) demonstrates God's righteousness in judging her.

Richard Phillips: The world tempts people by making actions seem attractive and pleasing when they are in fact immoral and ultimately destructive. This is heinously offensive to God, who made mankind to live in holiness and blessing. **Genesis 3** shows how sin came into the world by means of **deception**, ruining the world and placing mankind under the shadow of corruption and death. Every time sin is similarly advanced by deceitful enticements, God is infuriated once more. How terrible it is to lead a person into sin, especially those who are young and impressionable. Jesus declared that it would be better to be drowned in the sea with a millstone around one's neck than to lead a child into evil (**Matt. 18:6**), and **Revelation 18:21** shows this very judgment as befalling Babylon. Today, how great is the sin of the entertainment industry, advertisers, and government officials **who promote immorality** in order to gain money and power. In the end, God will vindicate his law by judging the entire Babylonian world for this kind of corruption.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: In **corrupting** the earth Babylon was undoing the work of the Creator and frustrating the purpose of creation. In **waging war** on the *saints* she fought the God of heaven. Her works accorded with here nature as the incarnation of the spirit of evil and its instrument in the world (**ch. 13**). The time had to come for the destroyer to be destroyed (**11:18**), and when it came the judgment was acclaimed by heaven as *true and just*.

b. Slaughtering God's Servants

“and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her.”

Buist Fanning: The further grounding of his just judgment is that she had slaughtered God's people for their faithful service to him (symbolized in “*the blood of his servants*”; cf. **18:24**) and thus rightly deserved God's vengeance (see same verb “*avenge*,” in **6:10**) exacted “*on her*.”

Kendell Easley: One great concern of Revelation is to show that God will ultimately vindicate the Christian martyrs. On earth they were rejected and killed by the prostitute city as if they were wicked people. They had cried, “*How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?*” (**6:10**). With the death of the harlot, God now has avenged the wrongful death of the saints. (**Rev. 6:10** and **19:2** are the only two verses in the book that use the Greek verb for *avenge*. In both instances, it is martyrs for whom divine justice must be served. For other New Testament appearances of the verb *ekdikeo*, see **Luke 18:3,5; Rom. 12:19; 2 Cor. 10:6**).

Gordon Fee: Thus what John's beleaguered churches need to hear is that “*our God*” has condemned the great prostitute; that God thus intends to mete out justice on an empire that cares nothing for God and will express its contempt by slaughtering God's own people.

II. (:3) PRAISE FOR GOD'S ETERNAL PUNISHMENT OF WICKEDNESS

"And a second time they said, 'Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever.'"

Buist Fanning: Here the heavenly voice from v. 1 repeats its declaration of praise in much the same terms as in v. 2, followed by a gesture of divine worship and an antiphonal response offered by the two groups of heavenly beings seen in John's original throne room vision in chapters 4-5.

John MacArthur: The destruction of the last and most powerful empire in human history marks **the end of man's day**. The rebellion that began long ago in the Garden of Eden is finally ended (apart from a futile, short-lived revolt at the end of the Millennium; 20:7-10). There will be no more false religion, worldly philosophy, injustice, unrighteousness; all the sorry results of human depravity will be vanquished.

James Hamilton: Her punishment will never end. Why? Because of the infinite majesty of God, against whom she sinned. The punishment of sin is ultimately about God's word being upheld as justice is visited against sin. Hell lasts forever because God is infinitely great.

Grant Osborne: This smoke "*of torment*" is in direct contrast to the "*smoke of incense*," the prayers of the saints (8:4), and the "*smoke from the glory of God*" that filled the temple (15:8). Also, the "*eternal torment*" of the unbelievers is in direct contrast to the God "*who lives forever and ever*" (1:18; 4:9, 10; 10:6; 15:7) and "*reigns forever and ever*" (11:15) and especially to the eternal reward awaiting the righteous (22:5).

Kendell Easley: Not only has evil been judged, but the sentence is without possibility of reversal. The city is pictured as an **everlasting ruin**: the smoke of her burning goes up for ever and ever. Because God lives "*for ever and ever*" (15:7), his righteous condemnation must also endure forever. In the Book of Revelation, three times he measures out eternal punishment: to the followers of the beast, to the great prostitute, and to the "unholy trinity" of dragon, beast, and false prophet (14:11; 19:3; 20:10). Wicked humans, wicked organizations, and wicked spirits alike will one day go into eternal destruction.

III. (:4) PRAISE AFFIRMED BY THE 24 ELDERS AND 4 LIVING CREATURES

"And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, 'Amen. Hallelujah!'"

Grant Osborne: Elsewhere in Revelation, ἁμήν concludes the doxology of 1:6, affirms the prophecy of 1:7, concludes the series of praise songs in 5:9-14, frames the praise song of 7:12, and concludes the book (22:20, 21). Throughout, it maintains its OT meaning of "*so be it*," authenticating and guaranteeing the efficacy of the worship (see on 1:6). Thus, the "*amen*" in some sense confirms the worship of the previous hymns, and the "*hallelujah*" continues the praise established in 19:1, 3 and leads into the call to praise (v. 5). In light of all that God has accomplished for his people, the whole of the celestial kingdom can only say, "*Praise Yahweh!*"

Buist Fanning: Verse 4 records the reverential response of the heavenly elders and living creatures like those John saw around God's throne in 4:4 and 4:6. They have appeared in scenes of heavenly worship at several places in Revelation since that initial throne room vision (7:11; 11:16; 14:3), but this verse is their last mention in the book. Their appearance here is a reminder

that all the judgments of **chapters 6-18** have been directed from the heavenly throne room and watched with rapt attention from there. In their deep reverence they fall in worship again before God on his throne.

William Barclay: We saw that the twenty-four elders represent the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, and, therefore, stand for the **entire Church**. The four living creatures, respectively like a lion, an ox, a human being and an eagle, stand for two things, for all that is bravest, strongest, wisest and swiftest in nature – and for the **cherubim**. Hence a song of praise from the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures is a hymn of praise to God **from the whole Church and the whole of nature**.

Alternate View:

Richard Phillips: **Revelation 19:4** shows the response of the **worship leaders of heaven** to God's eternal judgment of the wicked. . . The *twenty-four elders* are angelic counterparts to the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the church, who thus represent the entirety of the redeemed people of God in history. The "*four living creatures*" are the cherubim who are closest to God's throne and represent the submission of all creation (see **Rev. 4:4–6**).

IV. (:5) PRAISE COMMANDED OF ALL GOD'S PEOPLE

A. Authoritative Voice Commanding Praise

"And a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Give praise to our God,'"

David Aune: indicates the divine authorization of the speaker

John MacArthur: The text does not identify the owner of the voice that came from the throne, but it is likely an angel, since he refers to God as *our God*. The voice authoritatively calls **another group** to join in the anthem of praise, saying, "*Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.*" The redeemed believers in heaven are described as God's bond-servants (cf. v. 2; 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 11:18; 15:3; 22:3, 6; **Luke 2:29; Acts 4:29; 16:17; Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:7; 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1**), and those who fear Him (cf. **Deut. 6:13; 8:6; 10:12, 20; 13:4; Josh. 24:14; 1 Sam. 12:14, 24; 2 Kings 17:39; Pss. 22:23, 25; 25:14; 33:18; 34:7, 9; 85:9; 103:11, 13, 17; Luke 1:50**). The all-inclusive phrase *the small and the great* (cf. 11:18) **transcends all human categories and distinctions** to embrace everyone. **All the redeemed are called to praise God.**

Gordon Fee: At this point toward the end of the book, John pictures **all creatures** in heaven and on earth as joining in the worship of God, a concern that is then intensified by a responding voice that came from the throne. But at this point John leaves the reader simply to ponder as to the identity of the speaker. The content of what is said eliminates the possibility that it is God who speaks, since the aim of the "*voice*" is to call on the whole populace of heaven to praise our God, whereas the worshipers themselves are identified simply as all **you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!** As with such moments elsewhere in the book, this interlude moment serves as a kind of formal introduction, plus invitation, for John's readers and everyone else to join in the final "*hallelujah*" that follows.

John Walvoord: Another voice is now heard from the throne, calling God's servants to praise the Lord. It is probable that this is a voice of an angel rather than the voice of God or the voice of the

saints. The occasion for this praise is God's judgment against evil people who have oppressed His people, and all of God's servants are invited to join the praise. The verb "*praise*" is in the present tense and is therefore a command to "keep on praising" the Lord.

Grant Osborne: This is the third group worshiping in **chapter 19**: first the heavenly multitude, then the elders and living creatures, and now the **saints on earth**.

B. All-Inclusive Identification of God's People

1. Bond Servants

"all you His bond-servants,"

2. God Fearers

"you who fear Him,"

Richard Phillips: True servants of God worship him with reverence and are careful to obey God's Word. The believer's fear of God is not a servile terror, but the respectful attitude of a son for a father whose rule is accepted and whose punishment is dreaded. The wise Christian knows that "*the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives*" (**Heb. 12:6**). Therefore, he is careful how he lives, and while he delights in the Lord's kindness and love, he worships "*with reverence and awe*," knowing that "*our God is a consuming fire*" (**12:28–29**).

3. Classless

"the small and the great."

Buist Fanning: The final phrase extends the call across all groups of God's people regardless of their status (cf. **13:16; 19:18; 20:12**). The combination of "*those who fear him, the small and the great*" is derived from **Psalms 115:13** and appears also in **Revelation 11:18**.

Robert Mounce: "*You who fear him, both small and great*" (cf. **Ps 115:13**) are believers on earth from every socio-economic level, and represent every stage of spiritual maturity. The call is **directed to the church on earth** because it wouldn't make sense to admonish those in heaven to praise him, for that is what they were just doing in **vv. 1–4**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we convinced in our heart that God's dealings with us are fair and in accordance with justice?
- 2) How does this passage encourage us not to personally seek vengeance against our enemies?
- 3) Do our hearts constantly burst out in choruses of Hallelujah to our Savior?
- 4) What adjectives and terminology would you use to describe all of God's people?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Six items are cited in **verses 1-2** for this praise of Yahweh, this praise of the Lord: **His salvation, His glory, His power, His true and just judgments, His judgment of the notorious prostitute (i.e., Babylon), and His avenging the blood of His servants.** Verse 3 records the second hallelujah as “a sort of heavenly encore that heightens measurably the dramatic quality of the scene” (ibid., 337–38). God is praised because the notorious prostitute’s “smoke ascends forever and ever!” God is not vindictive or capricious in His judgment of Babylon. He is totally true and just. **John Piper** is right when he says,

If God turned a deaf ear to sin and evil and injustice and suffering in this world, He would not be true, and He would certainly not be just. God here is rightfully and wholeheartedly praised for His justice.” (*“Worship God!”*)

Verses 4-5 record the third hallelujah and add to our heavenly choir “*the 24 elders and the four living creatures.*” Clearly angels and humans are of one mind and heart in their adoration and worship of God. Here they fall down and worship together “*God, who is seated on the throne*” (see **Rev 4–5**). They cry, “*Amen!*” So be it! We agree! They cry, “*Hallelujah!*” Praise the Lord! This exclamation of praise is the last we see of the 24 elders and the four living creatures. They exit the scene worshipping the One who is worthy.

John Piper: Corporate worship . . . is the declaration in the midst of Babylon that we will not be drawn into her harlotries, because we have found in God the satisfaction of our souls. In his presence is fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore. Corporate worship is the public savoring of the worth of God and the beauty of God and power of God and the wisdom of God. And therefore worship is an open declaration to all the powers of heaven and to all of Babylon that we will not prostitute our minds or our hearts or our bodies to the allurements of the world. Though we may live in Babylon, we will not be captive to Babylonian ways. And we will celebrate with all our might the awesome truth that we are free from that which will be destroyed. (*“Worship God!”*)

James Hamilton: When we move into John’s vision of Babylon the whore in **chapter 17**, this is not a progression forward chronologically. Rather, John sees and gives to his audience a scene that gets at **the implications of what Babylon is and how she will fall.** The point of depicting Babylon as a prostitute is to get at the way she corrupts and defiles God’s good creation. She takes what God has made good and blessed and makes it immoral. She commodifies things that should not be sold, things that are made to be enjoyed within the confines of God’s instructions. Babylon sells cheap perversions of God’s free gifts. Babylon’s consorts destroy her at the end of **chapter 17**, and this is another way of describing the outpouring of God’s wrath on Babylon that we saw in **chapter 16.** The world that refuses to worship God and to honor Christ as King is a city destroyed by an earthquake, and it is also a prostitute who is brutally murdered by her customers.

Chapter 18 describes reactions to the fall of Babylon. Those who used her lament her fall. For God’s people, the fall of Babylon means the exile is over (**18:4**). Those who used Babylon lose everything they lived for when she falls, but the people of God are **called to rejoice over her** in **18:20**, and that is exactly what we see them do in **19:1–10.**

Craig Keener: God's judgment does not simply stop Babylon's oppression; he **avenges** her incomprehensible injustices. Babylon, the city of the world system, is the new Sodom (11:8). The smoke of her death *risers forever* (19:3), suggesting eternal torment (14:11; cf. Isa. 34:10). Although "*eternal*" is applied more broadly in Revelation (Rev. 14:11; 20:10), it is not impossible that such an image of Rome's "eternal judgment may be a partial polemic against the mythical name *Roma aeterna* ('eternal Rome'), which was one of the names for the Roman Empire."

By judging the world system, God has begun to reign (19:6; cf. 11:17). Presumably among those who now join in triumphant praise are the martyrs, especially if the sound of "*rushing waters*" in 19:6 recalls 14:2. All God's "*servants*" (cf. 1:1)—that is, those who *fear him* (cf. 11:18)—offer praise in 19:5; this group is also coextensive, at least in principle, with the martyrs mentioned in 19:2, because all true followers of Christ are potential martyrs (cf. 20:4). This group explicitly cuts across class lines, for like the world (6:15; 13:16; 19:18; 20:12), they include "*both small and great*" (19:5; cf. 11:18).

Joe Anady: The thing that differentiates the people of God from those who are of the world is that **those who belong to God worship God**, whereas those who belong to the world worship the things of this world.

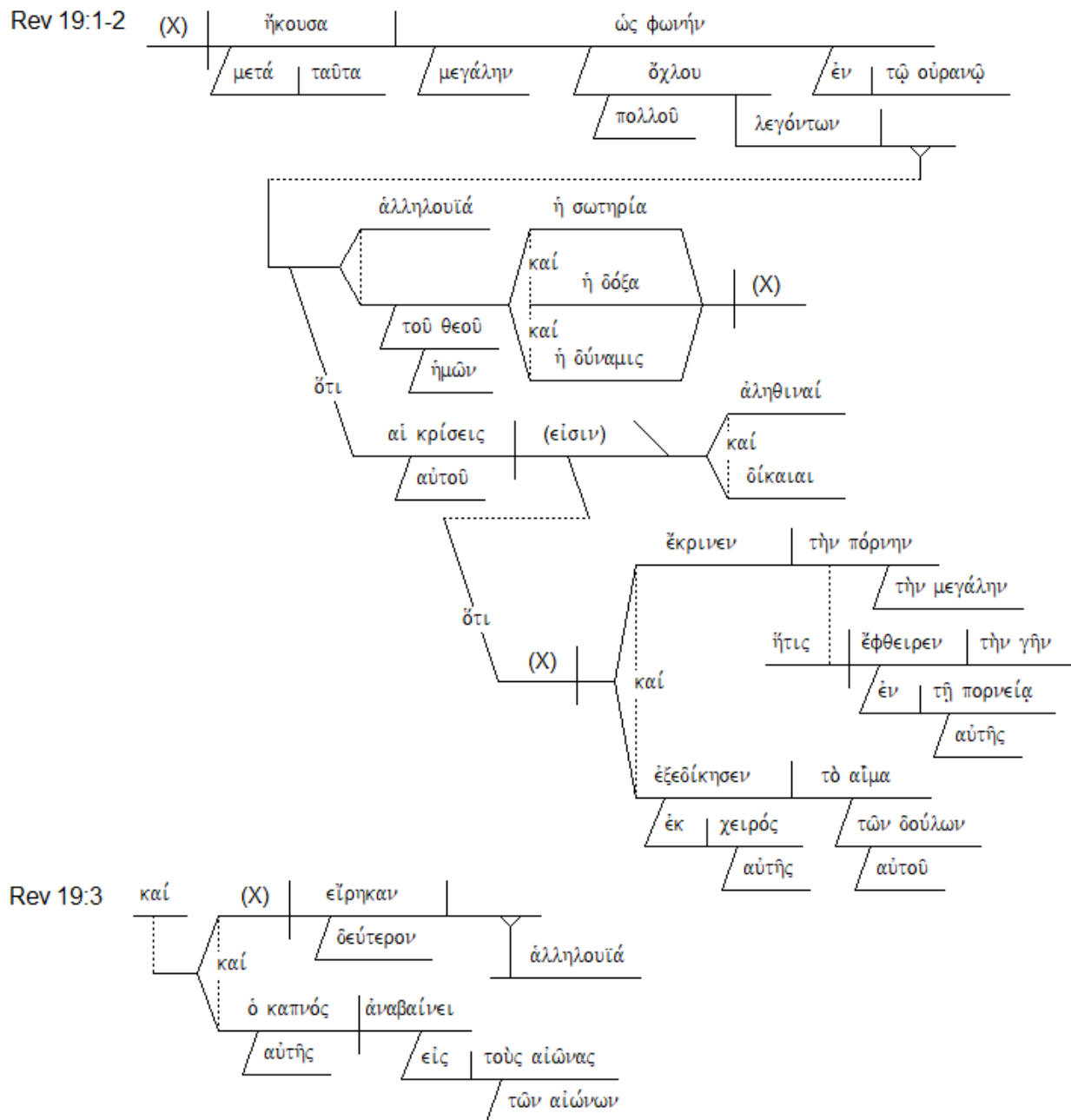
All people worship. Even the most devout atheist worships. The atheist, though he may deny the existence of God, has a god of his own. Someone or something owns his heart. He lives for something. He finds his pleasure and satisfaction somewhere. He has some source of hope. Even the atheist worships as he looks to this thing or that, saying, "this is of ultimate worth."

The question is not, "do we worship?", for all do. Instead the question is, do we worship aright. Do we worship that which is truly worthy of worship? And do we worship that one aright?

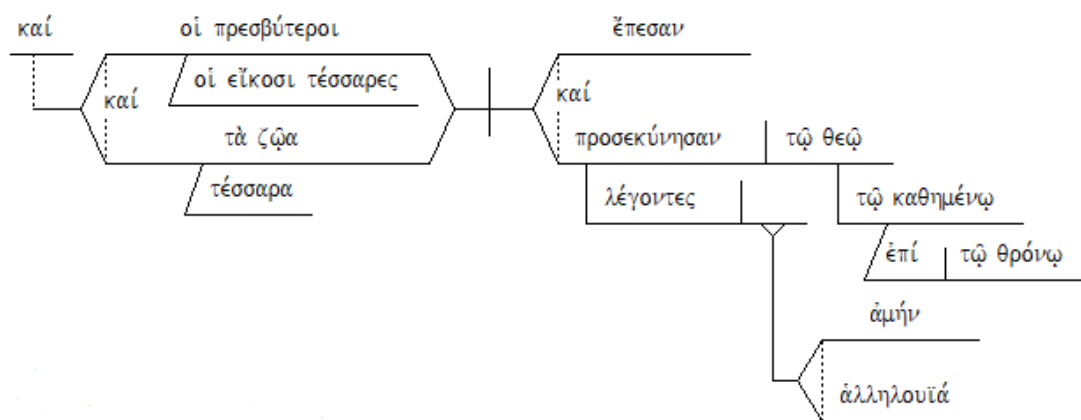
You've noticed, I'm sure, that the book of Revelation is **all about worship**. When we began the study of this book over a year ago you probably assumed that the book was about the future. What we have found is that, although the book does reveal some things about the future, it is really a book about worship. It reveals what it reveals in order to urge the reader to worship aright – to worship, not the things of this world, but God who made the world, and the Christ, who is the God-man, and our redeemer.

Grant Osborne: The reaction of those in heaven and the saints on earth fulfills the command of 18:20 as they all rejoice and sing a series of "hallelujah" choruses. First, the heavenly multitude celebrates (19:1–2) the victory, power, and justice of the God who has both judged the evil empire and avenged the blood of the saints in response to their prayer in 6:10. They also praise God (19:3) because the eternal punishment of Babylon is in keeping with her "crimes" (18:5) and exploitative luxuries (18:7, 12–13). Next, the elders and living creatures worship God and affirm the hymnic celebration of the multitudes (19:4). Finally, a voice from the throne calls on the saints on earth to join in praising God (19:5). This is a message for us as well, for this asks the saints to pray in hope that this vindication will truly come to pass. We are still in the midst of the fray, experiencing more the suffering than the triumph. But we believe that the final triumph is guaranteed, that Almighty God will indeed bring it to pass. That is the true message of this book.

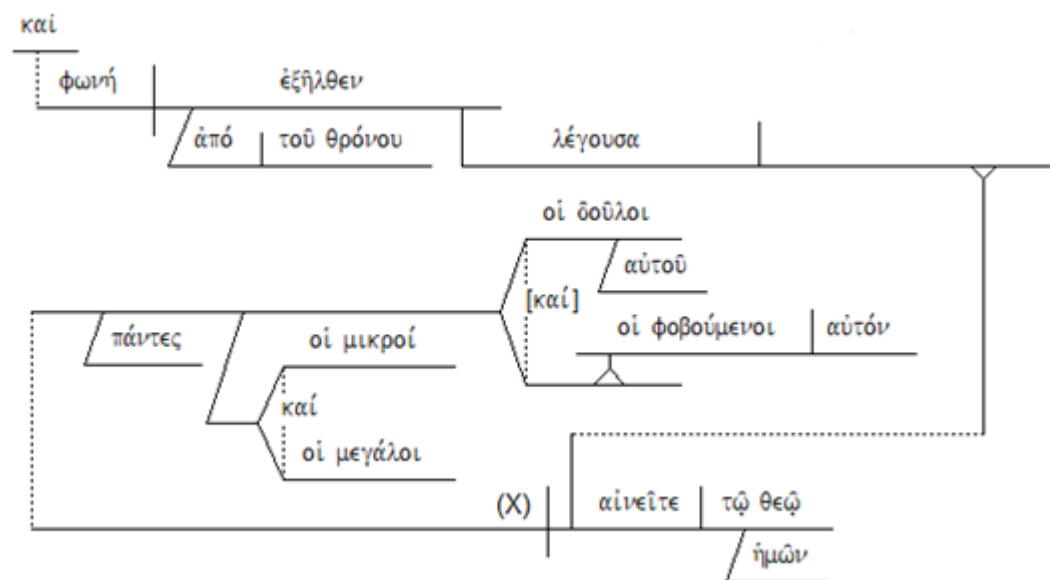
Leedy Greek Diagram:



Rev 19:4



Rev 19:5



TEXT: Revelation 19:6-10

TITLE: MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB FOR HIS RIGHTEOUS BRIDE

BIG IDEA:

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GOD'S RULE ON EARTH IS CELEBRATED WITH THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

INTRODUCTION:

Kendell Easley: Main Idea: The consummation of the ages is compared to a great marriage and the wedding supper of the Lamb. . .

With the words *then I heard*, John's vision enters a second phase. Babylon, the great prostitute so obviously the focus of the vision so far, will not appear in Revelation again. Her judgment is complete. Wonderful new sights await John and us. Beginning with this verse and proceeding through **Revelation 20:15**, John's attention will be drawn to the events connected with the great victory of Christ at his Second Coming. Three striking but complementary portraits of his return are seen:

1. first is Jesus as the Lamb-Bridegroom united to his bride (**19:6–10**);
2. second is Jesus as conquering King defeating all evil (**19:11–21**);
3. third is Jesus as righteous Judge of all human beings (**20:11–15**).

Craig Koester: Revelation assumes that readers will belong to some community and that living as a detached individual is not an option. The real question is the nature of the community to which people belong. John has depicted the harlot in strongly negative colors so that readers will be repulsed by what she represents. Here he introduces the bride in a positive way in order that readers might identify with her instead. Both the bride and the harlot are **relational images**. The **harlot is characterized by license** and the **bride by marital commitment**. In relation to the harlot city, which stands under God's judgment, a couple to be married has no reason to celebrate (**Rev. 18:23**), but those who belong to the bride have great reason to celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb (**19:9**). Moreover, the harlot sought to buy fine linen to satisfy her obsession with luxury (**18:12**), but the fine linen that adorns the bride is a **gift** that God has "granted" to her, and it consists of the **righteous deeds of the saints** (**19:8**). Although the harlot represents a way of life that seems glamorous, John unmasks its underlying corruption and warns of its coming demise. The bride calls people to the way of righteousness instead.

Grant Osborne: Aune (1998b: 1022–23) says this is the only hymn in the book that "conforms fully to the OT genre," having three parts: a summons to praise Yahweh ("*hallelujah*"), a thematic sentence stating the reason for the praise ("*our Lord reigns*"), and the divine actions that motivate one to praise (**19:7–8**). As the "*great multitude*" began the first half of the hallelujah choruses (**19:1–5**), so it begins the second half as well. The Greek (ὡς φωνὴν ὄχλου πολλοῦ, *hōs phōnēn ochlou pollou*, as it were the voice of a great multitude) is virtually identical, but the "loud voice" of **19:1** is here expanded to "*the voice of many waters and like the voice of loud thunders*." In **1:15** the voice of "*the one like a son of man*" was "*like the sound of many waters*," and in **14:2–3** the harpists singing the "*new song*" were as loud as "*many waters and loud thunder*" (**19:6** is a near duplicate of **14:2**; see also **Isa. 17:12**; **Ezek. 1:24**; **43:2**; **Dan. 10:6**). The "*new song*" of **Rev. 14:2** is closely connected to the hymn here, for it could only be

sung by the faithful, victorious believers, and this song celebrates their marriage to the Lamb. Its incredible volume is in keeping with the stupendous message it provides. Wedding songs are known for their **exuberance**.

I. (:6-8) THE RIGHTEOUS REJOICE AT THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB WHEN THE LORD REIGNS ON EARTH

A. (:6) Reigning on Earth after Subduing Evil Calls Forth the Hallelujah Chorus

1. Chorus of a Great Multitude

*“And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude
and as the sound of many waters
and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying,”*

2. Celebration of Praise for the Consummation of History

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.”

G.K. Beale: In light of this OT background, the Greek verb may best be translated “*begun to reign*” (with an **ingressive** sense), since, in view of Babylon’s defeat (**ch. 18**), it is the establishment of God’s rule that appears to be in mind. Although in one sense God’s reign is timeless (*the Lord ... reigns*, as the NASB translates), in another sense it is truly fulfilled in the created universe only as a result of His final judgment of Babylon and can thus be said to have “*begun*.” This is supported by the parallel in **11:17**: “*We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty ... because Thou ... hast begun to reign*.” In fact, the verse is also a development of **11:15**: “*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever*.”

B. (:7) Rejoicing Characterizes the Marriage of the Lamb

G.K. Beale: Vv. 7-8 form the conclusion of the section beginning with **18:1**, but at the same time, together with vv. 9-10, form a **transitional segment** between that and the following section. . . The opening words of the verse, *Let us rejoice and be glad*, allude to **Ps. 118:22-24**, where the rejoicing comes about because God has caused the stone the builders rejected to become the chief cornerstone. It also alludes to Jesus’ words, “*Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*” (**Matt. 5:12**). God has vindicated both His Son and those who follow Him. This section shows us that the existence of Babylon served as a necessary preparation for the bride’s marriage to the Lamb. The oppression and temptation of Babylon were the fire God used to **refine the faith** of the saints in order that they be prepared to enter the heavenly city (for a similar notion see on **2:10-11**; cf. also **6:11**; **Rom. 8:28ff.**; **1 Pet. 4:12, 19**; **Phil. 1:28-30**).

1. Rejoicing Glorifies God

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him,”

2. Rejoicing Celebrates the Fulfilment of Great Expectations

*“for the marriage of the Lamb has come
and His bride has made herself ready.”*

There are some significant questions raised by this event of the **marriage of the Lamb**:

- Who is the Bride? (The Church? Israel? All the Redeemed?)
- Who are those invited guests and is this a distinct group from the Bride?
- When does this ceremony take place (Right before Christ returns and inaugurates the millennial kingdom? In the millennial kingdom?)
- How long does this ceremony last? (MacArthur says for the entire duration of the millennial kingdom)
- Where does this ceremony take place? (In heaven? On earth in the millennial kingdom?)
- What relationship, if any, is there between this event and the OT prophecies of a great wedding banquet?

Daniel Akin: Verses 7-8 speak of the **preparation of the bride** for her wedding day. Through sanctification by the Word and Spirit, she has made herself ready (see **Eph 2:10**). This is the only time in Revelation where the saints are described as making themselves ready, preparing themselves as the bride of Christ for His coming. How do we prepare ourselves and get ready for that day? I believe the book of Revelation itself provides the answer.

- The bride prepares herself by remaining faithful to Christ in a fallen and evil world.
- The bride prepares herself by enduring hardship in the midst of suffering.
- The bride prepares herself by trusting God in the face of martyrdom.
- The bride prepares herself by obeying God to take the gospel to all tribes, languages, peoples, and nations.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: The Bride *made herself ready* through repentance and faith and continuance in righteous deeds which are the fruit of faith (cf. the emphasis on “*works*” in the seven letters, e.g., **2:2ff., 9, 13, 19**, etc.). Yet it was *granted her* to be clothed with fine linen. Holiness is the gift of God. It is the holy life of the Redeemer in the redeemed. This duality characterizes the Christian life through all its stages (**Phil. 2:12f.**) and finds its ultimate manifestation in the salvation and judgment which the kingdom of God bring.

John MacArthur: Betrothed in eternity past, presented in the Father’s house since the Rapture, the church is now ready for the wedding ceremony to begin. That ceremony will coincide with the establishment of the millennial kingdom, and **stretch throughout that thousand-year period** to be finally consummated in the new heavens and the new earth (cf. **21:1–2**). The idea of a thousand-year-long ceremony may seem farfetched; yet it is no more difficult than several thousand years of betrothal. And it must be remembered that “*a thousand years in [God’s] sight are like yesterday when it passes by*” (**Ps. 90:4**), and that “*with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day*” (**2 Pet. 3:8**). In the new heavens and the new earth, the bride concept will be expanded to include not only the church, but also all the **redeemed of all ages** as the **New Jerusalem becomes the bridal city** (**21:1–2**). It should be noted that in the Old Testament, God is the Bridegroom of Israel (**Isa. 54:5–6; 62:5; Jer. 31:32; Ezek. 16:7–14; Hos. 2:16, 19**). . .

The **recipients** of this blessing are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. That they are **invited guests** marks them as a distinct group from the church, since a bride would hardly be invited to her own wedding.

These guests represent Old Testament believers. **Matthew 8:11** and **Luke 13:28** both refer to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as being in the kingdom, and **Luke 13:28** also mentions the prophets. All the heroes of the faith mentioned in **Hebrews 11** will be among the invited guests. So will

John the Baptist, the greatest of all Old Testament believers (**Matt. 11:11**), who described himself as the friend of the bridegroom (**John 3:29**) and hence one of the invited guests. All the Tribulation saints, glorified and still alive on earth and entering the millennial kingdom, will be guests.

Some may question why the church age believers should be granted the honor of being the bride, while believers from other ages are merely guests. But one may equally ask why God singled out Israel to be the covenant people. The only answer to both questions is that God sovereignly purposed that it be so (cf. **Deut. 7:7–8**). It must be remembered that the wedding imagery is just that; imagery that is not reality, but pictures God's intimate union with His people. There will be no "second-class citizens" in God's kingdom, just as all the participants in a wedding enjoy the celebration. And in the new heavens and the new earth, as noted above, the imagery of the bride will be expanded to encompass all the redeemed from all ages (**21:1–2**).

Israel looked forward to this great wedding banquet: **Isa. 25:6-10**.

C. (:8) Righteousness Clothes the Bride

1. Divine Grace – Righteousness as a Gift of God

"And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean;"

G.K. Beale: **White clothes** in Revelation, when worn by the saints, always signify a **gift from God** given to those with tested and purified faith (**3:5-6, 18; 6:11; 7:13-14**; in **3:18**, the idea of buying the clothes from Christ is used to encourage believers to identify with Christ's clothes in **1:13-14**, which means to identify with Him and not with the compromising world). Therefore, the white clothes are not merely the saints' righteous acts but the reward for or result of such acts. This emphasizes **God's justifying or vindicating action**. The final clause of **v. 8** could thus be paraphrased: "the fine linen is the reward for or result of the saints' righteous deeds." The white robes would then represent two inextricably related consummative end-time realities:

- (1) human faithfulness and good works as a necessary evidence of a right standing with God and
- (2) vindication or acquittal accomplished by God's final judgments against the enemy on behalf of His people. . .

Consequently, the saints are clothed with pure linen as a symbol of God's righteous final, end-time vindication of them because, in spite of persecution, they persevered in righteousness on earth. The full-orbed meaning of the pure garments is that God's righteous vindication involves judging the enemy at the very end of time, which shows that the saints' faith and works have been in the right all along. This dual sense of fine linen here suits admirably the rhetorical purpose of the entire book, which includes exhortations to believers to stop soiling their garments (**3:4-5**) and not to be found naked (**3:18; 16:15**). This underscores the aspect of **human accountability** highlighted by **v. 7b**: "*His bride has made herself ready*." Yet the readers can be encouraged to obey the exhortation with the knowledge that **God has provided grace** for them to clothe themselves now **by the power of the Spirit**.

2. Human Responsibility – Righteous Acts of Faith

"for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints."

Gordon Fee: Thus even at the end, while still keeping his imagery intact, John recognizes that for God's redeemed people everything is **gift**, nothing is earned. So on the one hand, the wedding

garment “*was given her to wear*”; on the other hand, such people are not merely passive recipients, so John adds that the fine linen stands for the **righteous acts of God’s people**. That is, they receive the wedding garment as gift, while at the same time they are clothed so that their active righteousness is visible to all.

II. (:9-10) THE REVELATION FROM JESUS DIRECTS THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB TO WORSHIP GOD ALONE

A. (:9) Exclusive Blessing to Participants

1. Blessing Based on Divine Election

*“And he said to me, ‘Write,
Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’”*

Charles Swindoll: The analogy of the church’s marriage to Christ reflects these **ancient Jewish wedding customs**. In God the Father’s foresight, He chose the church “*before the foundation of the world*” (Eph. 1:4). When sinners are saved, they are **betrothed to Christ** —a binding relationship that is still awaiting its complete realization. At the **presentation**, the church will be raptured to meet the Lord in the air (Matt. 25:1-13; 1 Thes. 4:17). Then, at the **wedding feast of the Lamb**, the final consummation will begin as Christ and the church take their places to reign over the earth (Rev. 20:4-6).

2. Blessing Based on the Truth of God’s Word

“And he said to me, ‘These are true words of God.’”

B. (:10) Exclusive Worship Directed to God Alone

1. Inappropriate Worship

“And I fell at his feet to worship him.”

2. Instruction on Proper Worship in Accordance with the Testimony of Jesus

*“And he said to me, ‘Do not do that;
I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus;
worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’”*

Craig Keener: The angel’s explicit prohibition of worshipping him may be guarding against certain syncretistic practices among Jews of Asia Minor, in which some worshiped angels. The emphatic demand that God alone is to be worshiped challenges all forms of idolatry, including those offered the emperor in the name of loyalty to the state.

Kendell Easley: Now if “*the testimony of Jesus*” in **verse 10** means the same as it did in **verse 9**, then **verse 10** does not mean that human witnessing about Jesus is the true essence of prophecy. Rather, it means that only when Jesus’ human servants **proclaim the same message that Jesus taught and attested** do they truly prophesy. The best way to evaluate whether prophets claiming to have a word from God are genuine is to evaluate whether their message is just like the one that Jesus gave. The negative of this statement is equally true: those who do not proclaim the same testimony that Jesus held do not have the true spirit of prophecy.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: The testimony borne by Jesus is the concern or burden of the Spirit who inspires prophecy. Such is the chief thrust of the teaching on the Paraclete in **John 14-16** (see especially **Jn 16:12ff.**).

John Walvoord: The revelation of Christ is in contrast to the Christ of the Gospels, where He is revealed in rejection, humiliation, suffering, and death. His return is to be one of triumph, glory, sovereignty, and majesty. This is anticipated in the judgment upon Babylon in **chapters 17 and 18**, and in the dramatic introduction of the second coming in **19:1–10**. In many respects, Christ's second coming is not only the high point of Revelation, but the high point of all history. Here is the manifestation of the Son of God in glory, the demonstration of the sovereignty of God, and the beginning of the end of human rebellion. How poverty-stricken is any theology that minimizes the second coming of Christ, and how limited the hope that does not include this **glorious climax** to God's program of exalting His Son and putting all creation under His control (cf. **Ps. 2**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we looking forward to Christ's reign on earth?
- 2) What is your understanding of the marriage supper of the Lamb?
- 3) How does the bride make herself ready?
- 4) Do we appreciate God's sovereign grace in election?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daniel Akin: Conclusion: **Scott Duvall** provides nine excellent theological observations that capture the key themes of **Revelation 19**. I believe they serve us well as concluding truths on which we should meditate and reflect. I hope they will inspire even greater worship for "*our Lord God, the Almighty*."

- God's people are called to rejoice at the demonstration of God's righteous judgments.
- Evil power centers are guilty of arrogance, deception, and murder.
- God will avenge the suffering of His people.
- God is to be praised for His just and true judgments as reflections of His righteous and faithful character.
- God deserves praise and glory for beginning His universal reign.
- Jesus relates to His people like a husband to his bride.
- God's people, in contrast to the notorious prostitute, are clothed in righteous acts.
- Angels, like believing humans, are fellow servants who hold to the testimony of Jesus.
- God alone deserves worship, for He (by His Spirit) is the source of the prophecy [the prophetic message] about Jesus. (Revelation, 251)

Once more we see, it really is **all about Jesus**. That has always been God's plan. Nothing will keep it from coming to pass.

Kendell Easley: In this passage the reward is participation in a wedding. In the Old Testament the people of Israel were called the wife of the LORD, yet in the New Testament the church is the wife of Christ as the apostle Paul taught so explicitly (**Eph. 5:25–32**). The best way to picture **verses 7–9** is to remember the two important steps in ancient Jewish marriage. First came betrothal in which there was an agreement to marry. During this extended period, the groom and bride called each other “husband” and “wife” and remained faithful to each other, but there was no consummation of the relationship (see **Matt. 1:18–19** as a specific illustration). This period of betrothal **corresponds to the present extended era of church history**.

The second step was the **wedding ceremony itself**. At this time the groom went in procession to the bride's house and then escorted her back to his home for an elaborate **wedding feast** of several days (see **Matt. 22:1–10; 25:1–13** for parables of Jesus illustrating this). The text at hand announces that at last the church and her Lord have been united for eternity. Because John only heard the announcement, he did not state where or when this occurs. The wedding of the Lamb refers to the resurrection and beginning of eternal life for Christians. Thus it points to the same reality as another picture of the Second Coming for the saints John has already described: “*harvest of the earth*” (**14:14–16**). If this is true, then the “*wedding supper of the Lamb*” is fulfilled in heaven—the Father's home—during the time between the **harvest of the earth** and the **vintage of grapes (14:17–20)**. In other words, the activities portrayed in these verses occur with the saints in heaven **during the same brief interval that bowls of divine wrath are poured out on earth**.

Craig Koester: The conclusion of this cycle focuses the message of the book when John bows down before his angelic guide and is told, “*Worship God*” (**19:10**). Earlier, readers were warned against falling into the worship of the beast or other adversaries of God (**13:4**). Here they are warned against worshipping the angelic emissaries of God. The heavenly scenes that conclude each major section of Revelation reiterate that God and the Lamb alone are **worthy of worship**. This same passage clarifies the nature of true prophecy, and by implication, the nature of the prophecy that John is writing (**1:3; 22:18**). The spirit of prophecy is “*the testimony of Jesus*” (**19:10**). This expression can refer to the testimony that the community of faith has received from Jesus and to the testimony that they bear to Jesus in their own preaching.

John Walvoord: A problem of interpretation surrounds the term “*bride*.” In the biblical use of the figure of marriage, variations can be observed in both the Old and New Testaments. Frequently in the Old Testament, as for instance in the book of Hosea, Israel is described as the unfaithful wife of God to be restored to her position as a faithful wife in the future millennial reign. While marriage is often used as an illustration of various truths, the norm is that Israel is already married to God and has proved unfaithful to her responsibility as a wife.

By contrast, in the New Testament, the church is pictured as a virgin waiting for the coming of her bridegroom (**2 Cor. 11:2**). In this case the wedding union and feast are still future. The **dispensational distinction** between the saints of the present age belonging to the church, the Body of Christ, and saints of other ages . . . therefore seems to be observed in this passage.

Alternate View: [that the nation Israel rather than the Church is actually the Bride of Christ]

Michael Weis (Zion's Hope): Is the Church Really the Bride of Christ?

This is a theological tradition that has been passed down from generation to generation. But is it true? Sincerity is not a test for truth. Must test everything by the Word of God.

Ephesians 5:25-33 = most popular text to support this view

The context is the husband and wife relationship, leadership, submission, love, sacrifice and unity. The husband needs to shower his wife with spiritual truth. Paul is using Christ and the Church as an example of marriage. He uses the example of husbands and wives in marriage as an example as well. These two examples feed off of one another. It is not an explicit teaching that the Church is the bride of Christ. The mystery is the intimate relationship we have with Christ.

Does God have a bride? Yes. Look first in the OT.

Exodus 19-24 – The Mosaic Covenant as a Marriage Betrothal Covenant – structured as a Suzerain-Vassal treaty. There was a superior who tells the subordinates what he did and what he expects from them within the relationship. The people said, “Yes, we will obey.”

Many OT references to Israel being God’s bride.

Look at the many references to Israel’s spiritual adultery (going after other gods):

Is. 54:4-8; Ezek. 16:32 (cf. references to God’s love and care for Israel)

Entire **book of Hosea** dedicated to a husband loving an adulterous wife; a visual example of God’s love towards unfaithful Israel. **Hos. 1:2; 2:2-8**

These verses are focusing on the Northern Kingdom of Israel, not referring to the entire nation.

Jeremiah 31:31-32 = context of New Covenant made with the house of Israel

Thesis: Israel is God’s bride. You could say the Abrahamic Covenant was the unconditional choosing of Israel and the Mosaic Covenant was the betrothal ceremony. But in order for Israel to commit spiritual adultery with foreign gods, she had to be betrothed to God first, as her husband. Prophets were constantly calling the people to come back to the marriage commitment.

In the New Testament, John the Baptist called Jesus the bridegroom in **John 3:29**. Jesus calls Himself the groom in **Matthew 9:14-15**. View these references in the light of what the OT said.

Questions: What about . . .

1) God’s Certificate of Divorce – **Is. 50:1; Jer. 3:6-10** – a warning to Judah (the Southern Kingdom) not to do these same things when it comes to being spiritually unfaithful. God trying to shock Judah into obedience.

Is. 50:1 also refers to the sending away as a certificate of divorce. Some say yes, God divorced Israel, and some say no. First, again, the focus is in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. So, even if God “*divorced*” them, He was not talking about Judah, though she too committed adultery. Second, according to the Mosaic Law in **Deut. 24:1-4**, if a man divorced his wife and she became the wife of someone else, who also divorced her, she could not remarry her first husband.

Jer. 3:1 – can’t return to her original husband

Jer. 3:11, 14, 23 – God says “Repent and I will take you back.”

Think of the implications:

- If God divorced Israel, then why would He promise to bring them back to Himself again?
- If God divorced Israel, then the references to the 12 tribes in Revelation have no meaning

- If God divorced Israel, then why did Jesus say He only came for the lost sheep of Israel in **Matt. 15:24**?
- If God divorced Israel, then how could the Apostles rule the 12 tribes in the Kingdom?
- If God divorced His people, then the Promise of the New Covenant is meaningless and the reference of Him being a husband to them means nothing

What did Paul say? **Rom. 11:1-2a; 11:11; 11:23** – Paul said the same thing the OT prophets said; God could not have divorced His people because of the unconditional Abrahamic Covenant; His sending them away into captivity was only a temporary thing

Many [not all] who believe the Church is Christ's bride, take their theology to its logical conclusion. What is that? **Replacement Theology** = the Church has replaced Israel and God is done with the Jewish people. God divorced Israel and took a new bride, because He could no longer be married to a people who rejected Him and rejected the Messiah. If you believe the Church is the bride of Christ, then what do you do with Israel – you have to reject them too and get them out of the picture by replacing them with the Church. God doesn't have multiple brides.

2) The Parable of the Marriage Supper – **Matthew 22:1-14**

First, the context is a rebuke against the religious leaders. You see this in **Matthew 21**, with the previous two parables.[The Two Sons and the Parable of the Landowner] . . The marriage supper parable is a continuation. The Kingdom would be taken away from the religious leaders and given to those who produce fruit (**Matthew 21:43**), or the **common people** [not speaking of the Gentiles] and not the religious elites. They are the same vineyard. . .[not speaking of Gentiles who are from a different vineyard]

The parable is about the Kingdom, not the present age. The **invited guests** are the Gentiles.

3) The Wedding Feast of the Lamb – **Revelation 19:7-9**

John uses a marriage metaphor for the righteous. There are different views of what this means and when it occurs. The text puts it at the return of Christ just prior to the establishment of the Kingdom. Most of the time the word "*saints*" refers to Jewish followers of God. And, if we read this based on some Isaiah passages, then we will see who this "bride" is, and it is not the Church.

The purpose of Daniel's 70th Week is focused on God's plan for the Jewish people, not the Church [although it impacts the Church].

Is. 4:4-5 – The word for *canopy* in Hebrew is "*chuppah*," which is a covering used in a wedding ceremony in Jewish culture.

Is. 25:6-8 –

Is this the marriage feast of the Lamb? Possibly. The feast is for everyone. But the focus is on Israel. Gentiles will attend. Israel has now been restored.

4) The New Jerusalem – **Rev. 21:1-2, 9-10**

"the bride, the wife of the Lamb"

The New Jerusalem is pictured as a bride. **Verse 2** – *prepared as a bride*. **Verses 9-10** refer to the beauty and value the **New Jerusalem** has in its splendor as a bride. If a city is God's bride, then Israel and/or the Church cannot be God's bride. Brings some serious problems???

But Jesus didn't die for a city but for people.
And the New Jerusalem descends after the Millennium.

Conclusion:

[Don't argue based on **2 Cor. 11:2** – This is only an illustration – not a dissertation on the Church being the bride of Christ.]

I do believe **Israel is God's bride** as the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant state because of the promise to bring back both Israel and Judah to Himself.

Implications:

1. The implications are immense – impacts our view of end times. If we view the focus of end times on Israel rather than on the Church we come to very different conclusions. Yes, the Church will be impacted.
2. The Church is already joined to Jesus, by God's grace through faith in the completed work of Christ. We are not waiting to be joined to Him.
3. If you believe God divorced Israel, and believe the Church is the bride of Christ, then you have replaced Israel with the Church.
4. Even if you believe God divorced Israel for her unfaithfulness, God brings her back to Himself and remarries her. But you have a big problem if God has to divorce the Church to remarry Israel. God will not have 2 brides.
5. Put all this together: God entered into a marriage betrothal or covenant with Israel at Sinai. Some in Israel rejected Him by going after other gods. Later, many rejected Jesus as Messiah, because God blinded them because of their unbelief. But because of the Abrahamic Covenant, God cannot forsake Israel, and provided a sacrifice for their sin, and will complete the New Covenant, when God brings them to Himself in the marriage ceremony, fulfilling the promises He made to them. Today, they are a **separated bride**. God used their unbelief to bring salvation to the Gentiles, and move them to jealousy. Not because God chose the Church as the bride, but because He is saving Jews and Gentiles through faith in the Messiah (**Romans 11:11-15**). Gentiles will be **guests** at the marriage feast **when God retakes Israel as His bride** in the ceremony.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOW8sjGelzI>

cf. article by **Don Samdahl**: <https://doctrine.org/the-bride-of-christ>

Response by Tony Garland:

https://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Book_of_Revelation/commentary/htm/topics/marriage.html#4.10

- The nation Israel is unlikely to be the Lamb's bride because she has already been wed. God the Father is Israel's husband.
- Even though Israel proved to be an unfaithful wife which God put away by divorce, He promises to remain faithful to her in His relationship as husband. Moreover, in order to divorce her, she had to first be married.
- As unfaithful as Israel has been, God promises to stand by her. Their husband-wife relationship will be reestablished.
- The relationship between Israel and Jehovah is dramatically different than what the NT records concerning Christ and His bride. Perhaps the most significant difference

is that the marriage of Jehovah to Israel occurred in time past, whereas the marriage of Christ with His bride has not yet taken place.

Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of Messiah*:

Jewish marriage included a number of steps: first, betrothal (which involved the prospective groom's traveling from his father's house to the home of the prospective bride, paying the purchase price, and thus establishing the marriage covenant); second, the groom's returning to his father's house (which meant remaining separate from his bride for 12 months, during which time he prepared the living accommodations for his wife in his father's house); third, the groom's coming for his bride at a time not known exactly to her; fourth, his return with her to the groom's father's house to consummate the marriage and to celebrate the wedding feast for the next seven days (during which the bride remained closeted in her bridal chamber).

First, the father of the groom made the arrangements for the marriage and paid the bride price. The timing of the arrangement varied. Sometimes it occurred when both children were small, and at other times it was a year before the marriage itself. Often the bride and groom did not even meet until their wedding day. The second step, which occurred a year or more after the first step, was the fetching of the bride. The bridegroom would go to the home of the bride in order to bring her to his home. In connection with this step, two other things should be noted. First, it was the father of the groom who determined the timing. Second, prior to the groom's leaving to fetch the bride, he must already have a place prepared for her as their abode. This was followed by the third step, the wedding ceremony, to which a few would be invited. Prior to the wedding ceremony, the bride underwent a ritual immersion for ritual cleansing. The fourth step, the marriage feast, would follow and could last for as many as seven days. Many more people would be invited to the feast than were to the marriage ceremony. In the **Marriage of the Lamb** all four of these steps of the Jewish wedding ceremony are evident.

As we saw above, John the Baptist declared himself as the friend of the bridegroom (**John 3:29**). Thus, he indicated that Jesus is a bridegroom and that he, John, was not part of the bride. In numerous other passages, Jesus referred to Himself as a bridegroom (**Mat. 9:15; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34**). Paul describes the relationship of the Corinthian church as being betrothed as a virgin to Christ: "*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*" (**2Cor. 11:2**). When teaching of the freedom of the believer from the law, Paul uses the analogy of a woman whose first husband dies who then becomes free to marry another: "*Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God*" (**Rom. 7:4**). In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul makes the analogy between a husband and wife and Christ and the Church (**Eph. 5:24**). In the same way that husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies, so Christ loves believers: "*For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church*" (**Eph. 5:30-32**). Paul is saying that in the same way believers are merged with Christ, as the body of Christ, so should husbands consider their wives. "[The Church] *is both the body of Christ and the bride of Christ, as Eve was the body of Adam and also his bride.*"

Some observe that none of these passages **explicitly teach** that the Church is the bride of Christ.

They suggest that the marriage analogy used by these passages is only an **instructional aid** which is intended to teach **relational truths** and that the passages are not meant to establish the Church as the bride. While it may be true that the primary intent in these passages is teaching relational truths, this does not necessarily mean that the Holy Spirit chose the marriage analogy by chance. The sheer number of times where the wedding analogy appears is in itself considerable indication that **more is afoot than mere analogy**:

Robert Thomas: In the OT, God is the bridegroom of Israel (cf. **Isa. 54:6; 62:5; Jer. 31:32; Eze. 16:7-14; Hos. 2:16, 19**), and in the NT, Christ is the bridegroom of the church (cf. **2Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25 ff.; Rev. 3:20; 19:9; 21:2, 9; 22:17**). In the gospels, Christ is the bridegroom a number of times (cf. **Mat. 9:15; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35; John 3:29**) and parables about marriage occur in **Mat. 22:2-14; 25:1-13; Luke 14:15-24**.

Another consideration when identifying the bride of the Lamb is the **matter of resurrection**. At the time of the marriage of the Lamb (**Rev. 19:7**), there is only one group of saints who have already been resurrected to receive their glorified bodies: the Church at the Rapture prior to the Tribulation. It would seem premature for other saints which have not yet been resurrected to be included in the marriage with the Lamb. Nor will they return with Him as part of the army of heaven (**Rev. 19:14**).

Robert Thomas: The difficulty of including Israel along with the church as part of the bride is a chronological one. OT saints and dead saints from the period of Daniel's seventieth week will rise in time for the Millennium (**Dan. 12:1-2**), but not in time to join Christ in His triumphal return (**Rev. 19:14**). It is also impossible for saints who die during the Millennium to be part of this company, because their resurrection will not come in time (**Rev. 20:5-6**). **Yet it is incontrovertible that Israel will appear with the church in the New Jerusalem which is also Christ's bride.** The city's twelve pillars and twelve foundations (**Rev. 21:12, 14**) prove the presence of both distinctive groups.

As we have seen, the OT represents **Israel as the wife of Jehovah**. Although she has been unfaithful and divorced by her Husband, a time is coming when "*all Israel will be saved*" (**Rom. 11:26**). At that time, Jehovah will take her back as His wife: (**Rom. 9:25-26** cf. **Hos. 2:23; Hos. 1:10**)

In the meantime, those who accept Messiah Jesus are baptized into His body (**1Cor. 12:13**). In the same way that Eve was literally "*one flesh*" with Adam, having been taken from his side (**Gen. 2:21-24**), so believers are joined into the spiritual body of Christ and betrothed to Him. During Jacob's Trouble and the Great Tribulation, the wife of Jehovah is being purified on earth in preparation for her restoration during the Millennial Kingdom to follow. At the same time,

the bride of Christ is in her bridal chamber, having been taken in the Rapture and wed to Him at the marriage of the Lamb.

Later, after the Millennial Kingdom has come to a close and a new heavens and new earth are created, the holy city, the New Jerusalem, is prepared by Jehovah as a bride adorned for her husband—the Lamb (**Rev. 21:2, 9**). The long-unfulfilled promises of the **restoration of Jerusalem**, which found their initial fulfillment in the Millennial Kingdom (**Isa. 62**), will come to final fruition in the New Jerusalem where all the redeemed of all ages are in union with God

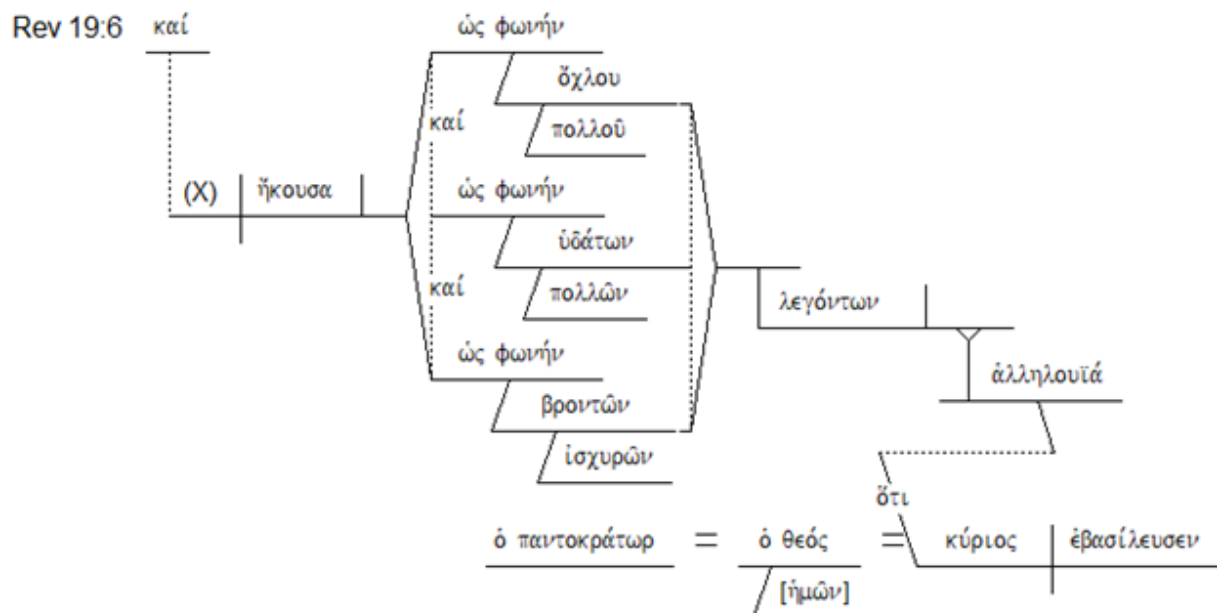
and the Lamb Who are its temple (**Rev. 21:22**). This is the **ultimate consummation of all the redeemed**.

cf. article by **Renald Showers**: <https://israelmyglory.org/article/the-marriage-and-marriage-supper-of-the-lamb-revelation-197-9/>

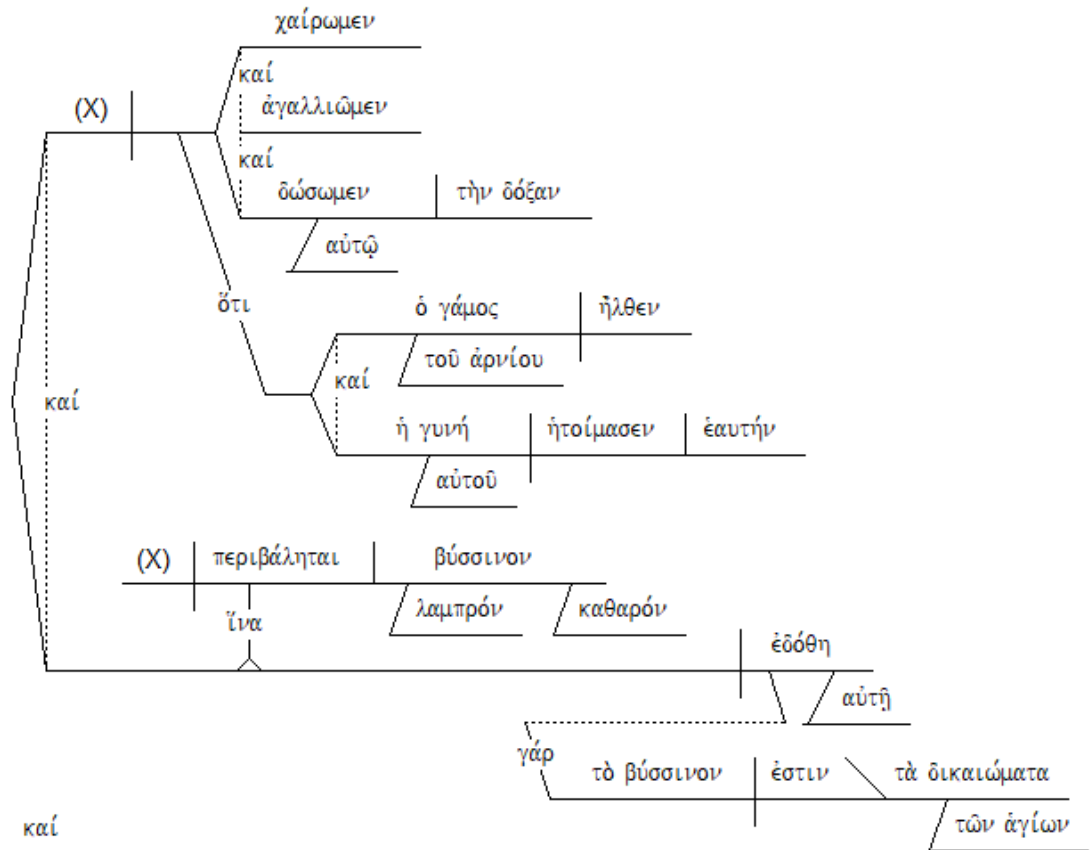
John MacArthur: Some have attempted to combine the marriage parables in **Matthew 22:1–14** and **Matthew 25:1–13** with **Revelation 19:7–10** to form a sort of “**marriage theology**.” But that violates the hermeneutical principle that doctrine cannot be formulated by combining elements from various illustrations or parables. Marriage is incidental in the two Matthew parables; in fact, neither one even mentions a bride. The theme of the parable of the marriage feast (**Matt. 22:1–14**) is Israel’s apostasy and rejection of God. The invited guests who rejected the King’s invitation to the great celebration symbolize Israel; the uninvited guests brought in from the streets symbolize the Gentile church (cf. **Matt. 8:11–12**). Thus, in this parable the church does not represent the bride, but the guests. The parable of the ten virgins (**Matt. 25:1–13**) emphasizes the importance of spiritual preparedness. Again, believers in that parable are not represented by the bride, but the virgins (the bride’s attendants). The five foolish virgins were like professing believers, unprepared for Christ’s return (i.e., unsaved); the five wise ones were true believers, genuinely prepared. The point of the parable is that professed believers must be ready (i.e., truly saved) when Christ returns to set up His kingdom. There will be no second opportunity for the unprepared (unsaved) because the Day of the Lord judgment is total and final. Only believers will survive to enter the kingdom.

Because the New Testament uses marriage to illustrate such a variety of spiritual principles, those illustrations cannot be used to interpret **Revelation 19**. Each parable or illustration must be interpreted in its own context. To blend together details from such unconnected illustrations with a common theme is not the way to interpret this text (or any text).

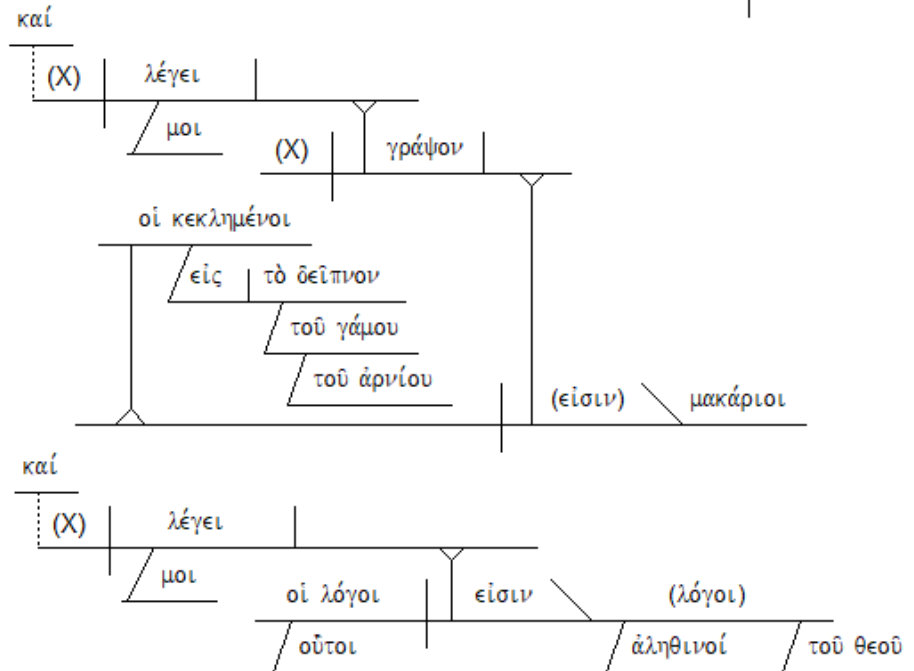
Leedy Greek Diagram:



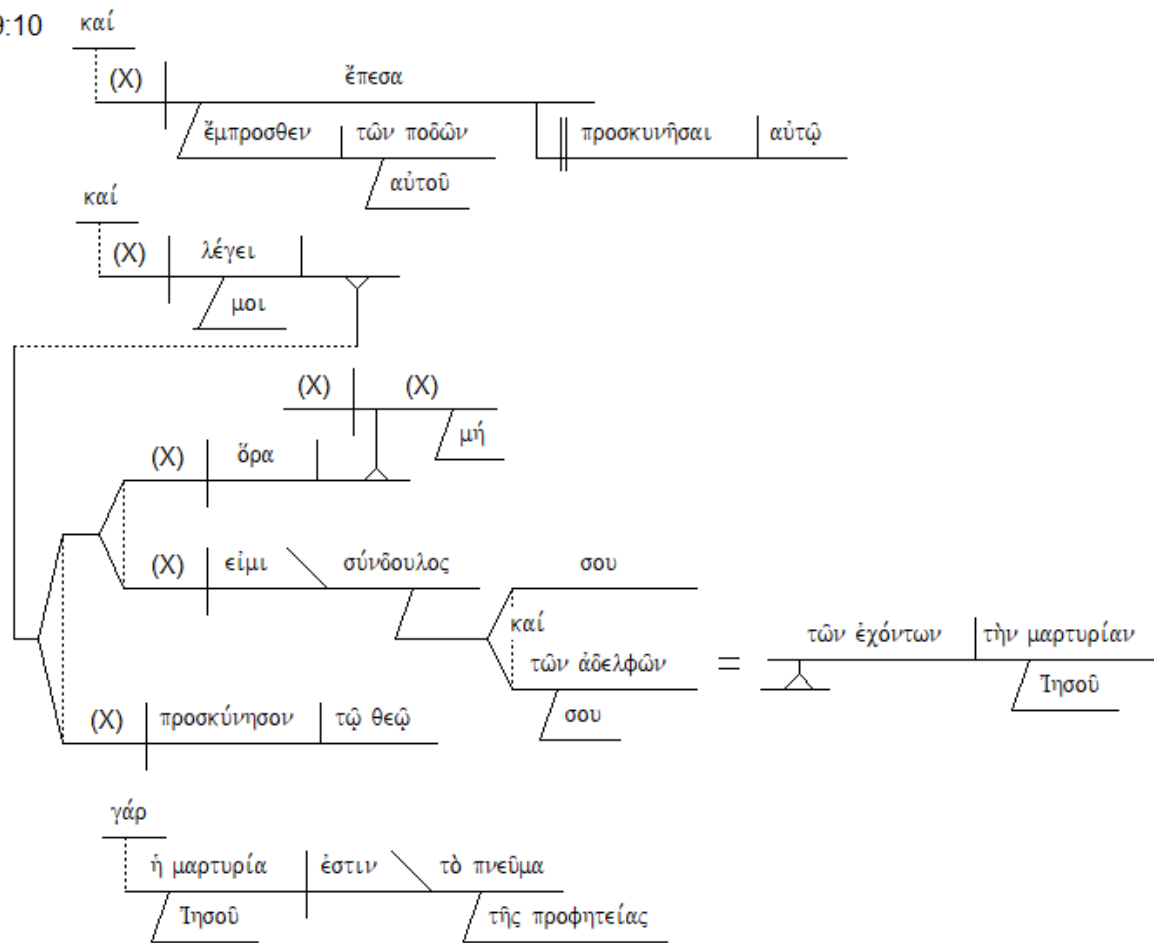
Rev 19:7-8



Rev 19:9



Rev 19:10



TEXT: Revelation 19:11-16

TITLE: *SECOND COMING OF CHRIST AS CONQUEROR, JUDGE AND KING*

BIG IDEA:

THE VARIOUS NAMES OF JESUS FLESH OUT THE PICTURE OF HIM RETURNING AS MESSIANIC CONQUEROR, RIGHTEOUS JUDGE AND SOVEREIGN KING

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: While John knows the traditions about Jesus and the New Testament preaching of his saving work, the predominant themes of his visions are drawn from Old Testament portrayals of the divine warrior coming to defeat the nations and regather repentant Israel in a restored Jerusalem from which a Davidic king will rule both faithful Israel and believing gentiles. . .

[The names for Christ in this passage] reflect the biblical idea that the **name of a person** is indicative of his or her true essence and role, and so a “new name” can symbolize a change of character or status. Likewise a new circumstance can reveal that an existing name, one already known, has a depth of meaning and relevance not previously appreciated.

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: When Jesus returns, He will do so in power and glory as He executes justice on all who reject and oppose Him. . .

The apostle John’s vision of the second coming of Christ focuses primarily on one major aspect of His return: **His complete and total victory over all the powers of evil**. He sees our King coming as the conquering warrior Messiah “in bloodstained garments, destroying all hostile and opposing powers with his mighty sword. . . . In his cross and resurrection, Christ won a great victory over the powers of evil; by his second coming, he will execute that victory” (**Ladd**, Commentary, 252–53). There is not a more glorious description of our coming King in the whole Bible than **verses 11-16**.

G.K. Beale: Christ will reveal His sovereignty and faithfulness in fulfilling His promise to judge evil by defeating the forces of wickedness at the end of history. . .

This passage offers a picture of Christ far different from, yet complementary to (and hinted at by) the portrait of His earthly life presented in the Gospels. He is represented as a **divine warrior** executing judgment and ruling sovereignly over all. His true identity cannot be known or controlled by others. He will crush His enemies in the winepress of the wrath of God. Not only that, His saints will assist Him in the execution of this judgment. How often do we consider the full biblical picture of Jesus? The mystery is of One who hung defenseless on the cross, taking the punishment for our sins and calling us to serve Him in weakness, yet who one day will ride forth to execute vengeance, with us alongside Him. A true understanding of Christ can only come as we consider all these elements of who He is. He has given everything, as must His followers, to reach those still outside His grasp, yet by virtue of His holiness must bring God’s righteous rule to creation by judging those who choose to bring destruction on the earth (**Rev. 11:18**).

James Hamilton: The purpose of this passage is to highlight **the glory of the coming King**. It is intended to give hope to suffering Christians by showing them that they have a King who is coming who will triumph over their enemies. Everything in this passage points to the glory of Christ.

In **19:11–21** we see the cavalry that we as Christians will ride in one day. We represent the world's true King. My prayer is that the knowledge that the rightful Lord of the World will return as King and the knowledge of our role in his conquest will do three things for us:

- 1) Deepen our appreciation of the significance and purpose of our daily lives, mundane though they may seem to us.
- 2) Increase our propensity toward instant willing obedience to our sovereign King, regardless of time, place, or the possibility of our being caught.
- 3) Most importantly, stir up in us a longing for our King to come and reign over us. May we be those of whom Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 4:8**, those who will receive a "*crown of righteousness*" because they have "*loved his appearing*."

J. Hampton Keathley, III: This is where God's kingdom comes to be on earth as it is in heaven. Here God's program is climaxed; God exalts His Son and puts all creation under His feet, a symbol of His victory and control (**Psalm 2; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 1:13; Psalm 110:1**).

John MacArthur: So the **sum of His names** really is a glorious picture, isn't it? He has a name which no man knew which expresses His essential deity. He has a name, The Word of God, which expresses His incarnate deity. And He has a name, King of kings and Lord of lords, which expresses His sovereign deity. Frankly, the gospel plan is in those three names. He is God who revealed Himself to man and someday will come to reign over the universe. The sum of the names, then, is the sum of the picture of the Conqueror. So **the return of the Conqueror**.

Sam Storms: According to **Proverbs 18:10**, "*the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe*." We are to take refuge and seek our safety and the reassurance of all God's promises by **trusting in the truth of what God's name embodies**. This means that we must put our confidence and hope for the future in what his many names mean.
<https://www.samstorms.org/all-articles/post/our-blessed-hope---revelation-1911-21>

Kendell Easley: The name Jesus or Christ is never used in this part of the chapter, but the identity of the rider is crystal clear. He is called by **four different titles** in six verses. (Kings of all times and places have adopted many such titles; not the least of these were the Roman emperors.) It will help us visualize these if we imagine them as banners unfurled flying behind him as he descends.

I. (:11) FAITHFUL AND TRUE – RIGHTEOUS JUDGE

A. Victorious Conqueror Returning from Heaven

"And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse,"

Grant Osborne: God is about to act on earth in a decisive way. . . The thrust is that the consummation of God's acts in human history has arrived. The eschaton is here.

The color **white** does not indicate purity, as it does when describing the garments of the righteous (3:4–5; 6:11; 7:9, 13–14) but indicates a **warhorse** and shows the one who comes is a **conquering king**.

John MacArthur: As it did in 4:1, heaven opened before John’s wondering eyes. But unlike 4:1, heaven opens this time not to let John in, but to let Jesus out. The time has come at last for the full, glorious revelation of the sovereign Lord. This is the time to which all of Revelation (as well as all of redemptive history) has been pointing, the time of which Jesus Himself spoke in **Matthew 24:27–31**:

“For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather. “But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.”

As the dramatic scene unfolds, John stands transfixed, his attention riveted on the majestic, regal, mighty Rider. Jesus, the One who ascended to heaven (**Acts 1:9–11**) where He has been seated at the Father’s right hand (**Acts 5:31; 7:55–56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22**), is about to receive the kingdom that the Father promised Him.

William Barclay: The white horse is the symbol of the **conqueror**, because it was on a white horse that a Roman general rode when he celebrated a triumph.

B. Identified as Faithful and True

*“and He who sat upon it is called **Faithful and True**,”*

Daniel Akin: “*Faithful*” conveys dependability, reliability, trustworthiness. “*True*” affirms that He is authentic, genuine, the real thing. What He says you can believe. When He acts you can trust Him. In fact, as **the faithful and true One**, He can do what no other King, ruler, or warrior can do: “*He judges and makes war in righteousness.*” **Ladd** notes, “The present tense of the verbs indicates the permanent character of Messiah in all his acts” (Commentary, 253). He is always faithful, true, and righteous in whatever He does, including making war.

John MacArthur: The description of Jesus as **Faithful and True** is in marked contrast with the unfaithfulness and lies of Satan (**12:9**), Antichrist’s evil empire (**18:23**), and wicked people (**2 Tim. 3:13**). The very fact that He is coming again as He promised confirms that Jesus is Faithful and True.

Grant Osborne: In this context, it means that the final war is mandated because Christ is “*faithful*” to his calling and “*true*” in his justice (see **16:7** and **19:2**, “*True and just are your judgments*”). This prepares for the description of the words of the book as πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοί in **21:5; 22:6**. As Jesus is “*faithful and true*,” and since he is “*the Word of God*” (**19:13**), the revelations he has given to John would also be “*faithful and true*.”

G.K. Beale: The rider on the horse is called **Faithful and True**. Christ will be faithful and true to fulfill His promise to judge the wicked, and to vindicate His name and His followers. This is confirmed by the use of the same phrase in the plural in **21:5** and **22:6**, which refer to the sure fulfillment of the prophecy of the new creation and the new Jerusalem.

Merrill C. Tenney: Because He is *faithful* [**Rev. 19:11+**] He must discharge His office as judge, not shrinking from the administration of discipline or punishment where it is needed. Because He is *true* [**Rev. 19:11+**] He cannot alter the standards of God which condemn sin. Favoritism and laxity cannot be found in Him, for He is the perfect administrator of justice in a world where injustice has long since reigned. . . . The meekness of Calvary and the sternness of Armageddon may seem inconsistent, but wherever sin exists, they may both be found.

C. Righteous as Judge and Warrior

“and in righteousness He judges and wages war.”

John MacArthur: Unlike other conquerors the world has seen, covetousness, ambition, pride, or power will not motivate this Conqueror. He will come in utter righteousness, in perfect holiness, and in strict accord with every holy interest. Heaven cannot be at peace with sin, for God’s “*eyes are too pure to approve evil, and [He] can not look on wickedness with favor*” (**Hab. 1:13**). There is a limit to God’s patience. Justice cannot always tolerate injustice; truth cannot forever tolerate lies; rebellion cannot be permitted to go on forever. Incurable, incurable, hardened sinners will face destruction; mercy abused and grace rejected will ultimately bring judgment. . .

So the promises of God, the statements of Jesus, the guarantee of the Holy Spirit, the plan for the church, for the nations, for Israel, the humiliation of Christ, the exaltation of Satan temporarily, all of those things demand the return of Christ and the establishment of His Kingdom. . .

The Lord is a man of war. In righteousness, He judges and makes war. Frankly, the judging has already been going on in the breaking of the seals and in the blowing of the trumpets and the pouring out of the bowls. But now He makes a final war. He who for long centuries had endured the scoffings patiently, the insults, the bad manners of men who contemplated Calvary and, as it were, spit on Him, who displayed human hatred and contempt, who through millennia have rejected the peace that He made through the blood of the cross. They’re now going to find Him a warrior King. But there’s not going to be much fighting on their part, the end will come in a split second.

William Barclay: Again, John finds his picture in the prophetic words of the Old Testament, where it is said of the chosen king of God: “*With righteousness he shall judge the poor*” (**Isaiah 11:4**). The people of John’s time knew all about the **perversion of justice**; no one could expect justice from a fickle tyrant. In Asia Minor, even the tribunal of the proconsul was subject to bribery and to maladministration. Wars were matters of ambition and tyranny and oppression rather than of justice. But, when the conquering Christ comes, his power will be exercised in justice.

James Hamilton: No one will question his decisions; no one will doubt the justice of his cause; no one will be able to refute the utter clarity of his motives and purposes. They may rebel against him, but there will be no unrighteousness in him.

II. (:12) MYSTERY NAME – TRANSCENDENT GLORY

A. Supreme in Judgment and Authority

1. Penetrating Judgment

“And His eyes are a flame of fire,”

Daniel Akin: penetrating judgment and insight (see 1:14; 2:18; see also Dan 10:6). Jesus peers into the depths of our souls. He sees every act, every thought, every emotion. He knows you as no one else knows you. He knows you better than you know yourself. Such a reality should thrill you and terrify you. It should humble you. He knows you in all of your sin, depravity, and wickedness. And yet He loves you and cares for you. To know you and me as He does and yet still love us is simply another evidence of His amazing grace.

Grant Osborne: There is a distinct aspect of **omniscience** (sees all) and **judgment** (repays all) behind this image.

2. Preeminent Authority

“and upon His head are many diadems;”

Buist Fanning: representing his royal authority that eclipses the ruling power of the dragon and his beast (cf. 12:3; 13:1).

John MacArthur: *Many* indicates His collecting of all the rulers' crowns, signifying that He alone is the sovereign ruler of the earth. Collecting the crown of a vanquished king was customary in the ancient world. After defeating the Ammonites, David “*took the crown of their king from his head ... and it was placed on David's head*” (2 Sam. 12:30). Christ alone will be sovereign, since He alone is “*King of kings, and Lord of lords*” (v. 16), and “*the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever*” (11:15). The many crowns Christ will wear are indeed a fair exchange for a crown of thorns (cf. Phil. 2:8–11).

B. Identified as the Transcendent Deity

“and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself.”

Grant Osborne: This builds on 2:17, where the victorious saints of Pergamum are promised “*a white stone, [on which] there will be a new name written that no one knows except the one who receives it.*” Both passages utilize Isa. 62:2, “*You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow*” (cf. 65:15). In addition, Christ promises the overcomers in Philadelphia, “*I will write on them the name of my God . . . and my new name*” (Rev. 3:12). . .

a title reserved for eternity, the name that will reveal the true nature of the Godhead in a way beyond our finite ability to grasp. As Moses could not see the face of God and live (Exod. 33:20), so we cannot at this time know the **true essence of God**. That awaits his final revelation. When we combine this with Rev. 2:17, a new, exciting truth emerges. At the *parousia*, we will first learn the new name of Christ (19:12) and then will be given that new name for ourselves (2:17). It is written on Christ, and then he will write it on us!

James Hamilton: This points to the divinity of Christ because it shows that there are aspects of God that we will never know. God is infinite, which means that we will never exhaust him. There are attributes of Jesus in this passage that can be known, and there are aspects of who he is

to which we have no access. He is transcendent. He reveals himself to us, but he is ultimately beyond our ability to comprehend.

III. (:13) THE WORD OF GOD – ULTIMATE REVELATION / CREATIVE AGENT

A. Victorious – Having Trampled Out the Life Blood of His Enemies

“And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood;”

Buist Fanning: In a gruesome and sobering description he is said to be “*clothed in a robe dipped in blood*” (v. 12a). The image of a garment that has been “*dipped*” or stained completely with “*blood*” is drawn from **Isaiah 63:1-6**, a picture of the Lord’s wrath against the nations of the world, using the imagery of someone treading out grapes in a winepress (cf. **Rev 14:19-20; 19:15**). But his garment is stained not with dark grape juice but with the lifeblood of those he has judged. The close dependence on **Isaiah 63** shows that in this context “*blood*” refers not to Jesus’s atoning sacrifice of himself (as in **1:5; 5:9; 7:14**) but to the blood of his enemies that will be shed in his overwhelming victory against all resistance that hostile earthly powers mount against him at his return (as in **14:17-20**).

B. Identified as the Word of God

*“and His name is called **The Word of God**.”*

Daniel Akin: As the **Word of God**, He is God’s perfect communication and revelation. When you look at Jesus, you are looking at God. When you listen to Jesus, you are hearing the voice of God. As the author of Hebrews reveals, in these last days, God “*has spoken to us by His Son*” (**Heb 1:2**).

John MacArthur: He is the full expression of the mind, will, and purpose of God, “*the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature*” (**Heb. 1:3**).

Kendell Easley: In the first chapter of Scripture, the Creation progressed because of the **powerful and active word of God**. When God said “*let there be*,” it happened according to his word (**Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26**). Both John and Paul taught that through Christ the worlds were made at the beginning (**John 1:3; Col. 1:16**). At the end of the age, the same “*Word of God*”—the Lord Jesus Christ—is the **active agent accomplishing the will of God for the universe**.

William Barclay: To a Jew, a word was not merely a sound; **it did things**. As **Dr John Paterson** puts it in *The Book that is Alive*: “The spoken word in Hebrew was fearfully alive. It was not merely a vocable [word] or sound dropped heedlessly from unthinking lips. It was a unit of energy charged with power. It is energised for weal or for woe.”

It is the **active word** which carried out the commandment of God. Here is the idea in **Hebrews 4:12**: “The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.”

Philip Hughes: As the Word of God the Son is both the **revealer of the divine mind** and also the **agent of the divine will**. Since the word of God never fails to effect what it decrees (cf. **Isa. 55:11**), it is through him who is the eternal Word that the will of God is brought to pass.

IV. (:14-16) KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS – SOVEREIGN DOMINION

A. (:14) Commander of Impressive Forces

“And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.”

John MacArthur: The Lord Jesus Christ will not return alone, but will be accompanied by the armies which are in heaven (cf. **17:14**). Four divisions make up these glorified troops.

1. Earlier in **chapter 19** the bride of the Lamb (the church) was pictured wearing fine linen, white and clean (**vv. 7–8**). Those glorified believers will accompany Christ.
2. So will the Tribulation believers, who are also pictured in heaven wearing white robes (**7:9**).
3. The third group is the Old Testament saints, who are resurrected at the end of the Tribulation (**Dan. 12:1–2**).
4. Finally, the holy angels will also accompany Christ (**Matt. 25:31**).

The white horses ridden by the heavenly cavalry are not literal horses, anymore than those ridden by hell’s cavalry in **9:7** and **16**. Unlike the Lord Jesus Christ, the heavenly army is unarmed; He alone will destroy His enemies. The saints will come not to fight with Jesus, but to reign with Him (**20: 4–6; 1 Cor. 6:2**).

B. (:15) Unparalleled Dominion

1. Wielding a Sharp Sword

“And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations;”

Grant Osborne: The **sword** was the symbol of Roman authority over life and death, an authority that only the emperor and his governors held (see on **2:12**). The message here is that Christ alone has the final authority of life and death. As in **1:16** and **2:12, 16**, this language echoes *Isa. 11:4* and **49:2**. In *Isa. 11:4* the branch from Jesse “*will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,*” referring to the justice with which he will rule the earth; and in *Isa. 49:2* God has anointed the servant of Yahweh and “*made my mouth like a sharpened sword,*” referring to the power of his word to save Israel and “*strike the nations*” (**Isa. 11:4d**) so as to deliver God’s people. This theme occurs frequently in Jewish apocalyptic that also builds on Isaiah to say “*the word of his mouth will do the sinners in*” (1 Enoch 62.2), or the Messiah will “*destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth*” (Ps. Sol. 17.24; cf. also 17.35–36), or the Messiah “*sent forth from his mouth as it were a stream of fire*” and burned up those “*gathered to wage war*” (2 Esdr. [4 Ezra] 13:8, 10–11). This is continued in **2 Thess. 2:8**, which says the Lord will “*overthrow*” the man of lawlessness “*with the breath of his mouth.*” Here in **Rev. 19:15** this idea flows out of the description of Christ as “*the Word of God*” and refers to Jesus’ proclamation of judgment on the forces of evil.

Tony Garland: How is it that the sword is figurative—coming out of His mouth? It represents the **sword of the Spirit, the word of God**: that which God has set forth as His spoken will (**Eph. 6:17**). Those who are slain meet their doom because they are judged by God’s righteous word (**Heb. 4:12**). They have consistently violated its precepts and standards and their destruction has been prophesied. In many ways, the action of their slaying is the unavoidable result of what God has said. This is why Jesus slays His enemies with His lips: “*He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked*” (**Isa. 11:4**). His mouth is like a sharp sword (**Isa. 49:2**). Hence, when Antichrist is destroyed, he is consumed “*with the breath of [the Lord’s] mouth*” (**2Th. 2:8**). The ultimate reason they are slain

is found in God's testimony—the law written in stone found in the ark of the covenant (**Rev. 11:19+; 15:5+**). The written law is His word, thus the weapon is said to come forth from His mouth.

2. Ruling with a Rod of Iron

“and He will rule them with a rod of iron;”

John Walvoord: The expression of ruling “*with a rod of iron*” is also found in **Psalm 2:9** and **Revelation 2:27**, with a similar expression, “*the rod of his mouth*,” in **Isaiah 11:4**. It represents unyielding, absolute government under which everyone is required to conform to the righteous standards of God.

Albert Mohler: The fact that he rules over his domain with a scepter or iron or a rod out of his mouth indicates he is the true Messianic King.

3. Treading Out the Wine Press of the Fierce Wrath of God

“and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.”

C. (:16) Identified as the Sovereign King

*“And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written,
‘KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.’”*

J. Hampton Keathley, III: There is no article with either of these titles which emphasizes the character and quality of His rule. It emphasizes the qualities of kingliness and lordship. “Of kings” and “of lords” means over all others, and like no others. This declares both His **authority** and **quality**. He is the epitome of a King and a Lord.

John Walvoord: Finally, Christ wears the title “*King of kings and Lord of lords*.” Here at last has come One who has a right to rule the earth, whose power and majesty will demonstrate His authority as He brings to bear His sovereign judgment on a wicked world. It is in anticipation of this ultimate triumph that God the Father holds the nations of the world in derision in their rebellion against the Lord's Anointed (**Ps. 2:1–4**). God will indeed break the nations with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces and give the uttermost parts of the earth to His Son as His rightful possession. In view of this consummation, how pertinent is the invitation of **Psalm 2:10–12** to serve the Lord and kiss the Son while there is yet time to claim the blessing of those who put their trust in Him.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Can you close your eyes and picture the majesty and glory and triumph of this return of Christ?
- 2) How do the contrasts with the Antichrist serve as the perfect backdrop for the imagery used here to describe Christ?
- 3) What is the purpose of referencing a name that cannot be known?

4) Why is the title *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* written on “*His robe and on His thigh*”?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Sam Storms: *If your hope is not in the concrete, tangible, physical, personal return of Jesus Christ, you have no hope.* No other hope makes sense or has any possibility of being of any benefit to anyone, if Jesus Christ is not going to return a second time. As Paul said, this is our “*blessed hope*”! If you think there is yet another option, another hope worthy of your focus and faith, you’ve been lied to. I’m not here to lie to you. I’m here to tell you the truth: Jesus Christ is coming back, and that and that alone is the only hope worthy of your confidence. It is the only hope that will never put you to shame or disappoint you. Today we are going to see what John says about this hope, especially as it pertains to what Jesus will do to the unbelieving, immoral, and idolatrous world that has denied him.

<https://www.samstorms.org/all-articles/post/our-blessed-hope---revelation-1911-21>

Daniel Akin: The First and Second Comings of Jesus Christ

His First Coming	His Second Coming
He rode a donkey.	He will ride a white horse.
He came as the Suffering Servant.	He will come as King and Lord.
He came in humility and meekness.	He will come in majesty and power.
He came to suffer the wrath of God for sinners.	He will come to establish the kingdom of God for His saints.
He was rejected by many as the Messiah.	He will be recognized by all as Lord.
He came to seek and save the lost.	He will come to judge and rule as King.
He came as God incognito.	He will come as God in all His splendor.

John MacArthur: There is only one solution for the world’s problems: the return of its true King, the Lord Jesus Christ, to establish absolute monarchy and unilateral authority in His earthly kingdom. Only under His rule will there be peace instead of war, justice instead of inequity, and righteousness instead of wickedness. But that glorious event will not occur without fierce opposition from Satan, his demon hordes, and the world of wicked sinners. The Tribulation, the seven-year period immediately before Christ’s return, will see the greatest of all human world empires, headed by the evil genius known as Antichrist. The earth will be infested with demons, those who have been here all along, those cast from heaven with Satan (12:9), and those released

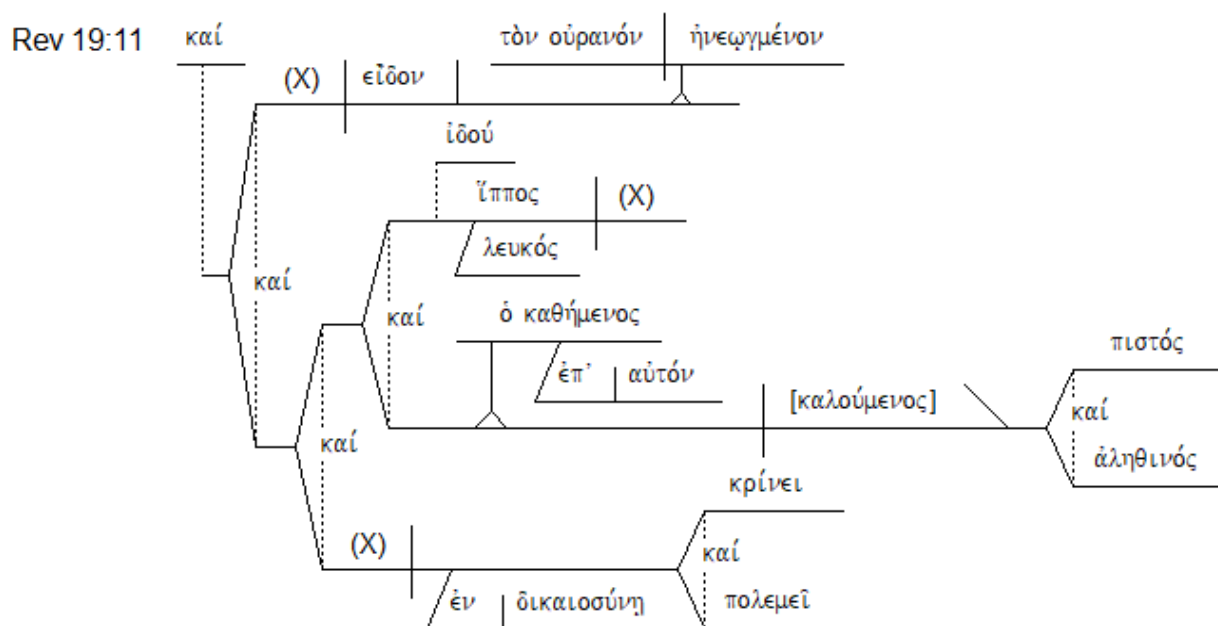
from imprisonment during the Tribulation (9:1–10, 14–20). The Tribulation will also be a time of escalating human wickedness, despite the unprecedented outpouring of God’s wrath in the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments. Stubbornly hardening their hearts against the truth of the gospel, people even then will obstinately refuse to repent (9:20–21; 16:9, 11). Even the destruction of Antichrist’s magnificent capital city of Babylon (chaps. 17–18) will provoke loud laments, but no repentance.

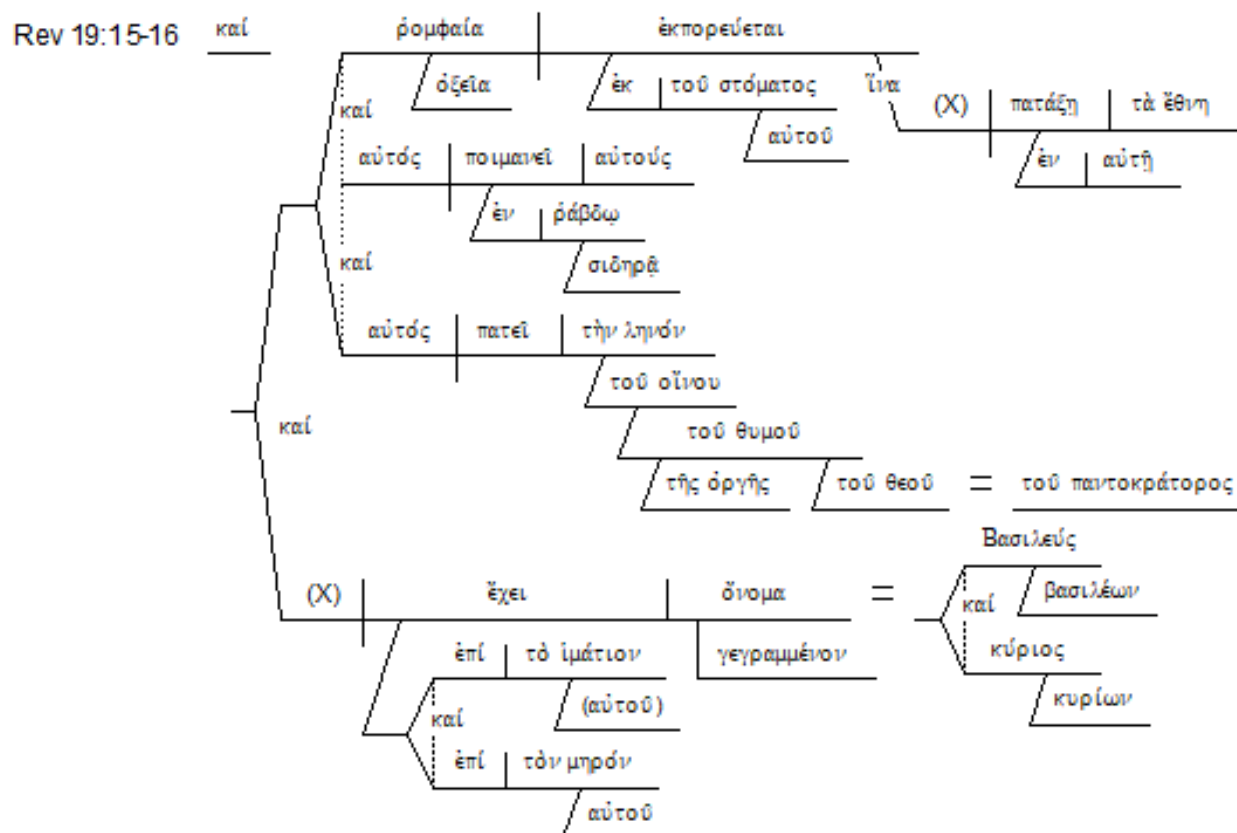
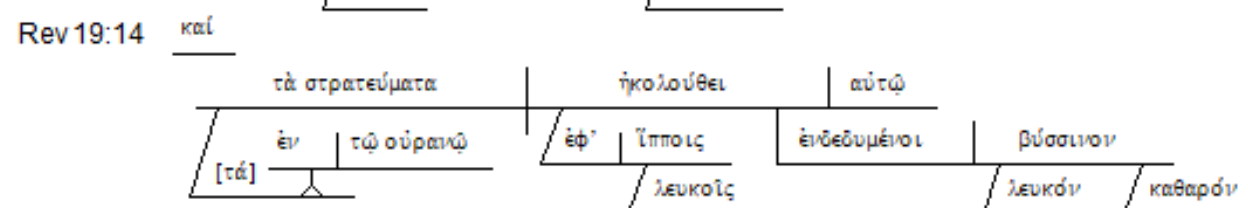
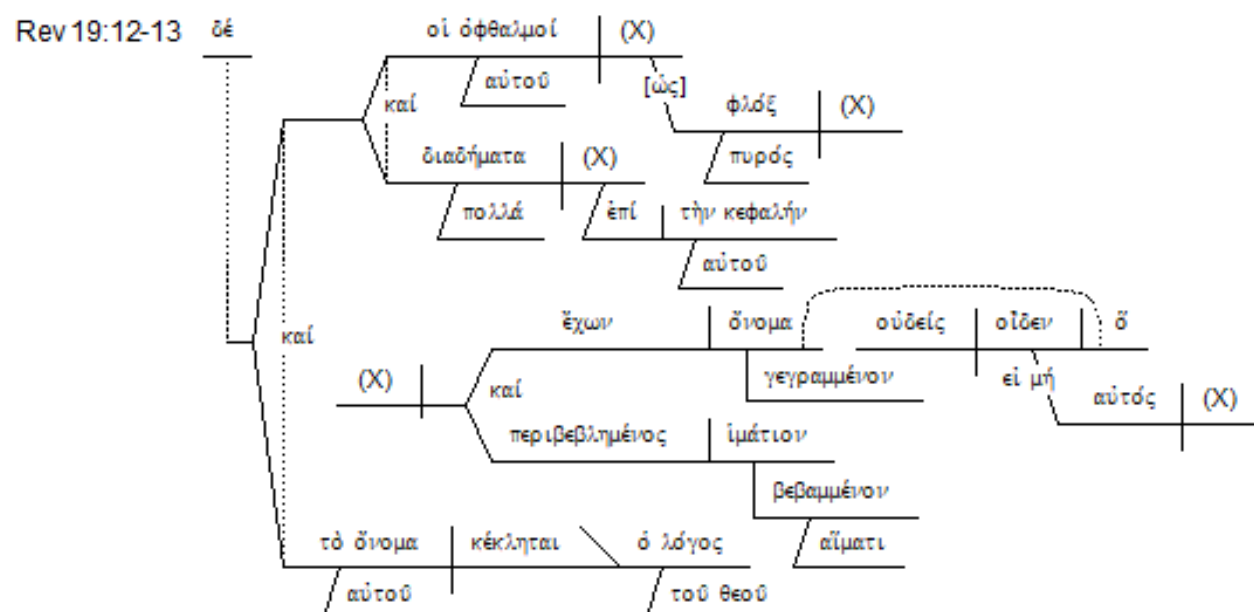
Charles Swindoll: This isn’t the first **white horse** we’ve seen in Revelation. When Jesus opened the first seal of the seven-sealed scroll, a “*white horse*” leaped forth (6:2). We identified its rider as falsehood personified: the deceptive and wicked theocracy established by the Antichrist. That first rider was given a bow and a crown —the *stephanos*, a “victor’s crown” —and he set out to conquer the world. In his wake followed warfare, famine, and death (6:3-8).

The second Rider on a white horse stands in direct contrast with the first. His name is “*Faithful and True*” (19:11), in contrast to the Antichrist’s agenda of “*deception of wickedness for those who perish*” (2 Thes. 2:10). The Antichrist will wage a wicked war inspired by arrogance (Rev. 13:4), but Christ will judge and wage war based on righteousness (19:11). In John’s vision, he saw Christ’s eyes ablaze with fire (19:12), just like the original vision in 1:14. This portrays Christ in all His heavenly glory, his very gaze piercing to the center of our souls and exposing our deepest thoughts and motives.

Unlike the Antichrist, who was crowned with the fragile and temporary “victor’s garland,” Christ wore many “*diadems*” (*diadēma* [1238]), the golden bands representing **sovereign authority**. Most earthly kings would be crowned with one diadem, but Christ’s many crowns represent the fact that He is “*King of kings and Lord of lords*.” This expresses the magnitude of His absolute sovereignty.

Leedy Greek Diagram:





TEXT: Revelation 19:17-21

TITLE: FEAST ON THE SLAUGHTERED WICKED

BIG IDEA:

**THE SLAUGHTER OF THE EVIL FORCES OF ANTICHRIST AT ARMAGEDDON
SETS THE TABLE FOR A GRUESOME FEAST FOR THE VULTURES OF THE SKY**

INTRODUCTION:

Buist Fanning: This vision anticipates the overwhelming defeat of all the forces that futilely resist his coming (cf. vv. 19-21), but it is a gruesome sight even when recounted indirectly, as done here. The imagery is drawn directly from **Ezekiel 39** as a typology of judgment, where God predicted a rout of the forces of Gog that will invade Israel (**Ezek 39:4**). . .

Such a grotesque “feast” represents the crushing defeat of all these enemies of God as well as the ignominy of dying in a dishonorable, profane cause. Leaving bodies unburied to be eaten as carrion constituted the worst dishonor (cf. **1 Sam 17:44; 2 Kgs 9:36; Ps 79:2**).

G.K. Beale: But why allude to **Ezekiel** at this point, especially since other OT prophetic passages concerning the end-time defeat of evil forces could have been drawn from (e.g., **Daniel 2, 7–12, Zechariah 14**)? The portrayal of **Ezekiel 39** has been included because its main point is that God will make His holy name known both to Israel and to Israel’s oppressors during captivity by means of defeating Gog and Magog. The goal of revelation of the divine name introduces (**Ezek. 39:7**) and concludes (**39:21-29**) the description of the slaughter (**39:8-20**). God will save Israel and judge His enemies. The same dual theme with respect to the revelation of Christ’s name has been the overriding concern in **Rev. 19:11-16**. The allusion to **Ezekiel 39** confirms the presence of this concern and underscores the defeat narrated in **19:19-21** as the means by which Christ will reveal His name in deliverance to His people and in judgment to their oppressors.

Daniel Akin: This supper is much different from the marriage supper of the Lamb in **19:9**. There the saints are called to come and celebrate with the Lord. Here sinners are called and condemned by the Lord for a “**bird feast**,” a **vulture’s banquet** where they are the entrée. It is a great supper because all rebellious sinners on earth will be present. Try as they might, there is no escape.

David Harrell: So, knowing his allotted time is up, the antichrist assembles his vast armies consisting of a 10 nation confederacy and they prepare to do battle foolishly thinking that they can somehow thwart the purposes of God and defeat the lamb who would be lion. We see, according to **Isaiah 14**, of **Zechariah 12** and **Zechariah 14** and **Joel 3** and other passages that the antichrist is going to amass his forces and then launch one final assault against Jerusalem and be utterly destroyed.

Now, to enhance the drama here and the suspense of this scene and to depict the absolute folly of the enemy, notice what the whole world will suddenly see. **Verse 17**. “*And I saw an angel standing in the sun.*”

Obviously the sun temporarily pierces the darkness of the fifth bowl judgment long enough now for the angel to appear before it and before the sky goes black again in preparation for the Lord's return. But the sun will not be a welcomed sight as this colossal angel evidently eclipses it. And I find it fascinating because his position will make him impossible to go unnoticed. And the enemy forces will hear this terrifying proclamation.

<https://cbctn.org/sermon/304/304/>

John MacArthur: Now following the vision of Christ with His armies, John is given another striking vision which may be divided up as follows:

- (1) The carnage for the birds (**vss. 17-18**)
- (2) The conflict with all the armies of the earth (**vs. 19**)
- (3) The captives thrown into the lake of fire (**vs. 20**)
- (4) The conquest of the remaining ones (**vs. 21**)

I. (:17-18) SETTING THE TABLE FOR THE GREAT SUPPER OF GOD

A. (:17) Invitation to the Great Supper of God to the Vultures of the Sky

1. Conspicuous Invitation

“And I saw an angel standing in the sun;”

Tony Garland: *Standing* is *estota*, perfect tense: *having stood*. The angel had taken his position prior to John seeing him. **Fausset** suggests his position in the sun is “so as to be conspicuous in sight of the whole world. Though some have taken this as a very unusual phenomenon, the most natural explanation is that the angel is standing in the light of the sun with the angel himself possibly shining with even greater brilliance.”

David Thompson: The fact that he is standing in the sun demonstrates a heavenly bright radiance that says to the world all that is happening is coming from the glorious, sovereign, shining God.

2. Call to the Vultures

*“and he cried out with a loud voice,
saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven,”*

James Hamilton: Note that the call for the birds to come happens before the battle, announcing the certainty of the victory.

John MacArthur: His invitation to the birds is reminiscent of Jesus' words in **Matthew 24:27–28**: “*For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather*” (cf. **Luke 17:37**).

David Thompson: Normal birds fly in the first heaven, our atmospheric heaven. The highest level that certain flying birds can reach for a brief time in migration is 20,000 to 30,000 feet.

Now it is estimated that the oxygen level for us to be able to breathe is somewhere around 30,000 feet. There have been climbers who have gone above 29,000 feet at Mt. Everest without oxygen.

So we assume that to be a mid-heaven bird means it is not a normal bird. So this angel, who is standing in the sun, which is the stellar heaven or mid-heaven, calls out to all birds that are in the stellar heaven or mid-heaven.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: He is not just talking about birds which fly, but about those that are noted for **soaring high in the sky** and noted for eating flesh, i.e., vultures, buzzards, and perhaps even hawks and eagles (cf. **Matt. 24:28** the Greek word used there means “eagle, vulture,” cf. **Job 39:26-30**). . .

There are two other passages that seem to parallel **Rev 19:17** because of the reference to the vulture-like birds (**Ezek. 39:17-20** and **Matt 24:28**). If **Ezekiel 39** occurs before the millennium (some take it to be equivalent to **Revelation 20:8** which occurs after the millennium), it is only an apparent parallel for it refers to an earlier battle of the Armageddon campaign, i.e., phase one and the destruction of Gog and his allies on the mountains of Israel. But in **Rev 19:17** the great supper of God involves all the armies of the earth. **Matthew 24:28** is an actual parallel, and refers to the carcasses which fall in battle when Christ returns, and the gathering of the birds to eat them.

Care must be exercised when interpreting passages which are similar. The rule is, **similarities do not necessarily prove identity**. Other factors must be considered. Birds of prey are always in evidence where there is death, and the presence of the birds does not mean we have the same event, only the same kind of event.

3. Celebration of the Great Supper of God

“Come, assemble for the great supper of God;”

Buist Fanning: likely to be a gruesome parody of the messianic banquet that the blessed will enjoy (cf. **Rev 19:9**). Instead of rich foods and wine at the messianic banquet, this feast for the carrion birds of the wild will consist of the slain bodies of the vast armies mustered by the beast (**19:19**; cf. **13:4**; **16:14**; **17:14**) to fight against the Lord and his Messiah, and none will be spared from the least to the greatest of them (**v. 18**).

John MacArthur: This will not be the first time birds have feasted on **human carrion** in Scripture. **Isaiah 18:6**, describing the results of judgment on Cush (modern Ethiopia), reads, *“They will be left together for mountain birds of prey, and for the beasts of the earth; and the birds of prey will spend the summer feeding on them.”* Jeremiah relates that, after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, *“the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away”* (**Jer. 7:33**). In a striking parallel to the present passage Ezekiel wrote,

“As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord God, ‘Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, “Assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. So you will eat fat until you are glutted, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. You will be glutted at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war,” declares the Lord God.” (**Ezek. 39:17–20**)

The brief but catastrophic Day of the Lord destruction will result in an unprecedented slaughter, with uncounted millions of dead bodies strewn throughout its entire two-hundred-mile length (14:20). Even after the birds have gorged themselves, it will still take seven months to bury the remaining corpses (Ezek. 39:12).

Tony Garland: *Supper* is δεῖπνον [*deipnon*], the same word which describes the marriage supper of the Lamb. Both suppers are hosted by God, but with dramatically different guests and foods. Those who are slaughtered for this supper share in the curse of **Deuteronomy 28:26**.

B. (:18) Menu of the Great Supper of God = the Dead Flesh of All the Forces of Antichrist

Joe Beard: The word **flesh** is repeated 5 times in this passage and while the angel's immediate reference is to the human bodies that will be eaten by the carrion birds, there is certainly a deeper meaning here, man will fail in his opposition to God because he is flesh and he is relying on his flesh. These men who oppose the Lord Jesus Christ chose to walk after the flesh spiritually and now their flesh must be eaten literally.

<https://www.mcclearycommunitychurch.com/sermons/great-day-god-almighty-revelation-1917-21>

1. Flesh of Political and Military Leaders

a. Kings

“in order that you may eat the flesh of kings”

David Thompson: These were the major political leaders of the world. God is causing birds to eat their dead bodies. Death does not play favorites and neither does judgment. The vast majority of political leaders who are big names of the world will have their flesh eaten by these birds.

b. Commanders

“and the flesh of commanders”

c. Mighty Men

“and the flesh of mighty men”

2. Flesh of Horses and Their Riders

“and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them”

3. Flesh of All Men

“and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.”

Daniel Akin: Just as our God is indiscriminate in His offer of salvation (**Acts 10:34**), He is also without discrimination in His judgment. A day of universal, righteous reckoning is coming. Everyone will be held accountable for their rejection of the Lamb.

Tony Garland: Normally, men are to offer up animals in sacrifice to God. Here, as when God judges Gog on the mountains of Israel, He reverses the normal roles and offers up men as a sacrifice to animals (**Eze. 39:17-20** cf. **Isa. 34:6-7**). Goliath threatened David, “*Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!*” (**1S. 17:44**). David

replied, “*This day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel*” (1S. 17:46).

II. (:19-21) SEIZING AND EXECUTING THE KEY ENEMIES

A. (:19) Targeting the Beast and His Loyal Followers

1. Forces of Evil

“And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies,”

2. Futile Objective

“assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army.”

G.R. Beasley-Murray: The army of heaven has no need to fight. It simply witnesses the judgment executed by the Christ on the leaders of the revolt. The antichristian forces have no opportunity even to make a show of strength.

B. (:20) Throwing the Beast and the False Prophet into the Lake of Fire

1. Seizing the Beast and the False Prophet

a. The Beast

“And the beast was seized,”

b. The False Prophet

“and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image;”

Robert Mounce: The false prophet is again described in terms of his two characteristic functions: he deceives by performing miraculous signs (cf. 13:13–15), and he brands with the mark of the beast all but those who are willing to die for their faith (cf. 13:16–17).

2. Throwing Them Alive into the Lake of Fire

“these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.”

John MacArthur: Hell has always existed, but this is its **final form**. Unlike **Hades**, the lake of fire is not a temporary holding place (cf. Luke 16:23) but a permanent place of incarceration and punishment. Brimstone is frequently associated with the fire of judgment (cf. 9:17; 14:10; 20:10; Luke 17:29). That the beast and the false prophet are still in the lake of fire a thousand years later when Satan is cast there (20:10) is a convincing refutation of the false doctrine of annihilationism. As the two most evil, vile, blasphemous people who have ever lived, it is only fitting that these two be the first to arrive in that awful place. The New Testament is clear on the eternity of punishment (cf. 14:10–11; Matt. 13:40–42; 25:41; Mark 9:43–48; Luke 3:17; 12:47–48)

Buist Fanning: The description of the lake “*burning with sulfur*” connects back to the pattern of judgment seen at Sodom and Gomorrah (**Gen 19:24**). But here the pattern is intensified to denote eternal condemnation as in **20:10** and **21:8** (cf. **14:10-11**). The savage beast’s destruction, foreshadowed in **17:8** and **11**, has now been accomplished.

G.K. Beale: The fact that they are said to have been cast into the lake of fire while alive (*these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone*) suggests not absolute annihilation but an **everlasting, conscious punishment**. That is, they will continue to live in the lake of fire. This interpretation is confirmed by the further statement concerning them in **20:10**: “*They will be tormented day and night forever and ever*” (see also **14:10-11** on the final end of one who worships the beast: “*He will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night.*”). Note that fire and brimstone are part of God’s judgment on Gog and Magog in **Ezek. 38:22**. Allusion is also made to **Dan. 7:11**: “*I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire.*”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: The most dramatic part of the verse is the last part where it tells us these two were “*thrown alive*” into the lake of fire. Literally it says, “*Alive, they were thrown, these two, into the lake of fire.*” The reason for the emphasis is that this is **not the ordinary sequence of the doom of unbelievers**. The normal sequence is death (**Luke 16:22**), torments in hades (**Luke 16:23**), the second resurrection that leads to the second death (**Rev. 20:11, 13a**), the Great White Throne Judgment (**Rev. 20:11-12**), and then the lake of fire or the second death (**Rev. 20:14-15**). The armies of the beast, for instance, will be killed, and will go to torments and follow the above sequence. “The beast and his false prophet will be the first occupants of the lake of fire; other unbelievers, now in hades, will join them at the end of the Millennium.”

There seems to be one other exception to this sequence which is the **judgment of the living Jews and Gentiles**. This takes place after this battle is over. In these two judgments, believers and unbelievers are separated. The believers remain (**25:34**) to inherit the kingdom, and unbelievers seem to go directly to the lake of fire (**Matt. 25:41**). This judgment on earth appears to take the place of the Great White Throne Judgment of *Revelation 20* for living, unbelieving Jews and Gentiles after Christ returns to earth.

C. (:21) Termination and Desecration of Antichrist’s Evil Forces

1. Termination – Sudden Slaying

*“And the rest were killed with the sword
which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse,”*

Tony Garland: The rest emphasizes the unique treatment of the previous two in comparison with these. Unlike the Beast and the False Prophet, the rest of those who war against Christ are killed. Their destination is Hades (**Luke 16:22-23**) where they undergo immediate torment while awaiting the Great White Throne Judgment (**Rev. 20:11+**). They will be in Hades awaiting judgment for the one thousand year period of the Millennial Kingdom.

Kendell Easley: The world's armies that gathered so mightily to oppose the rider on the horse did not put up a fight after all. They were killed with the sword that came out of the King's mouth. This symbolizes that his power alone won the final victory. There was, after all, no “battle of Armageddon,” **only massive bloodshed**. If the phrase “*the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great*” (**v. 18**) is taken at face value, then the rest of them were killed means that the entire human race—all who had the mark of the beast—were slaughtered. In the end, the whole world will be divided into two groups: the Lamb's armies and the beast's armies. Only one group will survive. The rest become bird food: all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. This verse

depicts in other imagery the horrible scene of the winepress with its 180-mile blood flow (14:20) and the outpouring of the seventh bowl of judgment (16:17–21).

2. Desecration – Disgusting Buffet

“and all the birds were filled with their flesh.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is this **brilliant flash** of the angel’s announcement from the backdrop of the sun contrasted with the surrounding darkness of the end times judgment?
- 2) What **contrasts** are evident between this gruesome supper of God and the wedding banquet of the previous chapter?
- 3) In what sense is death the **great equalizer**?
- 4) What is the significance of the beast and the false prophet being thrown “**alive**” into the lake of fire?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Buist Fanning: As **climactic** as 19:11-21 seems in comparison to the preceding chapters (i.e., Christ as divine warrior finally comes to earth to defeat the enemies who have waged war against his people), it does not yet constitute the **final consummation**. It is the penultimate or perhaps antepenultimate stage of God’s redemption. Two members of the infernal trinity of **chapters 13-19** and their earthly allies have been decisively defeated, and those two have been consigned to judgment, but nothing is said here about the dragon, **Satan**, who empowered them. His fate is discussed right away in 20:1-3, but the story stretches out a thousand years from there (20:7-10). The King of kings will rule with his redeemed over this earth (20:4-6), but a new heaven and new earth are still to come (chs. 21-22). **God’s full restoration has not yet been accomplished.**

Grant Osborne: The actual “*battle of Armageddon*” (cf. 16:13–16) is almost an anticlimax. First, an angel calls all the carrion birds to God’s second great messianic banquet, feasting on the bodies of the fallen soldiers of evil after Armageddon (19:17–18). The promise is that everyone who participates in that final “*great day of wrath*” (6:17; 16:14), from the greatest to the least, will be slaughtered. Next, the battle is described, **only there is no battle**. The armies are arrayed and ready (19:19), but no actual battle is recorded. The might of the Warrior Messiah is too great, and it is over virtually before it has begun. Two of the false trinity (the beast and the false prophet) are seized and consigned to their places in the lake of fire, that picture of eternal torment that builds on 14:10b–11. Then the armies are slaughtered, and the birds are given their feast. This gruesome image has caused many to wonder at a just, holy God of love. How can a compassionate God do such a thing? Yet such a question forgets that Yahweh is at one and the same time a God of love and a holy God of justice. To ask the question is to ignore the

devastating consequences of sin. We must remember the number of times in the book God has offered them forgiveness if they were to repent, yet they again and again refused God's offer (9:20–21; 14:6–7; 16:8, 10–11) and preferred to worship the very demons who hated them (9:1–21). They preferred the delusion to the truth. It is a holy God who must eradicate sin in order to inaugurate the perfect reality for which he had created humankind in the first place. A powerful sermon title for **chapter 19** could be, “**Will You Be the Eater or the Eaten?**”

Joseph Seiss: This tells already an awful story. It tells of the greatest of men made food for the vultures; -- of kings and leaders, strong and confident, devoured on the field, with no one to bury them; -- of those who thought to conquer Heaven's anointed King rendered helpless even against the timid birds; -- of vaunting gods of nature turned into its cast off and most dishonoured dregs. And what is thus far intimated soon becomes reality. The Great Conqueror bows the heavens and comes down. He rides upon the cherub horse and flies upon the wings of the wind. Smoke goes up from his nostrils, and devouring fire out of his mouth. He moves amid storms and darkness, from which the lightnings hurl their bolts, and hailstones mingle with the fire. He roars out of Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, till the heavens and the earth shake. He dashes forth in the fury of his incensed greatness amid clouds, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun frowns. The day is neither light nor dark. The mountains melt and cleave asunder at his presence. The hills bound from their seats and skip like lambs. The waters are dislodged from their channels. The sea rolls back with howling trepidation. The sky is rent and folds upon itself like a collapsed tent. It is the day for executing an armed world -- a world in covenant with Hell to overthrow the authority and throne of God, -- and everything in terrified Nature joins to signalize the deserved vengeance. (*The Apocalypse* [reprint; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1987], 441)

Craig Koester: The horrible specter of “*the great supper of God*” that occurs after the battle is the counterpart to the appealing announcement of “*the marriage supper of the Lamb*” (**Rev. 19:9, 17**). The two visions are presented to readers as warning and promise. A warning vision is designed to repel people from sin and its consequences. When considering an earlier vision of the wicked being tormented with fire (**14:9–10**), we noted that some readers might relish such texts because they assume that the judgment inevitably falls on their opponents, not on them, while other readers might quickly reject the text as harsh and unchristian. We have seen, however, that the text can best be taken for what it is: a warning that is designed to bring change, not despair. The revolting description of the birds feasting on carrion is a similar warning that deserves a similar response. Readers best respond to the vision in a manner that is consistent with the rest of Revelation, not by dismissing it or by assuming that they themselves are immune from judgment, but by heeding the warning and turning from the ways of the beast to the ways of God.

The promise of “*the marriage supper of the Lamb*,” which brings blessings to all who share in it, contrasts with the warning about the gruesome feast of the birds. The promise will be elaborated more fully in the description of the bride in **Revelation 21**, but here we must note how these texts relate to each other and to the readers. Warnings and promises work differently—a warning disturbs people and a promise assures them—but both serve the same end, which is that readers persevere in faith. John writes for a world in which it is easier to accommodate the beast than to resist it, a world in which faithfulness to the Lamb sets people uncomfortably apart from others in society. The warnings startle people out of an easy acceptance of the ways of the beast, while promises attract them to the ways of the Lamb.

Joe Beard: The chapter ends telling us that all the birds invited to the great supper of God are filled with the flesh of the dead. **William Newell** writes this concerning this scene, “And now, as the closing scene of the present order, behold the millions upon millions of flesh-eating birds clearing away the carcasses of the rebels against God and against Christ! One vulture or two feeding on some fallen creature is a hideous sight to our eyes. What, then, will be this awful line of corpses, of two hundred miles, covered with a countless host of scavengers! Reflect anew on what sin brings! This scene will come to pass!” The first objective of the six-fold purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ’s second coming was to conquer, to defeat the Antichrist and his armies, we have read of this objective this morning, the One called Faithful and True will bring it to pass.

David Harrell: The Return of the Warrior King

I believe that it is important for we as Christians to maintain the big picture of God’s plan for history. And if I can break it down very, very simply and then expand upon it a bit, there are really two dominant themes that are woven throughout the tapestry of Scripture.

1. First we see that God is going to redeem his people. And there God is pictured as a sacrificial lamb, as a Savior, as a suffering servant.
2. But the second theme is that he will restore the kingdom, and there he is depicted more as a lion, the lion of the tribe of Judah, the Messiah king who would one day defeat the usurper, Satan, and glorify himself on the earth for 1000 years in a kingdom that will ultimately be the consummating link between human history and the eternal state.

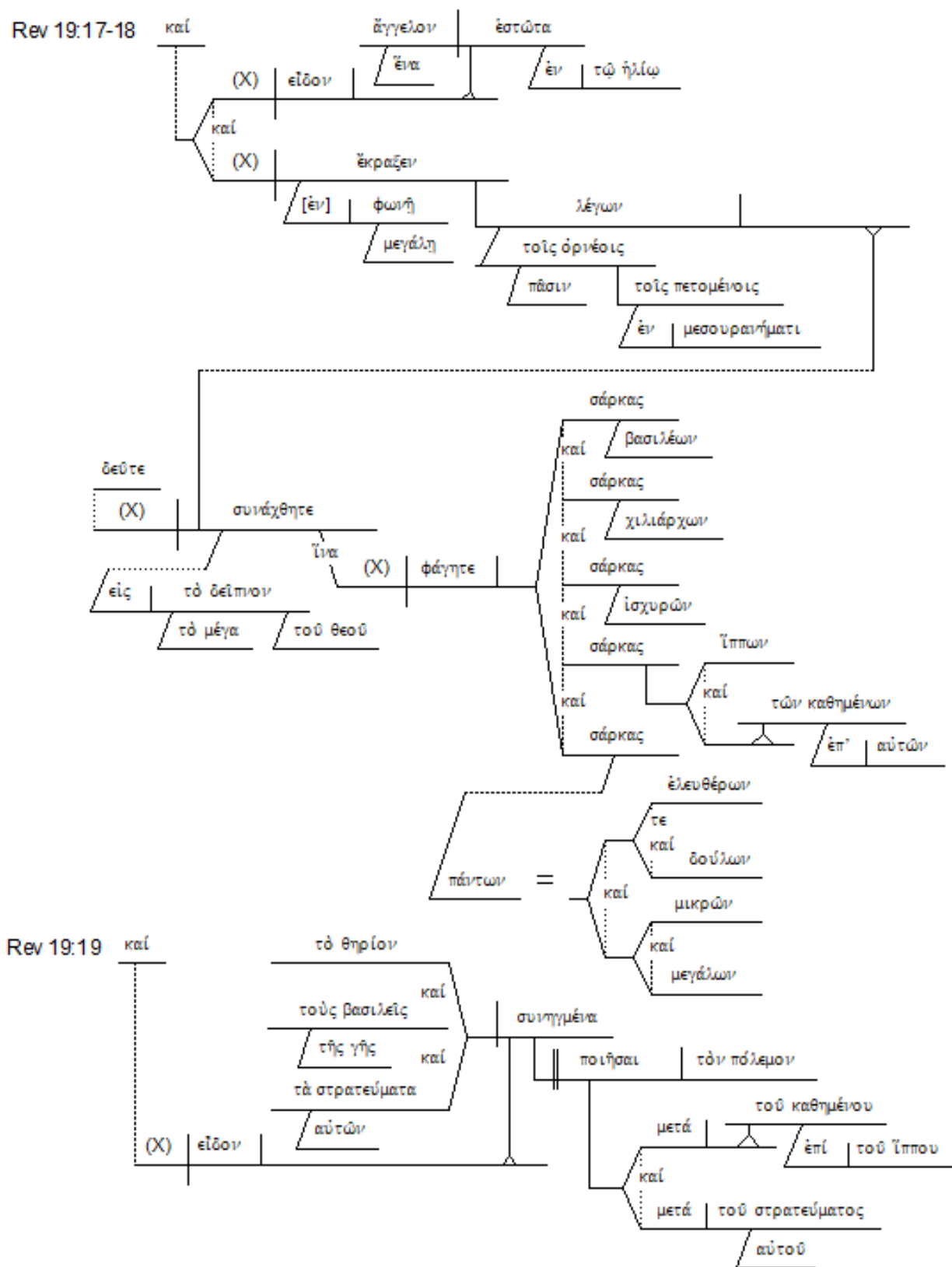
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Alan Johnson: The contrast between the assembling of the beast’s might with his kings and their soldiers and the ease by which he is overthrown and captured highlight the beast’s **powerlessness** before his mighty conqueror. . . Is John indicating that the battle has already been fought and this is simply the final realization of that previous victory? In **chapter 5** the Lamb had overcome (won the victory) by his death (**5:5, 9**). Further, we are told that there was a battle in heaven, and Satan was cast out and defeated by the blood of the Lamb and the word of his followers’ testimony (**12:7-9, 11**). . .

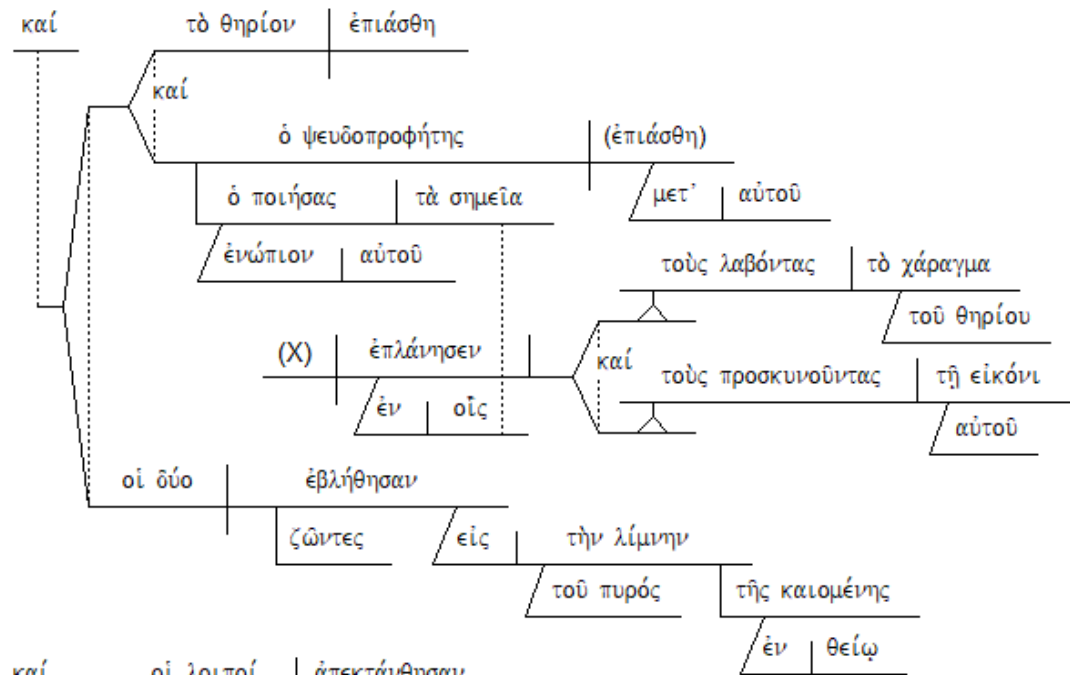
The decisive battle has already been won **at the Cross**. These armies and the beast are the destroyers of the earth (**11:18**), who ultimately are the satanic principalities of the world who ally themselves with the human puppets for their idolatrous ends. These have been positionally defeated at the Cross (**Col 2:15**), but they will finally be stripped of all power at Christ’s return.

Although Satan has been dealt a death blow at the Cross (cf. **John 12:31; 16:11**), he nevertheless continues to promulgate great evil and deception during this present age (cf. **Eph 2:2; 1 Thess 3:5; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Rev 2:10**). Yet he is a deposed ruler who is now under the sovereign authority of Christ but who for a “*little time*” is allowed to continue his evil until God’s purposes are finished. In this scene of the overthrow of the beast and his kings and their armies, John is showing us the ultimate and swift downfall of these evil powers by the King of kings and Lord of lords. They have met their Maker in this final and utterly real confrontation.

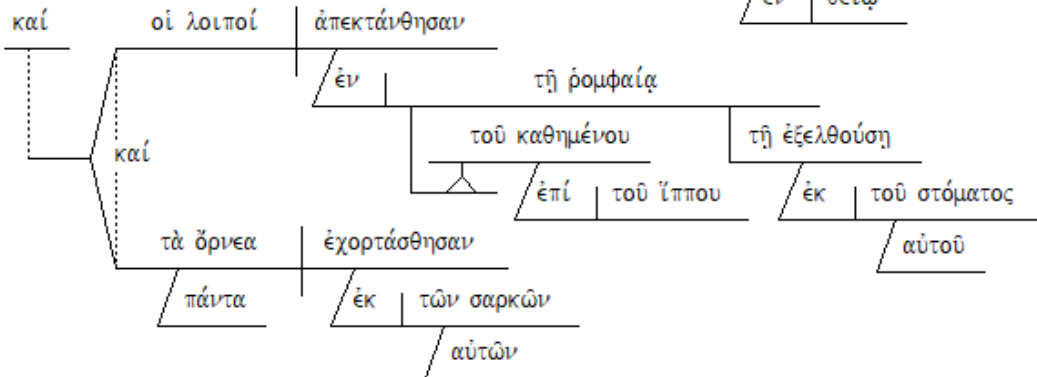
Leedy Greek Diagram:



Rev 19:20



Rev 19:21



TEXT: Revelation 20:1-10

TITLE: THE MILLENNIAL REIGN AND CONDEMNATION OF SATAN

BIG IDEA:

SATAN IS IMPRISONED DURING THE BLESSED MILLENNIAL KINGDOM BUT THEN RELEASED FOR ULTIMATE DEFEAT AND CONDEMNATION

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: Premillennialism believes that Christ will return to earth, destroy the evil forces, and reign here for a thousand years. This period will end with the rebellion and final destruction of Satan followed by the final judgment and the beginning of the future age. Amillennialism holds that there will be no literal earthly reign of Christ following the *parousia* (they say his reign is now, during the church age). Rather, **Rev. 20:1–10** is symbolic and describes the situation during the church age between the advents of Christ (so **Cruz** 1999: 86–87, who calls this a “historical prophetic approach”). Postmillennialism argues that the thousand-year period will be a time of the triumph of the gospel and a period of peace that will precede the second coming of Christ.

Buist Fanning: The millennial reign of Christ and his resurrected saints will witness the binding of Satan for a thousand years and at its end his ultimate condemnation following a short-lived final rebellion against Christ’s rule.

Tony Garland: As we have continued in our study of the book of Revelation, we have observed how the number of fellow saints who share our understanding of the text dwindles ever more as we proceed. This is because interpreting the book of Revelation is like traveling along a series of roads from a point of origin to a destination. As with any roadway, along the route we meet with numerous forks in the road which head off in different directions—leading to varied destinations. The fork in the road which looms before us in **Revelation 20+** is the thousand years: the **Millennial Kingdom**. Is the thousand year reign described here that of a literal kingdom on earth? And is it a future reign—or is it already in progress? Are the two resurrections which bracket the thousand years to be understood as literal, physical raisings from the dead? Or are they spiritual resurrections, related to faith? Or are they some combination of the two? When Satan is bound for the duration of this period, how complete is his binding? Who binds him and how is he bound? Is he bound even now? These are just some of the questions which confront the reader of **Revelation 20+**. That a kingdom would be the subject of this chapter is not unexpected. In the previous chapter we saw Christ ride forth under the declaration that he would (1) strike the nations, and (2) rule them with a rod of iron (**Rev. 19:15+**). The striking took place during the **Campaign of Armageddon**. Now, the “*KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS*” (**Rev. 19:16+**) is to take up His promised earthly reign (**Mat. 6:10**). It would seem most natural that if His Second Coming occurs in **Revelation 19+**, then the rule described here (**Rev. 20:4+**) would follow upon His physical return. Alas, there is great confusion over what should be obvious. The reader may recall the introductory material which we studied prior to our verse-by-verse exposition. He may recall the premise which motivated such preparation: If we all read the same text, how is it that such widely-different understandings result? The answer, to a great degree, was found in **differing Systems of Interpretation** which are themselves the result of different views concerning how to interpret the text, especially **Interpreting Symbols**. There is

perhaps no more dramatic illustration of the significant affect that interpretation has upon meaning than the divergence of opinion attending the Millennial Kingdom which comes before us in this chapter. The view we set forth is that of the earliest Church Fathers, known as premillennialism or chiliasm—the belief that Christ returns before His kingdom commences on earth for one thousand years.

Key Interpretive Issues in Revelation 20:1-6:

Issue	Premillennial View	Postmillennial View	Amillennial View
Satan's Binding:	Future	Present / Future	Present
First Resurrection:	Physical	Spiritual	Spiritual
Thousand Years:	Literal	Literal / Symbolic	Symbolic
Locale of Reign:	Earth	Earth / Heaven	Heaven
Chronology of chapters 19-20: ⁴	Sequential	Sequential / Recapitulation	Recapitulation

Charles Swindoll: The good news is that the book of Revelation promises a **golden age** in which all weapons of warfare will be fashioned into implements of peace. Prosperity will be shared. Peace will be the banner of all people. The light of justice will illumine every corner of the world. This condition will not be achieved through educational funding, political change, social programs, cultural awakening, or even religious revival. As promising as some of these things may be in the short term, fallen humanity ultimately foils all efforts at self-reformation. Praying for world peace sounds noble and pious, but such prayers are futile. True global transformation will occur only when Satan and his minions are ousted, allowing Jesus Christ and His glorified saints to rule over the earth. Theologians call this period of Christ's perfect rule the "millennial kingdom" or the "thousand-year reign." The primary passage describing the millennium is **Revelation 20:1-6**.

John MacArthur: The millennial kingdom is called by many names in Scripture. In **Matthew 19:28** Jesus calls it "*the regeneration*." **Acts 3:19** describes the kingdom as "*times of refreshing*," while **verse 21** of that chapter calls it "*the period of restoration of all things*." The apostle Paul refers to it in **Ephesians 1:10** as "*an administration suitable to the fullness of the times*." . . .

The passage clearly teaches that Christ's return **precedes** the millennial kingdom—a scenario incompatible with postmillennialism and amillennialism, but exactly what premillennialism teaches. To get around the difficulty the **chronology of Revelation** poses for their views, postmillennialists and amillennialists must deny that **chapter 20** follows **chapter 19** chronologically. But such a denial ignores the chronological significance of the phrase *kai eidon*, as noted above. It also ignores the **continuity of the context**: Having dealt with Antichrist and the false prophet in **chapter 19**, Christ deals with their evil master, Satan, in **chapter 20**. **Why reject such an obvious chronology?** It is apparently done for no other reason than to eliminate premillennialism, not because there is any justification in Scripture.

Daniel Akin: After the tribulation Christ will establish His millennial kingdom with His saints; then He will finally and forever judge Satan and his followers for their rebellion.

- I. Before the Kingdom Satan Is Bound (:1-3)
- II. During the Kingdom the Saints Will Reign (:4-6)
- III. After the Kingdom Sinners Will Be Defeated (:7-10)

I. (:1-3) BINDING OF SATAN FOR 1,000 YEARS

A. (:1) Implements of Imprisonment

“And I saw an angel coming down from heaven,”

1. Key of the Abyss

“having the key of the abyss”

Albert Mohler: The concept of “keys” locking and unlocking is used to depict God’s sovereign control and authority over Satan and the demonic spirits. The point is that Satan is bound in the Abyss, he cannot escape, and therefore he can no longer deceive the nations.

2. Great Chain

“and a great chain in his hand.”

Grant Osborne: Here the angel has not only the “key” but a “chain” in order to bind Satan all the more securely. The purpose of the ἅλυσιν μεγάλην (*halysin megalēn, large chain*; probably a manacle to chain the hands to the wall; see **Mounce** 1998: 361) is to **intensify the prison imagery**. When Satan is not only thrown in the abyss/prison but shackled inside with a “great chain,” and then the angel “locks” the gates shut, he is not going to escape. The Gadarene demoniac was strong enough (due to demonic influence) to “tear the chains apart” (**Mark 5:4**), but this chain is too “great” for that, even for the dragon himself. The abyss is his Alcatraz, and God is in complete control.

B. (:2a) Identification of Satan by Various Titles

1. The Dragon

“And he laid hold of the dragon,”

David Thompson: That verb “laid hold” means John saw this angel grab Satan in a very forceful, strong, overpowering way in total strength and domination (**G. Abbott-Smith**, Greek Lexicon, p. 256).

2. The Serpent of Old

“the serpent of old,”

Tony Garland: This alludes to the serpent in the garden of Eden, which Satan used to deceive Eve (**Gen. 3:1-6**). His title as **dragon** and **serpent** were seen in the heavenly war, when he was cast out: “So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan” (**Rev. 12:9+**).

3. The Devil

“who is the devil”

4. Satan

“and Satan,”

C. (:2b-3) Imprisonment of Satan

1. (:2b) Duration of Imprisonment = 1,000 Years

“and bound him for a thousand years,”

Buist Fanning: References to binding a spiritual being with a chain and sealing him in a deep pit underground are symbolic rather than woodenly literal descriptions, but what they symbolize is absolute imprisonment and cessation of influence.

John MacArthur: The first matter for the King’s attention as He sets up His kingdom is the confinement of the chief rebel. The removal of *“the god of this world”* (2 Cor. 4:4), *“the prince of the power of the air ... the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience”* (Eph. 2:2), will dramatically change the world. By this time, God will have destroyed all human rebels. Those who survived the Tribulation judgments will have been executed at Armageddon (19:11–21) or the goat judgment (Matt. 25:41–46). The ringleaders of the worldwide rebellion, the beast (Antichrist) and the false prophet, will have been thrown into the lake of fire (19:20). The final step in preparation for the kingdom will be the removal of Satan and his demon hosts, so that Christ reigns without the opposition of supernatural enemies.

John Walvoord: This passage introduces, for the first time in Scripture, the **exact length** of Christ’s earthly kingdom. Six times in this passage the fact is stated that the period is a thousand years or a millennium.

As discussed above, much of the opposition to the futurist interpretation has been leveled at this concept of a literal thousand years. Some amillennial scholars argue that it is obvious that the thousand years should be interpreted nonliterally, based on the argument that Revelation is apocalyptic literature. But **Benware** demonstrates that the vast majority of the numbers used in the book of Revelation are to be interpreted in the normal way, meaning as expressions of a quantity.

In addition, while Scripture sometimes uses the term *“day”* in other than a literal sense, never in the Bible is *“month”* or *“year”* used in other than its literal sense. Even the word *day*, used for a period of time in reference to *“the day of the Lord,”* is used literally throughout the book of Revelation. It may also be faithfully held that all numbers in the Revelation are **literal**. Certainly there is nothing inherently impossible in a thousand-year period in which Christ will reign upon the earth. So it must be stated again that there is no good exegetical reason for taking the thousand years of **Revelation 20** in other than their literal sense.

2. (:3a) Disposition of His Imprisonment

a. Location

“and threw him into the abyss,”

b. Locking Up

“and shut it and sealed it over him,”

Tony Garland: Examples of sealing elsewhere in Scripture indicate its complete effectiveness:

- Nebuchadnezzar sealed Daniel in the lion's den (**Dan. 6:17**).
- Daniel was told to seal the book of Daniel until the time of the end (**Dan. 12:4**).
- Pilate commanded that Jesus' tomb be sealed (**Mat. 27:66**).
- Believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit (**John 14:16; 2Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30**).
- Jesus' testimony was sealed (**John 3:33**).
- Jesus was sealed by the Father (**John 6:27**).
- The 144,000 witnesses from the twelve tribes were sealed on their foreheads (**Rev. 7:3-8+**).
- The things which the seven thunders uttered were sealed up so they would not be recorded by John (**Rev. 10:4+**).
- The contents of the book of Revelation are not to be sealed (**Rev. 20:3+; 22:10+**).

c. Limitation

*“so that he should not deceive the nations any longer,
until the thousand years were completed;”*

David Thompson: Satan is bound so that all Kingdom prophecy pertaining to Israel may be fulfilled. There are many, many passages that predict that Israel will have a peaceful kingdom of total and complete righteousness in her land. In order for that to actually happen, Satan cannot exist on this earth or he would prevent that -- **Jer. 33:15-16; Ezek. 11:17-21; 34:11-15,25-31; Zech. 14:9-11**.

3. (:3b) Discharge from Imprisonment for Temporary Purpose

“after these things he must be released for a short time.”

II. (:4-6) BLESSINGS OF THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

A. (:4a) Blessing of Privilege and Participation

1. Privilege

a. Reigning

“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them,”

Charles Swindoll: God's glorified people will enforce the will of Christ and adjudicate disputes between their subjects. But **who will their subjects be?** Those who survive the Tribulation in their mortal, nonglorified bodies (**1 Cor. 6:2**). These will include the 144,000, the preserved remnant of Israel, who will be gathered back to the Promised Land to reestablish the nation of Israel under the Messiah. These subjects will also include Gentile survivors of the Tribulation who had not received the mark of the Beast but who had also managed to avoid execution at the hand of the Beast and his wicked regime. These mortal survivors, Hebrews and Gentiles alike, will be responsible for repopulating the earth during the thousand-year earthly reign of Christ.

b. Judging

“and judgment was given to them.”

Tony Garland: These seated on thrones are from two major resurrection events, both of which are part of the category known as the **first resurrection**:

- OT Saints - Those who came to faith and died prior to the baptizing work of the Spirit which began on the Day of Pentecost. These are the OT saints, many of whom are Jews, and who were resurrected after Jacob's Trouble and the Great Tribulation (**Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19**).
- Church Saints - Those who came to faith and lived beyond the Day of Pentecost to be baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, the Church. These were resurrected or translated at the Rapture of the Church (**John 14:3; 1Cor. 15:51; 1Th. 4:13-18**).%

2. Participation

a. Martyred Saints

"And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God,"

b. Loyal Saints

"and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image,"

c. Undeified Saints

"and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand;"

Buist Fanning: John does not comment here on faithful Christians who will not be martyred but survive the intense persecutions and judgments of those final days and join in Christ's reign also, but their share in Christ's rule is pledged in **2:26-28; 3:21; 5:10**. Martyrdom is never said to be the universal fate of God's people in those days (cf. **7:3-8; 14:1-5** for one group of survivors) or cited as a condition for co-ruling with Christ (cf. **1 Cor 6:2-3; 2 Tim 2:12; Heb 2:5-9**). The martyrs are cited explicitly, but they are representative of the larger group of faithful people who will reign with him. John focuses on the martyrs in this verse to emphasize that costly fidelity – even to the point of death if necessary – is the pathway to glory and exaltation, a pathway that Christ himself exemplified.

B. (:4b-5) Blessing of Resurrection Prior to the Millennial Kingdom

1. (:4b) Purpose of Resurrection of the Saints = Reigning with Christ

"and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years."

Tony Garland: Their coming to life and reigning with Christ is a **future event** which is the fulfillment of the prayers of the saints throughout history that God would bring His kingdom to earth (**Mat. 6:10**). This is the beginning of the literal kingdom on earth which smashes all other earthly kingdoms and fills the globe. Both Jesus and the saints rule in the kingdom..At the sounding of the seventh trumpet, it was announced that *"He shall reign forever and ever"* (**Rev. 11:15+**). The reign of Christ and the saints eventually extends beyond the thousand years and on into the eternal state (**Rev. 22:5+**).

2. (:5a) Postmillennial Resurrection of the Wicked

"The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed."

3. (:5b) Preferred Resurrection = Prior to the Millennial Kingdom
“This is the first resurrection.”

John MacArthur: John calls the resurrection of the saints from all ages the *first resurrection*. That resurrection is also called in Scripture the “*resurrection of the righteous*” (**Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15**), the “*resurrection of life*” (**John 5:29**), the resurrection of “*those who are Christ’s at His coming*” (**1 Cor. 15:23**), and the “*better resurrection*” (**Heb. 11:35**). The use of *anastasis* (*resurrection*) offers further evidence that the resurrection described in **verse 4** is a **physical resurrection**. The word is used forty-two times in the New Testament, always of a physical resurrection (except in **Luke 2:34**, where the context clearly demands another meaning).

Tony Garland: Participation in Births, Death, and Resurrections

Event	Unbeliever	Believer	Description
Born Again	No	Yes	The first birth is <i>physical</i> birth. The second birth is <i>spiritual</i> and occurs when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ. ⁶³ Only believers are “born twice.”
1st Death	Yes	Yes	The first death occurs at the end of one’s physical life.
1st Resurrection	No	Yes	The first resurrection is a category and occurs in stages, beginning with the resurrection of Christ (1Cor. 15:20) and ending with the resurrection just prior to the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:5-6+). Only believers participate in the first resurrection. ⁶⁴
2nd Resurrection	Yes	No	The second resurrection occurs at the end of the Millennial Kingdom at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-13+). Only unbelievers participate in the second resurrection. See Order of Resurrection .
2nd Death	Yes	No	The second death is after the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:14-15+). As there is eternal life beyond this present life for the faithful, so there is eternal death beyond the death of the wicked. ⁶⁵ The second death is commonly known as <i>hell</i> . ⁶⁶

John Walvoord: At the end of the church age the rapture of the church will take place, and the dead in Christ will be raised. At the end of the great tribulation, the tribulation saints will also be raised from the dead. It would seem clear from these facts that the term “*the first resurrection*” is not an event but an **order of resurrection** including all the righteous who are raised from the dead before the millennial kingdom begins. They are “*first*” in contrast to those who are raised *last*, after the millennium, when the wicked dead are raised and judged. Just as there are two kinds of physical death, the first death that results in burial, and the second death that is described as being cast into the lake of fire (**20:14**), so there are two kinds of resurrection, a first resurrection of the righteous and a second resurrection of the evil. They are separated by at least a thousand years. Just as the first death did not occur to all in one moment but is experienced

individually by those who die over a long period of time, so the first resurrection is fulfilled according to the groups that are in view. . .

The main burden of this passage, however, is to demonstrate beyond any question that there will be a **thousand-year period between the resurrections of the righteous and the evil**. Passages such as **Daniel 12:2** and **John 5:28–29**, which refer in general to the resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous, must be interpreted as declaring the fact of resurrection rather than that the two events take place at the same time. The significance seems to be that the time will come when both the righteous and the wicked will be raised without designating exactly when it will occur. The main facts of this passage are clear when the general rule is applied that **that which is plain should interpret that which is obscure**.

C. (:6) Blessing of Functioning as Priests and Rulers

1. Holy

“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection;”

2. Untouchable

“over these the second death has no power;”

Sola Scriptura: The *second death* has no authority. The phrase *second death* occurs in the Revelation four times. **Revelation 20:14** defines the *second death* as the lake of fire or eternal punishment. All of those who partake in the first resurrection have no fear of eternal punishment. This can only mean that no one who partakes in the first resurrection is unholy or is damnable. This confirms that the first resurrection will only involve the righteous.

3. Priests

“but they will be priests of God and of Christ”

Grant Osborne: The priestly aspect of **Exod. 19:6** in the second clause of **Rev. 20:6** is followed by the royal aspect (“*kingdom of priests*”) in the third, as the saints “*reign with him a thousand years*” (see **20:4d**). As Christ is the “**priest-king**,” so the victorious saints will share in his royal as well as his priestly status. These last two describe the activity of the saints during the millennium as well as in the new heavens and new earth—they will worship God as priests and reign with him as royalty (**Krodel** 1989: 341; **Giesen** 1997: 435–36).

Sola Scriptura: God has always had a priestly representative on the earth. The first priest we meet in the Scriptures is Melchizedek (**Gen 14:18-20**). In what is truly one of the great mysteries of Scripture, Melchizedek appears and disappears without a beginning or an end. Subsequently, Israel becomes “*a kingdom of priests*.” The priestly function was to represent man before God. Through sacrificial mediation, the priest communicated to God on behalf of man. In what sense then will the resurrected faithful serve as priests to God and Christ? During the millennial kingdom, the saints will reign with Christ. Their job description, if you will, will involve their representation of Christ to the millennial constituents and visa versa.

The fact that the reign of the resurrected is limited to 1000 years signals an important detail. This reign cannot involve a spiritual reign in heaven. The Lord’s promise to the overcomers in **Revelation 2:26-27** makes no sense if a spiritual reign is the goal. There is no appreciable effect on the nations, if the saints are reigning in heaven in the sense intended in **Revelation 2:26-27**. To use 1000 years to describe the present reign of the saints (now 2000 years for some and may

be less than six months for those killed just prior to the Lord's return) renders the whole concept nonsensical. **Revelation 5:10** explicitly states that those purchased by the blood of Christ "*will reign upon the earth.*"

4. Rulers

"and will reign with Him for a thousand years."

John MacArthur: A final blessing for the participants in the first resurrection is that they will reign with the Lord Jesus Christ for a thousand years, along with believers who survived the Tribulation. Politically and socially, the rule of Christ and His saints will be universal (**Ps. 2:6-8; Dan. 2:35**), absolute (**Ps. 2:9; Isa. 11:4**), and righteous (**Isa. 11:3-5**). Spiritually, their rule will be a time when the believing remnant of Israel is converted (**Jer. 30:5-8; Rom. 11:26**) and the nation is restored to the land God promised to Abraham (**Gen. 13:14-15; 15:18**). It will be a time when the Gentile nations also will worship the King (**Isa. 11:9; Mic. 4:2; Zech. 14:16**). The millennial rule of Christ and the saints will also be marked by the presence of righteousness and peace (**Isa. 32:17**) and joy (**Isa. 12:3-4; 61:3, 7**). Physically, it will be a time when the curse is lifted (**Isa. 11:7-9; 30:23-24; 35:1-2, 7**), when food will be plentiful (**Joel 2:21-27**), and when there will be physical health and well-being (**Isa. 33:24; 35:5-6**), leading to long life (**Isa. 65:20**).

John Walvoord: **Psalm 72** gives a similar picture of the righteous reign of Christ, describing righteousness as flourishing and abundance of peace as continuing as long as the moon endures. Christ's dominion is stated to be from sea to sea with all kings bowing down before Him, all nations serving Him, and the earth being filled with the glory of the Lord. Then will be fulfilled the desire of the nations for peace and righteousness, for the knowledge of the Lord, for economic justice, and for deliverance from satanic oppression and evil. For the whole period of a thousand years the earth will revel in the immediate presence of the Lord and His perfect divine government. Israel will be exalted and Gentiles also will be blessed. The major factors of the millennium, therefore, include a perfect and righteous government with Christ reigning in absolute power over the entire earth. Every nation will be under His sway, and God's purpose in originally placing man in charge of the Garden of Eden will have its ultimate fulfillment in the Last Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will reign over the earth.

III. (:7-10) BURNING IN HELL FOREVER IS SATAN'S FINAL DESTINY

Grant Osborne: There are five aspects of this scene:

- the release of Satan,
- his deception and gathering of the nations for the final battle,
- their surrounding God's people,
- fire descending from heaven to devour the nations,
- and the casting of Satan into the lake of fire. . .

Block sees five theological motifs:

- Yahweh is the "unrivaled lord of human history";
- his reputation is connected to the welfare of his people;
- he is faithful to his covenant;
- he is the God of grace and mercy;
- and the experience of that grace by the believer is humbling.

I would add that for the unbeliever Yahweh is a God of wrath and justice. He is sovereign, and those who arrogantly repudiate his mercy cannot escape.

A. (:7a) Timing of the Final Uprising

“And when the thousand years are completed,”

B. (:7b) Temporary Release of Satan from Prison

“Satan will be released from his prison,”

J.A. Seiss: It seems like a great pity, after the world has rested for a thousand years, that this archenemy of its peace should again be let loose upon it. But there seems to be **some sort of necessity for it**. The statement to John was, that *“he must be loosed a little time”*... Some interest of righteousness and moral government renders it proper that he should be allowed this last limited freedom. If for nothing else, it is not unimportant that he should have this opportunity to prove how little an imprisonment of a thousand years had served to change him, or reform his malignity. Even the Devil is granted a final trial to make a better record to himself, if so minded. But neither judgment nor mercy has the least effect. He is, and remains to the last, the same depraved and wicked being, and employs even the little time of freedom before he is cast into perdition in tempting, seducing, and deceiving the happy and peaceful world. Perhaps, too, it was necessary for the millennial nations to be taught that, even after having been so far redeemed as to live a thousand years of holy obedience, they still are unable to stand without the special help and grace of Almighty God. At any rate, this brief period of Satan’s last freedom proves, that he is still Satan, and that man is still man, after a thousand years of bonds and imprisonment for the one, and a thousand years’ experience of the next thing to Paradise for the other; the Devil being just as eager to tempt and deceive, and man liable to be tempted and deceived. Nor can it be of small account to the after ages, or for the generations to whom it is foretold, that the full demonstration of these facts should be made before things are finally settled into the eternal state. Hence, Satan is let loose for a little time.

C. (:8) Treachery of Mobilizing the Nations

1. Mobilizing by Means of Deception

*“and will come out to deceive the nations
which are in the four corners of the earth,”*

Grant Osborne: His purpose is **twofold**, to *“deceive the nations”* and to *“gather them for battle”* (parallel infinitives). Revelation emphasizes strongly that Satan does not overpower people but rather deceives them.

Sola Scriptura: *“the nations”* – where did they come from? Since **Revelation 19:11-12** indicates the destruction of the nations. However, **Revelation 19:11-21** does not indicate that every single nation on the face of earth was destroyed. It says that the kings of the earth and their armies were destroyed. It does not naturally follow that every single individual from every single nation on the face of the earth was killed.

In fact, **Matthew 25:31ff** clearly indicates that there will be people left from all the nations of the world who are sheep (followers of Jesus Christ). These individuals inherit the kingdom on earth. During the 1000-year period, there will be a great increase in the population of the earth (**Isaiah 65:17ff**). Since those who enter God’s kingdom in natural bodies will be able to have babies,

subsequent generations will have a choice to follow or not to follow Christ. Thus, His need to rule the nations with a rod of iron (**Rev 2:26-27**).

2. Mobilizing Key Coalition of Powerful Forces

“Gog and Magog,”

Buist Fanning: named as the leaders or nations whom Satan assembles, and they move to attack Jerusalem.

Grant Osborne: The nations are now further identified as “*Gog and Magog*,” referring to **Ezek. 38–39**, where Gog (the king of the northern lands) and “Magog” (meaning “the land of Gog”) come to wage war against the people of God. . .

The prophecy looks to the king of a northern land, Gog, who decides to invade the “*peaceful and unsuspecting people*” of Israel (**Ezek. 38:11**) to plunder their land. They will establish a coalition of “*many nations*” (**38:5–6**) to invade with “*a mighty army*” (**38:15–16**). Yet God is in control and allows all this so that “*the nations may know*” that God is indeed Yahweh (**38:16, 23; 39:6–7, 22, 28**). This becomes an eschatological war, as seen in the “*after many days*”/“*in future years*” of **38:8** and the “*shaking of the heavens*” imagery of **38:18–23**. Thus, God’s purpose is to destroy the coalition of nations and to restore his people so that all will recognize that he is God (**39:25–29**).

John Walvoord: While many explanations have been made, one of the intriguing ones is that Gog refers to the ruler and Magog to the people as in **Ezekiel 38**. Hence, what the passage means is that the nations of the world follow Satan, including the rulers (Gog) and the people (Magog) under the rulers. Another plausible explanation is that the expression is used much as we use the term “Waterloo” to express a disastrous battle, but one related to the historic origination of the term.

3. Mobilizing for the Purpose of Fighting the Messiah

“to gather them together for the war;”

Robert Mounce: Apparently a thousand years of confinement does not alter Satan’s plans, nor does a thousand years of freedom from the influence of wickedness change people’s basic tendency to rebel against their creator.

4. Mobilizing Innumerable Forces

“the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.”

Grant Osborne: One of the purposes of this passage is to justify the **necessity of eternal punishment**. This book proves that even the equivalent of fourteen lifetimes (based on the current life expectancy of about seventy years divided into one thousand years) are not enough to overturn their allegiance to Satan. Therefore, the eternal lake of fire is a necessity.

Charles Swindoll: During the thousand-year reign, the mortal survivors of the Tribulation — Jews and Gentiles — will populate the earth by marrying and having children. By the end of the thousand years, the world will be filled with numerous generations of their descendants, who will still have bodies of mortal flesh and, more importantly, will still struggle with sin and temptation as we do. Those subjects of the kingdom will not be like the resurrected rulers, who will be

immortal, glorified, and neither marrying nor giving in marriage (Matt. 22:30). Yes, during the thousand-year reign the physical world will be made like Eden, harmonious and peaceful (**Isa. 11:6-9; 65:20-25; Ezek. 36:33-36**). Yes, the corrupt system of human government underwritten by Satan and his demonic powers will be replaced by Christ and His saints (**Dan. 7:21-22**). However, the human population will still have a sinful nature —after the likeness of fallen Adam rather than perfected and glorified after the likeness of Christ.

At the end of the thousand years, the descendants of the Tribulation survivors will be tested. After his thousand-year imprisonment in the abyss, Satan will be released for a short time (**20:7**), during which he will be successful in rapidly recruiting a massive force of rebels willing to march against the King of kings and Lord of lords. How will this be possible? Who in the world would turn against the Messiah enthroned in Jerusalem? The term “*Gog and Magog*” may give us a hint. This is a general term in the Bible for the enemies of God spread throughout the remotest parts of the earth (**Ezek. 38–39; Rev. 20:8**).

- Those enlisting in Satan’s army will likely be geographically remote, from among those cities and regions farthest from the center of the Messiah’s kingdom in Jerusalem.
- They will also be generationally removed from their original ancestors who survived the onslaught of the Beast, the memory of which will sound to these distant descendants like mere fables.
- Finally, the rebels will be spiritually distant, perhaps conforming to the outward expectations of worship and civil duty, but inwardly harboring cynicism, selfishness, and rebellion.

D. (:9) Turning the Tables on the Attackers

1. Strategic Attack

*“And they came up on the broad plain of the earth
and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city,”*

John Walvoord: As the battle is joined in **verse 9**, Satan and his armies surround the camp of the saints. The word for “*camp*” refers to those engaged in battle and who are in battle array, hence a “fortress” or “citadel.” Here the term seems to refer to the city of Jerusalem itself, which is described as “*the beloved city*” (cf. **Ps. 78:68; 87:2**). Apparently Christ permits the army to assemble and encircle His capital city. No sooner has Satan’s army been assembled, however, than fire comes down from God out of heaven, and the besiegers are destroyed, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Thus is shattered the last vain attempt of Satan to overthrow the throne of God and usurp His prerogatives. This also ends the false theory that human beings in a perfect environment will willingly serve the God who created and redeemed them. Even in the ideal situation of the millennium, innumerable people respond to the first temptation to rebel. This is the end of the road for the nations who rebel against God as well as for the career of Satan.

2. Sudden Destruction

“and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.”

E. (:10) Torment in the Lake of Fire Forever

1. Thrown into the Lake of Fire

*“And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone,
where the beast and the false prophet are also;”*

2. Tormented Constantly

“and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can you tell that Satan is not presently bound?
- 2) What aspects in this passage support the premillennial position?
- 3) How does this passage support eternal punishment rather than annihilation?
- 4) What is God’s purpose in releasing Satan to instigate one final rebellion?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Explanation of the Amillennial View of the Millennial Kingdom

This is the **most popular modern view**, but it goes back only as far as Origin and Augustine in the third and fourth centuries. This view denies the literal reign of Christ on earth. Satan is conceived as bound at the first coming of Christ and the present age between the first and second comings of Christ is seen as the fulfillment of the Millennium. Its adherents are divided. Some believe the Millennium is being fulfilled now on earth, and is equivalent to the kingdom of God in you. Others believe it is being fulfilled by the saints in heaven. It may be summed up in the idea that **there will be no more Millennium than there is now**, and that Christ’s second coming is immediately followed by the eternal state. The prefix “A” simply means a denial of the Millennium.

This Amillennial view has a great impact on a vast amount of Scripture. For instance, all the kingdom prophecies to Israel are spiritualized. Either they are spiritualized to apply to the church today, or they have been abrogated entirely and have no fulfillment at all, or they must be spiritualized to apply to the future or eternal state. As an illustration, rather than pointing to a literal reign of Christ on earth, **Isaiah 11:4-10** refers to the peace and tranquillity of mind of the believer, or it speaks in a spiritual way of heaven or eternity. The key factor here is one’s method of interpretation. In the postmillennial and amillennial positions one must spiritualize a large amount of Scripture. In the premillennial view Scripture is taken literally, i.e., according to its normal, more obvious meaning. Figures are taken figuratively, but they are not spiritualized. . .

The danger of the allegorical or spiritual method: **Pentecost** cogently points to three great dangers:

First, he warns, that “it does not really interpret Scripture.” In other words, it goes beyond all well-defined principles and laws of interpretation and leaves one open to the unlimited scope of one’s own fancy. It yields no true interpretation, though it may possibly illustrate certain valuable truths.

A second danger is that in the allegorical method “the basic authority in interpretation ceases to be the Scriptures, but the mind of the interpreter. The interpretation may then be twisted by the interpreter’s doctrinal positions, the authority of the church to which the interpreter adheres, his social or educational background, or a host of other factors.”

Finally **Pentecost** says, “a third great danger in the allegorical method is that one is left without any means by which the conclusions of the interpreter may be tested.”

The point is simply this. Scripture abounds in allegories, whether in the form of types, symbols, or parables. Paul explains such an allegory in **Galatians 4:21-23**. These are accepted and legitimate ways to teach and communicate spiritual truth. However, there is a great deal of difference between such use of allegories and **allegorical interpretation**. In one you have the illustration and application of spiritual truth based on literal interpretation and historical fact. In the other, you have **disregard for the literal meaning and historical fact** based on the literal method of interpretation and in its place an allegory is set up based on the interpreter’s own fancy.

David Thompson: When Jesus Christ returns in all of His glory . . . there will be two specific judgments that will take place before the 1,000 year reign.

1. Judgment #1 - There will be the judgment of Israel that will take **30 days**. **Daniel 12:11; Ezekiel 20:33-44**.
2. Judgment #2 - There will be the judgment of the nations that will take **45 days**. **Daniel 12:12; Matthew 25:31-46**.

Charles Swindoll: But **what about the Old Testament saints**, such as Abraham, Moses, and the prophets? **When will they be resurrected?** The book of Revelation does not specifically mention them, but there are really only two possibilities: Either they are resurrected at the same time that the New Testament believers are resurrected (**1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thes. 4:17**), or they will be raised with the Tribulation martyrs at the commencement of the thousand-year reign (**Rev. 20:4**). I prefer the second option, based on the last verse of Daniel, where an angel says, “*As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance*” (**Dan. 12:13**, NIV). In this context the “*end of the days*” seems to refer to the end of the Tribulation period (**Dan. 12:11-12**).

Buist Fanning: This phasing of the earthly messianic kingdom into a preliminary stage (the millennium) and a culminating stage (eternity in the new creation) means that the two periods have some differences as well as some shared features. What will be markedly different is that in the millennial phase evil will still raise its ugly head, although Satan himself will be prevented from having any influence until the very end. The entrance of some redeemed humans into the millennial age who physically survive the horrors of the tribulation period means that the earth’s inhabitants will be a mixture of resurrected martyrs as well as humans in their natural physical state (see **Isa 65:20**). Over time this will result in the propagation of a population of humans who are subject to messianic rule but perhaps not people of genuine faith and devotion to Christ. This explains – however perverse it will be, given their ideal conditions for life and their physical nearness to Christ – their deception by Satan when he is released and their abortive rebellion against divine rule at the end of the thousand years (**20:7-10**).

In both stages God and Christ will exert a beneficent, righteous reign over all the nations and regions of the earth, administered through faithful saints who rule with them. God's people will be active and engaged, tending and planting, designing and producing, learning and growing, using their gifts and creativity in the service of God and one another. The world and its peoples will enjoy peace and harmony among each other, justice will prevail in human relations, abundant provision will be available for every need, and ideal conditions for life and human prospering will exist. Best of all, people will experience the direct earthly presence of Christ and of God. All these benefits will be intensified in the new creation as compared with life in the millennium. God will live with his people, and they with him, in direct communion as a return to and even an advance on Edenic conditions in his restored creation, now cleansed of all evil and corruption. All mourning, sorrow, and death will be abolished forever. Jerusalem will continue to be the focal point of the new creation as the city of the true God (**Ps 48:1-2; Ezek 5:5; 38:12; Matt 5:35; cf. 1 En. 26:1; Jub. 8:12**), to which the world's nations will come in devoted worship of their great King and Creator.

The **purpose** of the millennium, then, can be discerned from how it is presented in **Revelation 20** as well as from these wider connections to the rest of Revelation and to the whole canon of Scripture. Six related points will help to unpack its purpose and theological significance.

First, it provides the proper context for God's vindication and reward of the martyrs and other faithful Christians who give unwavering allegiance to him through the dark days that immediately precede Christ's return as king. Other resurrected saints of all ages who accompany Christ from heaven will join in this reward as well. . . This is the fulfillment of Christ's promise to overcomers in **Revelation 2:26-27** and **3:21** as well as the arrival of God's time to "reward *[his] servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear [his] name, the small and the great*" (**11:18**).

Second, the millennium confirms the "goodness of creation and of God as creation." Establishing messianic rule over this world of woe even prior to its ultimate re-creation shows that God is unwilling to abandon the universe to the evil that has corrupted it. Instead he will judge those who have defiled it (**11:18; 19:2**) and restore righteousness and peace in the very real world of history, politics, and economics that was previously under a curse (**Gen 3:17; 6:12; Rom 8:20-21**).

Closely related is the third purpose for the millennium, to show the "importance of human history in God's salvific plan" and of the divinely intended role for humans in the administration of his creation (**Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8:3-8; Dan 7:22, 27; Heb 2:5-9**). **Revelation 20** demonstrates a belief "in the importance of the life men lead and the history nations fashion on this earthly scene . . . [God's] purpose is worked out in history and must be vindicated in history." . . .

Fourthly, the millennium demonstrates the sovereignty of God and his fidelity to the promises he made to Abraham and David and through them to Israel and the world (**Gen 12:1-3; 2 Sam 7:12-16**). The Lord's word through Jeremiah (**Jer 32:19-26**) declares the ironclad certainty of the divine promise to restore Israel to her land of blessing. All the spiritual and earthly forces of evil cannot stand against God's power to defeat them (Rev 19:20 – 20:3; 20:9-10) and to accomplish his purpose in this world. Israel by God's election is "beloved because of the patriarchs, for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:28-29), and through her the nations will also experience the Messiah's just and prosperous rule on earth.

Fifthly, the perverse and paradoxical rebellion at the end of the thousand years against Christ's idyllic reign (**Rev 20:7-10**) demonstrates God's righteousness in judging human sin and ultimately removing evil completely from his creation. Such susceptibility by humans to satanic influence under even the best of conditions shows the necessity of the devil's final consignment to judgment (**20:10**) as well as the exclusion from the new creation of all that is receptive to evil and deception (**21:8, 27; 22:15**).

Sixthly, the millennium "serves to motivate and direct human action in the present." Both future phases of Christ's earthly rule (millennium and new creation) give disciples hope that human life on this earth in all of its diversity of "*tribe and language and people and nation*" can be lived in harmony and mutual respect and in care of God's good creation. This requires the saving and restoring grace of God in Christ to deal with human brokenness and then mutual submission on the part of his people under the rule of Christ to align their lives not for self but for God and for others. Their future destiny as God's people should embolden disciple to live differently in the present and establish microcosms of God's coming kingdom on earth even now.

John MacArthur: Satan's binding poses a serious difficulty for both postmillennialists and amillennialists. Amillennialists argue that Satan is already bound, since, as noted above, they believe we are in the Millennium now (though they do not view it as one thousand literal years in length). Many postmillennialists also believe that Satan is presently bound, because otherwise it is difficult to see how the church could usher in the Millennium. Yet the biblical description of Satan's activity in this present age makes it impossible to believe he has already been bound. Satan plants lying hypocrites in the church (**Acts 5:3**), schemes against believers (**2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 6:11**), disguises himself as an angel of light to deceive people (**2 Cor. 11:14**), attacks believers (**2 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:27**) and must be resisted (**James 4:7**), hinders those in the ministry (**1 Thess. 2:18**), and leads believers astray (**1 Tim. 5:15**). Amillennialists and postmillennialists generally argue that Satan was bound at the Cross, and that his binding simply means that he can no longer deceive the nations and keep them from learning God's truth (e.g., **Anthony A. Hoekema**, *The Bible and the Future* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 228). But Satan did not keep the Gentile nations from the knowledge of the truth before his alleged binding at the Cross. The Egyptians heard about the true God from Joseph, and from the Israelites during the four hundred years they lived in Egypt. The Assyrians of Nineveh not only heard the truth from Jonah, but also repented (**Matt. 12:41**). The Queen of Sheba heard about the true God from Solomon (**1 Kings 10:1-9**); the Babylonians from Daniel and his Jewish friends; and the Persians from Esther, Mordecai, and Nehemiah. Further, in what sense is Satan restrained from deceiving the nations in the present age, since he blinds the minds of unbelievers (**2 Cor. 4:4**), "*is now working in the sons of disobedience*" (**Eph. 2:2**), and holds unbelievers captive (**2 Tim. 2:26**) in his kingdom (**Col. 1:13**)?

William Barclay: On the basis of this passage of Revelation, **Millenarianism** or **Chiliasm** was very widespread within the early Church, although it was never universal.

For the second-century Christian writer **Justin Martyr**, it was an essential part of orthodox belief, although he agreed that there were good Christians who did not accept it. 'I and others, who are right-minded Christians at all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and 1,000 years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned and enlarged as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare' (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 80). **Irenaeus**, the Bishop of Lyons, also held firmly to the belief in a Millennium upon earth (*Against Heresies*, 5:32). One of his reasons was the conviction that, since the saints and the martyrs had suffered on earth, it was only just

that on earth they should reap the rewards of their fidelity. Another Christian writer, **Tertullian**, also insisted upon the coming of the Millennium. **Papias**, the second-century collector of so much material on the gospels, insisted that Jesus taught the doctrine of the Millennium; and he hands down as the words of Jesus a passage which foretells the wondrous fertility of the earth which is to come.

Craig Keener: Indeed, other factors do favor reading this thousand years as **following** the Tribulation in the narrative plan of the book.

(1) The binding of Satan during the thousand years hardly matches Satan's furious deceptive and murderous activity during the present era (**12:12–13; 13:11–15; 20:2–3**).

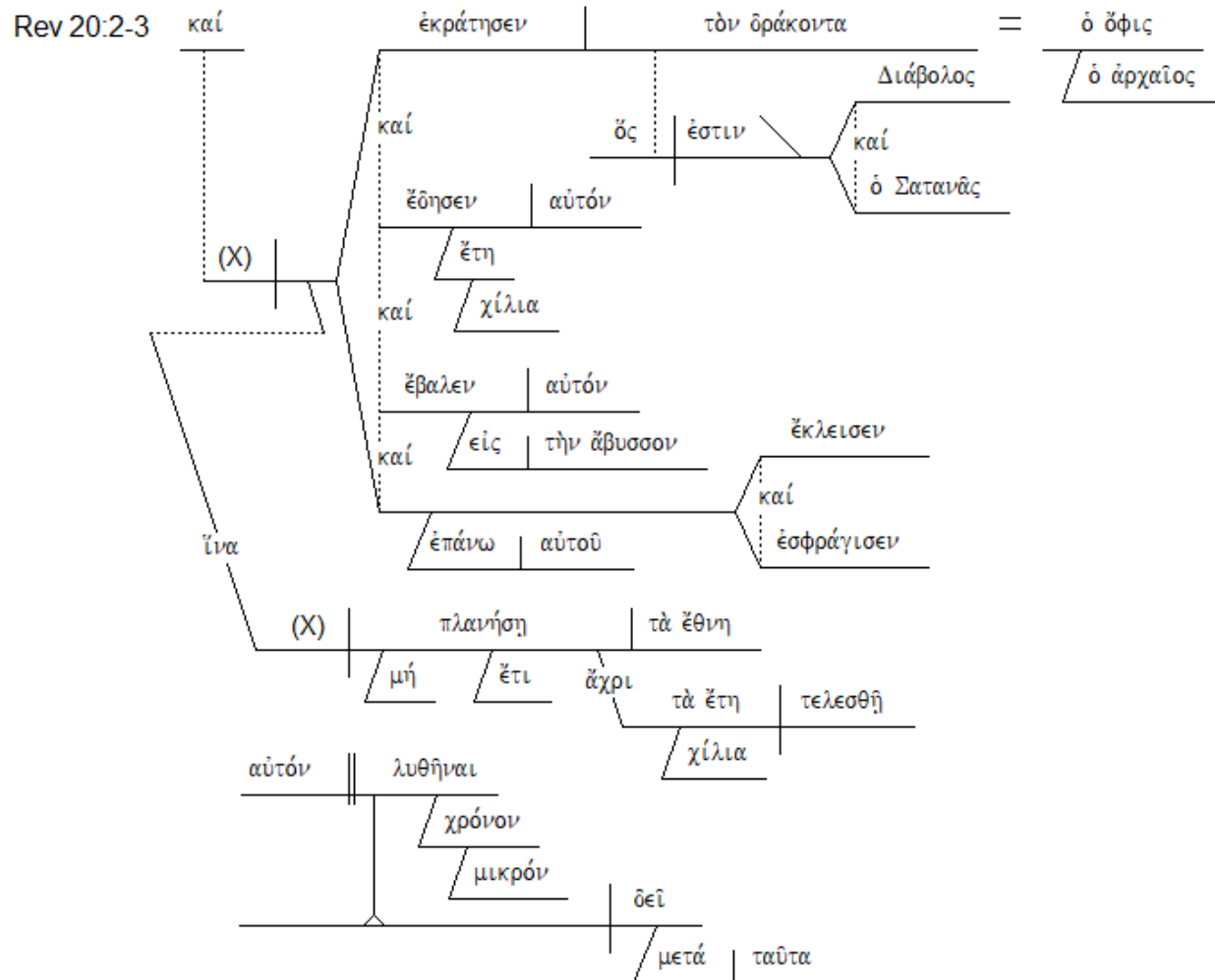
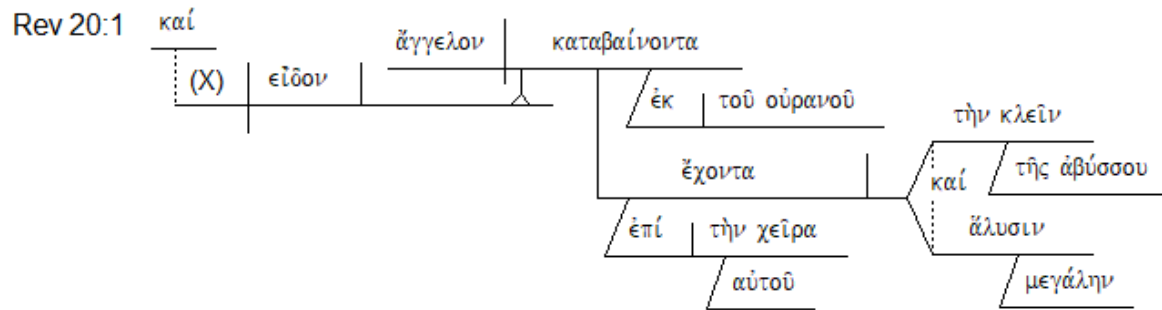
(2) The saints have already been martyred, suggesting that the Tribulation period precedes the Millennium (**20:4**).

(3) The resurrection of the righteous is parallel to and contrasted with the rest of the dead returning to life after the thousand years (**20:4–6**), suggesting a bodily rather than symbolic resurrection (the future resurrection rather than our spiritual new birth or natural death or unity with Christ's resurrection). Even by itself, though "*come to life*" can refer to realized eschatology (e.g., **John 11:25; Gal. 2:20**), it is also an acceptable euphemism for resurrection (**Rev. 2:8**; cf. **John 5:25; Rom. 6:10; 2 Cor. 13:4**; 1 En. 103:4; Sib. Or. 4.187–90); the context here points still more clearly to the latter understanding.

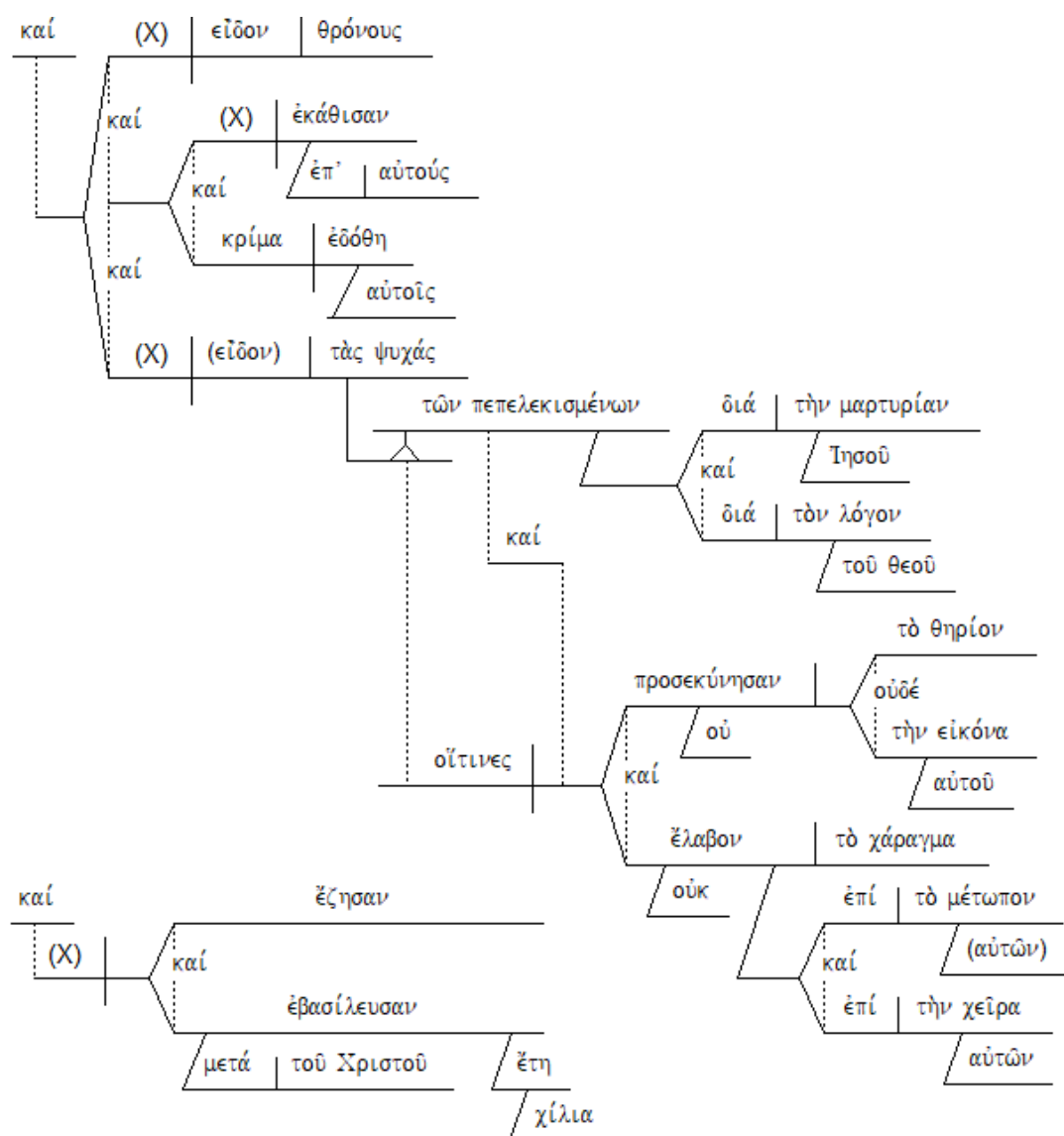
(4) **Revelation 20** "presupposes all that has transpired in **chapters 12–19**." Thus the beast and false prophet are already in the lake of fire before the Millennium (**20:10**); likewise, the devil cannot deceive "*anymore*," suggesting a suspension of his deceptive work that transpired from **12:9** on.

James Hamilton: Let me invite you to consider again the **futility of rebelling against God**, whether in big things or small. If you refuse to repent of your sins and trust in Christ, you will not escape. **Your rebellion is futile**. You will either repent and trust Jesus and be saved, or you will be destroyed. Concerning those of us who have repented and know the good we ought to do and hesitate to do it, our small-scale rebellion is futile too. So if the Bible tells us to do everything without grumbling or complaining (**Philippians 2:14**), our choices are: obey and rejoice in the Lord and enjoy his blessing; or rebel, complain, grumble, and be miserable. We will not escape. If he calls us to take up the cross, lay down our lives, pursue the greatness that comes from serving others, and store up treasure in Heaven, we can either enjoy the satisfaction of walking with God in obedience, or refuse to obey and suffer the pangs of conscience and the consequences that come with our sin. Rebellion against God is futile, whether you're trying to dethrone Christ at the last battle or just trying to get away with a little self-indulgence. On a small scale or large, all self-indulgence is the attempt to dethrone Christ. You will not succeed.

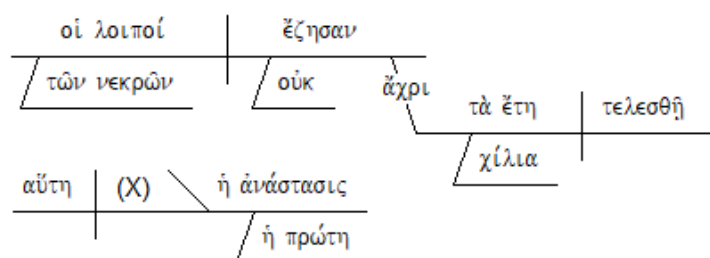
Leedy Greek Diagram:



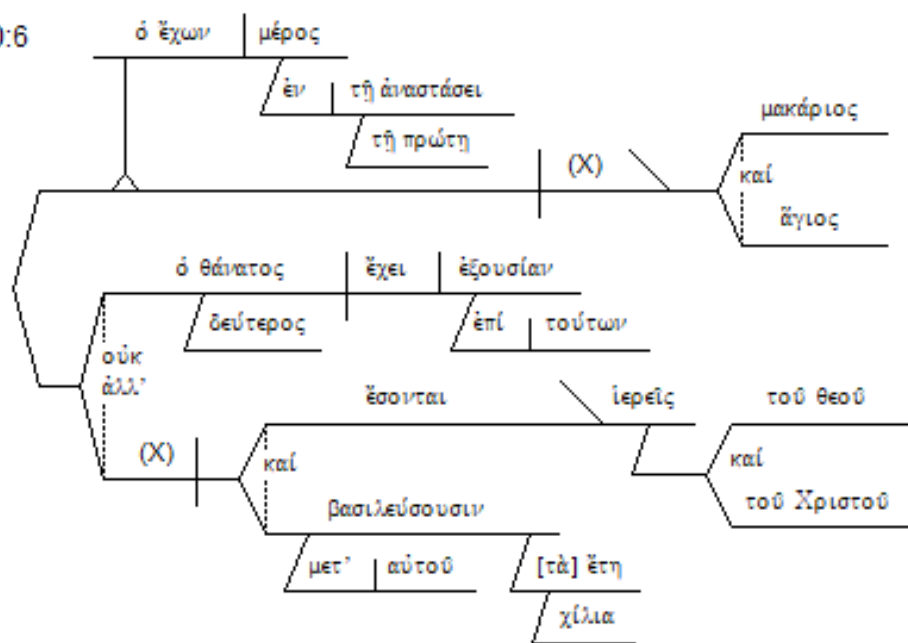
Rev 20:4



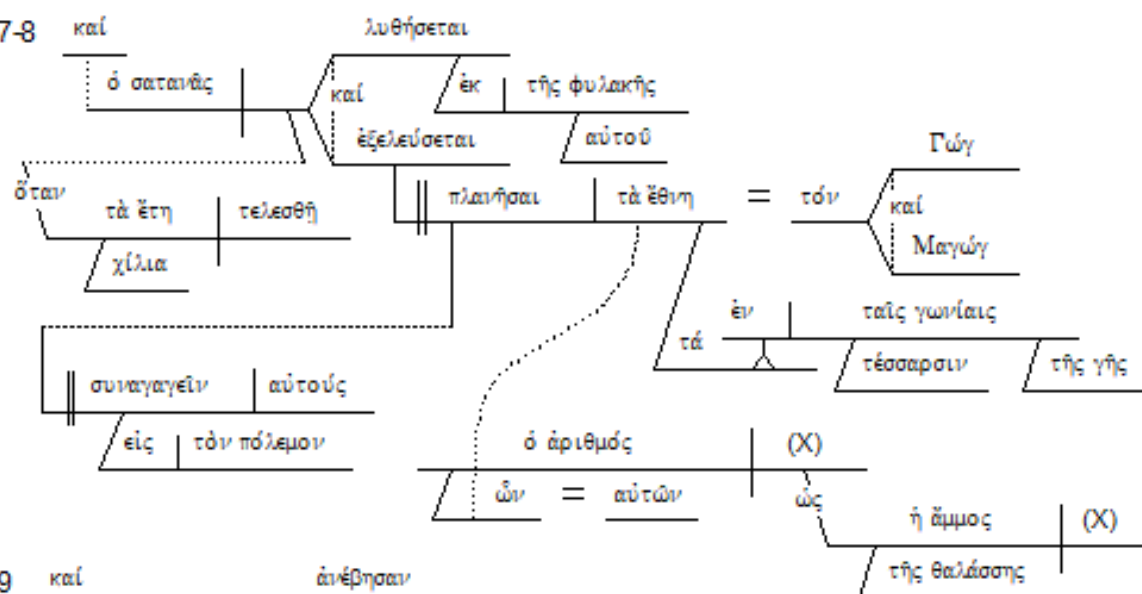
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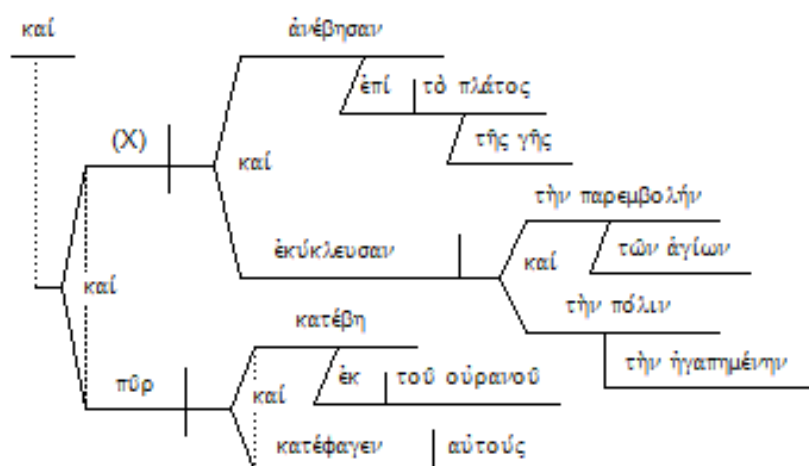
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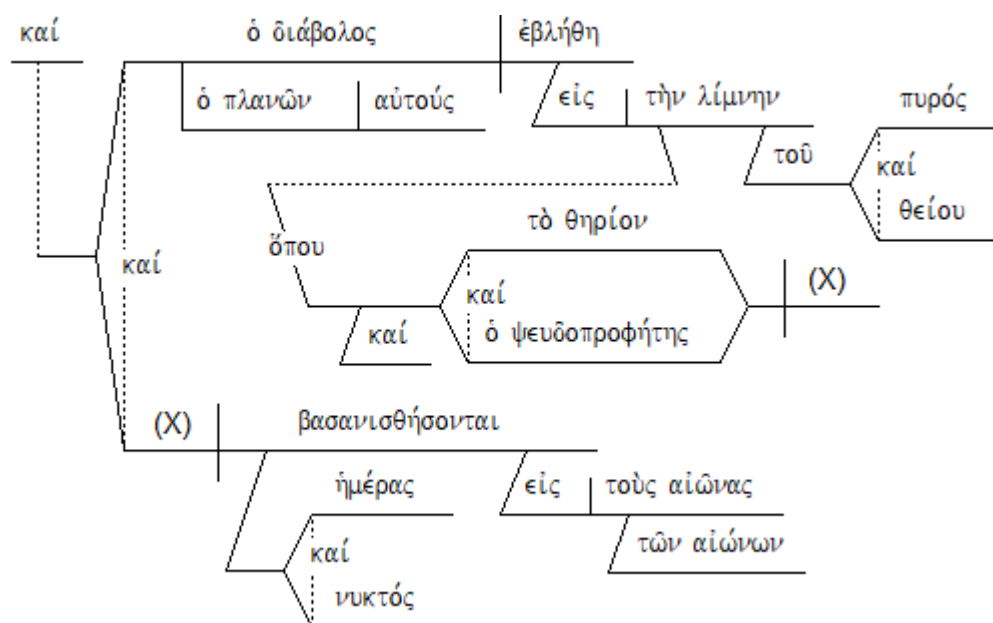
Rev 20:7-8



Rev 20:9



Rev 20:10



TEXT: Revelation 20:11-15

TITLE: GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

BIG IDEA:

THE WICKED DEAD WILL STAND BEFORE THE DIVINE JUDGE TO BE CONDEMNED TO THE ETERNAL LAKE OF FIRE BASED ON A FAIR EVALUATION OF THEIR WORKS

INTRODUCTION:

S. Lewis Johnson: The writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews says, “*It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment.*” The **final judgment** is one of the great truths of the word of God, and unfortunately, it is one of the ones that our society, in our day, does not really like to emphasize. In fact, we like to speak somewhat disapprovingly of hell, fire and damnation preachers. But if we are preaching the word of God, if we are paying attention to Scripture, then it does not seem possible for us to avoid being a hell, fire and damnation preacher.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Here is the last and final judgment of history following the close of the Millennium. It is an awesome and solemn scene and one which should cause deep concern to our hearts for many of our friends and even relatives will be here, those who have never received Jesus Christ as their Savior. All who have scoffed at God, denied His being, rebelled at His rule, or rejected His sovereignty, and in the process, have also rejected His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, must at this time stand before this throne to be condemned to eternal judgment. May the study of these verses make us more concerned and more committed to reaching the lost for Christ.

John MacArthur: This passage describes the final sentencing of the lost and is the most serious, sobering, and tragic passage in the entire Bible. Commonly known as the Great White Throne judgment, it is the last courtroom scene that will ever take place. After this there will never again be a trial, and God will never again need to act as judge. The accused, all the unsaved who have ever lived, will be resurrected to experience a trial like no other that has ever been. There will be no debate over their guilt or innocence. There will be a prosecutor, but no defender; an accuser, but no advocate. There will be an indictment, but no defense mounted by the accused; the convicting evidence will be presented with no rebuttal or cross-examination. There will be an utterly unsympathetic Judge and no jury, and there will be no appeal of the sentence He pronounces. The guilty will be punished eternally with no possibility of parole in a prison from which there is no escape.

Buist Fanning: This paragraph gives the all-important transition between Satan’s final judgment at the end of the millennium (vv. 7-10) and God’s full blessing of his people in renewing all of creation (21:1-8). Before the ultimate renewal occurs, the fate of the ungodly dead who followed Satan’s way during their lifetime must be settled, and John records their destiny here in vv. 11-15.

Robert Mounce: And so ends “the tale of the first city.” Babylon has ruled the world with regard for no one but herself. She is a great prostitute who has seduced the nations into following her illicit way of life. Inspired by Satan, she has taken into her own hands the right to control the entire inhabited world. Her deceptive practices have lured all but the faithful into ungodliness.

Her doom, however, is certain. She will be reduced to a heap of burning ashes, and her “lovers” will stand afar and marvel at how great has been her fall. Heaven will be filled with the Hallelujahs of those who have resisted her claims even to the point of death. The triumphant Messiah will return, and all who have fallen under the control of the beast and false prophet will be destroyed. The death of the martyrs will be vindicated. Satan will be bound in the Abyss for a thousand years, while the church will reign triumphant with the Lamb. Babylon has fallen. The forces of Satan in this world will be destroyed, and he and his henchmen will burn forever in the lake of fire.

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: **Jesus will defeat all the enemies of God forever by sending them to eternal punishment in hell.**

- I. Unbelievers Will Stand Before the Sovereign God of the Universe (**20:11**).
- II. Unbelievers Will Be Judged for Their Righteousness, Not the Imputed Righteousness of Christ (**20:12-13**).
- III. Unbelievers Will Spend Eternity Separated from God in the Lake of Fire (**20:14-15**).

I. (:11) THE AUTHORITY OF JUDGMENT -- THE DIVINE JUDGE ON HIS GREAT WHITE THRONE

A. Transcendent Authority

1. Impressive Throne

“And I saw a great white throne”

Newell: Weigh each word. *Great*, -- it is the Infinite before whom the finite must stand; *White*, -- it is the unveiled, undimmed blaze of the divine holiness and purity and justice; *Throne*, -- it is majesty unlimited, in which inheres utter right to dispose of the destiny of creatures. Before such a throne, creatures cannot stand; but they shall stand -- even the lost!

J. Hampton Keathley, III: First it is called “*great*.” The Greek word is *meas* which connotes:

- (a) the size of something, the extent,
- (b) the intensity or degree of something, and
- (c) rank, dignity, or standing.

In essence, all of these ideas have application here. It is great because of the awesome intensity and the degree of its importance. Here each unbeliever’s eternal destiny is determined and declared with ample proof and reason. It is great because it is the final judgment putting an end to all judgment for all time. Finally, it is great because all the unbelievers of all time, from Cain to the final revolt at the end of the Millennium, will be here assembled to face the bar of God’s perfect justice. The only exceptions will be the beast and false prophet and perhaps those of the judgment of the Jews and Gentiles at the end of the Tribulation who have already been consigned to the lake of fire.

Second, it is called “*white*” because it will be the supreme, undimmed display of the perfect righteousness and justice of God. Throughout history God has taught man that he must have God’s kind of righteousness, that God is of purer eyes than to approve evil, or to accept or look upon wickedness (**Hab. 1:13**), *that all have sinned and come short of God’s glory* (**Rom. 3:23**), and that the penalty of sin is eternal death, separation from God (**Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:2**). Now these facts will become evident to each individual and proven without question.

Third, it is called a “*throne*” because here the Lord Jesus Christ will sit in absolute majesty and sovereign authority to consign these eternally to the lake of fire. In **Revelation 4:2** John beheld a throne set in heaven from which the Tribulation judgments proceeded. The word “*throne*” is used more than 30 times in the book, but this throne, the great white one, is to be distinguished from all others because it is the most significant of all.

John MacArthur: It is called *great* not only because of its size as greater than the thrones mentioned in **20:4**, but also because of its significance, majesty, and authority. That it is *white* symbolizes its purity, holiness, and justice. The verdict handed down from this throne will be absolutely equitable, righteous, and just. “*The Lord abides forever,*” wrote David, “*He has established His throne for judgment, and He will judge the world in righteousness; He will execute judgment for the peoples with equity*” (**Ps. 9:7–8**). Daniel described this scene in **Daniel 7:9–10**; cf. **John 5:29**; **Rom. 2:5**.

2. Impressive Sovereign

“and Him who sat upon it,”

David Thompson: We learn from Daniel that this one is “*the Ancient of Days*” who actually takes His seat (**Dan. 7:9**). This Divine Person is none other than Jesus Christ.

Kendell Easley: He is simply him who was seated on the throne, fulfilling **John 5:22**: “*the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son*” (see also **2 Cor. 5:10**; **2 Tim. 4:1**). Until the victorious coming of Christ, the occupant of the throne was God; now Christ has taken his seat on a great white throne (see also **21:5**). This is heaven's throne John had first seen without describing in **4:2**.

Alternate View:

Robert Mounce: There is some **question about the identity of the One who sits upon the throne**. The NT teaches generally that judgment has been committed to the Son. **John 5:22** specifically says, “*The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son*” (cf. **2 Cor 5:10**; **2 Tim 4:1**). Similarly, in 1 Enoch, eschatological judgment is the function of the Messiah (“On that day Mine Elect One shall sit on the throne of glory and shall try their works,” 45:3; cf. 51:3; 55:4; 61:8). Yet in the present passage it is apparently God the Father who is judge. Elsewhere in Revelation the One seated upon the throne is the Father (**4:2, 9**; **5:1, 7, 13**; **6:16**; **7:10, 15**; **19:4**; **21:5**). It is more natural in the present context to see the Father rather than the Son in the role of judge.² The ease with which the NT speaks both of the judgment seat of Christ (**2 Cor 5:10**) and of the judgment seat of God (**Rom 14:10**) implies a **unity** that makes unnecessary any quibbling over exact assignment of functions. In his Gospel John records the statement of Jesus, “*I and the Father are one*” (**John 10:30**).

B. Terrifying Presence

*“from whose presence earth and heaven fled away,
and no place was found for them.”*

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Heaven and earth are seen fleeing from the face of Him who sits on this throne. In other words, they are destroyed, dissolved (**2 Pet. 3:7, 10–12**). The point is the great white throne judgment does not occur on earth or in heaven as we know it, but somewhere beyond, perhaps in extreme outer space. The indication is also clear that it does not occur in the new heaven and earth which is not created until after this event.

John MacArthur: That amazing, incredible statement describes the “**uncreation**” of the universe. The earth will have been reshaped by the devastating judgments of the Tribulation and restored during the millennial kingdom. Yet it will still be tainted with sin and subject to the effects of the Fall—decay and death; hence it must be destroyed, since nothing corrupted by sin will be permitted to exist in the eternal state (**2 Pet. 3:13**). God will in its place create “*a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away*” (**21:1**; cf. **21:5**; **Isa. 65:17**; **66:22**; **2 Pet. 3:13**). The present earth and heaven will not merely be moved or reshaped, since John saw in his vision that no place was found for them. They will be **uncreated** and go totally out of existence. This is nothing less than the sudden, violent termination of the universe (cf. **Ps. 102:25–26**; **Isa. 51:6**; **Matt. 5:18**; **24:35**; **Luke 16:17**; **21:33**; **Heb. 1:10–12**; **12:26–27**).

Barnhouse wrote, “There is to be an end of the material heavens and earth which we know. It is not that they are to be purified and rehabilitated, but that the reverse of creation is to take place. They are to be uncreated. As they came from nothing at the word of God, they are to be sucked back into nothingness by this same word of God” (*Revelation: An Expository Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971], 391).

Alternative View:

G.R. Beasley-Murray: Verse 13 provides a puzzle, since the sea can hardly be said to give up its dead if the world has passed away. . . [John’s] subject at this point was not geophysical and astronomical changes in the universe, but the majesty of God in the judgment. . . It is not the earth and the heavens but “those who dwell upon the earth” and the angelic, or rather demonic, powers which seek to flee from the overwhelming glory of the presence of the Lord.

II. (:12-13) THE APPRAISAL OF JUDGMENT – BASED ON THE WORKS OF THE WICKED DEAD

A. (:12) Unimpeachability of Judgment by Works

1. Applies without Distinction to all the Dead

“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne,”

Tony Garland: Every category of man now stands on an individual basis before God. Wealth, power, fame, is all immaterial now. As the cross stands as the great equalizer among people of faith on the road to salvation, so the Great White Throne Judgment is the equalizer among those on their way to eternal damnation.

Kendell Easley: Premillennialists generally believe that “*the dead*” here are only the **wicked dead** in that the righteous were already judged before the thousand-year reign of Christ. (On this view, the judgment of **Matt. 25:31–46** occurs long before the judgment at the white throne.) This means both judgments conclude identically with the wicked cast into everlasting fire and so serve the same purpose.

John Phillips: There is a terrible fellowship there. . . The dead, small and great, stand before God. Dead souls are united to dead bodies in a fellowship of horror and despair. Little men and paltry women whose lives were filled with pettiness, selfishness, and nasty little sins will be there. Those whose lives amounted to nothing will be there, whose very sins were drab and dowdy, mean, spiteful, peevish, groveling, vulgar, common, and cheap. The great will be there, men who sinned with a high hand, with dash, and courage and flair. Men like Alexander and Napoleon, Hitler and Stalin will be present, men who went in for wickedness on a grand scale

with the world for their stage and who died unrepentant at last. Now one and all are arraigned and on their way to be damned: a horrible fellowship congregated together for the first and last time. (*Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991], 242-43)

Charles Swindoll: The final judgment has three phases —the verdict, the sentencing, and the penalty. The verdict is determined quite simply by confirming that the accused is not, in fact, listed in the Book of Life. Having determined this, the next step is the sentencing, which will be based strictly on the deeds of the accused. The implication is that those who acted more wickedly will receive a greater degree of punishment than others. How this actually works out is up to God. Finally, having determined guilt as well as a just sentence, the Judge assigns the penalty — they will be thrown into the “*lake of fire*,” which John calls “*the second death*.”

Robert Mounce: The point is that no one is so important as to be immune from judgment, and no one is so unimportant as to make judgment inappropriate.

2. Applies on the Objective Evidential Standard of Recorded Works

a. Transparent Evidence

“and books were opened;”

James Hamilton: Perhaps the Bible, with its standard of righteousness, is among these books. No evidence is lacking. Just judgment is rendered.

Craig Koester: The judgment is based on not one but two sets of books: the book of life and the books in which people’s deeds are recorded (**20:12**). Each set of books has its own function. The book of life has to do with **divine grace**, while the books of deeds have to do with **human accountability**. The book of life is like a civic record, in which the citizens of the city of God have their names inscribed (**21:27**). John has already said that people are inscribed in this book “*from the foundation of the world*” (**13:8; 17:8**), which means that they cannot obtain access to the book of life by their own efforts, but they are included in the book as an act of **divine grace**. Some cities expunged from the citizenship rolls the names of those who were condemned and executed, but the risen Christ said that he would not blot the names of the faithful out of this book, even though they were condemned by human beings (**3:5**).

The other set of books includes the records of what people have done during their lives. The book of Esther tells of an earthly book in which the king would keep a record of the good deeds that people performed, so that they could be rewarded (**Esther 6:1–2**). The book of Daniel speaks of more comprehensive books that are kept in the archives of heaven. On the day of judgment, these books will be opened and people will be held accountable for their actions (**Dan. 7:10**). The idea that people’s deeds are subject to final divine judgment appears in various New Testament writings (for example, **Matt. 25:31–46; John 5:28–29; 1 Cor. 3:10–15; 2 Cor. 5:10**).

b. Transformative Exception

“and another book was opened, which is the book of life;”

Buist Fanning: These books are records of human deeds, a symbol of God’s complete and lasting knowledge of human actions, which ensures that his judgment will be informed and just. The theological point of this (in light of the absence of these dead in “*the book of life*”; **vv. 12d-e, 15**)

is that apart from God's electing and redeeming love in the Lamb all humans will fall short when God's righteous judgment comes (**Acts 17:31; Rom 2:16**).

Craig Koester: Note that in the judgment, both **divine grace** and **human accountability** are important, but God's decision finally is based on the grace that is represented by the book of life. John does say that people are "*judged according to their works, as recorded in the books*" and that they are "*judged according to what they [have] done*" (**20:12, 13**). Clearly, he understands that God holds people accountable for their way of life. At the same time, John does not suggest that salvation is ultimately based on human achievement, so that only those who achieve a certain score in their books of deeds merit a place in the kingdom. **God's favorable judgment is an expression of grace.** People can hope for a place in the heavenly city because God wants them there and writes their names in the book of life (**20:15; 21:27**).

c. Thorough Evaluation

*"and the dead were judged
from the things which were written in the books,
according to their deeds."*

Fruchtenbaum: There is a principle in Scripture that does teach **degrees of punishment** based upon degrees of sinfulness and upon greater or lesser light or knowledge and the response or lack of it to that light [**Mat. 11:20-24; Luke 12:47-48; John 19:11**].

John MacArthur: It should be noted that while there are varying degrees of punishment in hell, everyone there will suffer intolerable, indescribable misery and torment. All sinners in hell will be utterly separated from God and all that comes from His goodness. Thus, they will be miserable, but not equally miserable.

Tony Garland: The unbelieving dead will get what they desire: they will be judged by their works. But their works will be found to be imperfect. Not only in application, but in **motivation** because it is impossible for those who lack faith to please God (**Heb. 11:6**). Even their altruistic works are flawed by selfish and deceptive motivations.

David Thompson: When we analyze Scripture, we learn of some of the kinds of things that go into these condemnatory works books:

- 1) Every act contrary to God's word. **Rom. 2:5-6**
- 2) Every word spoken that was contrary to God's word. **Mt. 12:36-37; James 3:6**
- 3) Every thought a person had that was contrary to God's word. **I Chron. 28:9**
- 4) Every motive a person had for doing something contrary to God's word. **Heb. 4:12**
- 5) Every secret sinful act that a person did contrary to God's word. **Rom. 2:16**
- 6) Every rebellious act one did contrary to God's word. **James 4:17**
- 7) Every suppression of God's word and Spirit when convicting is stored up. **Rom. 1:18**
- 8) Every violation of God's law is all recorded in the works books. **Rom. 3:19-20**

Robert Mounce: The great white throne judgment is **not arbitrary but based on the evidence** written by the life of every person. Books are opened, and the dead are judged on the basis of what they have done as recorded therein. The teaching of **judgment by works** runs throughout both the OT and the NT. **Ps 62:12** gives expression to the commonly accepted principle that God requites a person according to his work. In **Jer 17:10** God says, "*I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds*

deserve.” The same principle is taught in the NT. Paul writes that God “*will give to each person according to what he has done*” (Rom 2:6), and Peter reminds his readers that God “*judges each man’s work impartially*” (1 Pet 1:17).

B. (:13) Universality of Judgment by Works

1. The Subjects of Judgment

a. From the Most Remote Area Possible

“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it,”

David Thompson: The reference to the “*sea*” metaphorically could refer to all unsaved Gentiles (Rev. 17:15). It also may refer to the fact that no matter where the person’s dead body was, including in a remote place like the sea, that person will be raised up to face this judgment.

b. From the Holding Zones of Death and Hades

“and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them;”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: They come from:

- (a) “*the sea*,” i.e., those who died at sea and were not buried in the earth,
- (b) “*death*,” those who were buried in graves in the ground, cremated, or destroyed in any other way on earth, and
- (c) “*Hades*,” a reference to the place of torments, the compartment which contains the souls of unbelievers (Luke 16:23).

The sea and death (i.e., the ground) contain the bodies and Hades contains the souls. At this second resurrection, the soul and body are reunited and the person is brought up before the throne.

2. The Basis of Judgment

“and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.”

III. (:14-15) THE AGONY OF JUDGMENT -- ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN THE LAKE OF FIRE

A. (:14a) Designees of Eternal Torment

“And death and Hades”

Speaking of the wicked unbelievers delivered up from death and Hades who had been judged and condemned and now cast into the lake of fire.

B. (:14b) Description of Eternal Torment

1. Lake of Fire

“were thrown into the lake of fire.”

Sola Scriptura: Perhaps, the reason John personifies death and Hades is to emphasize their termination as instruments of God’s judgment.

2. Second Death

“This is the second death, the lake of fire.”

C. (:15) Destiny of Eternal Torment

1. Unique Exemption

“And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life,”

G.K. Beale: What is it about the book of life which spares them? The fuller title for the book is “*the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain*” (**13:8**; and **21:27** has “*the Lamb’s book of life*”). The life granted them in association with the book comes from their identification with the Lamb’s righteous deeds and especially with His death, which implies likewise that they are identified with His resurrection life (cf. **5:5-13**). They do not suffer judgment for their evil deeds because the Lamb has already suffered it for them: He was slain on their behalf (so especially **1:5** and **5:9**; see on **13:8**). The Lamb acknowledges before God all who are written in the book (**3:5**) and who are identified with His righteousness and His death.

2. Unrecoverable Destination

“he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is it critical that preachers don’t compromise or sugarcoat the biblical doctrine of hell and the reality of torment in the lake of fire?
- 2) What does the imagery of a great white throne signify to you?
- 3) What evidence can you find in Scripture that there are gradations of suffering in hell?
- 4) What does it mean that “*earth and heaven fled away*” before the presence of the divine judge?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Walvoord: Even Bible-believing Christians have tended to tone down the awfulness of eternal death for the unsaved. A thorough appreciation of eternal punishment, however, will in the end enhance the doctrine of God’s grace and make His love all the more wonderful for those who enter into its truth. The fact of eternal punishment is not limited to this passage of Scripture, for Christ Himself speaks of the destiny of the evil in many passages (**Matt. 13:42; 25:41, 46**; etc.). Earlier in Revelation itself (**14:11**) eternal punishment is predicted for those who receive the mark of the beast. A confirming note is also added in **Revelation 21:8**. The only revelation that has been given concerning the eternal state recognizes two destinies only: one of blessedness in the presence of the Lord, the other of eternal punishment.

Alan Johnson: John’s theology of faith and its inseparable relation to works is the same as Jesus’ and Paul’s (**John 5:29; Rom. 2:6ff.**). This judgment is not a balancing of good works over bad works. Those who have their names in the Lamb’s book of life will also have records of righteous deeds. The opposite will also be true. The imagery reflects the delicate balance between grace and obedience.

Richard Phillips: The apostle Paul warned that God “*has fixed a day on which he will judge the world*” (**Acts 17:31**). Jesus defined this day as the day of his return: “*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne*” (**Matt. 25:31**). **Bruce Milne** comments: “Despite the humorous dismissal of the last judgment in our culture, its comparative neglect in much theological reflection, and the virtual silence on the subject in the modern pulpit, it is going to happen.” Whatever clever arguments may be made to urge us not to expect God’s judgment, **Revelation 20:11–15** starkly upholds the words of the Nicene Creed: Christ “will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead.”

Daniel Akin: Contrasting the “Judgment Seat of Christ” and the “Great White Throne Judgment”

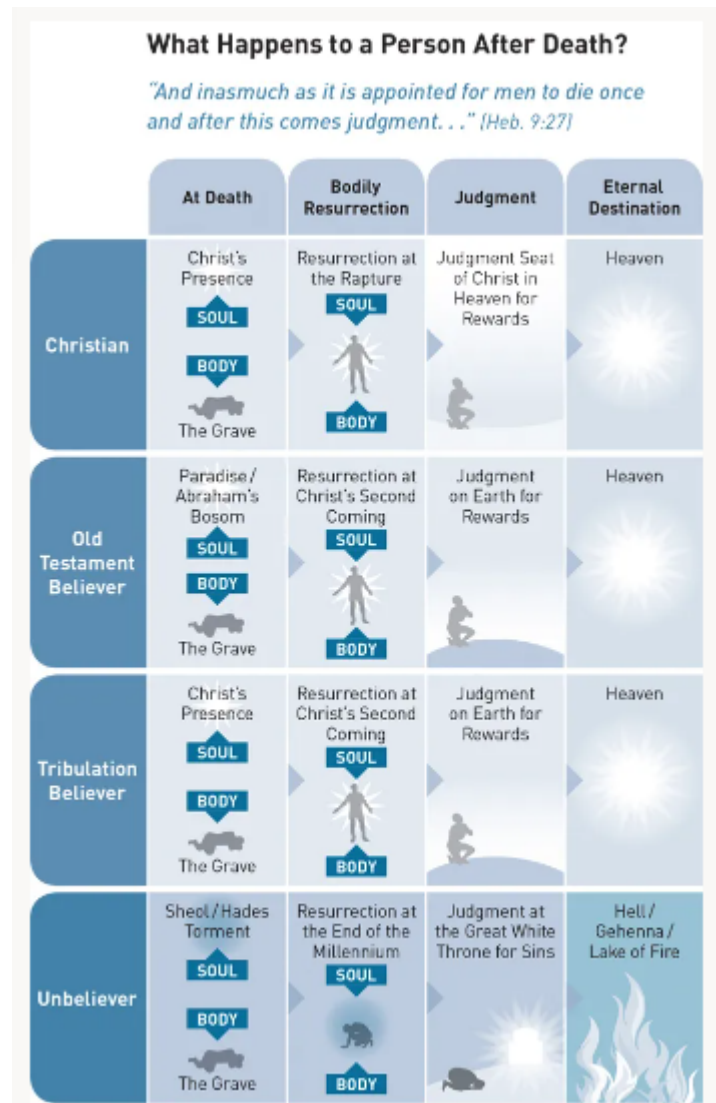
Issue	Judgment Seat of Christ (The Bema Seat of Judgment)	Great White Throne Judgment
Persons Judged	Believers only who have the imputed righteousness of Christ	Unbelievers only who have only their own righteousness
Key Scriptures	Romans 14:10 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 2 Corinthians 5:10	Revelation 20:11-15
Basis of the Judgment	Faithfulness in Christ and resultant good works (even to the motivations)	Rejection of Christ and thus one’s own righteousness
Results	Rewards or loss of rewards, but not loss of salvation, which is secure	Eternity in hell, the “lake of fire”

Dorothy Sayers: There seems to be a kind of conspiracy, especially among middle-aged writers of vaguely liberal tendency, to forget or to conceal, **where the doctrine of hell comes from**. One finds frequent references to the “cruel and abominable doctrine of hell,” or “the childish and grotesque mediaeval imagery of physical fire and worms. . .”

But the case is quite otherwise; let us face the facts. The doctrine of hell is not “mediaeval”: it is Christ’s. It is not a device of “medieval priestcraft” for frightening people into giving money to the church: it is Christ’s deliberate judgment on sin. The imagery of the undying worm and the unquenchable fire derives, not from “medieval superstition,” but originally from the Prophet Isaiah, and it was Christ who emphatically used it. . . . One cannot get rid of it without tearing the New Testament to tatters. We cannot repudiate Hell without altogether repudiating Christ. (*Matter of Eternity*, 86)

Charles Spurgeon: Think lightly of hell, and you will soon think lightly of the cross. . . . He who does not believe that God will cast unbelievers into hell will not be sure that He takes believers into heaven” (“*Future Punishment*”).

Charles Swindoll:



Warren Wiersbe: Hell is a witness to the righteous character of God. He must judge sin. Hell is also a witness to man's responsibility, the fact that he is not a robot or a helpless victim, but a creature able to make choices. God does not "send people to hell"; they send themselves by rejecting the Savior (**Matt. 25:41; John 3:16–21**). Hell is also a witness to the awfulness of sin. If we once saw sin as God sees it, we would understand why a place such as hell exists.

In light of Calvary, no lost sinner can condemn God for casting him into hell. God has provided a way of escape, patiently waiting for sinners to repent. He will not lower His standards or alter His requirements. He has ordained that faith in His Son is the only way of salvation.

The White Throne Judgment will be nothing like our modern court cases. At the White Throne, there will be a Judge but no jury, a prosecution but no defense, a sentence but no appeal. No one

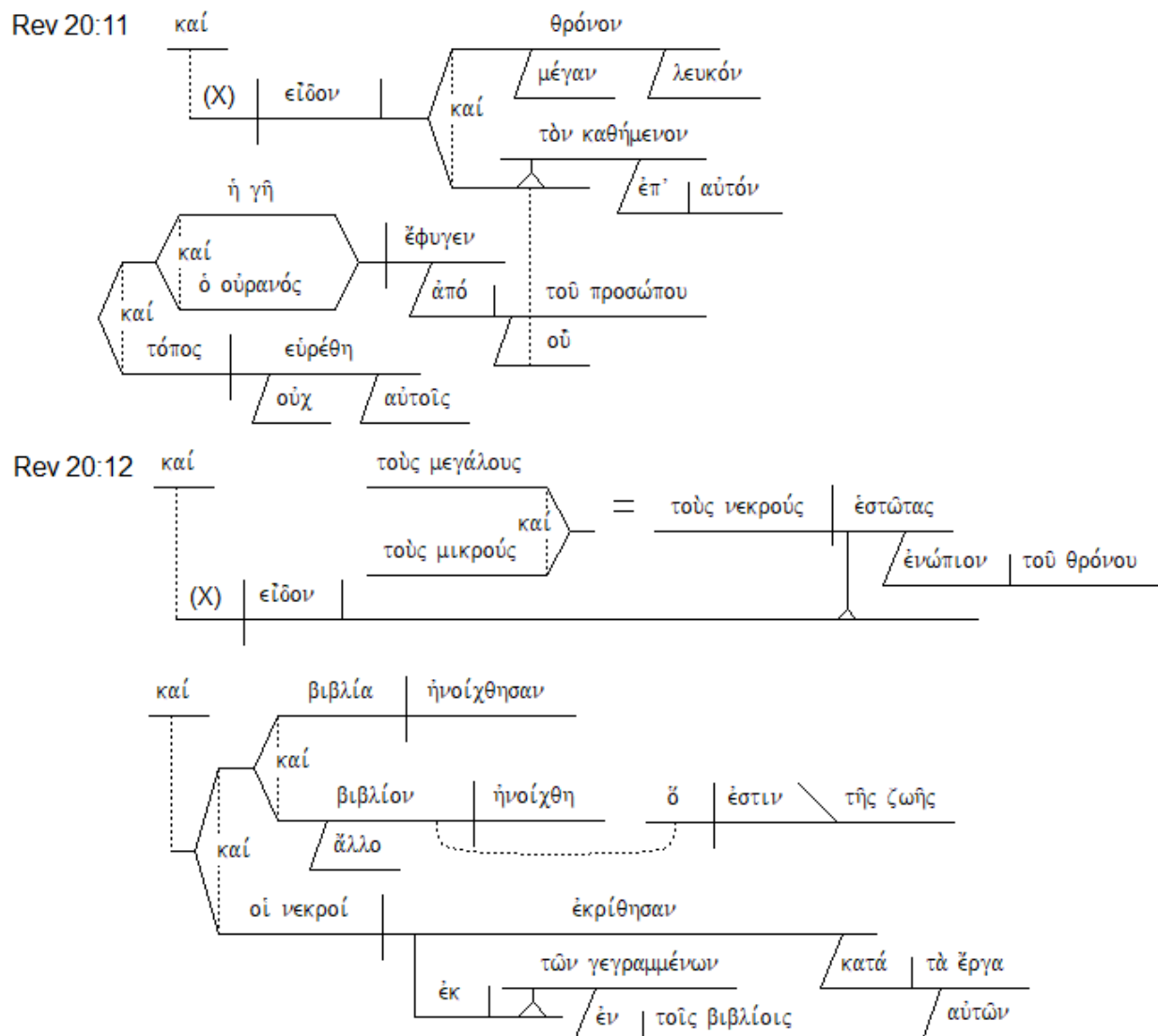
will be able to defend himself or accuse God of unrighteousness. What an awesome scene it will be!

Before God can usher in His new heavens and earth, He must finally deal with sin, and this He will do at the Great White Throne. You can escape this terrible judgment by trusting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. By so doing, you will never be a part of the second resurrection or experience the terrors of the second death, the lake of fire.

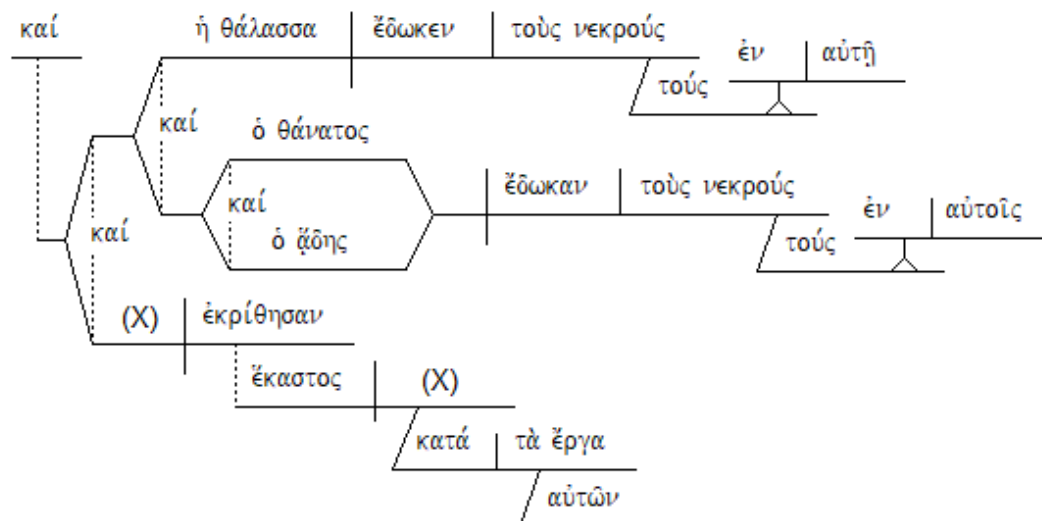
“He that heareth my word,” said Jesus, *“and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [judgment]; but is passed from death unto life”* (**John 5:24**).

Have you trusted Him and passed from death unto life?

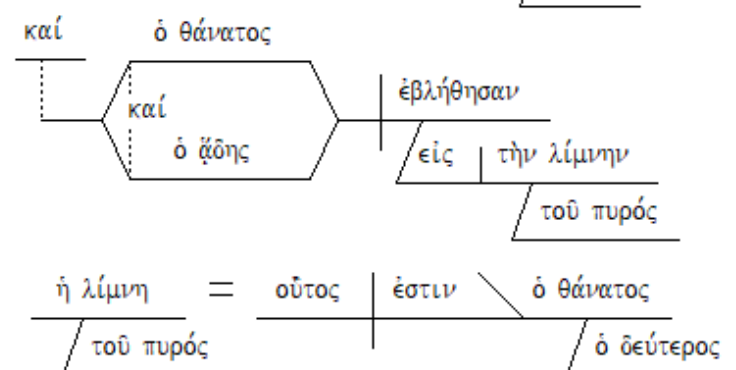
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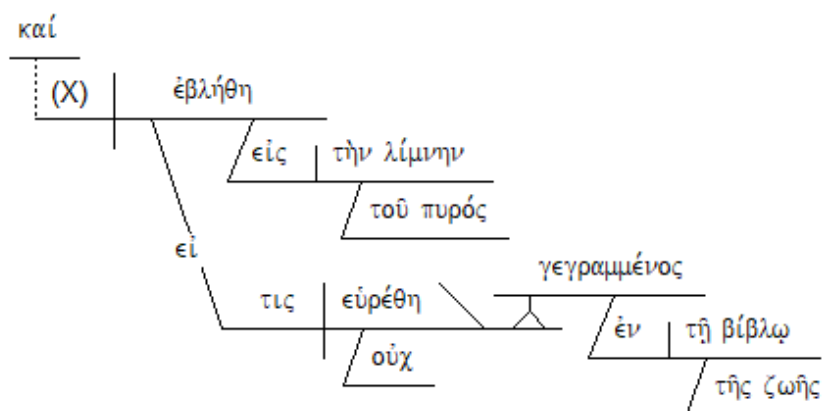
Rev 20:13



Rev 20:14



Rev 20:15



TEXT: Revelation 21:1-8

TITLE: *VIEW OF THE ETERNAL STATE AFTER JESUS MAKES ALL THINGS NEW*

BIG IDEA:

JESUS WILL CREATE A NEW COSMIC ORDER WITH NEW JERUSALEM AS THE CAPITAL CITY WHERE OVERCOMERS WILL ENJOY ALL THE BENEFITS OF ETERNAL LIFE IN COMMUNION WITH GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Daniel Akin: Main Idea: God will establish a new heaven and a new earth, where Christ will spend eternity among His redeemed people in perfect and constant communion.

- I. We Will Enjoy a New Heaven and a New Earth (:1-2)
- II. We Will Live in Intimate and Personal Communion with Our God (:3)
- III. We Will No Longer Experience the Horrible Effects of Sin (:4)
- IV. We Will Rest in the Sure Promises of God (:5-6)
- V. We Will Live as God's Adopted Children with No Fear of the Second Death (:7-8)

G.R. Beasley-Murray: With the two paragraphs which form this section John's vision of the future reaches its climax. He had described under varied forms the messianic judgments of the last times, the collapse of the antichristian empire and overthrow of evil powers which inspired it, the coming of the Christ and his kingdom on earth, and the last judgment wherein God's verdict on mankind is made known. Now follows the unveiling of a new order not subject to the ravages of time. It is, in **Farrer's** words, "the last of the Last Things and the end of the visionary drama". Nothing more than this can follow, beyond the attempt to explain it.

Craig Koester: The new creation is marked, in part, by an absence of powers that oppose God and diminish life. The demise of the harlot brought an end to a power that reduced the creation and its people to mere commodities that could be bought and sold to satisfy the self-indulgent tastes of the powerful (18:11–19). The defeat of Satan, the beast, and their allies eliminated powers that dominated the nations and oppressed the faithful (19:19–21; 20:7–10). The resurrection of all the dead brought an end to death itself (20:14). Therefore, in the new creation there is an absence of death, mourning, crying, and pain, for all those marks of the former, fallen world have passed away, together with the sea from which the beast arose (21:1, 4; compare 13:1). At the same time, the new creation is characterized by the presence of the God who gives life. The anguished cry, "Where is your God?" will no longer be heard (Ps. 42:3), for in quick succession, a voice from the throne declares that God's dwelling will be "with humankind"; he will dwell "with them," and "God himself will be with them" (Rev. 21:3). Instead of the toxic waters of judgment (8:11; 16:3–4), God will invite them to drink freely from "the spring of the water of life" that flows from his throne (21:6; 22:1).

Grant Osborne: Not just the Book of Revelation but the whole Bible has pointed to this moment. Since Adam and Eve lost their place in Paradise and sin reigned on earth (Rom. 5:12–21), the divine plan has prepared for the moment when sin would finally be eradicated and the original purpose of God when he created humankind could come to pass. Every stage of the Apocalypse, from the earthly woes of the seven churches to the three judgment septets to the destruction of

the great prostitute/Babylon the Great to the final events of this aeon (return of Christ / millennium / final judgment), the goal has been the “*new heaven and new earth*.” It is especially connected to the letters to the seven churches, for many of the promises given to the “*overcomers*” (2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21) are fulfilled in this vision of the “*new heaven and new earth*.” Hemer (1986: 16) says that the perfection of the heavenly Jerusalem is set in implicit contrast to the imperfections of the seven cities in **chapters 2–3**. At the same time, the visions here provide the realization of all the hopes and dreams of the people of God from time immemorial. Many of those hopes have been tainted by sin (e.g., material prosperity, status, or pleasure in this life), but what they represented could only be truly fulfilled in heavenly prosperity and joy. Indeed, the reigning on thrones during the millennium (whatever position one takes on that issue) is merely a harbinger of the greater reality of the New Jerusalem. That is one of the primary purposes of that temporal and earthly kingdom, to provide a foretaste of the far greater glory awaiting us. Giesen (1997: 450) calls this John’s great finale with his magnificent portrait of the new reality that will conclude God’s plan of salvation. . .

This section is organized like **chapters 12–13**, with a thesis paragraph (21:1–6, with 7–8 a parenetic challenge to the readers in light of the vision) that is then expanded in two directions, first viewing the Holy City as an eternal Holy of Holies (21:9–27) and then as a new Eden (22:1–5). Throughout this John pulls material from OT images, especially from Isaiah and Ezekiel, to show how the prophets have prepared for this day. Like the OT counterparts, this passage also views heaven as an **earthly reality**. The Holy City descends out of heaven to earth, and the new Eden is also apparently in the “*new earth*.” . .

[21:1–8] is a **transition passage** similar to the hallelujah choruses of 19:1–10. Deutsch (1987: 109, 111) says this is both the conclusion to the seven visions of 19:11 – 21:8 and an introduction to 21:9 – 22:5. It bridges the heavenly and the earthly, and the two become one. At the literary level, it is the last segment of a series of καὶ εἶδον (*kai eidon*, and I saw; cf. 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1) passages, thus concluding the series of events (*parousia*, Armageddon, millennium, final judgment, arrival of the new heaven and new earth) that constitute the eschaton. At the thematic level, it introduces the final major segment of the book, the vision of the eternal state.

James Hamilton: We may never fully understand what God has done in this world, but 21:1–8 shows us that God will make a new heaven and new earth that is pure, that, unlike the first one, will never be defiled. He will comfort those who trust him, wiping away every tear, protecting them from all sin, dwelling in their midst, satisfying their thirst, relating to them as a bridegroom in covenant, as a father to a beloved son, as a faithful God in covenant with his people. And God’s people will know him. They will know the glory of his justice and the glory of his mercy, and they will perceive these things in the salvation that comes through judgment. In studying Revelation, we pass through the final judgment in 20:11–15 on our way to the new heaven and new earth, in which righteousness dwells. God created the world so that he could make known his justice and his mercy. The justice God will demonstrate against the wicked is on display in the new heaven and new earth in his wrath on those who burn in the second death of the lake of fire in 21:8. For all eternity God’s justice will be on display so that the redeemed who enjoy God’s mercy will continue to feel the mercy they have received.

I. (:1-2) INTRODUCTION TO THE ETERNAL STATE

A. (:1) Vision of a New Heaven and a New Earth – No More Evil and Rebellion

*“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth;
for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.”*

John MacArthur: “*And I saw*” -- That little phrase is a technical phrase; it’s been used since **chapter 19, verse 11**: “*I saw heaven opened, and then Christ comes.*” It’s a very important phrase, because I think it is used to take us step by step through the chronology of the coming of Christ.

It is used when the Lord returns. It is then used at the defeat of Antichrist. It is then used to introduce the banishment of Satan at the outset of the kingdom. It is then used at the introduction of the kingdom, the millennial kingdom. It is used at the opening of the release and the destruction of Satan. It is used to introduce the scene at the great white throne. And it is used to introduce the new heaven and the new earth. **It’s a technical phrase that introduces each of the sequential events from the return of Christ to the establishment of the eternal state.**

Richard Phillips: No More Sea

Revelation 21:1 adds a provocative statement that sums up the **removal of all evil**: “*and the sea was no more.*” In the symbolism of Revelation, the sea has a theological rather than topographical meaning. The sea is the **realm of evil and rebellion against God**. **Psalm 74** described salvation as God’s breaking the head of “*the sea monsters*” and crushing “*Leviathan*,” the great mythical sea beast that represents idolatrous opposition to God (**Ps. 74:12–14**). **James Hamilton** writes that for the Israelites, the sea was “*the great dark unknown from which evil comes.*” . . . God’s covenant people avoided the sea as a **source of chaos and destruction**. In **Revelation 12:17**, Satan “*stood on the sand of the sea*,” and then raised up his beast “*out of the sea*” (**Rev. 13:1**). In **chapters 17–20**, John was shown the removal of the dragon, his beasts, and the harlot, together with their entire wicked program. **Finally, even the sea from which they came will be no more.**

Grant Osborne: It seems out of place and unnecessary in light of heaven and earth “*passing away.*” The answer is found in the **symbolic meaning** of the “*sea*” in the Apocalypse. **Giesen** (1997: 452) notes the link between “*sea*” and “*Death and Hades*” in the judgment of **20:11–15**. Both are hostile to God and humanity. **Beale** (1999: 1042) lists five uses of the concept in this book:

- (1) the origin of evil (**12:18; 13:1**);
- (2) the nations that persecute the saints (**12:18; 13:1; 17:1–6**);
- (3) the place of the dead (**20:13**);
- (4) the location of the world’s idolatrous trade activity (**18:10–19**); and
- (5) a body of water, part of this world (**5:13; 7:1–4; 8:8–9; 10:2, 5–6, 8; 14:7; 16:3**).

He believes all five are related to this, but it is likely that **the first two predominate**. The sea as a symbol of evil would best explain why it is added here. In the new order, not only will the old creation be gone, but evil will “*be no more.*” The false trinity and the nations that caused so much suffering will have been cast into the lake of fire, so temptation and pain will be gone forever.

B. (:2) Vision of Holy New Jerusalem – No More Corruption and Defilement

*“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,
made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.”*

Warren Wiersbe: Even despite Scripture's description, it is difficult to imagine what the eternal city will be like. John characterizes it as a **holy city** (see **Rev. 21:27**), a **prepared city** (see **John 14:1–6**), and a **beautiful city**, as beautiful as a bride on her wedding day. He amplifies these characteristics in **Revelation 21—22**. But the most important thing about the city is that **God dwells there with His people**.

John Walvoord: Most important, however, is the fact that the city is declared to **come down from God**. Nothing is said about the New Jerusalem being created at this point and the language seems to imply that it has been in existence in heaven prior to this event. Nothing is revealed concerning this in Scripture unless the expression of **John 14:2**, "*I go to prepare a place for you*," refers to this. If the New Jerusalem is in existence throughout the millennium, it could be a satellite city suspended over the earth during the thousand years as the dwelling place of resurrected and translated believers who also have access to the earthly scene. This would help explain an otherwise difficult problem of where these resurrected believers would dwell during a period in which people are still in their natural bodies and living ordinary lives. If so, the New Jerusalem is withdrawn from the earthly scene at the destruction of the old earth, and later comes down to the new earth.

Richard Phillips: The first characteristic of God's city is its **holiness**: "*the holy city*." **Bruce Milne** writes that this "reflects not simply—and negatively—the absence of sin and evil in all their forms, but the glorious positiveness of the outshining majesty of God in his resplendent otherness. . . . Because the city is the dwelling place of such a God, it cannot be other than a holy place." When believers come to faith in Christ, they are spiritually renewed for the sake of this destination. By calling the new Jerusalem "*the holy city*," John identifies the **chief characteristic** and calling that is to define Christians and the church today. The Bible highlights the church not as "the affluent city," "the culturally progressive city," or "the entertaining city," but as "*the holy city*."

Second, God's people are a **community**. A city is defined not primarily by streets and buildings, but by its people. Eternity therefore consists not of a solitary pursuit of the beatific vision but of a **corporate experience of God's glory**. **Hebrews 12:23** identified the heavenly Jerusalem as "*the assembly of the firstborn . . . the spirits of the righteous made perfect*." This city now comes down to earth in renewed and glorified form. Just as God's own being involves the community of the Trinity, so the new Jerusalem involves a fellowship not merely of saints with God but of saints together with God.

Third, God's city is marked by his **sovereign grace**. When John says that the new Jerusalem is "*coming down out of heaven from God*" (**Rev. 21:2**), he means that God's activity results in his people's attaining to this place in eternal glory. The church was chosen, justified, adopted, and sanctified, and will finally be glorified by God's sovereign grace. For this reason, believers in Jesus can be certain of this glorious destiny: Peter promises "*an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, . . . a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*" (**1 Peter 1:4–5**). For the same reason, the glory of the new Jerusalem belongs exclusively to God, reflecting on his people who are eternal mirrors of his grace.

Fourth, the new Jerusalem is marked by **loving intimacy**, since she is "*prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*" (**Rev. 21:2**). This love is enjoyed by Christians together with our Lord, the triumphant Jesus Christ. Many Christians struggle with the idea that earthly marriages, which are designed to foster our closest intimacy in this life, will end when we are separated by

death and enter into glory (see **Luke 20:34–36**). But believers will suffer no loss in the eternal city. For just as earthly fathers are designed to hold in our hearts a place that God the Father will perfectly fill, so also God blesses us with marital intimacy now in order to ready our hearts for loving intimacy with Christ as his bride forever. **Milne** writes, “The experience of heaven is the bliss of being utterly and eternally loved.” As Paul wrote in his famous chapter on love, “*then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known*” (**1 Cor. 13:12**).

Grant Osborne: There is a debate about the connection between the city and the saints. Is the New Jerusalem the **place** in which the saints reside, or is it a **symbol of the saints themselves**? **Thüsing** (1968) says it is not so much a place as the perfected people themselves, and **Gundry** (1987: 256) argues strongly that “John is not describing the eternal dwelling place of the saints; he is describing them and them alone.” Thus, it describes their future state rather than their future home (see also **Draper** 1988: 42). **Mounce** (1998: 382) connects this with **1 Cor. 3:16–17**, where the believers are the temple of God; here they are the city of God, visualizing “the church in its perfected and eternal state.” Yet while it is possible that John transformed the Jewish tradition of an end-time New Jerusalem into a symbol of the people themselves, that is not required by the text. In **Deutsch**’s study of the transformation of the images in this text, she concludes (1987: 124) that John chose this as a **contrast to the evil city of Babylon the Great** in order to comfort the afflicted with the promise of the future blessing. **Babylon was both a people and a place**, and that is the better answer here. It is a **people** in **21:9–10**, when the angel shows John the New Jerusalem as “*the bride, the wife of the Lamb*,” and in **21:13–14**, when the twelve tribes and twelve apostles are the gates and the foundations of the city. But it is a **place** in **21:3** where God “*dwells*” with his people, in **21:7–8** where the readers either “*inherit*” it or face the lake of fire, and in **21:24, 26** where the glory of the nations are brought into it. In short, **it represents heaven as both the saints who inhabit it and their dwelling place**.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: Only a few passages in the Word deal with the new heaven and new earth and these are often in a context dealing with both the Millennium and eternal state which causes some confusion due to our limited understanding (cf. **Isa. 65:17f; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13**). This kind of thing is not uncommon in prophetic literature and should not cause confusion. A prophetic passage will often mention two events together which, chronologically in their fulfillment, are separated by a large interval of time. . . **2 Peter 3:10–13** speaks of the Day of the Lord, the Tribulation, and of the destruction of the heavens and the earth as though they were one and the same or close together, yet Revelation shows they are separated by a thousand years. The mention of two prophetic events together does not mean that they are one and the same or that they occur together or should be confused. We must consider all of Scripture together and when all the passages dealing with certain events are considered, then the sequence and chronology become evident.

II. (:3-4) INTRINSIC DIFFERENTIATORS OF THE ETERNAL STATE

A. (:3) God in Full Shekinah Glory Tabernacles with Men

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them,’”

John Walvoord: The **loudness** of the voice signals that what follows is **important** and **authoritative**. This “*dwelling place*” (“*tabernacle*,” KJV) is in contrast to the tabernacle in the wilderness in which God dwelt and also to the tabernacle in heaven (**13:6; 15:5**).

Robert Mounce: Jesus had spoken of “*other sheep that are not of this sheep pen*” that must become part of the one flock (**John 10:16**). It is with the redeemed peoples of all races and nationalities that God will dwell in glory. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. It is the presence of God, and the fellowship with him of all believers, that constitutes the principal characteristic of the coming age.

Craig Keener: The promise that God “*will live*” (*skenoo*) with his people (**21:3**) was a frequent Jewish hope that ultimately points back to a promise of God’s covenant for Israel (**Ex. 25:8; 29:45–46; Lev. 26:12; 1 Kings 6:13; Ezek. 37:27; Zech. 2:10–11**), including in the future temple (**Ezek. 43:7, 9**). This promise is spelled out more clearly when the text reveals that new Jerusalem is a temple city (**21:22**) and is shaped like the Most Holy Place (**21:16**). The restoration of the temple was a specific hope for restored Jerusalem (**Ezek. 37:26–28; 41–48**), but in Revelation **this hope is transferred to the entire city**. This will be the most explicit “*tabernacling*” of God with humanity since the Incarnation (see **John 1:14**, which declares that Jesus, the Word, “*made his dwelling*” [lit., “*tabernacled*”] among us, the only New Testament use of *skenoo* outside Revelation), though deceased believers in heaven have already experienced it (**Rev. 7:15**). This promise was expected for end-time Israel, but here all who “*overcome*” receive it (**21:7**).

Grant Osborne: The first part of the promise, ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ (*hē skēnē tou theou, the dwelling of God*), is a virtual translation of “*Shekinah*,” typified in the cloud and pillar of fire at the exodus and symbolized in both the tabernacle (often translated with σκηνή in the LXX) and the temple. Most of all, Shekinah meant **communion between God and his people**, and it was finalized in two stages, first when “*the Word became flesh and tabernacled (σκηνώω) among us*” (**John 1:14**), and second here as the Shekinah “*dwells with his people*.” In Christ the Shekinah became incarnate, and here communion between God and his people becomes physical and absolute, as God σκηνώσει μετ’ αὐτῶν (*skēnōsei met’ autōn, will dwell with them*—the verb cognate of “*dwelling*” above). As in **19:7–8**, the verbs in **21:3–4** switch to future tenses, probably to draw attention to the prophetic overtones of these critical portions. God will no longer dwell high and lifted up above his people but will now “*tabernacle*” in their midst.

B. (:4) God Removes All the Pain and Suffering of the Former State

*“and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes;
and there shall no longer be any death;
there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain;
the first things have passed away.”*

Grant Osborne: After the eternal covenant is presented, the **benefits** belonging to the saints who form and inhabit the new heaven and new earth are presented (**21:4**). They center on the peace and joy God will give his people.

Richard Phillips: A favorite verse for Christian funerals is **Psalm 116:9**: “*I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living*.” It is pointed out that we currently inhabit the land of the dying—the land of the living is the heaven to which our beloved departed have gone. The sorrows of this life put tears on our cheeks and pain in our hearts. But when Christ returns, those who are joined to him by faith will experience the fullness of eternal life. **George Eldon Ladd** writes: “Tears here represent all human sorrow, tragedy, and evil. Accompanying the glorious vision of God will be a transformed mode of existence in which the sorrows and evils of existence in the old

order are left far behind.” Isaiah foresaw that “*the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*” (**Isa. 35:10**).

Kendell Easley: The great multitude who came out of the Great Tribulation received the pledge of many blessings including the final removal of any cause for tears (**7:15–17**). Now this promise extends to every citizen-saint of the New Jerusalem. The picture of God himself gently taking a handkerchief and wiping away all tears is overwhelming. It pictures the removal of four more enemies:

- death—destroyed and sent to the fiery lake (**20:14; 1 Cor. 15:26**)
- mourning—caused by death and sin, but also ironically the eternal experience of those who loved the prostitute (**18:8**)
- crying—one result of the prostitute's cruelty to the saints (**18:24**)
- pain—the first penalty inflicted on mankind at the Fall is finally lifted at last (**Gen. 3:16**)

All these belonged to the old order of things where sin and death were present. The last thought could also be translated, “*The former things are gone.*” No greater statement of the end of one kind of existence and the beginning of a new one can be found in Scripture.

III. (:5-6) FIVE IMMUTABLE DIVINE PROMISES REGARDING THE ETERNAL STATE

A. (:5a) The New Order Is Different and Far Superior

“And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’”

G.R. Beasley-Murray: The word order should be observed: “*Behold, new am I making all things!*” The emphasis is on the newness which God imparts to his creation, and therefore to his creatures.

Richard Phillips: On only two occasions in the book of Revelation does God himself speak directly. The first occasion was at the beginning: “*I am the Alpha and the Omega, ’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty’*” (**Rev. 1:8**). Now, at the end of history, we face God himself once more. In this way, Revelation makes a vital point: **every living soul must deal with God**. All through life we may follow the distractions that keep us from reckoning with God, but in the end we must all face him.

B. (:5b) God Can Be Counted on to Keep His Revealed Word

“And He said, ‘Write, for these words are faithful and true.’”

Richard Phillips: Here, God himself bears witness to the **truth of his Word**. He is able to establish truth because, as **Hebrews 6:18** asserts, “*it is impossible for God to lie.*” God’s nature demands that he be faithful to his promises. Paul writes: “*He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it*” (**1 Thess. 5:24**). In writing down the words that God has given him, John is fulfilling his apostolic office. When Paul said that the church is “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*” (**Eph. 2:20**), he meant that by writing down the New Testament, they secured for us the truths committed to them by God for us to believe.

Not only was God speaking to John when he appeared in this vision on the Isle of Patmos, but God speaks to us now as this same Word is read and preached. Ultimately, **it is by the Word itself that we know the truth of the Bible**, as God speaks directly to us just as he did to John. **Westminster Confession of Faith** 1.5 notes that there are many reasons to receive the Bible as true. These include “the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, . . . [and] the full discovery it makes of the only way of man’s salvation,” together with “many other incomparable excellencies” by which the Bible commends itself to us as the revealed truth of God. “Yet notwithstanding,” the confession adds, “our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.” God reveals the truth of his Word by his Word as the Spirit applies it to our hearts. John writes in **Revelation 21:5**, “*He who was seated on the throne said,*” and by his declaration that “*these words are trustworthy and true,*” his people know and recognize the truth of God’s Word. This is why John needed to write the book of Revelation, so that the persecuted believers of his day would receive God’s truth by God’s Word just as tempted believers today need the same. **James Hamilton** explains: “When we believe the Bible to be God’s Word, we are believing what it tells us about itself,” and then in our hearts “the Holy Spirit bears witness that these things are so and confirms the Bible’s claims.”

C. (:6a) The New Eternal Order Is a Done Deal

“And He said to me, ‘It is done.’”

Richard Phillips: Not only does God declare the truth of his Word by his own direct assertion, but he declares that the events foretold in Revelation are already fully established: “*And he said to me, ‘It is done!’*” (**Rev. 21:6**). God is standing at the end of history, speaking to John in the midst of history to declare a future that is already certain. The Greek word is a perfect tense of the verb *to happen*, meaning “*it has happened*.” Moreover, it is a plural verb (*gegonan*), so that it should be read “*everything has happened*,” referring to all that is revealed in Revelation, including both judgment and salvation. **George Eldon Ladd** writes: “Contrary to the confusing and chaotic picture presented to man in his human experiences, the purposes of God in redemption are as certain as though they have already taken place. The future is not uncertain to those who trust God.” People say that the only certain things are death and taxes. But believers know that **everything promised in God’s Word is absolutely certain and worthy of our faith.**

Grant Osborne: The **perfect tense** stresses a state of affairs resulting from an action (see on **16:17**), so this means salvation history is at an end and the future age can begin. **Rissi** (1972: 58) says that the plural points to the λόγοι of **21:5**, the “*words*” of the prophecies of the whole book. There are in a sense three stages:

- 1) At the cross Jesus said, “*It is finished*” (**John 19:30**), meaning God’s redemptive plan for his sacrificial death.
- 2) Then in **Rev. 16:17** the voice from the throne said, “*It is over*,” meaning that the events of the eschaton ending this present evil order are finished (cf. **10:6; 11:15, 18; 12:10; 15:1**).
- 3) Finally, God here says “*They are over*,” meaning that all the events of world history—including the world’s destruction and the inauguration of the final new age—are at an end.

D. (:6b) God Is Sovereign Over History – Including Both Present Tribulations and the Future Eternal State

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”

Robert Mounce: The descent of the New Jerusalem and all the attendant blessings may now be considered as having taken place. God says, *“It is done.”* There is no uncertainty about the eternal felicity of those who hold fast in the trial of faith because from God’s vantage point the future is determined. He is not subject to the vagrancies of time because time itself is encompassed by his eternal nature. **He is the Alpha and the Omega** (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet), the Beginning and the End (cf. **1:8; 22:13** and **Isa 44:6; 48:12**). That God is the Beginning refers not only to the fact that he was first in point of time (cf. **John 1:1**, NEB, *“When all things began, the Word already was”*), but also that he is the **source and origin** of all things. He is the end in the sense that he constitutes their **goal or aim** (as in **1 Tim 1:5; Rom 10:4**). As such he allows those who are thirsty to drink from the spring of the water of life. Scripture often employs the figure of thirst to depict the desire of the soul for God. *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God,”* sang the Psalmist (**Ps 42:1**; cf. **36:9; 63:1; Isa 55:1**). God is a spring of living water (**Jer 2:13**; cf. Ps 36:9) that assuages thirst and wells up into eternal life (**John 4:14**). In the arid climate of Palestine a spring of cool water would be a vivid symbol of refreshment and satisfaction.

Grant Osborne: The title is built on **Isa. 44:6** and **48:12**, *“I am the first and I am the last”* (cf. **41:4**), which meant that Yahweh was sovereign at the beginning of the nation and would be in charge at the end as well. In keeping with this title, God began history at creation and ends it at the eschaton. But the title means he controls not only the beginning and the end but also everything in between; in other words, **he is sovereign over history**. For the readers, this means that they can know **God is in charge now** because the Bible recorded his sovereignty over past history, and the prophecies in this book have demonstrated his control over future history. Therefore, they can be assured he is also **sovereign in the present time of trouble**.

E. (:6c) God Freely Gives the Gift of Eternal Life

“I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.”

Richard Phillips: We can imagine a dry and weary land where travelers are parched. In that land there is a springing fountain, with green foliage all around. If only they will come, the thirsty may drink of this living water. This is an apt metaphor for the life in which we live. Souls are unsatisfied, hearts are grieved, and countless lives are embittered. Perhaps you are wrestling with a great disappointment. Perhaps you have felt a gnawing worry that this is all there is. Perhaps you have been broken by tragedy, like a cistern that has been emptied of water. God offers you water that restores life, satisfies the heart, and comforts those who are aggrieved. Jesus used this metaphor to speak of the Holy Spirit of God: *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, . . . ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’”* (**John 7:37–38**). John explained, *“Now this he said about the Spirit”* (**7:39**). This image describes the experience of those who have turned to God through faith in Jesus Christ. **J. C. Ryle** writes:

“The saints of God in every age have been men and women who drank of this fountain by faith and were relieved. They felt their guilt and emptiness, and thirsted for deliverance. They heard of a full supply of pardon, mercy, and grace in Christ crucified for all penitent believers. They believed the good news and acted upon it.”

God offers through his Son everything that the soul needs in order to have eternal life: mercy, grace, pardon, peace, and strength from above. A man who owned the only refreshing spring in a

dry wasteland would charge a fortune to allow others to drink. But God in his love “*will give from the spring of the water of life without payment*” (Rev. 21:6). God offers you eternal life as a free gift because of the grace of his generous heart.

IV. (:7-8) INCENTIVE = TO OVERCOME AND WARNING = NOT TO FALL AWAY

Grant Osborne: The section concludes with a challenge to the readers to recognize the difference between those who are faithful and those who are not, that is, to decide whether to be a “conqueror” (21:7) or a “coward” (21:8). . .

In contrast to those who inherit the blessings, the sinners will be cast into the lake of fire (21:8). At first glance, this verse does not belong, for the unbelievers have already been cast into the lake of fire (20:13–15). The key is to realize once more that much of 21:5–8 is addressed to the reader and does not just describe the situation in the new heaven and new earth. As said above, we are to ask ourselves whether we are “overcomers” or “cowards.”

A. (:7) Incentive to Overcome

1. Glorious Inheritance

“He who overcomes shall inherit these things,”

G.K. Beale: V. 7 defines God’s people, the recipients of the new creation promises, as **overcomers**. Overcomers conquer through refusal to compromise their faith, even though it may cost them their lives (see further on 2:28-29). . .

All the **promises** made to the overcomers in the letters section (chs. 2 and 3) are fulfilled in this closing section, which describes the new Jerusalem and the **eternal reward of the believer**:

- “*the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God*” (2:7 and 22:2),
- inclusion in the new temple (3:12 and 21:22ff.),
- participation in “*the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God*” (3:12 and 21:2, 10),
- God’s name written on one’s person (3:12 and 22:4),
- one’s name written in the book of life (3:5 and 21:27),
- bright garments as a reward (3:5 and 21:2, 9ff.; cf. 19:7-8),
- a bright stone and a luminary, whether star or lamp (2:17, 28 and 21:11, 18-21, 23; 22:5, 16),
- consummate reigning with Christ (2:26-27; 3:21 and 22:5),
- and exclusion from the second death (2:11; 21:7-8).

These **blessings** are summed up in the one promise of v. 7, *I will be his God and he will be My son*. This fulfills a prophetic promise given to David for the One who would come from his house, “*I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me*” (2 Sam. 7:14); “*He will cry to me, ‘Thou art my Father.’ ... I also shall make him My first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth*” (Ps. 89:26). The promise is applied according to the concept of corporate representation by which Christ represents His people.

Craig Keener: In the context of Revelation, **overcoming** addresses such varied tests as **compromise with the world's values (2:14, 20)**, **dependence on our own strength (3:17)**, and **persecution (2:10)**; but persecution is the test Revelation particularly emphasizes for the end-time witnesses of Jesus (**12:11; 13:7**). Jewish texts often speak of inheriting the world to come (**21:7**), a common figure of speech among early Christians as well (e.g., **Matt. 25:34; Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 6:9**). Here the overcomers inherit "*all this*," that is, the new and sorrowless world God has prepared for them (**Rev. 21:1–6**).

2. Covenant Relationship

"and I will be his God and he will be My son."

Craig Keener: The promise that God will be his people's God and they will be his people is the most basic component of the ancient covenant formula (**Gen. 17:8; Ex. 6:7; 29:45; Lev. 11:45; 22:33; 25:38; 26:12, 45; Num. 15:41; Deut. 29:13**). The prophets rehearse the same covenant formula (**Jer. 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Zech. 8:8**). But Revelation slightly adapts it: He will be the overcomer's God, and the overcomer will be his own child (**Rev. 21:7**). God had earlier declared Israel his children (**Ex. 4:22; Deut. 32:19–20; Hos. 1:10; 11:1**), but here in the end time he publicly honors **individual believers** as his own children (**21:7**; cf. **Matt. 5:9; Rom. 8:19; 1 John 3:2**).

B. (:8) Warning Not to Fall Away

Buist Fanning: After such pledges to the readers to encourage them toward costly perseverance, it would not be right to mention only the positive side (**vv. 6d-7**) without the negative counterpart (**v. 8**). In difficult struggles against evil all around, it always seems easier to yield and escape persecution than to live in faith and obedience. But a major focus of the "unveiling" that John has received is to see fully the larger reality of the universe, both now and in the future. The perspective of the present earthly scene is insufficient. So here as elsewhere (**v. 27**; also **9:20-21; 22:15**) God reveals through John the radical division that divine judgment and redemption will finally bring to all humans. Over against God's redeemed who experience his renewal of all creation will be those who resisted him and chose evil instead. These people and their horrifying eternal fate are described in **v. 8**, beginning with eight descriptions of characteristic patterns of evil conduct. For such people, their "*part*" will be "*the lake burning with fire and sulfur*" (**v. 8**), the fate of Satan, the beast, and the false prophet (**19:20; 20:14-15**). The further identification of this as "*the second death*" (cf. **2:11; 20:6, 14**) adds to the finality and tragedy of such a fate. It is to be avoided no matter what suffering or persecution it may cost.

1. Description = Spiritual Traitors and Spiritual Lawbreakers

a. Spiritual Traitors

"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable"

Richard Phillips: The list given to John seems to have two groups, the first of which likely refers to those who had professed faith in Christ but abandoned their confession under worldly pressure or sinful enticement: "*But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable.*" The "*cowardly*" and "*faithless*" are not Christians who struggle with fear, but **people who betray Christ under pressure**. Such a person is the rootless one who Jesus said endures for a little while, but "*when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away*" (**Matt. 13:21**). Such people do not lose their salvation but reveal by their faithlessness that they had

never been saved (see **1 John 2:19**). Christians should therefore approach trials with determination, realizing that they test us, both to prove the genuineness of our faith and to purify the faith by which we are saved (**1 Peter 1:6–7**).

Joined to the cowardly and faithless are “*the detestable*,” which refers to those who imbibe the perverse practices of the harlot Babylon. This item may not seem to go with the previous two, until we realize that **apostates very often become the most virulent haters of Christianity and promoters of the grossest sins**. Those who betray Jesus do not abandon the gospel for nothing, but are generally like Paul’s one-time colleague Demas, who was “*in love with this present world*” and so abandoned Christ (**2 Tim. 4:10**).

Robert Mounce: In fact, all eight classes of people mentioned in the verse may refer to professing believers who have apostatized (although after the second or third class they apply to pagans as well).

b. Spiritual Lawbreakers

*“and murderers and immoral persons
and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars,”*

Richard Phillips: The remainder of the list involves sinners whose lives characterize the ungodliness of the world: “*murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars*” (**Rev. 21:8**). These are the kinds of sins that Jesus rebuked in the seven letters of Revelation, calling believers to purge them from their lives and fellowship. Jesus especially demanded a rejection of sexual immorality and idolatry (**2:14, 20**), although worldly violence, occult practices, and falsehood are also to have no place in the lives of those who are joined to Christ through faith.

Craig Keener: **Vice lists** were a common literary form in ancient texts, but Revelation tailors this list to specific issues confronting its audience.

- The “*cowardly*” may be those who fear persecution (**2:10**) more than they revere God (**11:18; 14:7; 15:4; 19:5**).
- The “*unbelieving*” are those who prove faithless, unwilling to maintain their faith in the midst of testing (**2:13, 19; 13:10; 14:12**).
- The Greek word translated as “*vile*” (*ebdelygmenos*) is related to words that refer to “*abominations*” (**17:4–5; 21:27**), that which is disgusting before God (**Deut. 14:3; 17:1; Prov. 15:9, 26**). Most often in the LXX this word applies to two sins: sexual immorality (**Lev. 18:22–29; Deut. 22:5; 23:18; 24:4; 1 Kings 14:24; Jer. 13:27; Mal. 2:11**) and—by far most frequently—idolatry (over forty times). Those who compromise with the cult of the emperor or other forms of paganism and worldliness fall into the “abominable” or “vile” category.
- “*Murderers*” (cf. **9:21; 22:15**) is a broad designation but includes those who kill God’s saints (**2:13; 6:11; 13:10, 15**); this may include those who betrayed Christians to the government (**2:9; 3:9**), who to save oneself refused to love sufficiently to withhold betraying others (cf. **1 John 3:14–16**), or who would not meet a fellow Christian’s needs

(1 John 3:17). Such murderers will justly suffer the second death (20:14).

- The “*sexually immoral*” (cf. 9:21) in Revelation often point to spiritual immorality (2:14, 20; 17:1–2, 5, 15–16; 18:3, 9; 19:2), but unless readers have this in mind, they would suppose it most naturally refers to the notorious literal physical immorality of paganism. In either case, the sexual unfaithfulness of the world’s citizens contrasts sharply with the sexual purity of the bride, the holy city, and her inhabitants (14:4; 19:7–8; 21:2).
- “*Those who practice magic arts*” (cf. 22:15) translates a word in Revelation that includes the world’s seductive signs (13:13–14) and perhaps even its seductive power (18:23); in the broader sense, it includes any deceptive tools of demons (9:20–21; Gal. 5:20).
- “*Idolaters*” include all who have succumbed to the demands of the imperial cult or who worshiped the idols of the world system (2:14, 20; cf. 1 John 5:21); they worship the image of the beast (Rev. 13:15).
- “*Liars*” includes not only false prophets (2:2; cf. 1 John 2:22) like Balaam and Jezebel (Rev. 2:14, 20) but also those who falsely claim to follow the truth (3:9; cf. 1 John 2:4; 4:20), in contrast to the saints (Rev. 14:5).

2. Destiny = Lake of Fire

*“their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone,
which is the second death.”*

G.K. Beale: It is noteworthy that the new creation is what the righteous alone “*inherit*” (v. 7). The unrighteous, whether pseudo-Christians or the non-Christian world in general, will not inherit the coming new world and therefore will not reside within the borders of the new cosmos. 21:1 – 22:5 shows that the blessing of God’s presence permeates the entire new creation, whereas 21:8 and 27 indicate that God’s judgment is revealed outside the confines of the new world (see also 22:15). Even though the second death is a perfected punishment, those who suffer it do so outside the geography of the new universe, since we have already been told that “*there shall no longer be any death ... or pain*” in the new order of things (v. 4).

G.R. Beasley-Murray: This sure word of judgment is added as a plea to the followers of Christ to make their calling and election sure. The prophecy of the new world in **verses 1–4** is guaranteed by God. The promise of inheriting the new world is assured to believers by God (**vv. 6a–7**), and the prospect of exclusion from that new world is equally affirmed by God. Everything of worth is at stake for the man of God. Therefore, in the coming contest, one action alone is appropriate: **endurance (Mk 13:13)**.

Sola Scriptura: This verse actually concludes the chronological development of the book of Revelation. From this point on, the book deals with issues related to the consummation of human history, as we know it. Having reached eternity, God restates his promise to the righteous and his intent to punish the wicked.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage undermine typical Christian musings about heaven as some ethereal place in the sky where we float around on clouds and play harps and sing praise to the Lord?
- 2) Do you have the sense that your future **intimacy** with the Lord Jesus will be far more intense than any human marriage experience?
- 3) Why is it evident that Paul uses the identifier of “*overcomers*” to reference all true believers rather than just some special elite group of Christians?
- 4) What are you most anticipating about life in the eternal state in the New Heavens and New Earth?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: God’s statements recorded in **Revelation 21:5–6** aptly summarize these final two chapters: “*Behold, I make all things new ... It is done.*” What began in Genesis is brought to completion in Revelation, as the following summary shows:

<u>Genesis</u>	<u>Revelation</u>
Heavens and earth created, 1:1	New heavens and earth, 21:1
Sun created, 1:16	No need of the sun, 21:23
The night established, 1:5	No night there, 22:5
The seas created, 1:10	No more seas, 21:1
The curse announced, 3:14–17	No more curse, 22:3
Death enters history, 3:19	No more death, 21:4
Man driven from the tree, 3:24	Man restored to paradise, 22:14
Sorrow and pain begin, 3:17	No more tears or pain, 21:4

Daniel Akin: Now we should address an important question: **Will God renovate the old creation**, as **Romans 8:19-22** seems to teach, **or will He completely recreate a new creation**, as **2 Peter 3:10-13** appears to affirm? This is not an easy question to answer. Might it be that there is something of a transformation of the old order through the destruction of the old order? I think we are on good ground to affirm some type of **continuity** between the old order and the new order, though the new will be radically superior. Perhaps the judgment of **2 Peter 3** is one of cleansing rather than total destruction (**Osborne**, Revelation, 730n4). What we can say for certain is, “There will be a whole new reality, a new kind of existence in which all the negatives of the “first” (**Gen 1**) world will be removed, all the discoloration by sin will be gone” (ibid., 730).

Richard Phillips: A better understanding is that of the **cleansing** and **renewal** of the cosmos after Christ returns. Instead of making “*all new things*,” Christ makes “*all things new*” (**Rev. 21:5**). In **Matthew 19:28**, Jesus spoke of “*the new world*” after he returns. In Greek, the word is *palingenesia*, that is, “*regeneration*,” suggesting an analogy between the spiritual rebirth of believers in coming to Jesus and the **transformation** of heaven and earth after Jesus returns. The

contrary idea, that Christ eliminates the original creation because of sin, holds alarming implications. Under this view, Satan would have succeeded in overthrowing the glorious work of God recorded in **Genesis 1**. Moreover, if God eradicates the present heavens and earth, then, as **Cornel Venema** writes, “we would have to conclude that the Triune God’s redemptive work discards rather than renews all things.”

If Christ’s return renews rather than replaces the universe, how do we understand Peter’s statement that “*the heavens will pass away*” and “*the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved*” (2 **Peter 3:10**)? The answer is seen in Peter’s analogy with the destruction of the flood in Noah’s time. The great flood did not destroy the world itself but rather removed sinners in judgment and cleansed the world of corruption. Just as Noah departed the ark into a renewed version of the old world, with sin swept away, Christ will usher his church into a creation that has been **pristinely cleansed and made glorious**. As **Venema** writes: “Once more, but now in a surpassing way, the creation will be a temple fit for the dwelling of God with his people.”

G.K. Beale: Despite the discontinuities, the new cosmos will be an identifiable counterpart to the old cosmos and a renewal of it, just as the body will be raised without losing its former identity.

Charles Ryrie: Perhaps the best way to understand this entire section is to regard the new Jerusalem as the **abode of the redeemed of all ages**. Conditions within the new Jerusalem are **conditions of eternity**. Of course the redeemed will be inhabiting the city during the Millennium as well as during eternity. Always the conditions within the city are eternal, even when the city is related to the Millennium. This is no different from the present, for loved ones in heaven are enjoying eternal conditions as is God even though these eternal conditions impinge on time (as, for instance, on the Mount of Transfiguration or this entire vision given to John in the revelation). In other words, the new Jerusalem is the abode of the redeemed during the Millennium and during eternity.

Buist Fanning: By focusing on the result that John does portray here and how the rest of the book has prepared the way for this change from old to new, we can come to some further understanding of the significance of this new creation. Several points are clear.

1. First, a radical change has come, and the old evil world seen at its worst in the preceding chapters has come to an end. Death, darkness, deprivation, threat, conflict, and rebellion against God are replaced by life, light, provision, security, community, and intimacy with God. There is clear discontinuity between the two creations.
2. Second, at no place is this change grounded in a cosmological dualism that regards physical existence and the material world as evil as opposed to the spiritual or heavenly realm as good. The existing material world is God’s good creation despite the ravages caused by the sin of his creatures. This passage shows heaven and earth brought together as the dwelling place of God and his people. And heaven is brought to earth instead of earth being eclipsed and left behind for heaven.
3. Third, signs of continuity with the old as created by God appear in the new creation, however radically it has been reformed. The new Jerusalem bears the same name as the old, and its layout and daily life are pictured in terms similar to the better features of the old. The paradise of **Revelation 22:1-3** mirrors the garden where God place his creatures originally (**Gen 1-2**).

4. And fourth, however much the new mirrors the old and is continuous with it, it clearly transcends and supersedes the old. It is far better and far more like what the Creator intended for the original creation. In this way it is analogous to the relationship between the mortal body and the resurrected body of Christ and of all who are his. There is unmistakable continuity with the old, but the new is better by far.

Grant Osborne: There are three major themes in the inaugural vision (21:1–8).

1. First, there is the end of the old aeon of sin (“*the first heaven and first earth have passed away*,” v. 1). Before the new order can be inaugurated, the old order has to be destroyed (also **Mark 13:31**; **1 Cor. 7:31**; **2 Pet. 3:10–13**). The “*sea*,” a symbol of evil, must disappear before the eternity of joy can begin.
2. Second, there is the continuation of the bridal theme from **19:7–8**. There the bride is pictured as ready for the wedding, and the guests are invited to the wedding supper. Here the bride is pictured as “*adorned for her husband*” (21:2), and her wedding adornment is the precious jewels of **21:18–21**.
3. Third, there is the uniting of heaven and earth, such that God now actually “*dwells*” with his people (21:3). All of Scripture longed for a closer relationship with God. In the OT, that focused on the Shekinah presence in the tabernacle and the temple; in the NT, it centered on the Shekinah presence of God in Jesus (cf. **John 1:14**). Since heaven has now become the “*new earth*,” the deprivations of the old order (tears, death, mourning, crying, pain) will be no more (**Rev. 21:4**).

John MacArthur: The reason we should have a **longing for heaven** is because God is there. And whom have we in heaven but Him? And whom do we desire on earth but Him? He should be our supreme affection, our supreme love, our supreme desire. And if He’s in heaven, then heaven should be the place we long to be. . .

We are living on a **disposable planet**; God does not intend for it to remain. The goals of all those who want to save the earth, the save-the-planet people are really wasting their time, because this one will be replaced by an eternal new heaven and new earth. In fact, the earth is not headed for an ecological crisis; I want to take that burden off your back. The earth is not headed for an ecological crisis, it is not headed for an ecological holocaust; it is headed for an **eschatological holocaust**. . .

The point that the writer is making here is that it is **new in terms of kind**, it’s different. The quality of it is completely different from the one we now know. And we won’t even have any remembrance of the one that now exists. . .

The sea is emblematic of a **water-based environment**. Man’s existence is water-based. You’d die if you get dehydrated. So what is he saying here? Well, what he’s saying is the new heaven and the new earth don’t operate on water anymore. Now that’s enough to tell you it’s going to be different. No more evaporation, distillation, and condensation. **New climatic conditions**. And whatever we are in our glorified form is not going to depend on a process that demands consumption of water. The new heaven and the whole new universe isn’t going to have to have a

whole lot of oceans. It won't have to have any; it won't have any. So in our glorified form, no water is needed.

You say, "Well, is there going to be any water at all there? I might get thirsty even there in heaven." Well, you probably won't. But in **Revelation 22** it says, "*He showed me a river of the water of life.*" That's the only water. It's not the H₂O kind, it's the water of what? **Life.**

So whatever the water of life is is what gives us life; but it's not the kind of water we know, it's not a chemical called H₂O. You say, "Well, why does he say that?" Well, just to point out that it's **different**. And that's about as profound a way to express its difference from the physical standpoint as any way he could say it; because if there's no water there and there's no sea there, then life is going to be so completely different than anything we could even understand in its glorified form. The eternal state is totally different. . .

He starts out with **the appearance of the new heaven and the new earth**; and then secondly, the **capital of the new heaven and new earth**. . . This is not the historic old Jerusalem and this is not the millennial Jerusalem, this is the **eternal city**. It is called the **holy city**, New Jerusalem. And this is holy, not because it is set apart to God, not because Christ is there; but it is holy now because every person in it is perfectly holy. And so, Jerusalem will have gone from a holiness by virtue of being devoted to God, to a holiness by virtue of being ruled by Christ, to a holiness by virtue by being occupied only by holy people. Everyone in it will be perfectly holy. **Chapter 20, verse 6 of Revelation**, "*Blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection that takes people to heaven.*" . . .

The Lord is now preparing a place for us in the Father's house, the Father's house is in the heavenly Jerusalem, or heaven as we know it, and some day the whole thing will descend into the eternal state, the new universe. . .

You know, in the very beginning of God's redemptive plan, you know what His purpose was? To go get a bride for His Son, wasn't it? It was to go get a bride for His Son. And He did. And by the time you come to this point in the chronology of Revelation, the bride is collected – all the Old Testament saints are incorporated into the final figure of the bride, all the tribulation saints are incorporated in it, all of those who were converted during the time of the kingdom, all of the church is included; and they're all in the bridal city, they're all encompassed in the bride that God has chosen for His Son. And the city descends with all the redeemed in it into the eternal state. . .

Verse 3 tells us the **supreme reality**: Three times it says, "*God is going to be among them.*" That's the supreme reality – fellowship with God, seeing Him as glorious light, worshiping Him, serving Him, and even being served by Him, as **Luke 12:35 to 40** pointed out. we have considered the **appearance**, the **capital**, and the **supreme reality** of the new heavens and the new earth. Here's a fourth point: **The changes**.

Now we're going to find out what life there will be like, and the only way it can be described to us really is with negatives. We cannot understand what we cannot understand. We cannot understand what we cannot perceive or what we cannot conceive or what we cannot experience. And so the only way we can understand what we can't see, what we can't understand, and what we can't experience, is to understand it by its difference from what we do experience. And so you have a **series of no mores or no longer**s, which will demonstrate for us the difference.

Charles Swindoll: Twelve “No Mores” in the New Heaven and Earth

1. No more sea —because chaos and calamity will be eradicated (21:1).
2. No more tears —because hurtful memories will be replaced (21:4).
3. No more death —because mortality will be swallowed up by life (21:4).
4. No more mourning —because sorrow will be completely comforted (21:4).
5. No more crying —because the sounds of weeping will be soothed (21:4).
6. No more pain —because all human suffering will be cured (21:4).
7. No more thirst —because God will graciously quench all desires (21:6).
8. No more wickedness —because all evil will be banished (21:8, 27).
9. No more temple —because the Father and Son are personally present (21:22).
10. No more night —because God’s glory will give eternal light (21:23-25; 22:5).
11. No more closed gates —because God’s doors will always be open (21:25).
12. No more curse —because Christ’s blood has forever lifted that curse (22:3).

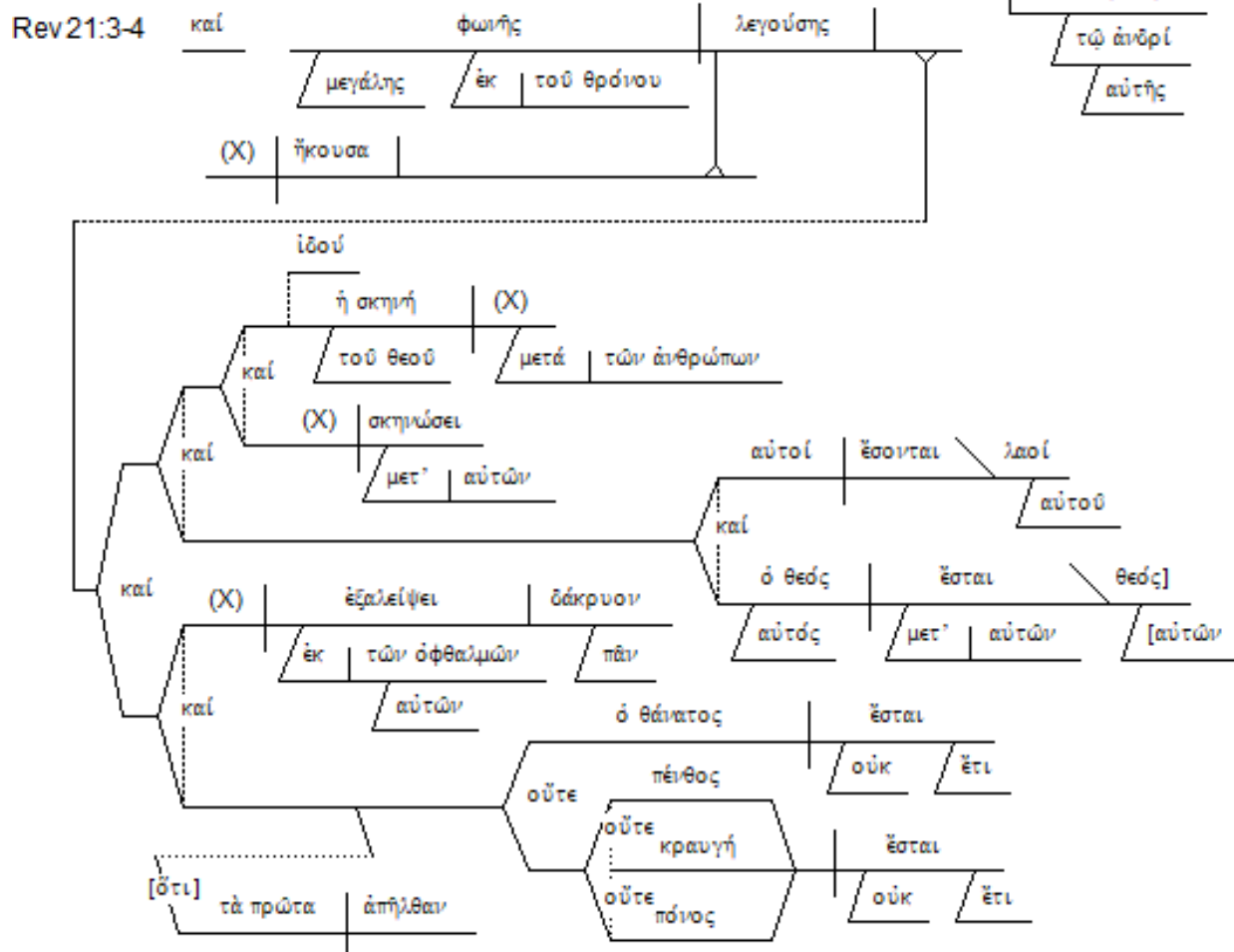
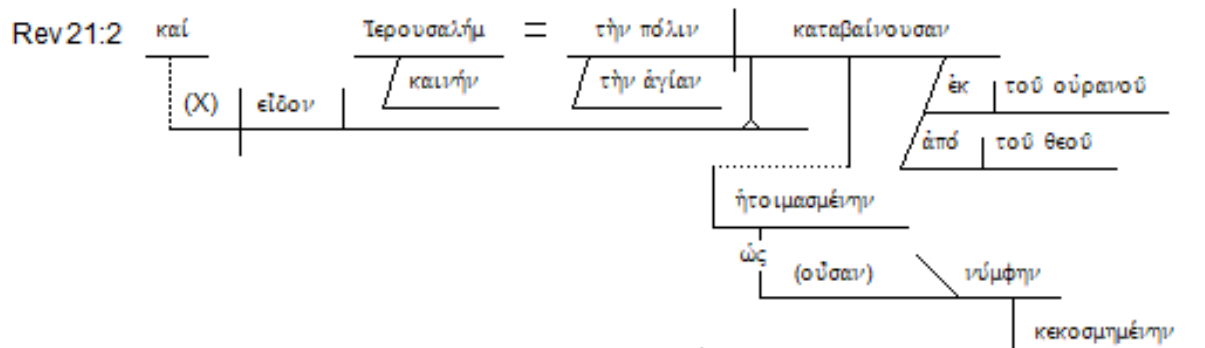
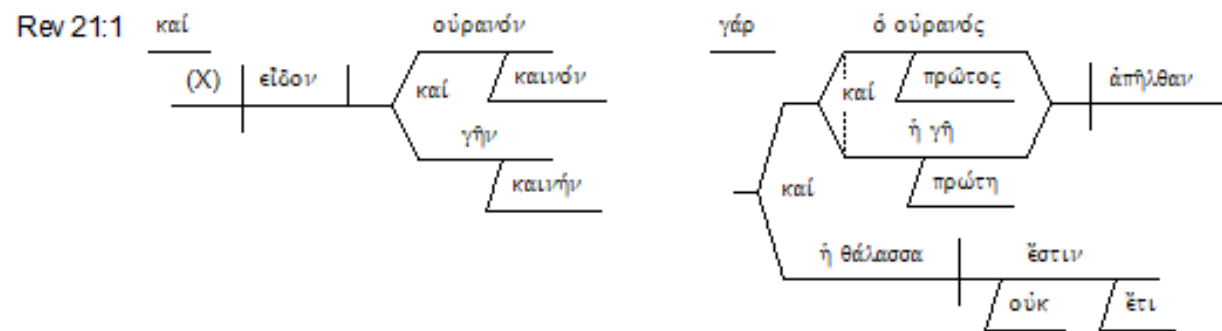
S. Lewis Johnson: Now, the next statement is, to my mind, one of the greatest in the Bible. We read, “*And he shall dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be among them.*” . . . that’s **covenantal language**. . . You go back and read the account of the covenants and you will find out that that’s the climactic promise of the covenants that God makes with men. That is, they shall be his people, he shall be their God.

And here the final consummation of it all is found right here. What one has called the unfluctuating joy of the future is bound up in God fulfilling the ancient unconditional covenants, the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the new, and now we have them before us: “*He shall dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be among them.*” But you know there is something else there in that verse that is very interesting to me. We read, “*And God himself shall be among them.*”

[Better translation] instead of “*God himself shall be among them*” that “*God with them shall be their God.*”

Now, I wonder if you have ever wondered, I know that you have, why when our Lord is announced by the angel as to be born of Mary and it is said of him that his name shall be **Immanuel**, why in the whole of the Bible, all of the New Testament, we have no reference to our Lord being called Immanuel? Isn’t that interesting? Nowhere. It would seem, incidentally, that if anyone was writing the Bible apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he would surely have put in a sentence about his name being **Immanuel**, which is very interesting for New Testament criticism — and I’m using that in the technical sense of the study of the New Testament by scholars. Because if it’s true that the writers of the New Testament are people who looked at the Old Testament and then made up the facts of our Lord’s life in order to agree with what they saw in the Old Testament as modern scholars have often tried to tell us, then surely we would have, in the gospel accounts, an incident which he is called Immanuel, but we do not. But if this is the way in which we have to read it, and both conservative and liberal scholars are inclined to think that it is so, then we do have that: “*God with them,*” for **that’s the meaning of Immanuel, God with us.** “*God with them shall be their God.*” “*Immanuel shall be their God.*” In **Isaiah chapter 7, verse 14** finds its **consummation** here. And that’s simply in the birth of the Son of the virgin, but the full meaning of it is right here, “*God with them shall be their God.*” **What a magnificent thing it is to think about heaven.**

Leedy Greek Diagram:

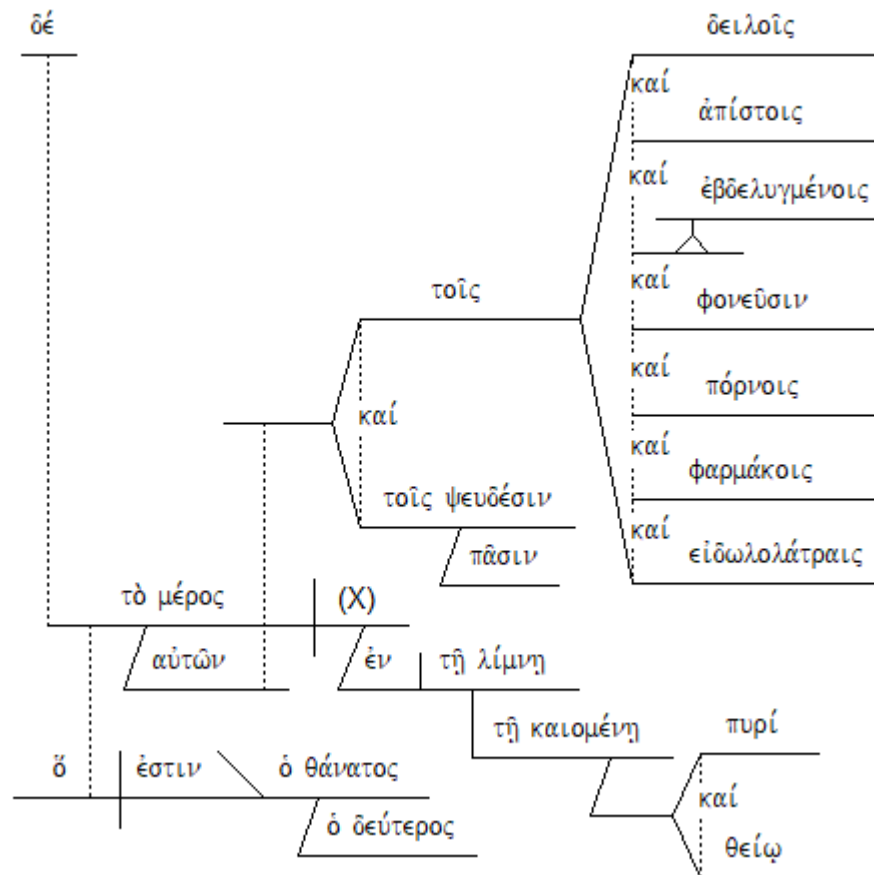


Rev 21:6 καὶ (X) εἶπεν μοι (X) γέγοναν ὅτι οἱ λόγοι εἰσιν πιστοὶ οὗτοι καὶ ἀληθινοί

Rev 21:7

ὁ νικῶν	κληρονομήσει	ταῦτα
καί	(X)	ἔσομαι θεός
καί	αὐτῷ	αὐτός ἔσται υἱός
	μοι	

Rev 21:8



TEXT: Revelation 21:9-21

TITLE: DESCRIPTION OF NEW JERUSALEM

BIG IDEA:

NEW JERUSALEM IS PRESENTED AS GLORIOUS IN APPEARANCE WITH MAGNIFICENT ARCHITECTURE AND COSTLY BUILDING MATERIALS

INTRODUCTION:

Gordon Fee: The point of all this, of course, is to indicate how **great** is the “*new Jerusalem*,” where God and the Lamb sit enthroned, and God’s people, “*his servants, will serve him.*”

John MacArthur: By the way, everything has **perfect symmetry**. Everything has perfect balance. Everything is in perfect order. That reflects a God who demands symmetry, balance and order. That’s the way the mind of God operates. The mind of God is incredibly balanced and ordered; very different than the chaotic kind of art and music that’s characteristic of our culture.

Albert Mohler: This passage marks the beginning of the final vision (21:9 – 22:5). Another angel, holding one of the seven bowls, invites John to see the bride of the Lamb, and he is carried away in the spirit to a high mountain (21:9-10). This vision constitutes an expanded presentation of the new Jerusalem introduced in **verses 1-8** and portrays the dazzling beauty of the holy City coming down to earth from heaven. This passage parallels much of Ezekiel’s vision of the glorious new and final temple (**Eze 40-48**), which Ezekiel also saw from a high mountain (**Eze 40:2**). The new Jerusalem, however, is itself a temple city (**Rev 21:22**) because it is where God and the Lamb will dwell with the holy people forever. While it is described as a city, it is also the glorified people of God, who are the bride of Christ. Christians are the “*living stones*” forming the true temple of God in Christ, who is the chosen and precious cornerstone (**1 Pe 2:4-7**).

Alan Johnson: In John’s description of the city, precious stones, brilliant colors, and the effulgence of light abound. The problem of the literalness of the city has received much attention. If the city is the bride and the bride the glorified community of God’s people in their eternal life, there is little question that John’s descriptions are primarily symbolic of that glorified life. This in no way diminishes the reality behind the imagery. In the most suitable language available to John, much of it drawn from the OT, he shows us something of the reality of the eschatological kingdom of God in its glorified existence.

Buist Fanning: As he resumes this theme [the glorious appearance of the Lamb’s bride], John launches the final major section of Revelation, parallel to **17:1 – 19:10**, in which he completes the contrast between the great prostitute representing Babylon, Satan’s evil city, and the Lamb’s bride representing Jerusalem, God’s holy city. These sections begin and end in corresponding ways to reinforce the contrast. . .

The surprising correlation that the angel makes in **vv. 9-10** (“*the bride, the wife of the Lamb*” is “*the holy city Jerusalem*”) shows that what these symbols represent is both a people and a place. Despite the figurative language used in both phrases and throughout the following description, we are not forced to choose between these two symbols. The two ideas of people living in

intimacy with the God who loved them and chose them to be his forever (the bride) and living in vibrant community with one another, enjoying God's abundant provision and security (the city, a place), easily cohere. Both figures bring something important to our understanding of the future reality they point to. This does not require an either-or-choice.

I. (:9-11) GLORIOUS APPEARANCE OF NEW JERUSALEM

A. (:9-10) Bride / Holy City Makes her Appearance

1. (:9) Presentation of the Bride

*“And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls
full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying,
‘Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’”*

John MacArthur: **Why is it called a city that is a bride?** Because it draws its character from its occupants. And its occupants are the eternal bride of Christ, now enlarged beyond the church to encompass all the redeemed of all the ages. When you go back in to **chapter 19, verses 7 to 9**, and you talk about the bride there and the marriage supper of the Lamb, of course, the bride is the church. We find that very clearly in **Ephesians chapter 5**. But as you move along in the unfolding of the eschatological plan, the bride enlarges to encompass all the redeemed. . .

The city is like a bride, because the people are forever united to God and to the Lamb. It takes on the character of its inhabitants. It is a city with virgin beauty, virgin virtue, and intimate relationship to the living God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Robert Mounce: The angel is undoubtedly the one who in **17:1** summoned John to witness the judgment of the great prostitute. This seems to be the purpose of the identical introductions. It also draws attention to the **contrast** between the great prostitute (the wicked city Babylon) and the bride of the Lamb (the holy city Jerusalem). One is of the earth, symbolizing the unbridled passion of evil, and the other descends from heaven, the **epitome of all that is pure and beautiful**.

2. (:10) Personal Tour of the Holy City

*“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain,
and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,”*

Robert Mounce: **Verses 10–14** in the Greek text comprise one compound sentence that describes the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven.

John MacArthur: It is not the creation of heaven here, it is simply the descent of what already existed from eternity past. God creates a new heaven and a new earth in the sense of a created universe. But descending into that created universe is an already eternally existing dwelling place that has always been the abode of God and the abode of the redeemed and the holy angels. And even once was the abode of Satan and demons who fell and were cast out.

B. (:11) Brilliant Glory

*“having the glory of God.
Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.”*

John MacArthur: So the first thing that strikes John as he is taken to this high mountain and he looks up and sees the holy city, the new Jerusalem, is that it has the **glory of God**; that blazing out of the middle is this light. He is the light of heaven, He is the light of the city. And it comes out of that city, and I believe it'll fill all of the new heavens and the new earth. And it calls attention to His majesty and His wonder and His character. . .

Now when you think about jasper you've got to think in terms of ancient understanding, because our modern jasper is opaque; but this one is not. *Iaspis* is the Greek word; and the Hebrew word is almost identical, *yashepheh*. And what you have here is not a translation, but a transliteration. The best understanding of that term is that it's a **diamond**, crystal clear; it is a diamond. . .

So the city is like one massive perfect diamond gem, flashing the reflection of God's glory in infinite light – the ultimate light show, believe me. All of eternity then becomes bathed in the radiating splendor of God. And that is the remarkable general appearance. It is like a massive – and when I say massive, I mean massive, because it is fifteen hundred miles squared, or cubed really, fifteen hundred miles cubed, one massive crystal-clear diamond gem, with the glory of God shining out from the center of it and splattering its rainbow colors all over the new heavens and the new earth.

Albert Mohler: John first gives a description of the outside of the new Jerusalem as an eternal Most Holy Place, shining with the glory of God. The glory of God radiates with the sparkling and dazzling beauty of precious gemstones (cf. **4:3**). John compares the glory of God to the greenish or reddish hue of jasper, but he describes it as crystal clear, unlike the translucent character of normal jasper, suggesting something more like a diamond.

Charles Swindoll: Nothing on earth even begins to compare to what God has prepared for us because any choice of words fails to capture the breathtaking intensity of His glory.

II. (:12-14) GREAT WALL AND IMPRESSIVE GATES

A. (:12a) Fortress Type Wall

“It had a great and high wall,”

Albert Mohler: The city is surrounded by a massive wall with 12 gates named after the 12 tribes of Israel, and each gate is protected by an angel (**21:12-13**). The wall with its gates indicates that the city is totally secure and safe from all threats (**Isa 26:1-2; Eze 40:5-6; Zec 2:5**). The 12 tribes of Israel – the original 12 sons of Israel who represent the redeemed people of God in the Old Testament – serve as the entry point into God's city (**Eze 48:31-34**).

Kendell Easley: For any ancient city, one sure sign of importance was the magnificence of its wall and its gates. For all other cities, they served an important military defense function; this city needs no such protection. John's initial impression is of a wall great and high. The exact specifications are delayed until **verse 17**. Earthly cities often had military guards for the gates, especially in times of security alerts. The heavenly city has guardians to beautify its appearance: twelve angels at the gates.

B. (:12b) Number, Guarding and Naming of the Gates

1. Number of the Gates

“with twelve gates,”

2. Guarding of the Gates

“and at the gates twelve angels;”

3. Names on the Gates

*“and names were written on them,
which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.”*

Robert Thomas: It is significant that John brings together the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles here, and makes a **distinction** between them. Jesus did the same earlier (**Mat. 19:28; Luke 22:30**). This distinction shows the wrongness of identifying the twelve tribes in **Rev. 7:4-8+** with the church.

C. (:13) Location of the Gates

1. East

“There were three gates on the east”

2. North

“and three gates on the north”

3. South

“and three gates on the south”

4. West

“and three gates on the west.”

D. (:14) Foundation Stones of the Wall

1. Number

“And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones,”

Albert Mohler: The city rests on 12 foundation stones named after the 12 apostles (**Mt 10:2-4**). It is established on the sure foundation of the gospel of Jesus delivered faithfully by the apostles (**Eph 2:20**).

Alan Johnson: Foundations of ancient cities usually consisted of extensions of the rows of huge stones that made up the wall, down to the bedrock. Jerusalem’s first-century walls and foundation stones have recently been excavated. Huge stones, some of which are about five feet wide, four feet high, and thirty feet long, weighing eighty to one hundred tons each and going down some fourteen to nineteen layers below the present ground level, have been found.

2. Names

“and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

Tony Garland: Who will be listed as the twelfth?

- Judas?
- Matthias?
- Paul?

While it is impossible to know, and perhaps not of great importance, we are inclined to think the

twelfth name will be that of the Apostle Paul, for it seems impossible that his name would not appear on a foundation as a major contributor to the early church and the New Testament.

III. (:15-21) DIMENSIONS AND COSTLY BUILDING MATERIALS

Albert Mohler: The purpose of the measuring (as in **Rev 11:1-2**) is to guarantee it as eternally protected by God's power. The city is laid out in a perfect cube shape – with an equal length, width, height, and depth. The significance of the cube shape is that it is the same dimensions as the Most Holy Place, where God dwelled in the earthly temple, which means the entire new Jerusalem is the Most Holy Place (**1Ki 6:20; Eze 45:2-3**). It is 12,000 stadia (about 1,400 miles) in length, making it a massive city with walls 144 cubits (or about 216 feet) thick. The use of the number 12 conveys the idea of completeness or perfection. The measurement of the city is a number that represents absolute perfection: 12 times 10 cubed. The walls are also represented as absolutely perfect since 144 is 12 squared. Not only is this city larger than the entire Roman Empire of John's day, it symbolically represents the entirety of the redeemed people of God now perfected in glory.

A. (:15-17) Cubic Dimensions of the Gates and Its Wall

1. (:15) Gold Measuring Rod

“And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall.”

Grant Osborne: The measuring connotes God's **ownership** and **protection** of his people. The city of God is forever guaranteed the presence and protection of God. This is in keeping with the negatives of this section—no tears, no pain, no sinners, no sun or moon, no night, no impurity, no shame or deceit—God has removed them all! In **Rev. 11:1–2** the measuring referred to God's presence spiritually with his people in the midst of their present travails. Here the measuring is **God's final and eternal presence**, and the travails are over.

Robert Mounce: The measuring in **chapter 11** was to insure protection; here it serves to portray the enormous size and perfect symmetry of the eternal dwelling place of the faithful.

2. (:16) Cubic Structure

“And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.”

Alternate View:

John Walvoord: The city's shape is not mentioned, but judging from its square dimensions some have assumed it to be a **cube**. Inspiration, however, does not indicate the shape; it also could be in the form of a **pyramid** with sides sloping to a peak at the height indicated. This would have certain advantages, not necessarily because it is smaller, but because this shape provides a vehicle for the river of life to proceed out of the throne of God, which seems to be at the top, to find its way to the bottom, assuming our experience of gravity will be somewhat normal also in the new earth.

3. (:17) Wall Measurement

“And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards,

according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.”

John MacArthur: Do you realize that an inch is an inch whether you’re a human or an angel? A foot is a foot whether you’re a man or an angel? I love that, that’s put there for the spiritualizers who are going to say, “Well, of course, angelic measurements would be different than human measurements.” No, they’re not.

B. (:18-21) Costly Building Materials

1. (:18a) Wall Made of Jasper

“And the material of the wall was jasper;”

Tony Garland: Jasper was the last stone in the breastplate of the high priest (**Ex. 28:20; 39:13**). It was also one of the stones which was Satan’s covering in the garden of God (**Eze. 28:13**).

2. (:18b) City Made of Transparent Pure Gold

“and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.”

Grant Osborne: The reason both the city and its street are constructed of transparent gold is probably the same theme as the sea of glass in **4:6**: its own glory is insufficient, and it can only radiate through its transparency the incomparably greater glory of God himself. The splendor of earthly gold is inadequate; it must be transparent so God’s glory can shine through it.

3. (:19-20) Foundation Stones Made of Precious Stones

“The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone.”

Albert Mohler: John continues to describe the beauty, worth and glory of the new Jerusalem in terms of valuable and colorful gemstones (**Rev 21:18-21**). The imagery pictures the city stunningly adorned with a variety of precious stones, but it also reinforces the priestly nature of the people of God (**1:5-6; Ex 28:3-28**).

a. Jasper -- Green

“The first foundation stone was jasper;”

b. Sapphire -- Blue

“the second, sapphire;”

c. Chalcedony – Greenish or Gray

“the third, chalcedony;”

d. Emerald -- Green

“the fourth, emerald;”

e. Sardonyx – Red and White

“the fifth, sardonyx;”

f. Sardius – Fiery Red

“the sixth, sardius;”

g. Chrysolite – Golden Yellow
“the seventh, chrysolite;”

h. Beryl – Aqua Green
“the eighth, beryl;”

i. Topaz – Greenish Yellow
“the ninth, topaz;”

j. Chrysoprase – Golden Green
“the tenth, chrysoprase;”

k. Jacinth -- Violent
“the eleventh, jacinth;”

l. Amethyst -- Purple
“the twelfth, amethyst.”

John MacArthur: Now what you have, of course, is just a blazing, blazing panoply of these brilliant colors that the light of God’s glory is shining through, as they make up the foundation of the heavenly city. The general picture then is one of just unbelievable beauty, indescribable beauty, a spectrum of color blazing everywhere. The light of the gold, the diamond, transparent city shining through the diamond walls, pushing its light through all of these colored jewels, forms a scene of dazzling, wondrous, incredible beauty.

4. (:21a) Gates Made of Pearls

*“And the twelve gates were twelve pearls;
each one of the gates was a single pearl.”*

Tony Garland: The pearls may stand as a testimony that the redeemed from among the Gentiles, who responded to God in faith, are no longer considered unclean and can pass through the gates.

John Phillips: All other precious gems are metals or stones, but a pearl is a gem formed within the oyster. It is the only one formed by living flesh. The humble oyster receives an irritation or a wound, and around the offending article that has penetrated and hurt it, the oyster builds a pearl. The pearl, we might say, is **the answer of the oyster to that which injured it**. And the glory land is God’s answer in Christ to the wicked men who crucified heaven’s beloved and put Him to open shame. How like God it is to make the gates of the new Jerusalem pearls. The saints as they come and go will be forever reminded as they pass the gates of glory, that access to God’s home is only because of Calvary.

Think of the size of those gates. Think of the supernatural pearls from which they are made. What gigantic suffering is symbolized by those gates of pearl. Throughout the endless ages we shall be reminded by those pearly gates of the immensity of the sufferings of Christ. Those pearls hung eternally, as it were, at the access routes to glory will remind us forever of One who hung upon a tree, and whose answer to those who injured Him was to invite them to forever share His home.

5. (:21b) Street Made of Pure Gold

“And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”

Kendell Easley: Because we are so accustomed to clear glass, we have a hard time remembering that ancient glass was usually dark and filled with flaws. Only kings and the extremely wealthy had anything like clear glass. Thus, for the city street to be transparent as glass (revealing that it was flawless) shows that every citizen of the heavenly city will have access to far more than the wealthiest human who ever lived. It is also worth noting that in the ancient temple of Israel, the priests walked on gold floors; now every citizen has the same privilege and beyond (**1 Kgs. 6:30**).

Charles Swindoll: The streets of the city will be made of pure gold (**21:21**). Imagine that! In the new Jerusalem the materials we adore the most in this world will be put to common use. The marble-paved streets of Ephesus, where the apostle John lived out his days, were unusually extravagant, earning Ephesus a reputation as one of the most opulent cities of the Roman Empire. But the opulence of the new Jerusalem will far exceed that of Ephesus or any other city. Gold will be trodden upon like asphalt. There will be no vanity, no materialism, no envy or greed. Best of all, no one will be poor in a place that paves its streets with gold.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what sense is the holy city – the New Jerusalem – the bride?
- 2) Why are the measurements and symmetry of construction so important?
- 3) How excited are you to spend eternity with the redeemed saints of all ages – OT as well as NT believers joined together in worshipping the Lord?
- 4) Why are precious stones and costly construction materials so appropriate for the eternal abode of the presence of God and His redeemed people?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Joe Anady: There have been times in our study of the book of Revelation that a passage feels overwhelming to preach. This is because many of the visions shown to John are complex. The visions shown to John and recorded for us in the book of Revelation are **interconnected**. Many of the visions found early in the book of Revelation anticipate later visions, and visions found later in the book of Revelation harken back to earlier visions, so that the individual visions of the book of Revelation are interwoven. And the same thing can be said concerning the relationship between the book of Revelation and the rest of scripture. The visions shown to John constantly connect with Old Testament texts, showing how the prophecies, types and shadows of Old Testament find their fulfillment in Christ during the church age or at the end of time. When I think of the book of Revelation I think of a **rich tapestry**. The closer you look at it the more

aware you become of the complexity of its parts and its interconnectedness. The further back that you stand from the book the more simple, clear and beautiful the picture appears. Here is one of those passages where the interconnectedness of the book of Revelation is most apparent.

<https://emmausrbc.org/2018/02/25/sermon-manuscript-bride-christ-glory-revelation-219-27/>

John Walvoord: In interpreting the description of the heavenly city, the **problem of symbolic interpretation** comes to the fore perhaps more than in any other section of Revelation. Even the most conservative scholars are not necessarily in agreement on the extent to which this description should be taken literally.

The decision depends ultimately upon the considered judgment of the expositor. Certain guidelines, however, can be laid down.

John actually saw what he recorded, and what he saw is to some extent interpreted for him.

Obviously what he saw transcended any earthly experience, and it was necessary for him to describe what he saw in terms that were meaningful to him. This must not be construed, however, as an inaccurate description because John was guided by the Holy Spirit when he wrote, and the description must be viewed as accurate insofar as it was possible to communicate what he saw. The passage itself, however, as in the description of the gold that is transparent (21:21), suggests strongly that the material substances were different from what exists on this present earth.

Of major importance are the facts that John actually saw a city that was inhabited by believers of all ages, and that God Himself was present in it. Until further light is given, it is probably a safe procedure to accept the description of this city as corresponding to the physical characteristics attributed to it.

Richard Phillips: We may wonder why John is shown this vision with its emphasis on the holiness and glory of God. The answer can only be that his readers were to **coordinate their present lives in this world with their destination in the age to come**. If our destiny is to dwell in a holy city in the light of God, to radiate the light of God's glory like a most radiant jewel, then this surely shapes our calling now. This is true of the church corporately. **H. B. Swete** wrote that the church is to shine as God's holy city in the whole of her witness to Christ: "her teaching, her sacraments, her whole corporate life—the light of tens of thousands of saintly lives." Today, mass gatherings of Christians tend to emphasize the secular: worldly styles, worldly goals, and worldly methods; relying more on the splendor of the latest worldly technology than on the shining forth of God through his Word. In this world, holy churches may often seem small and insignificant, but they anticipate a great city in which all of God's people will be gathered in the end for the holy display of his glorious perfections.

What is true of the church corporately is true of Christians individually. If your destiny is to reflect the glory of God in holy beauty, then there should be a sacred quality about the entirety of your present life. Paul pointed out that Christians are not to blend into the dark world around us or to fall into the sin-corrupted lifestyles common to this age. Instead, he called Christians to be "*blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life*" (Phil. 2:15–16). . .

Realizing that God’s purpose in our lives now is not for happiness but for holiness will transform our attitude about trials and sorrows. The story is told of a Christian man who was staggered by great losses so that he wondered what God was doing in his life. As he walked dejectedly through the city, he encountered a construction site where a great cathedral was about to be finished. A stonemason caught his eye, working carefully on a decorative piece, and the man asked him what he was doing. The worker said, “I am shaping this down here so that it will fit up there.” The Christian realized that this was the answer to God’s working in his life. His destiny was not to be fulfilled in this age but in the next, and God was using trials to shape him in holiness for the holy city that is to come.

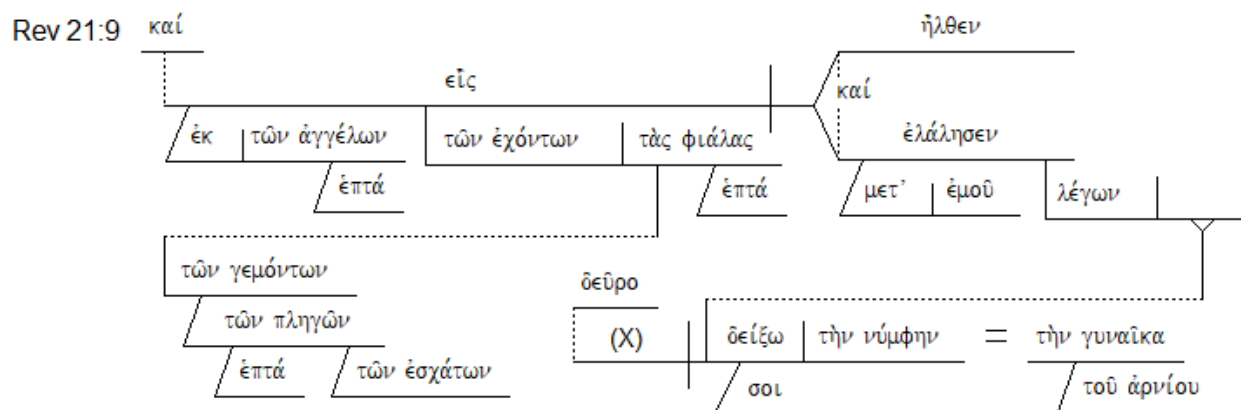
Brad Mills: The combined image of a **Bride** and a **City** show us how God is perfecting a people for himself. He is completing the work that he began. Those who were justified are also being sanctified and will eventually be glorified. The Bride doesn’t walk down the aisle until she is **fully adorned**. The New Jerusalem is only populated by **holy citizens**.

That is why we strive for holiness without which “*no one will see the Lord*” (**Heb. 12:14**). Holiness is far more important than happiness. If your happiness were God’s primary aim, then he would never ordain suffering. He would always want you to be healthy and wealthy and prosperous.

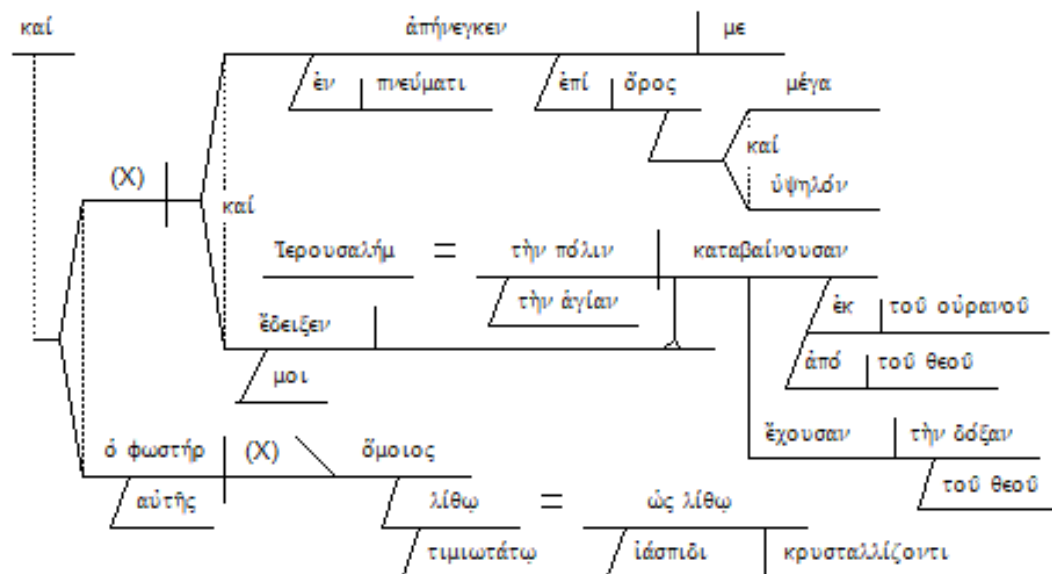
If happiness is your priority, then holiness will be compromised.

<https://gracefresno.com/sermons/the-new-jerusalem-revelation-219-21/>

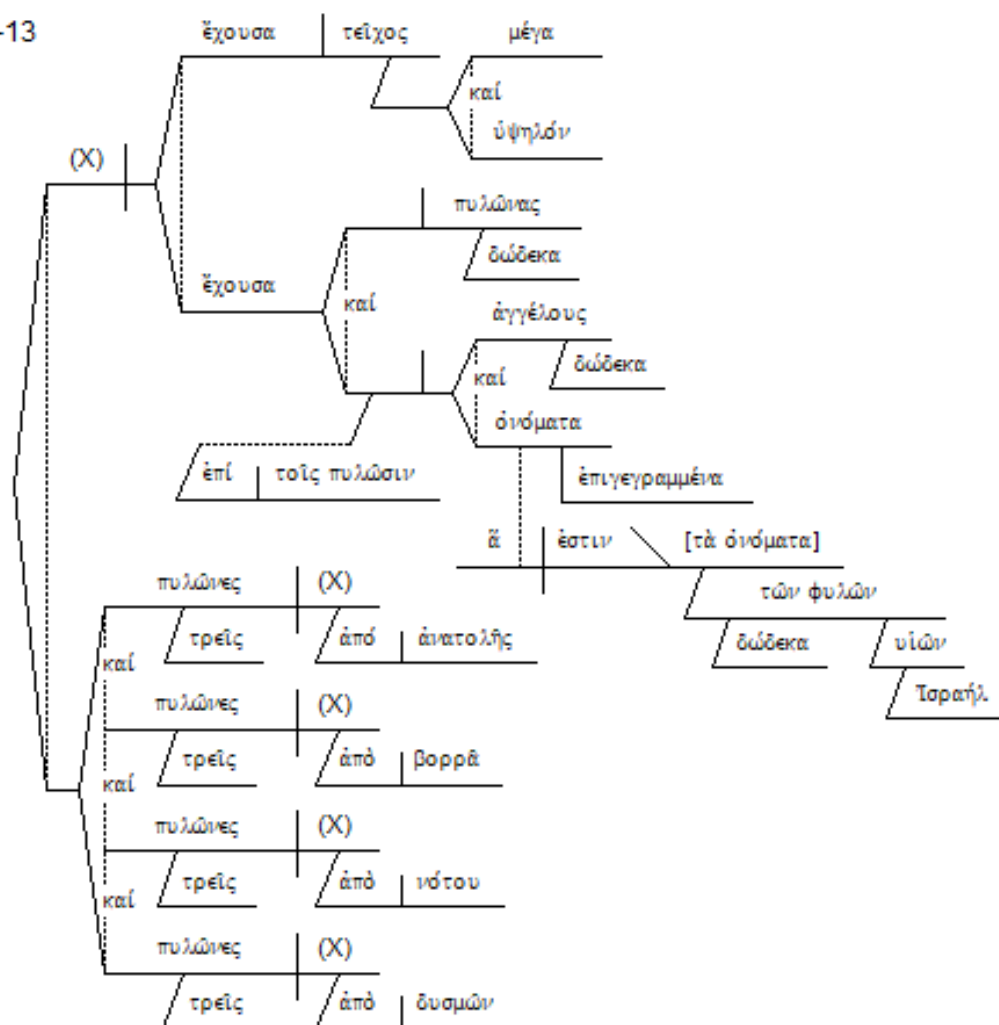
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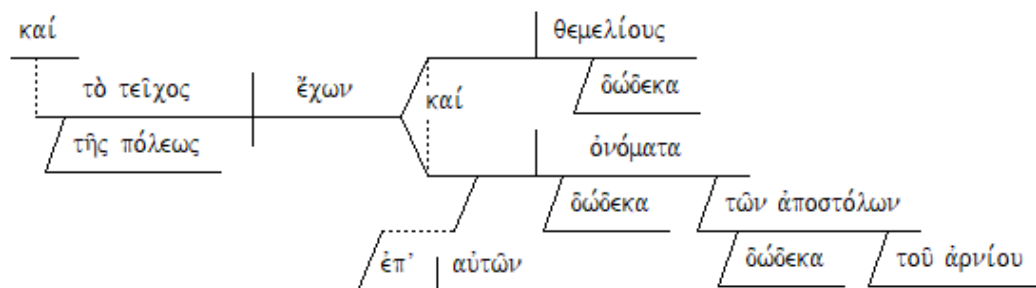
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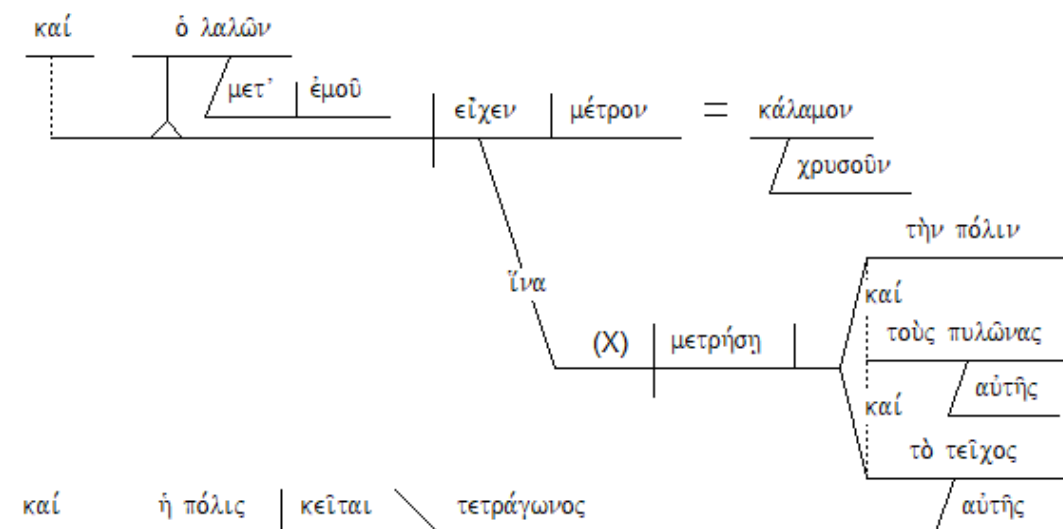
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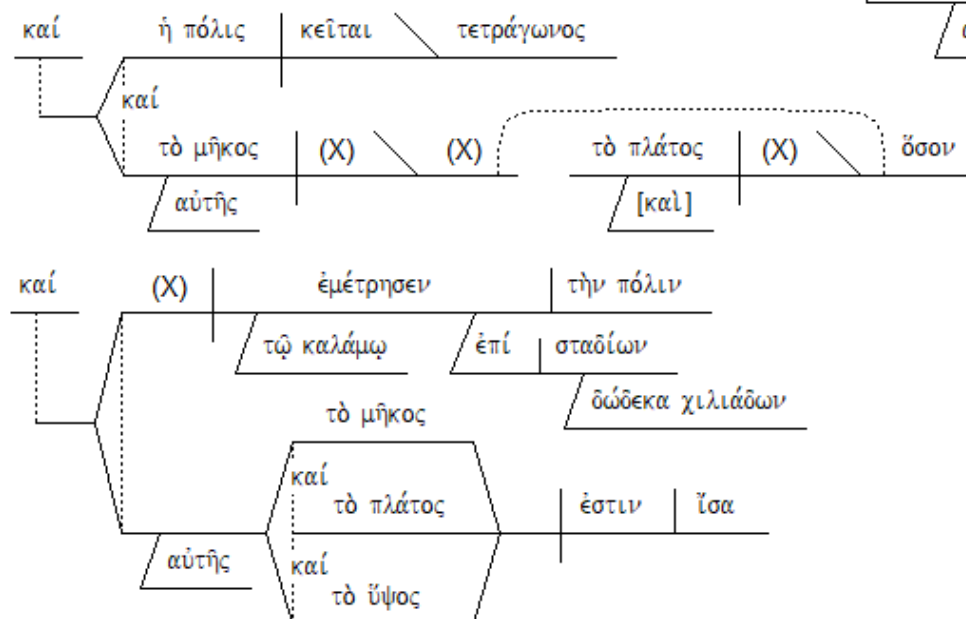
Rev 21:14



Rev 21:15



Rev 21:16



Rev21:17 καί

(X)	ἐμέτρησεν	τὸ τεῖχος
	μέτρον	αὐτῆς πηγῶν
	ἀνθρώπου	ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τεσσάρων
	ὃ ἐστίν	ἀγγέλου

Rev21:18

καί	ἡ ἐνδώμησις	(X)	ἱασπις
	τοῦ τείχους		
καί	αὐτῆς		
	ἡ πόλις	(X)	χρυσίον
		καθαρόν	ὅμοιον
			ὕδω
			καθαρῶ

Rev 21:19-21

καί	οἱ θεμέλιοι	κεκοσμημένοι		
	τοῦ τείχους	λίθω		
	τῆς πόλεως	παντί	τιμίω	
	ὁ θεμέλιος	(X)	ἱασπις	
	ὁ πρῶτος			ὁ δεύτερος (X) σάπφειρος
	ὁ τρίτος	(X)	χαλκηδών	ὁ τέταρτος (X) σμάραγδος
	ὁ πέμπτος	(X)	σαρδόνις	ὁ ἕκτος (X) σάρδιον
	ὁ ἑβδομος	(X)	χρυσόλιθος	ὁ ὄγδοος (X) βήρυλλος
	ὁ ἕνατος	(X)	τοπάζιον	ὁ δέκατος (X) χρυσόπρασος
	ὁ ἐνδέκατος	(X)	ὑάκινθος	ὁ δωδέκατος (X) ἀμέθυστος
	οἱ πυλώνες	(X)	μαργαρίται	
	δωδεκα	δωδεκα		
καί	εἰς	τῶν πυλῶνων	ἡν	
	ἕκαστος	ἀνὰ	ἐξ	μαργαρίτου
	ἡ πλατεία	(X)	χρυσίον	ἑνός
	τῆς πόλεως	καθαρόν	ὡς	ὕαλος (X)
			διαυγής	

TEXT: Revelation 21:22-27

TITLE: THE SHEKINAH GLORY OF NEW JERUSALEM

BIG IDEA:

3 DEFINING REALITIES OF THE ETERNAL STATE –

- **HOUSES THE PRESENCE OF GOD,**
- **MANIFESTS THE BRILLIANCE OF GOD’S GLORY**
- **AND CONTAINS DEDICATED WORSHIPERS**

INTRODUCTION:

Grant Osborne: The rest of the chapter provides a glimpse of the holiness, glory, and joy that will typify life in the eternal city. It consists of a series of negative statements telling what of this earthly sphere will have no part in the city followed by a γάρ (*gar, for*) clause providing the reason for the removal (**21:22, 23, 25**, with **21:27** having the negative without the γάρ clause). In addition, two parenthetical comments regarding the “*nations*” (**21:24, 26**) further clarify the themes in the surrounding context. The passage as a whole tells what conditions will characterize the New Jerusalem. . .

The final section of **21:9–27** continues the theme of **21:4** regarding all the negatives of the old earth that are to be removed from the celestial city. There is no temple because all that was signified in the earthly temple (the presence of God and the relationship between him and his people) are now finalized, so the temple is indeed God and the Lamb with his people (**21:22**). There is no need for external sources of light (**21:23, 25**) because God’s Shekinah glory and the presence of the Lamb illumine the city. Therefore, all the glory of the nations are surrendered to God. This culminates the mission theme in Scripture. As Jesus said, “*The gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world . . . and then the end will come*” (**Matt. 24:14**). Thus, the nations have been evangelized (the missionary journeys of Paul repeated throughout church history), and those who responded to the gospel’s proclamation now enter the eternal city. This is an incredible moment, one the evangelizing church constantly awaits with all its heart. Like **21:1–8**, this section also ends with a warning to those who are “*impure, shameful, and deceitful*” that they will have no place in the New Jerusalem (**21:27**).

Albert Mohler: An intriguing feature of the new Jerusalem is what it does not have: it does not have a temple because God and the Lamb dwell there. What made the temple in Israel special was its purpose as God’s dwelling place in the land with his people. Most Israelites were only permitted to enter the temple courts, since only the priests could actually enter the temple sanctuary in the new Jerusalem, all of God’s redeemed people have direct access to God at all times throughout the entire city. What is more, there is no longer any need for the sun and moon because the city is illuminated by God’s own presence (**v. 23; Isa 60:19-20**). The darkness of night is no more. Though God’s earthly temple was to be a house of prayer for the nations (**Isa 56:7; Mt 21:13**), Israel had made it exclusive and had corrupted it, but now eternal access is guaranteed because the gates will never shut. The temple city of the new Jerusalem is filled with people from every nation, tribe, people, and language redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (**Rev 5:9; 7:9**). Only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life enter it because it is a pure city populated by the purified people of God. This is nothing less than heaven on earth.

I. (:22) THE PRESENCE OF GOD – ACCESS TO WORSHIP -- NO PHYSICAL TEMPLE NEEDED IN NEW JERUSALEM

*“And I saw no temple in it,
for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.”*

Grant Osborne: We must remember that the major religious feature of the temple was that God resided there. The entire Book of Ezekiel ends with the new name of the eschatological city, “**THE LORD IS THERE**” (48:35). It was his **Shekinah presence** in the Holy of Holies that made the temple sacred. But now he physically resides among his people (**Rev. 21:3**), and the entire city has been made into a Holy of Holies (21:16). As **Park** (1995: 209–10) says, “Just as the NJ [New Jerusalem] is more than a place, i.e., denoting the community of God’s people, the temple is more than a place, i.e., denoting the presence of God and the Lamb in the community of his people.” Thus, when his presence among his people is final and eternal, there is no need for a temple. . .

Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple (**Mark 13:2** par.) and said to the Samaritan woman, “*A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem*” (**John 4:21**). Stephen said that “*the Most High does not live in houses made by men*” (**Acts 7:47**). In **Heb. 9** the furniture of the tabernacle (**vv. 1–5**) has been replaced by the new covenant Christ mediated with his blood (**vv. 11–15**). In Revelation the temple is heavenly (**7:15; 11:19; 14:17; 15:5**), and in **chapter 21** it comes to earth in the form of the New Jerusalem. Once again, there is no temple in the eternal city partly because it is the Holy of Holies itself.

John MacArthur: We will be the **true worshipers** that the Father has always sought. Our worship will be pure and true and perfect. We will be worshiping in perfect spirit and in perfect truth in His eternal presence. And I think it’s interesting that that’s the first thing that John noted. Because it was important to him; it was priority to him. After all, he was the one that wrote about God seeking true worshipers. He was the one who was so concerned about God being worshiped, and he was the one who had been taking through all of these tremendous visions in the book of Revelation and been instructed about how important worship was and what happened to people who didn’t. And he had seen glimpses of heaven where worship was the constant occupation. And so, naturally, the first thing he would look for, when he was taken to the inside of the capital city of heaven, would be to see if there was a place of worship there, and the answer is there isn’t any; it’s not necessary, because there won’t be anything but worship, there wouldn’t be any need to go somewhere and worship.

II. (:23) THE GLORY OF GOD – ILLUMINATING BRILLIANCE -- NO EXTERNAL LIGHT SOURCE NEEDED IN NEW JERUSALEM

*“And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it,
for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.”*

Grant Osborne: This verse flows naturally out of the preceding verse: as the Shekinah glory fills the temple (**Ezek. 43:2–3 = Rev. 21:22**), so the light of God’s “glory” fills the New Jerusalem (**Rev. 21:23**), with the result that “*there is no need for sun or moon.*” **Isaiah 60** as a whole is behind this verse, for themes of light and glory also begin the chapter, as in **60:1** (“*Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you*”) and **60:2b–3** (“*His glory*

appears over you. Nations will come to your light"). In **James 1:17** God is called "*the Father of the heavenly lights,*" and **1 John 1:5** says, "*God is light; in him there is no darkness at all*" (cf. **1 Tim. 6:16**, God "*lives in unapproachable light*"). The idea of "*its lamp is the Lamb*" combines **Ps. 132:17**, "*I will . . . set up a lamp for my anointed one,*" and **John 8:12**, "*I am the light of the world.*" In heaven we will see the final realization of the exhortation in **2 Cor. 4:6**, "*For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*" (cf. **Eph. 5:8; 1 John 1:7**).

Charles Swindoll: Throughout the Bible, the images of **light and darkness** are used to describe two opposing cosmic and spiritual realms:

- truth versus error (**John 3:21; 1 Jn. 1:5-8**)
- God's perfect order versus sin's corrupt disorder (**John 1:1-5**)
- pure Spirit versus impure flesh (**Rom. 13:12-14**)
- God's heavenly kingdom versus Satan's worldly kingdom (**Col. 1:13-14**)

J.A. Seiss: That **shining** is not from any material combustion, not from any consumption of fuel that needs to be replaced as one supply burns out, for it is the **uncreated light of Him who is light**, dispensed by and through the Lamb, as the everlasting lamp, to the home and hearts and understandings of His glorified saints.

When Paul and Silas lay wounded and bound in the inner dungeon of the prison of Philippi, they still had sacred light which enabled them to beguile the night with happy songs. When Paul was on his way to Damascus, a light brighter than the sun at noon shone round about him, irradiating his whole being with new sights and understanding and making his soul and body ever afterward light in the Lord.

When Moses came down from the mount of his communion with God, his face was so luminous that his brethren could not endure to look upon it. He was in such close fellowship with light that he became informed with light and came to the camp as a very lamp of God, glowing with the glory of God. And on the Mount of Transfiguration, that same light streamed forth from all the body and raiment of the blessed Jesus. And with reference to the very time when this city comes into being and place, Isaiah said, "*the moon shall be ashamed and the sun confounded,*" – ashamed because of the outbeaming glory which then shall appear in the New Jerusalem, leaving no more need for them to shine in it, since **the glory of God lights it, and the Lamb is the light thereof**.

Brian Tabb: No More Night

The Scriptures regularly associate "night" with darkness, lamentation, sin, and judgment. For example, God sends plagues of darkness against Egypt and the beast's kingdom (**Exodus 10:21–22; Revelation 16:10**), and there is darkness throughout the land when Jesus is crucified (**Mark 15:33**). There is no night in John's vision of the new creation because the dazzling glory of God and the Lamb will so illumine the New Jerusalem that no other lights will be necessary — including the sun (**Revelation 21:23; 22:5**; cf. **Isaiah 60:19**). Moreover, the city's gates remain open as a picture of comprehensive safety and security since no enemies remain to threaten God's people under cover of darkness (**Revelation 21:25; Isaiah 60:11**).

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/all-things-new>

III. (:24-27) THE HOLINESS OF GOD – NO DEFILEMENT -- NOTHING UNCLEAN OR SINFUL BUT ONLY DEDICATED WORSHIPERS (THE TRULY REDEEMED) IN NEW JERUSALEM

A. (:24-26) Only Dedicated Worshipers in New Jerusalem

1. (:24a) Guidance in Holy Living

“And the nations shall walk by its light,”

2. (:24b) Glory of Kings Submitted to God

“and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.”

Grant Osborne: In other words, John has replaced the idea of military victory and plunder with that of **conversion** and **worship**. By inserting “*glory*” instead of “*wealth*,” there has been a subtle shift of emphasis, for the “*glory*” theme in Revelation centers on the glory of God (**1:6; 4:9, 11; 5:12–13; 7:12; 15:8; 19:1, 7; 21:11, 23**) and the conversion of the nations (**11:13; 14:7; 16:9**). These are the only two verses that speak of any kind of “*glory*” other than what belongs to God, and it is natural to suppose that **21:24, 26** mean the earthly “*glory*” that the nations possessed is now being given back to the one who alone deserves it.

Richard Phillips: This language seems confusing to some, since it implies Gentile peoples outside the city. But this scene takes place after the final judgment when all unbelievers and enemies of Christ have been cast into the lake of fire (**20:15**). Therefore, John sees not future people bringing the material wealth into the city, but rather believers from all the nations coming from this age into the eternal age, having believed in Christ and then offering themselves for worship to God. Isaiah foretold this scene in a passage to which John is referring throughout this vision, using language appropriate to his ancient setting: “*Your gates shall be open continually . . . , that people may bring to you the wealth of the nations, with their kings led in procession*” (**Isa. 60:11**). Ancient conquerors paraded their spoils of victory with captured kings led before them in chains. In Christ’s eternal city, his “conquests” will have been won by grace, and they will fulfill their hearts’ desire in yielding their fervent worship to God. As **G. K. Beale** puts it, the nations “are bringing . . . themselves as worshipers before God’s end-time presence.” Our greatest treasure is our lives, offered up in service to Christ now and praising the glorious presence of God forever.

G.K. Beale: **Isa. 66:12** speaks of the glory of the nations coming to Israel as an overflowing stream, as God extends peace to her like a river. The glory spoken of in **Rev. 21:24-26** focuses not on the literal wealth of nations, but is grounded in Isaiah’s picture of glory in the form of praise arising to God from the nations, which then results in Israel’s peace with them. Presumably, this refers to those formerly antagonistic but subsequently redeemed from among the nations who will submit to God, praise Him, and so become unified with redeemed Israel (see for instance **Isa. 11:6-12**). . .

The point of the figurative picture is that the believing Gentiles will never be separated from open, eternal access to God’s presence and that nothing evil can threaten such access. Whereas in the old world the gates of Jerusalem, and of all ancient cities, had to be closed at night to protect the inhabitants from unexpected intruders, the new city faces no such danger. Though direct entrance by humans to the tree of life was blocked by angelic beings throughout history (**Gen. 3:24**), at the end of history angels stand guard to ensure that people retain free access (**22:14**).

3. (:25) Gates Remain Open Always

*“And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there)
its gates shall never be closed;”*

Robert Mounce: The gates of the New Jerusalem stand open because with the demise of evil security measures are no longer necessary. John’s parenthetical remark about the absence of night explains why only day is mentioned in the preceding clause. Day extends indefinitely without interruption because darkness never comes. Thus there is no need of closing gates. One is reminded of the Isaianic declaration concerning the restored Jerusalem, “*Your gates will always stand open*” (**Isa 60:11**). Through these open gates the kings of the earth bring the glory and honor of the nations. The reference is to the choicest of earthly treasures.

Buist Fanning: John adds that the impressive gates described earlier are not obstacles to these lively connections since they “*will never close by day*” (**v. 25a**). This appears to be specifically designed to build on the pattern of **Isaiah 60:11** (Jerusalem’s gates will “*never be shut by day or night*”), but to show its **intensification** in the new Jerusalem.

Craig Keener: That the gates of the new Jerusalem are never closed (**21:25**) suggests unlimited access (borrowing the exaltation image of Gentiles continually bringing tribute, **Isa. 60:11**). To control access, Roman cities usually provided entrance on only one side of the city. For safety reasons, city gates were usually shut at night. But new Jerusalem welcomes all (**22:17**) and has no enemies to fear.

4. (:26) Glory of Kings Submitted to God

“and they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it;”

Craig Keener: This is the most positive vision of the future possible: Whereas Gentiles once trampled the temple city (**11:2**), now they honor it, coming to worship God (**15:4**; cf. **Ps. 102:15; Zech. 14:16-19**). . . . They offer their glory to God in light of God’s greater glory (**21:23**), forsaking idolatry.

G.R. Beasley-Murray: The **encouragement** which this expectation would afford the original readers of the Revelation, and its pertinence to their situation, should not be overlooked. It indicates that their opponents, whose hostility is to grow to murderous proportions, are yet to render up their sword to God and the Lamb and offer him the tribute of their adoration. It suggests more. The nations who once offered their riches to the city of the Antichrist will yield them instead to the city of God and the Lamb (**vv. 24 and 26**), and that implies a sanctification of the whole order of this created world and its products.

B. (:27a) Nothing Unclean or Nobody Practicing Sin

1. Nothing Unclean

“and nothing unclean”

Grant Osborne: Unclean things are an abomination to Yahweh (**Lev. 11:40–43; Deut. 7:25–26; 14:3**; et al.), for they offend his holiness. Thus, in the eternal Holy City nothing “*unclean*” is to be allowed.

2. Nobody Practicing Sin

*“and no one who practices abomination and lying,
shall ever come into it,”*

John Walvoord: Verse 27 indicates plainly that nothing will ever enter the city that is in any sense evil, as only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life are eligible for entrance. This is another reminder that all who are there have entered the city as the objects of God’s grace, otherwise they too would be excluded. This will be a perfect environment in contrast to the centuries of human sin, and the believers will enjoy this perfect situation through all eternity to come. The inhabitants of the city will be characterized by eternal life and absolute moral purity.

C. (:27b) Only the Truly Redeemed in New Jerusalem

“but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

Richard Phillips: We are not permitted to look into God’s Book of Life before the final judgment, but we can identify the distinguishing character of those whose names are there. **J. C. Ryle** points out that, first, “they are all **true penitents**.” Those destined for the new Jerusalem have felt the condemnation of their sins, have grieved before God for their guilt, and have hated the presence of sin in their lives.

Second, “they are all **believers in Christ Jesus**.” Those who dwell in the eternal glory are those who trust the saving work of Christ, especially his atoning work as the Lamb of God who died for their sins. They found salvation nowhere else, but believed in Jesus, received his offered mercy, and continued in faith throughout their lives despite all manner of persecution.

Third, those whose names are written in God’s Book of Life “are all **born of the Spirit and sanctified**.” This means that they began in this life, however imperfectly, the holy life they will enjoy perfectly in the age to come. They have been inwardly renewed by the Holy Spirit with a nature that inclines after God. **Ryle** writes: “The general bent of their lives has always been towards holiness—more holiness, more holiness, has always been their hearts’ desire. They love God, and they must live to Him.”

This is how you know that you are destined to enjoy eternity in the glory of God’s presence: not church membership alone, not fleeting spiritual experiences, not money given to the church or good deeds that you think will overcome your sins, but **a penitent heart that embraces the Lamb of God in faith and seeks thenceforth to live for the glory and honor of God.**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are we taking advantage of our present access to the presence of God and access to worship?
- 2) What do you learn as you trace the revelation of God’s Shekinah Glory through different stages of human history?
- 3) How does the eternal state showcase the fulfilment of God’s promises to the Gentiles?

4) How does living in light of eternity motivate us towards holiness?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Greg Allen: Conspicuous Absences

1. No Temple (:22)
2. No Need of Sun or Moon (:23-24)
3. No Shut Gates (:25)
4. Nothing That Makes Evil (:26-27)

<https://bethanybible.org/new/bible-study/am/2016-11-16/conspicuous-absences-%E2%80%93-revelation-2122-27>

Richard Phillips: All ancient cities had a temple or many temples. How remarkable it is, then, that when we gaze into the consummate fulfillment of the city of God, there is no temple within it. Temples existed as places where one went to meet with God. The new Jerusalem will need no such place, since “*its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*”

In the eternal city, God will fill the dwelling of his people so that he is met and known everywhere. **William Hendriksen** writes: “The radiance of God’s majesty and glory, in all its fullness, fills the entire city. . . . No sanctuary is needed, for the fellowship of believers with their God is direct and immediate. God tabernacles with His people; they are constantly in His immediate and loving and abiding presence.” It was God’s presence that made the old, physical temple sacred. In the end, God will have so reclaimed the entirety of creation that his glory will equally and fully pervade every square inch and light-year. **Bruce Milne** writes: “All is sacred, the Shekinah glory fills the entire city, and God is everywhere accessible to the priestly race.”

John’s description of the city without a temple completes the Bible’s development of the **theme of God’s dwelling with his people**. When Moses met God on the mountain, the Lord told him to build the tabernacle, and from the inner sanctum of that tent God’s shekinah glory shone forth in the midst of Israel. Later, Solomon built a permanent temple structure. Yet his prayer revealed that God was not contained in its cube-shaped holy of holies: “*Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!*” (**1 Kings 8:27**). When Jesus began his ministry, the presence of God extended outside the temple. John wrote that in his coming, “*the Word became flesh and [tabernacled] among us, and we have seen his glory*” (**John 1:14**). No longer did people go to the temple to meet with God, but they went to Jesus and found God’s saving grace in his person and works. Speaking of his body, Jesus said, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*” (**2:19**). His death and resurrection are now the place of our meeting with God and the ground of our blessing.

The temple theme moved forward yet again when Jesus ascended to heaven and sent God’s Spirit to live within his people. Paul wrote that the believer’s own body is now sacred, “*a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,*” and thus to be used only for God’s glory (**1 Cor. 6:19**). Peter taught that the church is together the dwelling place of God on earth: “*You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ*” (**1 Peter 2:5**). In the final resurrection, after Christ returns, the church will be perfected in glory and will enjoy full communion with God in a regenerated cosmos designed for an infinite experience of God’s holiness. Aaron prayed of old,

“*The LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace*” (**Num. 6:26**). An unmeasurable experience of this benediction is the destiny of believers in the presence of God’s glory forever.

Buist Fanning: Verses 24-26 (as well as 22:1-5) reflect lively, productive human life and commerce on a renewed earth. Its redeemed people move in and out of the city that forms the center of God’s new creation. They use their creative skills and crafts (**21:24, 26**), till and tend the fruitful earth (**22:2-3a**), learn and grow (**22:2e**), and worship God with direct intimacy and commitment (**21:23, 22; 22:3-4**). This is not a “heaven” spent floating in the clouds and strumming harps or eternally contemplating the face of God with an inward but not physical vision. Many longstanding (and somewhat off-putting) impressions of what “heaven” and eternal life will be like are not informed sufficiently by the picture John has given here.

Ray Stedman: The City of Glory

I am sure someone is asking, “Is this literal or is it symbolic?” I hope, by now, as we have been going through this book, you have come to realize that you do not have to make that choice. God loves to use literal things that remain symbols. The cross behind me is literal (i.e., the cross mounted behind the pulpit at PBC), but it is also a symbol of the death of Jesus. It is both at the same time. So, all through this book, we find the blending of the literal and symbolic. I believe there will be a great, visible city of incredible brilliance and glory, located somewhere above or within the atmosphere of the earth, which also will picture activities and relationships that are going on within the community of the saints. Those will be characterized by stability, by symmetry, by light, by life and ministry. That is what is described here. The literal is very evident; the symbolic perhaps needs a bit of interpretation.

<https://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/revelation/the-city-of-glory>

Gordon Fee: The final two descriptors of the splendor of the “*new Jerusalem*” pick up on and elaborate the further outcome of what has preceded. First, “*the nations*” that “*will walk by its light*” will also bring their **glory and honor** . . . into it. What John may have specifically intended by this is mostly guesswork on our part, but the implication seems to be that part of the glory of the city will lie not with the unceasing imports being brought into it; rather, everything that would already give any city glory is now to be transferred to the final great city that has come down from heaven to earth. Second, and especially significant, the city exists only for those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life, God’s own people who once more are set off in stark contrast to others, who are designated in this case as anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, thereby covering a multitude of sins. In so doing, John once more echoes the Prophets of Israel, this time **Isaiah 52:1** (“*Put on your garments of splendor, Jerusalem, the holy city; the uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again*”).

Craig Koester: In the end, those who gather around the throne see the face of God and reign with him forever, in the glory of God’s everlasting light (**22:4-5**). This marks the final reversal of the story that began when Adam and Eve sinned and hid themselves from the face of God in shame, seeking refuge in the shadows (**Gen. 3:8**). God’s light, purity, and power threaten the darkness of human sin, uncleanness, and mortal weakness. The Lord told Moses that no human being could see his face and live (**Exod. 33:20**), and when Isaiah had a vision of God’s heavenly throne he cried out in terror, “*I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*” (**Isa. 6:5**). Just as the sun’s blazing rays can destroy the eyesight of those who gaze at it, God’s burning holiness can destroy those who come directly into his presence. Therefore, the Law of Israel stipulated that the high

priest, with the Lord's name inscribed on the turban that crossed his forehead, was to come into the presence of God under a protective cloud of incense to make atonement for the people (**Exod. 28:36–38; Lev. 16:11–19**).

In the New Jerusalem, the barriers of sin and mortality are removed, and the redeemed find themselves again in the garden. Instead of hiding from God's face, they turn towards God's face, for just as the privilege of being God's people is extended to the nations, the privilege of serving as high priest is extended to all worshipers, who bear God's name on their foreheads (**Rev. 22:4**). The promise that the righteous might one day see the Lord comes to its fulfillment (**Ps. 11:7; Matt. 5:8; 1 John 3:2**). The night of sin and death is gone; the light of God's salvation and light has come. Faith gives way to sight, uncertainty issues into understanding (**1 Cor. 13:12**). The story of God's people reaches its culmination when they "rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end" (**Augustine**, *The City of God* 22.30).

John MacArthur: In fact, what he is really saying here is this is not going to be limited to one group. This is going to be – this is going to be the eternal capital where everybody is welcome. There will be **no more divisions** as we know them. All of the nations shall walk by its light.

What it really is saying is that there will be no more divisions. It'll be the **capital city for everybody**. It's not the idea that heaven is going to be organized by political sections, but that all ethnic groups will be moving in and about that city. No race, no culture, no one left out.

And then it says, "*And the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.*" Some see this as indicated, and I think it may well indicate that. No social structure, no upper and lower class. All the kings of the earth who come to that place – and that would be those mighty men, noble men, those leaders, those great men – give their glory to that city. That is their glory is gone. Everybody is at the same level. **All human glory dissolves into the glory of God**. All races dissolve into the people of God. And the character of that city is universal in the fact that everybody there belongs, and there is no social strata. The kings give up their glory.

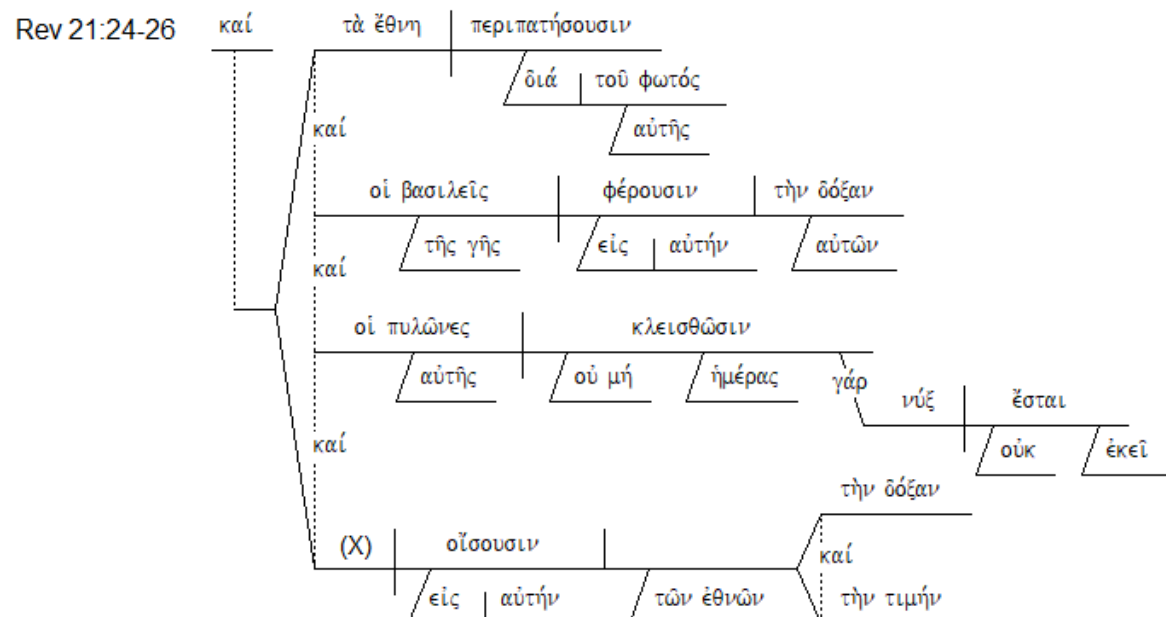
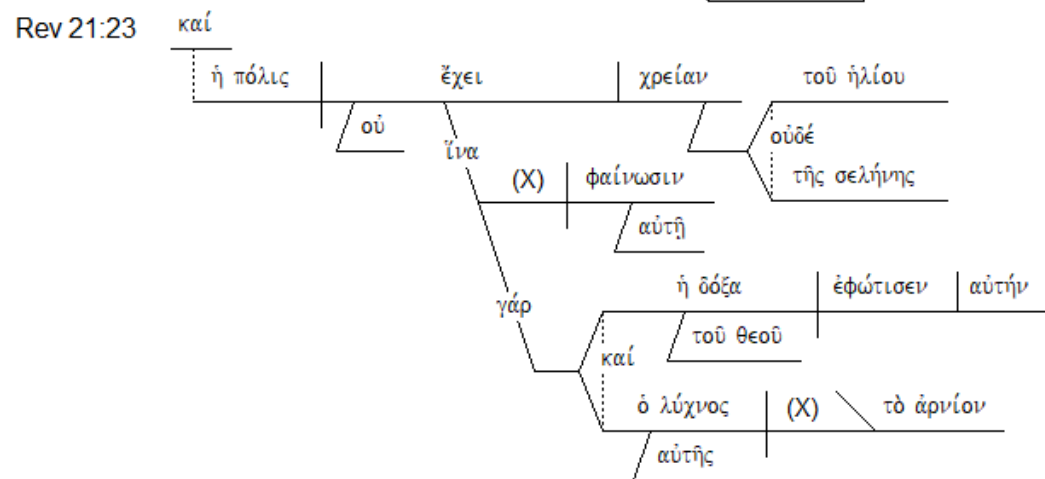
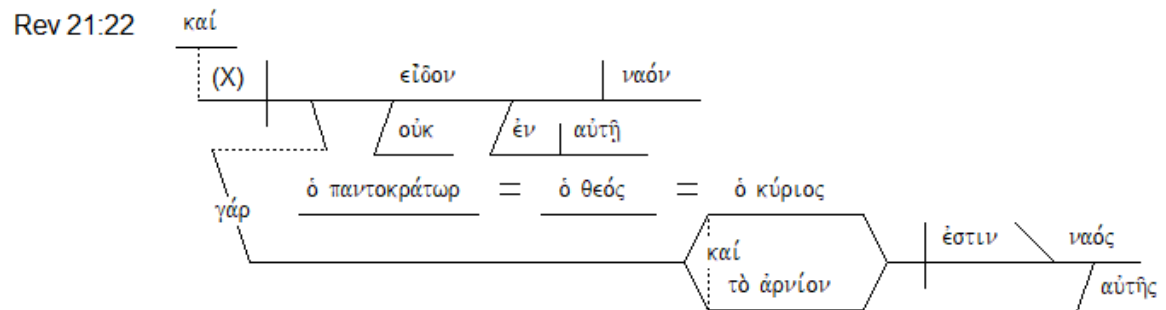
There's another interesting possibility about this verse, and I suggest it to you. There will be believers living at the end of the millennial kingdom. Think with me on this. There will be believers living at the end of the millennial kingdom. Right? In other words, when the kingdom starts, there will be people on earth who will have children; they'll populate the earth. Many of those people who populate the earth will be unbelievers. And even though Christ is ruling in Jerusalem, they won't believe in Him. Satan will be released at the end of the thousand years. He'll sweep through the earth with his demons. He'll create a rebellion; he'll gather a huge army, and he'll fight against the Lord Jesus Christ.

But there still will be millions of believers all over the world. All over the world. Now, when the present creation, in its millennial form, is uncreated, the question is what's going to happen to all those living believers?

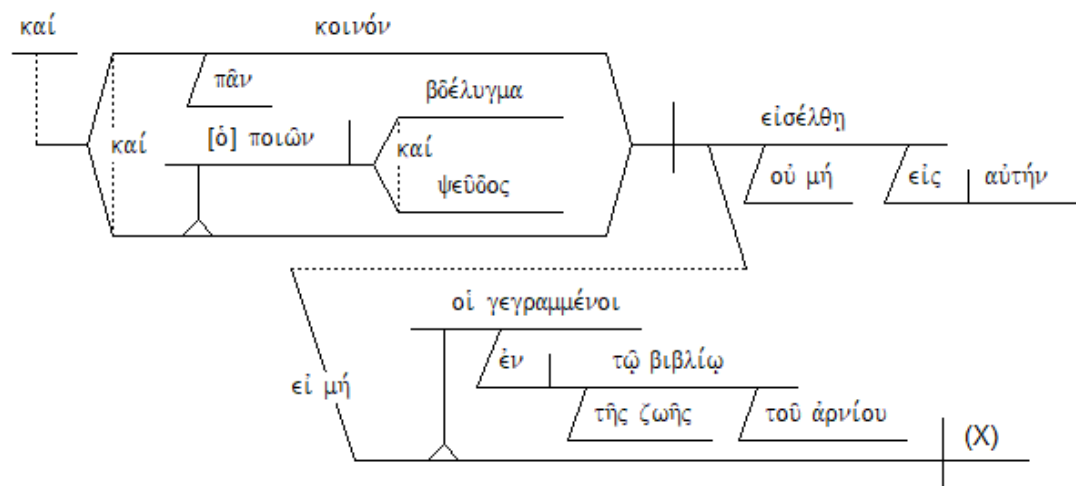
And some commentators feel that this verse, "*And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it,*" is a reference to the translation of those living believers on earth, people and rulers, who are taken into the eternal state. Perhaps that is what John had in mind. We certainly can't be dogmatic about it, but it could refer to those believers who simply are alive at the end of the millennial kingdom and are translated into the new heavens and the new earth without going through death, and certainly they wouldn't be judged

by God and executed in the rebellion when God judges Satan and all who fight with Him. It may well be that as the new heavens and the new earth come immediately into existence, and the old is uncreated, they are translated instantaneously into the descending New Jerusalem, and it is those nations and kings to which he refers. But in the end, everybody is going to be there, and all peoples are going to be there, and all rulers are going to have their glory dissolve into the glory of God which is all the glory that will be in the eternal state.

Leedy Greek Diagram:



Rev 21:27



TEXT: Revelation 22:1-5

TITLE: RESTORATION OF ENHANCED EDENIC PARADISE

BIG IDEA:

WITH ITS FRUIT-BEARING TREE OF LIFE AND ILLUMINATION BY GOD'S PRESENCE, PARADISE TRANSFORMED SURPASSES THE SPLENDOR OF EDEN

INTRODUCTION:

Many times we experience disappointment and regret when our new experiences revisit and remind us of past similar incidents. The new reality fails to live up to the glories of days gone by. Cf. the disappointment of the Jewish fathers at the rebuilding of the temple in the days of Ezra (**3:10-12**) – “*But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple [Solomon’s grand temple], wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid*”. But in the case of New Jerusalem, the situation is reversed. Certainly Adam and Eve will rejoice at the transformation of their new enhanced Edenic paradise. God “*is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.*” We do not even have the language or the ideas to describe in detail what awaits us in glory.

Warren Wiersbe: In **Revelation 22:1–5**, we move inside the city to discover that it is like a beautiful garden, reminiscent of the garden of Eden. There were four rivers in Eden (**Gen. 2:10–14**), but there is only one river in the heavenly city. Ezekiel saw a purifying river flowing from the temple, certainly a millennial scene (**Ezek. 47**), but this river will flow directly from God’s throne, the very source of all purity. Man was prohibited from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and prevented from eating of the tree of life (**Gen. 2:15–17; 3:22–24**). But in the eternal home, man will have access to the tree of life. The river and the tree symbolize abundant life in the glorious city.

Craig Koester: In the New Jerusalem, the barriers of sin and mortality are removed, and the redeemed find themselves again in the garden. Instead of hiding from God’s face, they turn towards God’s face, for just as the privilege of being God’s people is extended to the nations, the privilege of serving as high priest is extended to all worshipers, who bear God’s name on their foreheads (**Rev. 22:4**). The promise that the righteous might one day see the Lord comes to its fulfillment (**Ps. 11:7; Matt. 5:8; 1 John 3:2**). The night of sin and death is gone; the light of God’s salvation and light has come. Faith gives way to sight, uncertainty issues into understanding (**1 Cor. 13:12**). The story of God’s people reaches its culmination when they “rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end” (**Augustine, The City of God 22.30**).

Buist Fanning: The new Jerusalem will be like an **enhanced Eden** where God’s people will forever experience his full provision, enjoy his presence in face-to-face fellowship, and reign with him over a renewed creation as he intended for them from the beginning (vv. 1-9). This book’s authoritative revelation from God about the imminent return of Jesus as King and Judge should cause all people to seek his free gift of life forever in his eternal city (vv. **10-21**).

Grant Osborne: The purpose of God in the first Garden of Eden in **Gen. 2–3** was to provide a “*garden of delight*” (the meaning of “*Eden*”) as part of his covenant with humankind. Adam and

Eve were placed in the garden not only to enjoy it but to take care of it as their service to God (**Gen. 2:15**). In a sense tilling the garden was an act of worship. At the same time, their whole existence was oriented to God. This is why they could partake of the tree of life but not of the tree of knowledge (**Gen. 2:17**). To do so was to replace dependence on God with dependence on self and one's own knowledge. When they partook of it, they lost their place in Paradise (the term used in the LXX for Eden) and were thrust out into this world of death (cf. **Rom. 5:12–21**). To the Jews this Edenic paradise was then taken up to heaven to await the faithful (T. Levi 18.10–11; T. Dan 5.12–13; 2 Bar. 4.3–7). Here in Revelation it has once more come down to join the renewed earth and is now part of the eternal city. Eden has not only been restored but has been **elevated** and **expanded** for the people of God in eternity. . .

The New Jerusalem will not only be the final Holy of Holies (**21:9–27**) but also the final Eden (**22:1–5**). It will be more than a restored or regained Eden—it will be a **transformed Eden**. All that the original garden could have been is expanded and intensified. The river that flowed from the garden in Gen. 2:10 and from the altar in the temple in Ezek. 47:1 now flows “from the throne” and proceeds “down the center of the street” of the city. This is a superhighway to beat all superhighways ever constructed. The central theme here is life, for the river is “a river of the water of life,” and on both banks of the river is a grove of the “trees of life.” This goes beyond the “tree of life” in Gen. 2:9 and 3:22–24, for these multiple trees also have “twelve kinds of fruit” that produce life “every month,” and the leaves “heal the nations.” This pictures the healing power of eternal life and the lavish provision of God for his people. In the old order, no one could look on the face of God and live (Exod. 33:20), but now the goal of worship throughout the Bible and the church age is finally realized when the saints “see his face” (22:4). The reason for this is that “the throne of God and of the Lamb” is in their midst, and they have total access to God and the Lamb. Moreover, they in some sense share the throne (3:21; cf. 20:4) and “reign forever” with Christ. Our great privilege is not only to serve him and look on his face but also to reign with him.

I. (:1-3a) ENHANCED EDENIC CONDITIONS IN NEW JERUSALEM

A. (:1-2a) Flowing of the River of the Water of Life

1. (:1a) Nature of the River

“And he showed me a river of the water of life,”

2. (:1b) Appearance of the River

“clear as crystal,”

Richard Phillips: He says that its water is “*bright as crystal*,” depicting the **purity** of life that God gives and the cleansing effect of the grace that we receive by faith.

3. (:1c) Source of the River

*“coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb,
in the middle of its street.”*

Buist Fanning: the clear symbolism here is that God and the Lamb are the ever-abundant source of life and health for their people.

John Walvoord: The picture is that the river flows through the middle of the city, and the tree is large enough to span the river, so that the river is in the midst of the street, and the tree is on both

sides of the river. It would appear that the river is not a broad body of water, but a clear stream sufficiently narrow to allow for this arrangement.

G.K. Beale: That the river flows down the middle of its street shows that the imparting of eternal fellowship with God is at the heart of the city's significance. . . . The living waters impart life because they come from God's presence, drawing His people into intimate communion with Him.

B. (:2b) Fruit of the Tree of Life

1. Accessible Tree of Life

"And on either side of the river was the tree of life,"

G.K. Beale: The allusion to **Ezek. 47:12** supports a picture of trees growing on either side of the river, so that the singular "*tree*" of **v. 2** is likely a **collective reference to trees**. And in any event, how could one tree grow on either side of the river? The absence of the article "*the*" (which would underline that a singular particular tree was being referred to) may point further to a collective meaning. The one tree of life in the first garden has become many trees of life in the escalated paradisaical state of the second garden. But since these trees are all of the same kind as the original tree, they can be referred to from the perspective of their **corporate unity** as "*the tree of life*" (so **Rev. 2:7**), just as we might refer to a grove full of oaks as an **oak grove**.

2. Abundant and Varied Fruit

*"bearing twelve kinds of fruit,
yielding its fruit every month;"*

G.R. Beasley-Murray: The fruit of the tree of life, like the manna (**2:17**), symbolizes life in fullest measure and delight. The river of living water even more powerfully expresses the idea of life in inexhaustible supply.

William Barclay: The tree gives many and varied fruits. Surely in that we may see the symbolism of the fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:22–3**). In the different fruit for each month of the year, may we not see symbolized that in the life which God gives there is a special grace for each age from the cradle to the grave? The tree of life is no longer forbidden; it is there in the middle of the city for all to take. Nor are its fruits confined to the Jews; its leaves are for the healing of the nations. Only in the Spirit of God can the wounds and the rifts between the nations be healed.

Richard Phillips: The fact that "*twelve kinds of fruit*" are yielded "*each month*" indicates both the **variety of blessings** and their **perpetual availability**. There is an abundant provision of spiritual life and grace to meet every imaginable need. As Adam and Eve walked "*in the garden in the cool of the day*," enjoying "the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden" (**Gen. 3:8**), so will the vast multitude of God's redeemed people live in the blessing of the grove of the divine life forever.

3. Adorned by Healing Leaves

"and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

Kendell Easley: As in **chapter 21**, so here we find the nations present. The picture is of a vast, glorious city making a worldwide impact. Disease or sickness will not be present in heaven, so

no healing will be required. The meaning is that all will enjoy full, wholesome, robust health. Just as the death of Christ made possible the water of eternal life (spiritually), so his death also provides the leaves that completely remove all the consequences of sin forever (physically). Here is the final reference to the nations in Revelation.

James Hamilton: When the redeemed enjoy the new and better Eden, old hurts will be healed. The nationalism, the racism, the acrimony, the bitterness, and the long history of warfare will be healed. The nations will be healed by the leaves of the tree of life. The redeemed of every tribe will enjoy the crystal-clear water of life, the twelve fruits of “*the tree of life*,” and “*healing*.”

Robert Mounce: The healing leaves indicate the complete absence of physical and spiritual want. The life to come will be a life of abundance and perfection.

C. (:3a) Freedom from Sin’s Curse

“And there shall no longer be any curse;”

John Walvoord: In the millennium there is a lifting of the curse upon the earth, but not a total deliverance from the world’s travail brought in by sin, for in the millennium it is still possible for a “sinner” to be “accursed” (**Isa. 65:20**) with resulting physical death. In the new heaven and the new earth, however, there will be no curse at all and no possibility or need of such divine punishment.

II. (:3b-5) EXALTED ELITE PRIVILEGES IN NEW JERUSALEM

A. (:3b) We Will Serve God

1. Centrality of God’s Throne

“and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it,”

2. Commitment of God’s Servants

“and His bond-servants shall serve Him;”

Kendell Easley: Eternity will never be boring. We cannot imagine exactly what it will mean for us to serve and worship God throughout eternity or even that he would desire such. The implication, however, is of great activity, not passive lethargy. In this life, his servants truly served him, though sometimes halfheartedly and often with incomplete obedience. In eternity this will change to perfect service. The first blessing is **faultless active usefulness**.

B. (:4) We Will See God

1. Observation

“and they shall see His face,”

William Barclay: The sight of God produces two things.

- It produces the **perfect worship**; where God is always seen, all life becomes an act of worship.
- It produces the **perfect consecration**; the inhabitants of the city will have the mark of God upon their foreheads, showing that they belong absolutely to him.

2. Ownership

“and His name shall be on their foreheads.”

G.R. Beasley-Murray: As the people of God were sealed on the forehead in time of tribulation as a sign that they belonged to God (7:3), so the whole populace of the New Jerusalem are marked as belonging to God and the Lamb.

Kendell Easley: The seal or name of God on someone authenticates that person as genuine, guarantees God's protection, and is a token of his reward to the overcomers. The third blessing is eternally guaranteed reward.

James Hamilton: God is the best thing about this new and better Eden, and John teaches that reality even in the way that he organizes what he has to say about this Edenic temple-city. He has saved the best for last. The last thing that John describes in 22:4, 5 will be the best part of being there.

G.K. Beale: The assertion that *His name shall be on their foreheads* intensifies the notion of **intimate fellowship with God**. It is beyond coincidence that God's name was written on the high priest's forehead in the OT (*“Holy to the Lord”*: **Exod. 28:36-38**). The high priest represented Israel and was consecrated to God so that he could enter into God's presence in the Holy of Holies to offer propitiatory sacrifices on Israel's behalf, in order to make the people acceptable before God and so that they would not incur His wrath. As was the case with the high priest's jewels in **Exod. 28:17-21** (see on 21:18-20), so in v. 4 the privilege of being consecrated to be acceptable in the immediate presence of God, formerly reserved only for the high priest, is now granted to all of God's people. This expresses further the **priestly nature** of God's new people.

Richard Phillips: The name of God stands for his character, which is reflected in the holiness of the glorified saints. God's mark indicates his ownership, his covenant union, and his acceptance of all who bear his name in eternity. None who bear his name will ever be forgotten or lost.

C. (:5a) We Will Never Lack Light

1. No Darkness

“And there shall no longer be any night;”

2. No Need of Ordinary Light Sources

*“and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp
nor the light of the sun,”*

3. Supernatural Light Source

“because the Lord God shall illumine them;”

D. (:5b) We Will Reign with God Forever

“and they shall reign forever and ever.”

G.R. Beasley-Murray: Here is the ultimate reach of the bliss of God's people in the city which descends from heaven: participation in the sovereignty of God and the Lamb, not alone for the duration of the kingdom of Christ on earth but in the eternal kingdom of the new creation. It signifies the final fulfilment of the promise in 3:21, the status of joint sovereignty with Christ in

God. That is an extension of the grace of God in Christ beyond the human mind. As such it brings to a fitting conclusion John's vision of the city of God and the Lamb, leaving the reader dazzled, not to say dazed, with the glory of the prospect before him.

John Walvoord: Those who are His servants have the blessed privilege of reigning forever. The eternal character of their reign is another indication that this is the eternal state. The concept that the reign of Christ must cease at the millennium, based on **1 Corinthians 15:24-25**, is a misunderstanding. It is the character of His reign that changes. Christ continues for all eternity as King of kings and Lord of lords, even though the scene of His mediatorial and millennial rule over the earth is changed to the new heaven and the new earth. There is no contradiction, therefore, in calling these believers servants and at the same time recognizing them as reigning with Christ.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is the future eternal state preferred over the paradise of the Garden of Eden in Genesis?
- 2) How is the unity of God the Father and God the Son portrayed in this passage?
- 3) How are we representing Jesus today as those that bear His name (just as in eternity we will have His name imprinted on our foreheads)?
- 4) Why do we find mixed metaphors here of both serving and reigning?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Alan Johnson: This section continues the description of the Holy City begun in **21:9**, but now with the emphasis on its **inner life**. John returns to his archetypal images from Genesis (**1-3**) and Ezekiel (**40ff**). The paradisiacal quality of the future age is briefly but beautifully described. Here Paradise is regained. As in the OT imagery of the age to come, metaphors of water and light abound (cf. **Isa 12:3**; **Zech 14:7-8**). The river of the water of life recalls **Ezekiel 47:1ff**. (cf. **Joel 3:18**) and the pastoral scene of **Revelation 7:17** (q.v.). In both Testaments water is frequently associated with the salvation of God and the life-imparting and cleansing ministry of the Holy Spirit (**Isa 44:3**; cf. **John 3:5**; **4:13-14**; **7:37-39**; **13:10**; **19:34**; **Titus 3:5**). In the new city of God the pure water does not issue from the temple as in Ezekiel but comes from the throne of God, since this whole city is a Most Holy Place with God at its center. Life from God streams unceasingly through the new world.

Buist Fanning: One important point is that even in resurrected, glorified bodies and a renewed world, humans will not become gods. Their dependence on God will still be total and will never come to an end. They will continue to be creatures rather than the Creator, although they will be delivered from sin's corrupting effects on their creaturely existence. Likewise, God's good creation, even renewed, will continue to display his glory in its operation, apparently with plants that grow and yield useful fruits to meet human needs, and perhaps they will require tending or at least harvesting. Humans for their part will not become omniscient, but it seems likely that

human potential for growth in knowledge and skills, for creativity and satisfying labor, for management of God's good creation to his glory – that is, for greater and greater expression of the divine image – will continue eternally.

Kendell Easley: Even people that reject the biblical account of Creation understand the power of the portrait of mankind's first home in the garden of Eden. Although the narrative takes up only two early chapters of Scripture (**Gen. 2–3**), the notion of a garden-like paradise, lost due to the Fall, still exerts a strong influence on three of the world's major religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

Just think about a few of the themes that the account of Eden introduces:

- Human beings, given the opportunity, rebel against their Creator.
- The serpent continually attempts to beguile people away from God.
- The curse on the human race includes banishment from paradise.
- Pain and suffering are the lot of mankind.
- People are absolutely barred from access to the Tree of Life.
- One day “*the seed of the woman*” will prevail.

By the time the final vision of Revelation ends, these have all been resolved.

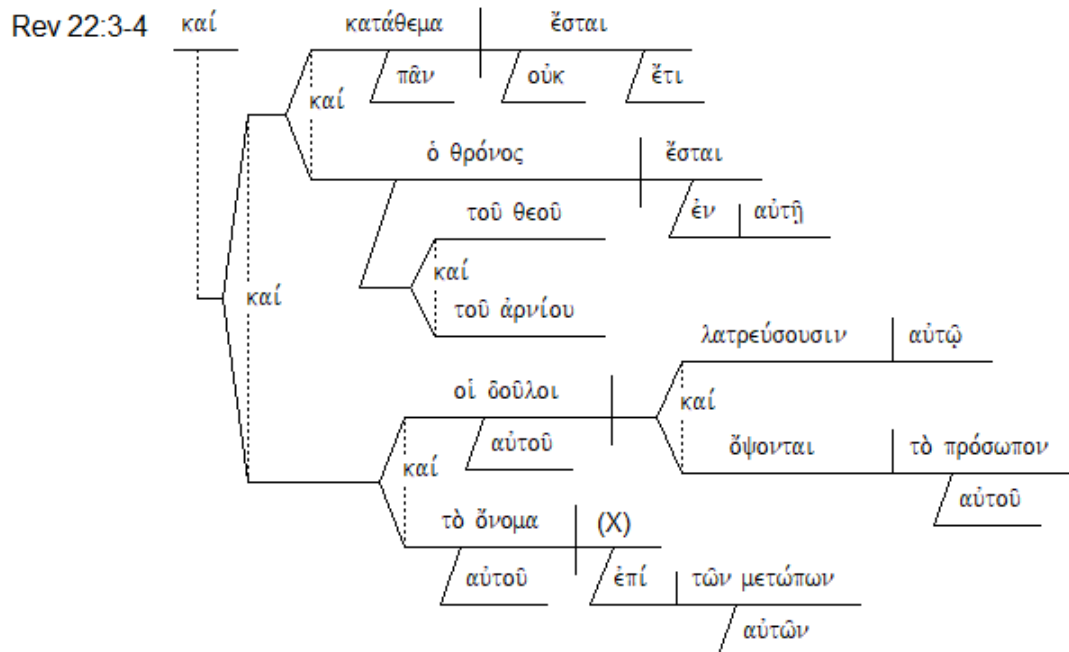
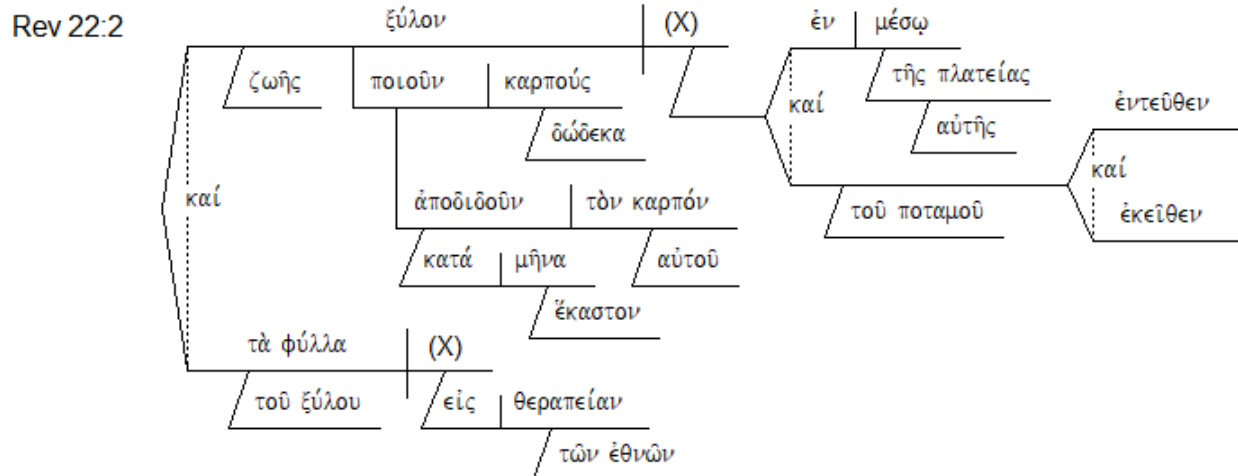
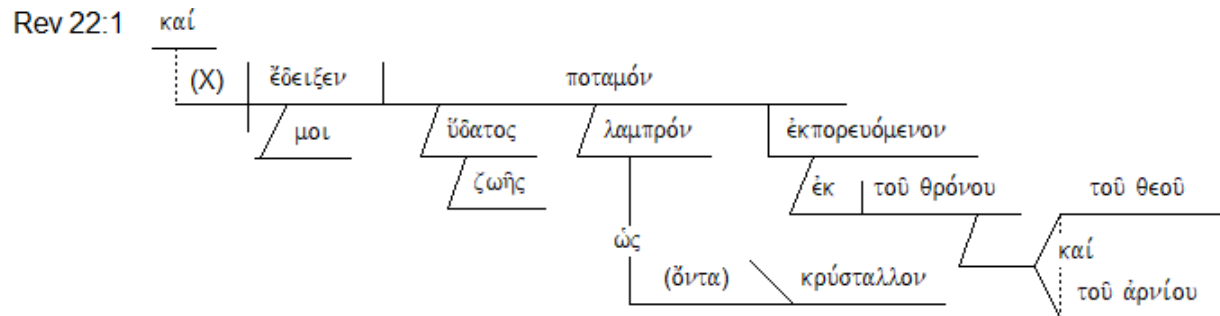
- God's people serve him forever, for all rebellion has ceased.
- The serpent has been thrown into the fiery lake forever.
- “*No longer will there be any curse*” (**22:3**).
- God has removed all pain and suffering from his people.
- The Tree of Life appears once more, with its fruit and leaves freely applied.
- Jesus “*the seed of the woman*” rules from eternity's throne.

No wonder so many Bible students see the final vision of Revelation as **paradise regained**. Yet in many ways, this is much, much more than a return to Eden. Just as the New Jerusalem surpasses Solomon's Jerusalem as diamonds surpass rhinestones, so **the new paradise surpasses the old**.

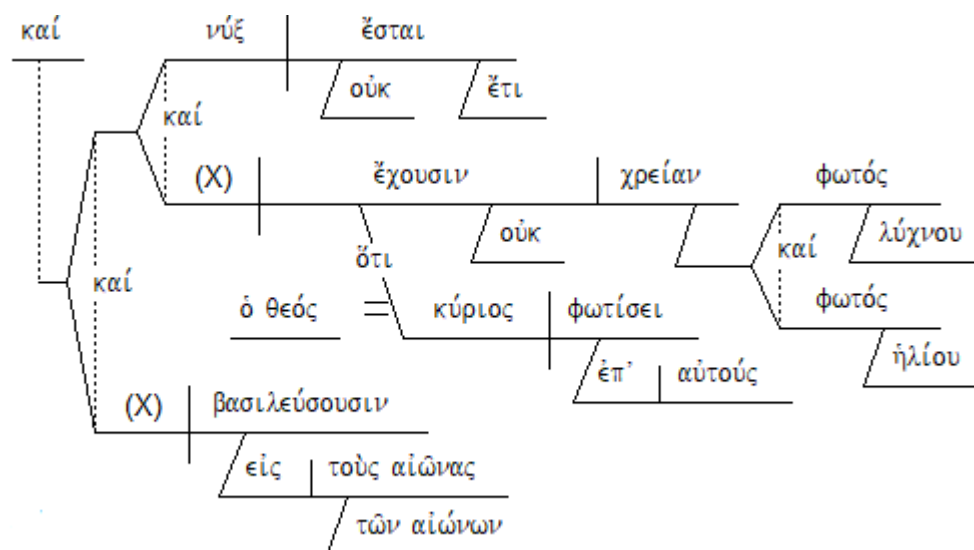
Main Idea: In Jesus' eternal presence, the final state of redeemed humanity with the river and Tree of Life will greatly surpass the garden of Eden in splendor.

G.K. Beale: While the main pastoral goal of the book's argument is to exhort God's people to remain faithful so that they will inherit final salvation, this is not the most important theological idea in the book. The major theological theme of the book is that **God should receive worship and glory as a result of accomplishing consummate salvation and final judgment** (see on **4:11; 5:11-13; 19:1, 5, 7; cf. 1:6; 11:16-17**). This notion of divine glory is central to **21:1–22:5** since, as we have seen, the new Jerusalem (or God's people) can only be defined in relation to its luminescent reflection of God's glory. Indeed, the central feature of the city is God and the Lamb, who shine as a lamp upon the city (**21:22-23; 22:5**), so that the more complete definition of the new Jerusalem includes God's people in full fellowship with God and Christ, reflecting the glory of God and Christ.

Leedy Greek Diagram:



Rev 22:5



TEXT: Revelation 22:6-21

TITLE: *EPILOGUE – JESUS IS COMING SOON*

BIG IDEA:

TWELVE FINAL EXPRESSIONS CONSTITUTE THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF OUR LONGING FOR JESUS TO RETURN SOON

INTRODUCTION:

We have arrived finally at the end of our journey through the book of Revelation. This wraps up our study of the entire canon of scripture as well – as the threads of prophecy initiated in the Old Testament and then traced through the NT Gospels and Epistles regarding God’s kingdom agenda for His people and for all of creation find their point of culmination and termination in the establishment of Christ’s kingdom on earth, not just in the millennium but for all of eternity. These 12 final expressions in these closing verses take a variety of different forms: invitations, exhortations, words of assurance or proclamation or affirmation, corrections, warnings, etc. But the focus is the same: JESUS IS COMING SOON!

John MacArthur: As we come to **chapter 22** and **verses 6 to 12**, we come to the **epilogue**, the **wrap-up on the apocalypse**. All of the glorious and gracious purposes of God, ordained from before the foundation of the world, have now been attained. The rebellion of angels and mankind is all over. The rebels are all in the everlasting punishment of the lake of fire.

The King of kings is now sitting on the eternal throne as the Sovereign with His Father over the new heaven and the new earth. Absolute and unchanging holiness characterizes all within a universal and eternal kingdom of God. The redeemed, the chosen, the glorified saints bought by the slain Lamb are now in their resurrection bodies, dwelling in the glory of the new heaven and the new earth, and particularly living in the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city.

Holy life and praise fills the universe, the universe having been recreated as the abode of God, and His glory fills it with blazing light, starting from inside the diamond holy city and splattering its beauty throughout the whole new heaven and new earth. Light, beauty, holiness, joy, the presence of God and the Lamb, worship and praise, service, likeness to Christ are all the realities of this eternal state. . .

The character of these verses which I just read to you is **rapid fire**, breathless, almost feel – you almost feel like John is sort of panting as he races his quill across the parchment to get this down rapidly. They are **single statements, brief and independent**, one after another. And they move from theme, to theme, to theme, to theme. Yet each deals with a needed response – a response that every Christian should have to the coming of Jesus Christ, which is the theme of this book. .

The key word in this text is, “*He is coming quickly.*”

You will notice it there in **verse 7**, “*Behold, I am coming quickly.*” You will notice it in **verse 12**, “*Behold, I am coming quickly.*” And down in **verse 20**, “*Yes, I am coming quickly.*” And the term is *tachy* from which we get tachometer which measures speed. “I’m coming speedily; I’m coming hastily,” or, “I’m coming quickly,” or, “I’m coming shortly,” or, “I’m coming soon.” Six

times in the book of Revelation that is stated. Six times. Twice it is a warning. In chapter 2, verses 5 and 16, He is coming quickly with judgment on His mind. Four times it is a promise. A promise of blessing - the three that I read you here in chapter 22, and one in chapter 3, verse 11. In all four of those, He is coming **to bless**. In the first two, chapter 2, verses 5 and 16, He's coming **to judge**.

Also we read, in chapter 3, verse 3, that His coming is *like a thief*. That is repeated in chapter 16, verse 15. It means He will come **unexpectedly**. He's coming soon, and He's coming when not expected. That is, of course, the ploy that a thief has to count on is that he is not expected, that he can get in and get out and do what he wants to do immediately and hastily, without anybody able to make preparation or put up a defense.

Now, what this is telling us is that the coming of the Lord is soon. It's coming shortly. It's coming hastily; you need to be ready.

You say, "Well, wait a minute. When this was written around 96 A.D., they might have thought that, but we're here a long time, almost 2,000 years after that, and He's not here yet."

Well, that's from the human viewpoint, isn't it? From the vantage point of God, we remind ourselves that a day with the Lord is as – what? – a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day. And for God's – **from God's perspective, it's only been two days. In the light of eternity, it is very, very brief.**

Buist Fanning: Its subsections [of **22:6-21**] are hard to delineate because it takes the form of a lively dialogue between **various speakers** (the angel, John, Jesus, the Spirit, the bride, and even the readers or hearers of the book).

Albert Mohler: This epilogue reaffirms everything presented in the vision, restates its truthfulness, and calls for a response of continued faith in Christ as believers await his return.

Daniel Akin: **Last words are important words.** Indeed, last words are intended to be lasting words, words that make an impression, words that will stay with the listener or the reader. In **Revelation 22:6-21** we come to the last words in the book of Revelation, the last words of the Bible. God's written Word comes to an end, and so what we find here is of utmost importance to God. It also should be of utmost importance to us. Two themes are dominant: the **reliability and authenticity** of the book and the **imminence of the end**.

As the Apocalypse comes to an end, God sends forth His final invitation. . . Here we will discover words of affirmation, encouragement, command, and warning. As our Lord repeatedly challenged the seven churches in **chapters 2-3**, anyone who has an ear should listen!

I. (:6-7) INVITATION TO RESPOND IN OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S REVELATION

A. (:6a) God's Revelation is Reliable and True

"And he said to me, 'These words are faithful and true';"

John MacArthur: That is a heavenly confirmation, a heavenly attestation to what John has heard and seen throughout the entire apocalypse. . .

The exactness, detail, and precision with which earlier prophecies already fulfilled came to pass forms the pattern for those yet to be fulfilled. God's prophetic record is perfect. He predicted Israel would go into captivity, and the nation did (**Lev. 26:33-39+**). He predicted the destruction of Babylon (**Isa. 13:1 - 14:27; Jer. 50-51**) and Tyre (**Isa. 23:1 ff.**), and those cities were destroyed. He predicted that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (**Mic. 5:2+**), to a virgin (**Isa. 7:14+**), and be killed by sinners (**Isa. 53:7-10+**) and He was. Thus, when God predicts future events, such as the rapture of the church, the rise of Antichrist, the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments, the Battle of Armageddon, the return of Jesus Christ, and His thousand-year earthly kingdom, **those events will just as certainly come to pass [Isa. 46:9-11]**.

Buist Fanning: The next clause (**v.6c-d**) begins with “*and*” (*kai*), but it provides the basis for the reliability asserted in **vs. 6b**: these words can be trusted because God who inspires his prophets has revealed them. The description of the Lord as “*the God of the spirits of the prophets*” anchors this revelation in the inspiration of the prophets by God's Spirit across the generations (see **10:6-7**). The words that follow in **v. 6c-d** provide explicit verbal links back to the opening verses of the book (**1:1-3**).

Charles Swindoll: All of this is meant to communicate three important exhortations that are particularly compelling for a confused culture.

- First, we are to believe what is faithful and true. . .
- Second, we are to anticipate what has been predicted. . .
- Third, we are to heed what has been revealed. Hearing isn't the same as heeding. Heeding implies responding to admonitions and obeying commands.

B. (:6b-7a) God's Revelation Provides Insight into End Time Events

1. (:6b) Communication Regarding End Time Events

*“and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets,
sent His angel to show to His bond-servants
the things which must shortly take place.”*

John MacArthur: Now, God hasn't given us the exact timetable, but we are called to live in expectation. And the eternal God who revealed His Word to the spirits or the minds of the prophets has also revealed these truths to John through the angels for us. The things they say in here are real. The visions he sees are real, and they will happen just the way Revelation says they will happen.

Richard Phillips: By referring to the “*spirits*” of the prophets in the plural, John speaks of the inward faculties of the various men who wrote the Bible books. The Bible was written by men in a wide variety of situations, and their spirits were fully engaged in writing their histories, poems, and prophecies. Yet **God was ruling over this entire process**: the Lord is “*the God of the spirits of the prophets.*” **Ben Witherington** states that “God is the source of the prophet's inspiration because God is the ruler over human spirits.”

The angel's statement accords with the classic definition of the inspiration of Scripture, which states that the Bible's human authors **wrote under God's control**. Peter asserts that the Bible writers conveyed not their own thoughts, but God's message through the Holy Spirit: “*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*” (**2 Peter 1:21**). It is because God inspired the Bible writers that we can

echo David's confidence, expressed in **Psalm 119:105**: "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*"

In the case of the book of Revelation, John's guide adds that God "*has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place*" (**Rev. 22:6**). In the Old Testament, angels often delivered God's Word, especially when it involved prophetic visions. John thus stands in the line of the prophets. **Douglas Kelly** writes: "What Revelation predicts is not brilliant human guesswork. It is not the product of human philosophy, or even religion. It is rather, a matter of God revealing to us what is true" through angelic messengers. John offers a final attestation to the truth of Revelation by noting that it was recorded by an **eyewitness** of the visions who was also an authorized apostle of Jesus Christ. **Revelation 22:8** states: "*I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.*"

G.K. Beale: The **chain of the book's revelatory communication** is from God to Jesus to an angel to John and finally to Christians (so **1:1**; cf. **22:8**), which implies that John held a specific prophetic office, which is confirmed by the Dan. 2:28-29, 45 allusion here and in **1:1, 19** and **4:1**.

2. (:7a) Chief End Time Event = Soon Return of Christ = Thesis Statement
"And behold, I am coming quickly."

J. Hampton Keathley, III: "*I am coming*" in the Greek is a present tense verb. It is what we call a **futuristic or prophetic present**. This is used of an event which is so certain that it is regarded as already in the process of coming to pass.

Robert Mounce: The coming of Christ is to be "*soon*." It is best to take the utterance at face value and accept the difficulty of a foreshortened perspective on the time of the end rather than to reinterpret it in the sense that Jesus "comes" in the crises of life and especially at the death of every person. Revelation has enough riddles without our adding more. **Matt 24:42–44** counsels **every generation** to be on the alert for the return of the Son of man. An infallible timetable would do away with that attitude of urgent expectation that has been the hallmark of the church down through the centuries.

C. (:7b) God's Revelation Brings Special Blessing to Those Who Obey
"Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."

John MacArthur: What does it mean *to heed*? Well, it's from *tēreō*. It basically means to keep, to hold fast, or to guard. That's its meaning, to hold onto, to hold captive, to make one's own, to possess. That same term is used in **chapter 14, verse 12**, where it talks about the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God, who hold onto. . .

I not only have **to obey** what the book of Revelation says, but I have **to protect** from the people who want to destroy it. It calls for guarding this great book from its detractors who would deny it, guarding it from its critics who would ignore it, guarding it from its false interpreters who would obscure it.

Buist Fanning: The use of "*obey*" (or "*keep*") is a reminder of the **hortatory** content of this entire book. Its intent is not simply to convey information about the future but to communicate

moral demands to be obeyed in the present. But the one who lives out what the book calls for will enjoy the transcendent happiness that God's favor brings.

II. (:8-9) CORRECTION REGARDING PROPER OBJECT OF WORSHIP

A. (:8) Improper Worship

1. (:8a) Testimony of John

"And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things."

2. (:8b) Natural Reaction of John

*"And when I heard and saw,
I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things."*

John MacArthur: It says when he was the one who heard and saw these things – all of it. He meant no idolatry. He just lost himself. For a moment **he was so overwhelmed he couldn't discern between the messenger and the one who sent him.** "And the angel" - who realizes that God alone is to be worshiped and feels so self-conscious at John's posture, **verse 9** - "said, 'Don't do that. Stop. I'm a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book.'" I'm just another creature. "I'm" – I love this – "I'm a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets." Isn't that wonderful that the angels felt like they were brothers with the prophets. . .

Just as a footnote, The Roman Catholic Church advocates the worship of Mary, the worship of angels, the worship of saints. They call it "veneration," but it is indistinguishable from worship. It is a violation of what the Bible teaches. **Worship God.** All that John felt should be directed to God alone.

B. (:9) Proper Worship

1. Prohibition = Don't Worship Angels

"And he said to me, 'Do not do that;'"

Richard Phillips: In responding to John's action, the angel instructs us in the vitally important matter of worship. **Angels are worship specialists**, so we should listen carefully when they teach us about this topic. Here, the angel responds in outraged horror: *"You must not do that!"* (**Rev. 22:9**). The English language does not fully reflect the strength of revulsion expressed in the original Greek, which says, "See that not!" "Don't do this, John!" the angel responds.

We should not think that this interplay between John and the angel is disconnected from the exhortation to keep the message of Revelation. John is being shown, and we with him, that the first and single most important element in keeping God's Word is to give to God alone the glory that he is due. The angel reacts out of a **consuming passion for the exclusive glory of God**, and this same passion must be seen in the hearts of all those who keep the words of God's Book.

The attitude of this angel is also seen in God's servants in the Bible. A notable example is that of the apostle Paul in **Acts 17** when he worked his way through the streets of Athens. **Acts 17:16** says that *"his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols."* Paul was so grievously startled by idolatry that he suffered an inward convulsion. He suffered in his spirit something analogous to a heart attack. The reason for his paroxysm was the grievous thought that God's glory was being given to others who were not God. Paul was not overwhelmed

because he did not know how to contextualize his ministry or because he lacked the sophistication of his pagan neighbors. Paul was stricken because through the Word of God he had obtained an **overwhelming passion for the glory of God** and a revulsion for the casting down of God's honor.

2. Partnership in Submission and Worship

*"I am a fellow servant of yours
and of your brethren the prophets
and of those who heed the words of this book;"*

Kendell Easley: The angel refuses worship with a stern "*Do not do it.*" His comments that follow emphasize plainly the **difference between creature and Creator**. We must never be allowed to forget the infinite gulf between God and that which he made, no matter how splendid. The people of God are his servants (literally, "*slaves*"), a term John uses, along with saints as a preferred designation for Christians. (*Servants* emphasizes their deeds; *saints* their character.) Now, however, for the only time in Revelation an angel is called a servant of God. Both the holy angels and redeemed humanity exist to serve their Creator.

Because of this angel's special privilege in revealing God's word, he identifies with those human beings to whom God entrusted his message: you and your brothers the prophets. This is the only time in Scripture that brother and prophet are connected so closely. It could also be translated **your brother-prophets**. While the prophets were specially entrusted with God's revelation, they were, on the other hand, simply brothers within the family of God. This is emphasized even further with the angel's inclusion of all who keep the words of this book. Think of the vast heavenly company of holy angels and the multitude of Christ's earthly disciples together as "*fellow servants*" of the Lord God.

3. Passion = "worship God."

Robert Mounce: The angel's exhortation, "*Worship God!*" puts in the most succinct form possible the theme of the entire book.

Grant Osborne: There is only one imperative in light of all this: τῷ θεῷ προσκύνησον (*tō theō proskynēson, worship God*). This is the basic message of the whole book. There is only one worthy of worship—not the emperor or the Antichrist or the angels but God alone. Eternity will be typified by the unadulterated and direct worship of God. As the *Westminster Confession* has said, human beings were created to "praise God and enjoy him forever."

III. (:10-11) EXHORTATION TO BROADCAST GOD'S TRUTH AS A SAVOR OF LIFE UNTO LIFE AND DEATH UNTO DEATH

A. (:10) Call to Urgently Proclaim God's Truth

1. Unseal the Revelation

*"And he said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy
of this book,'"*

Daniel Akin: We dare not silence the Word of God by disobedience, indifference, laziness, or neglect. We must preach it and teach it continually and faithfully. A time is coming when the opportunity to respond to the gospel and the Word of God will be no more.

Buist Fanning: God desires what John has written to be widely known in his own day and in subsequent generations up to the actual fulfillment of the prophecies it contains.

G.K. Beale: What Daniel prophesied [**Daniel 12:4**] can now be understood (**the unsealing**), because the prophecies have begun to be fulfilled, and the **latter days have begun**. Therefore, the language of unsealing what is written indicates also the revelation of **greater insight** into the prophecies, a greater insight kept from OT saints (so likewise **Eph. 3:4-5**, where insight is now given “*which in other generations was not made known ... as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit*”; cf. also **1 Pet. 1:12**). In particular, Christ’s death, resurrection, and reign over history and the saints’ tribulation are the inaugurated fulfillment of OT prophecies. Similarly, Christ unsealed the book in **ch. 5**. Even if these two books are not identical, generally they both contain to a significant degree **revelatory material pertaining to OT prophecies**, some of which have been fulfilled and some of which await fulfillment.

Tony Garland: Since it is not a sealed book, it is then obvious that it is **meant to be understood** and not shrouded in undecipherable mystery and allusion:

What a rebuke to the negligence, the neglect, the sneering, ignorant arrogance, shown by most of Christendom toward The Revelation! Our Lord Jesus may declare it an open, unsealed, understandable book; men say it is filled with “unintelligible language” and “mystic symbols.” Christ says: “*Blessed is he that readeth*”; men say: “Let it alone, you cannot understand it.” [**William Newell**]

Dare we suppose that the merciful Jesus would hang his benedictions so high as to be beyond the reach of those to whom they are so graciously proposed? Would he mock us by suspending his offered blessings on terms beyond our power? Yet this is the charge men bring against their Redeemer when they think to plead the incomprehensibility of this Book for their neglect and practical rejection of it. The very propounding of these blessings and rewards is God’s own seal to the possibility of understanding this Book equally with any other part of Scripture. Would he, the God of truth, lie to us? Would he, the God of mercy, mock us? Would he who gave his life for us, and ever lives and ministers in heaven and earth for our enlightenment and salvation, give us a Book to tell us of the outcome of all his gracious operations, command us to note its words, to believe and treasure its contents, and promise us a special blessedness in so doing, if what he has thus put into our hands is not at all within the limits of our comprehension and successful mastery? . . . Therefore these very benedictions pronounce against the common notion that this Book is too difficult for ordinary Christians, and rebuke all who despise and avoid it. [**J.A.Seiss**]

2. Understand the Times

“for the time is near.”

J. Hampton Keathley, III: *To seal up a book* means to conceal, hide its message. “*Seal up*” is the Greek *sfragizw* which means “to put a seal on something,” either to “mark it, identify it, certify it, or to close it, keep it secret.” This book, unlike **Daniel 12:4**, was never to be sealed and was meant to be understood and applied from the day John received it. Why? Because the time is near, imminent, and people need the truth of this book to understand what God is doing and to prepare for what is coming, i.e., to live with a view to these coming events through the

perspective of eternity; the contents of this book were needed immediately by the churches and those living in the church age. In view of the imminent return of Christ, critical choices always need to be made.

B. (:11) Conduct Confirms Eternal Destiny

1. Persisting in Sin and Perversion

*“Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong;
and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy;”*

Robert Mounce: From the perspective of the Seer the end is so close that there is no longer time to alter the character and habits of people. Those who do wrong will continue to do wrong, and those who are morally unclean will continue in their vile condition. The major thrust of the verse is that since the end time is now at hand **people are certain to reap the consequences of the kinds of lives they have led**. The time arrives when change is impossible because **character has already been determined by a lifetime of habitual action**. The arrival of the end forecloses any possibility of alteration.

Grant Osborne: The rebellious and apostate members of the church as well as the pagans are warned that they will soon cross their Rubicon and face an angry God.

Richard Phillips: In what sense can we understand Jesus to be commanding evil? The answer is that Jesus is commanding that ungodliness be seen for what it is and that godliness be seen for what it is. One of the emphases of Revelation is that Christ will confront and judge evil throughout this age and especially at its end. Here, he commands that evil doing be seen as evil and moral corruption be displayed as the filth that it is. Is this not happening in Western society today, despite the propaganda that promotes sexual perversity, celebrates greed, and masks a culture of death? Despite the clever denials and deceptions, wickedness is nonetheless revealed by its effects. In this way, the Sovereign Christ exposes the evil of both sinful deeds and sinful character. The opposite will be true for godliness throughout this age and at the end: however misrepresented and despised biblical obedience may be in our time, Christ will ensure that its luster will nonetheless shine. Righteous deeds will be seen as being right, and Christ’s holy people will be revealed as holy.

2. Persisting in Righteousness and Holiness

*“and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness;
and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.”*

Daniel Akin: How we respond to the truth of God’s Word in this life will confirm our character and determine our destiny for all eternity. Negatively, the unrighteous will still do evil, and the filthy will forever be filthy. On a positive note, the righteous will still do right, and the holy will still be holy. One’s character will be set, forever fixed in a final condition and disposition. Those in hell will have no heart and passion for God. Those in heaven will delight in their emulation of their Lord. These truths must be told. We dare not be silent. Souls are at stake. Eternal destinies hang in the balance.

Charles Swindoll: The final words of the angel seem strange. He seems to be encouraging the wicked to continue being wicked instead of repenting. . . . However, in light of the many exhortations to repent throughout the book of Revelation, this cannot be the intended meaning. Rather, the language may be itself a kind of **warning**, perhaps paraphrased this way: “You

wrongdoers, go ahead and keep doing wrong. Just see what happens. And all unclean sinners, keep rolling in the mud. Just ignore God's offer of cleansing. You've seen what's in store for you. As for you righteous and holy saints, keep practicing righteousness, keep being holy —and you'll get your reward in due time."

IV. (:12) ASSURANCE OF REWARD FOR THE FAITHFUL

A. Thesis Statement

"Behold, I am coming quickly,"

B. Prospect of Reward

"and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done."

Grant Osborne: Since Christ is returning soon, we had better **be ready at all times**, lest he find us unprepared like the ten virgins (**Matt. 25:1–13**) or the servant who wasted his talent (**Matt. 25:14–30**). This is stressed in the rest of the verse, for Christ says that when he comes, ὁ μισθός μου μετ' ἐμοῦ (*ho misthos mou met' emou*, *my reward is with me*). This echoes **Isa. 40:10**, "See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power . . . his reward is with him." In **Isa. 40** the theme is that God would deliver his people from the destruction and exile that would overtake the nation, and his reward will be the return from exile. In Revelation the "reward" is **eschatological** and relates to the **eternal recompense** that will be given believers for their faithful walk with Christ, as in **11:18**, where the twenty-four elders spoke of "*the time for the dead to be judged, and to give a reward to your slaves the prophets*." God and the Lamb will vindicate and reward their people for all that they have sacrificed (see **6:9–11; 21:4**) and for all they have done for him. **Beale** (1999: 1136–37) adds **Isa. 62:11** LXX, "*Behold, the savior has come to you, bearing his reward*." This is closer to the text here, for there the reward is "*salvation*." Here it is not only salvation but recompense for "*work*" accomplished.

V. (:13) PROCLAMATION OF AUTHORITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the first and the last,
the beginning and the end."*

John MacArthur: That's just three different ways to say basically the same thing, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning – that is to say the source of all things. He is the end – that is the goal of all things, the consummation of all things. He is the eternal, transcendent, infinite God. That kind of designation identifies completeness, timelessness, and sovereign authority. He is not just another man. He is not an angel. He is not a created being. He is not some superhuman genius. He is not a distinguished martyr. He is God eternal and almighty. The beginning and the end, the first and the last.

William Barclay: There is more than one idea here.

(a) There is the idea of **completeness**. The Greeks used from *alpha to omega* and the Hebrews from *aleph to tau* to indicate completeness. For instance, Abraham kept the whole law from *aleph to tau*. Here is the symbol that Jesus Christ has everything within himself and needs nothing from any other source.

(b) There is the idea of **eternity**. He includes in himself all time, for he is the first and the last.

(c) There is the idea of **authority**. The Greeks said that Zeus was the beginning, the middle and the end. The Jewish Rabbis took over this idea and applied it to God, with their own interpretation. They said that, since God was the beginning, he received his power from no one; since he was the middle, he shared his power with no one; and since he was the end, he never handed over his power to anyone.

VI. (:14-15) PRONOUNCEMENT OF BLESSING AND CURSING – INSIDERS VS OUTSIDERS

A. (:14) Blessing on the Insiders

1. Righteousness Is Essential

“Blessed are those who wash their robes,”

William Barclay: *Those who wash their robes* have the right of entry into the city of God; the Authorized Version has *Blessed are they that do his commandments*. In Greek, the two phrases would be very like each other. *Those who have washed their robes* is *hoi plunontes tas stolas*, and *those that do his commandments* is *hoi poiountes tas entolas*. In the early Greek manuscripts, all the words are written in capital letters and there is no space left between them. If we set down these two phrases in Roman capital letters, we see how closely they resemble each other.

HOIPLUNONTESTASSTOLAS
HOIPOIOUNTESTASENTOLAS

“Those who have washed their robes” is the reading of the best manuscripts; but it is easy to see how a scribe could make a mistake in copying and substitute the more usual phrase.

2. Right to Eternal Life Tied to Imputed Righteousness

“that they may have the right to the tree of life,”

3. Restriction to Entering Heaven Dictated by the Way Ordained by God

“and may enter by the gates into the city.”

B. (:15) Cursing on the Outsiders

Craig Keener: But not everyone will be welcome to enter the city; future paradise for the faithful does not imply universalism. Just as the gates were open only for those in the Lamb’s book of life in **21:25–27**, so in **22:15** Jesus provides a partial list of those who will be excluded.

1. “Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers”

Kendell Easley: *“dogs”* -- a symbolic term for various impure persons; used in Scripture for male prostitutes as well as for those who distorted the gospel (**Deut. 23:17–18; Phil. 3:2**).

2. “and the immoral persons”

3. “and the murderers and the idolaters,”

4. “and everyone who loves and practices lying.”

Kendell Easley: people like this have nothing to do with the truth; they have followed the devil, who is the great deceiver and liar (12:9).

VII. (:16) ASSURANCE OF THE RELIABILITY OF THIS REVELATION BASED ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF MESSIANIC CREDENTIALS

A. Authority and Reliability of This Revelation

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches.”

Buist Fanning: The “you” seems to refer to the seven specific churches originally addressed, while “the churches” is the larger group of Christians to whom the Spirit also speaks through this book. So, in v. **16a-b** Jesus attests again to the **reliability** of the book’s contents as a testimony that he revealed through his messengers.

B. Authenticity of Messianic Credentials

1. “I am the root and the offspring of David,”

2. “the bright morning star.”

John MacArthur: The *morning star*, by the way, is the brightest star, and it announces the arrival of the day. And that is uniquely fitting, for the Lord Jesus Christ, because when He comes, the brightness of that star shatters the darkness of man’s night and heralds the dawn of God’s glorious day, the dawn of kingdom glory. The brightness of that star shatters the darkness of man’s night and heralds the dawn of God’s glorious day. The dawn of kingdom glory. He is the morning star who appears right before the kingdom dawns.

Grant Osborne: Here two more titles are added to **22:13** to anchor further **the reality of who he is**. Each also occurs earlier in the Apocalypse, so this also has an intertextual purpose, binding the book together. First, Jesus is ἡ ρίζα καὶ τὸ γένος Δαβὶδ (*hē rhiza kai to genos David, the Root and Offspring of David*). In **5:5** he is “the root of David,” a military metaphor drawn from **Isa. 11:1** and **10** (“the root of Jesse . . . will stand as a banner for the peoples”), which for the Jews connoted the **Warrior Messiah** who would destroy their enemies (see on **5:5**). That image continues here, where the Root of David will be the judge of the wicked (**vv. 11a, 15**) but adds that he is also David’s “Offspring.” Here he is seen as the fulfillment of all the Davidic messianic hope. He is indeed the **Davidic Messiah**. The second title (ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ λαμπρὸς ὁ πρωῒνος, *ho astēr ho lampros ho prōinos, the bright Morning Star*) is also messianic, alluding to **Num. 24:17**, “A star will come out of Jacob,” a passage that was seen as messianic in Judaism (see on **2:28**). In **2:28** this messianic glory was shared with the faithful followers and also referred to the victory of the Warrior Messiah over his enemies. Thus, **both titles refer not only to the messianic nature and glory of Jesus but also his great power over the wicked.**

VIII. (:17a) INVITATION FOR JESUS TO RETURN SOON

A. Invitation Issued by the Spirit and the Bride

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’”

Charles Spurgeon: To my mind, the solemnity of this invitation lies partly in the fact that it is placed at the very end of the Bible and placed there because it is the sum and substance – the aim and objective of the whole Bible. It is like the point of the arrow and all the rest of the Bible is like the shaft and the feathers on either side of it. We may say of the Scriptures what John said of his Gospel, *“These are written”* – all these books that are gathered together into one library called the Bible – *“These are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And that believing you might have life through His name.”* So far as you are concerned, this blessed Book has missed its purpose unless you have been led by it to come to Christ!

It is all in vain that you have a Bible, or read your Bible, unless you really *“take the water of life”* of which it speaks. It is worse than vain, for if it is not a *savor of life unto life* to you, it shall be a *savor of death unto death*! Therefore, it seems to me that this is a very solemn invitation because all the books of the Bible do, in effect, cry to sinners, *“Come to Jesus.”* (*“Oft-Repeated Invitation”*)

B. Invitation Reinforced by Believers

“And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’”

John MacArthur: The first part is the Spirit and the bride calling for Christ to come. The second part is calling unbelievers to come to Christ. . .

What about the bride? Why does the bride – why does the Church, the bride of Christ the bridegroom say, *“Come?”* For obvious reasons. We, too, are weary of the battle against sin, as is the Holy Spirit. We, too, long for the exaltation of Jesus Christ. We who are the Church, who belong to Christ, His sheep who love Him, who long for Him to bring us to Himself, we have been waiting and praying and hoping and watching and longing for the coming of the Lord. God’s people have always longed for this. They’ve always longed for the day when the serpent’s head would be bruised, crushed, and he would be destroyed.

God’s people, ever since in the very beginning, when God announced redemption, that there would be someone who would come and bruise the head of the serpent, God’s people have longed for that destruction to come so that righteousness could prevail and sin be destroyed.

Robert Mounce: The threefold use of the present imperative (*“come/let him come”*) serves to extend the invitation until that very moment when history will pass irrevocably into eternity and any further opportunity for decision will be past.

IX. (:17b) INVITATION TO DRINK FREELY FROM THE WATER OF LIFE

A. The Invitation Addresses Man’s Basic Need = Spiritual Thirst

“And let the one who is thirsty come;”

Grant Osborne: It is part of the mission motif addressing the unsaved and part of the perseverance theme calling Christians to a deeper commitment. This is certainly one of the major purposes of the book, to call back to Christ those members of the church who are straying (such as the churches of Sardis and Laodicea as well as those who have joined the Nicolaitan cult in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira) and to **evangelize those who are lost** (a major purpose of the Gospel of John as well).

B. The Invitation of the Water of Life May Be Freely Received

“let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”

Richard Phillips: Notice **the kind of person to whom Christ offers salvation**. He speaks to “*the one who is thirsty*.” Here is a universal appeal, for the entire human race thirsts from souls that are unfulfilled and dissatisfied with life. Man is created with a universal need to know his Maker and a craving in the soul for the life that only God can give. The heart longs for acceptance by One who is wholly worthy to be loved. The mind cries out for truth. The will desires a truly noble cause, to which we may offer our lives and find transcendent meaning. None of these desires can be satisfied by worldly things so as to fulfill our nature, which is stamped by the image of God. Thus, David wrote, “*My soul thirsts for God, for the living God*” (**Ps. 42:2**).

The tragedy of life arises when men and women know their thirst but have forgotten the only object of satisfaction. They move from one pursuit in life to another, seeking fulfillment in romance, in career success, in family and child-raising, in politics, in sports, or in the arts. However worthy these pursuits are in themselves, they are not designed by God to quench the thirst of the soul made by him and for him. It is therefore with mercy and love that Jesus Christ presents himself before everyone—even the greatest sinners—as “*the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star*” (**Rev. 22:16**). He calls, “*Let the one who is thirsty come*” (**22:17**). Here is the **general call of the gospel**, offered universally to every soul, promising life if only you will come. It is the call given by the church today, proclaiming the gospel in every ear with the genuine offer of forgiveness and life.

Jesus further speaks to “*the one who desires*” (**Rev. 22:17**). Here is the special call of the gospel, which only Jesus can give to the souls of those made willing by his power. If we only choose to be saved, we may come to Christ and drink. But the great problem of life is that men and women in sin are not willing and do not choose salvation. In their pride they will not bow before the Son of God. With hardened hearts they cast down the cup of faith by which alone they may drink from the waters of life. Without having heard the gospel, we may not realize the true thirst that we feel. But having heard the gospel, many still perish in moral rebellion against their Sovereign and Redeemer. This is why Jesus said, “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*” (**John 6:44**). It is the special, personal grace of God through the Holy Spirit that **makes sinners willing** and brings them to the Savior for eternal life.

Finally, there is a condition—you must receive Christ’s salvation as a **free gift**: “*Let the one who desires take the water of life without price*” (**Rev. 22:17**). God has grace for sinners who need to be saved and can do nothing for themselves.

X. (:18-19) WARNING AGAINST ALTERING GOD’S PROPHETIC MESSAGE

“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book:”

A. (:18) Prohibition against Adding to God’s Word

*“if anyone adds to them,
God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book;”*

Richard Phillips: In the time of Jesus, the Pharisees and Sadducees best fit the description of this warning. **Raymond Brown** writes: “The Pharisees added to the word of God hundreds of detailed prohibitions which were not contained in canonical Scripture. In the same period, the Sadducees

subtracted from the word the things they found unacceptable—anything about the supernatural, the doctrine of the resurrection, angels and spirits.” These two groups find their analogies today in legalists who add man-made works to salvation and liberals who deny plainly taught biblical doctrines. Moreover, adding to or subtracting from Revelation’s message is a hallmark of the cults and their false prophetic leaders.

B. (:19) Prohibition against Taking Away from God’s Word

“and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.”

John MacArthur: That does not, of course, mean that believers will never make errors in judgment or mistakenly interpret Scripture incorrectly or inadequately. The Lord’s warning here is address to those who engage in deliberate falsification or misinterpretation of Scripture, those whom Paul denounces as peddlers of the Word of God (**2 Cor. 2:17**).

Grant Osborne: The reader is warned here that distorting God’s message in these prophecies is tantamount to apostasy, and the person guilty of it will become an apostate unbeliever in God’s eyes.

John Walvoord: No one can dare add to the Word of God except in blatant unbelief and denial that the Word is indeed God’s own message to man. Likewise, no one should dare take away from the words of the book, since to do so is to do despite to the inspired Word of God. What a solemn warning this is to critics who have tampered with this book and other portions of Scripture in arrogant self-confidence that they are equipped intellectually and spiritually to determine what is true and what is not true in the Word of God. Though not stated in detail, the point of these two verses is that a child of God who reveres Him will recognize at once that this is the Word of God.

J. Hampton Keathley, III: So how does one add to the Bible or revelation?

- One way is by **claiming new revelation**, that the Bible and the book of Revelation are not enough (as with the Book of Mormon or any other religious writing that claims to be from God).
- Another way is by **claiming advanced knowledge** in spiritual matters and that the Bible is not the answer or simply wrong (**2 John 9**). Liberal humanists are grossly guilty of this. Of course such action not only is adding but subtracting. The point is that this reveals a blatant unbelief in the Bible which denies that the Word of God is the revelation and testimony of God. Such action is a clear evidence of personal unbelief and rejection of Jesus Christ.

XI. (:20a) THESIS STATEMENT

“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming quickly.’”

XII. (:20b) FINAL AFFIRMATION

“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.”

(:21) BENEDICTION

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.”

Daniel Akin: Taken as a whole, the end of Revelation calls us to a clear and simple threefold posture: **watch, wait, and witness**. Persecution, trials, and suffering may be a threefold companion, but do not grow weary in well doing. God sees and He knows. And He is with you and working through you to advance His kingdom among the nations. How do we know? Just look at the last verse in the Bible, **Revelation 22:21**. There is our prayer and promise, *“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints.”* To this we say with the apostle John, *“Amen.”* We agree. We believe.

Richard Phillips: A **benediction** is both a prayer appeal and a declaration of God’s blessing on his people. As was Paul’s practice, John in his benediction proclaims the grace of Christ for believers. When we speak of salvation *“by grace,”* we mean that salvation is a free gift from God. Here, *“grace”* refers to the attitude of the Lord toward his people: Christ is filled with merciful love for all those who call on his name. Revelation has shown Jesus as the Lion and Lamb who is worthy to unseal the scroll of God and establish the divine purpose for heaven and earth. This victorious Lord looks upon his struggling people—then and now—with grace in his heart, acting in compassion for their sufferings and determining by his redeeming work to bring them with him into the new Jerusalem that is to come.

“Grace” further refers to the **power** that God provides to his people in need. In Revelation, Christ has commanded believers to overcome through faith. Will we? The answer is yes! By his grace the people of Christ will persevere in faith so as to stand triumphant on Mount Zion together with the Lamb (**Rev. 14:1**). Christians are commanded to hold fast to God’s Word and uphold our testimony to Jesus to the end. By the grace of Jesus, we will: the stars of the churches will shine brightly in the darkness of this world until the morning star rises to bring a new day. Christians are required to withstand the allures of the harlot and must refuse to worship the beast. We must reject false teaching from the false prophets of this world. Will the church and will Christians maintain their faith against such potent opposition? The answer, for which John prays and that he declares on Christ’s behalf, is found in his closing benediction: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen”* (**22:21**). Not merely some of Christ’s people are strengthened, empowered, and secured by this grace, but, John insists, the grace of the Lord Jesus will save all who hear, believe, and call on his name in true faith.

This grace is **sufficient to our need** because it is the grace of Jesus, who bears to us the love of God the Father. **Charles Hodge** writes: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is the undeserved love of a divine person clothed with our nature, whose love has all the attributes of sinless human love; the love of one who owns us, who is invested with absolute dominion over us and who is our protector and preserver.” The grace of this Lord and Savior, Lion and Lamb, who reigns forever from the throne of God, is now and will always be *“able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him”* (**Heb. 7:25**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) How are these final words of Revelation especially appropriate as the last words of the canon

of Scripture?

- 2) Are we living as if we truly believe that Jesus is coming soon?
- 3) How can we be more aggressive and faithful in extending the free offer of eternal life to those who may be spiritually thirsty?
- 4) Is our approach to the Christian life one of relying on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ or one of relying on performance and works?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Robert Mounce: With this the book of Revelation is **complete**. It has served to inform the readers of that day (and all subsequent time) that God is sovereign and that his eternal plan for the human race will in fact be carried through. During the interim there will be hostility and opposition, but what he has decreed must of necessity come to pass. People will be faced with the crucial decision of pledging their allegiance to the beast (and hence to Satan himself) or to the Lamb. Those who choose to wear the mark of the beast will ultimately share his fate. The great city Babylon will fall. Those who choose to follow the Lamb, who bears the marks of redemptive sacrifice, will ultimately be brought into eternal fellowship with God in the New Jerusalem. The end of all things has been laid bare before the readers of Revelation. All uncertainty regarding the eschaton has been removed. Believers are encouraged to remain faithful to their trust and wait expectantly for the return of Christ, who will forever put away all evil and usher in the eternal state of blessedness. *“Amen. Come Lord Jesus.”*

Grant Osborne: This **complex epilogue** serves as the perfect conclusion to the book, for it sums up the key emphases: the sovereignty of God, the soon return of Christ, and the necessity of both conversion for unbelievers and perseverance on the part of believers. To anchor these critical truths, John goes to great length to stress the authenticity of the book as a prophecy received directly from the Lord (**22:6, 8, 18–19**). That so few of the speakers are identified is deliberate, for John wants the reader to focus on the message rather than the one speaking it. Moreover, whether it is Christ or John, the message is **ultimately from Christ**. Therefore, the reader must choose now between God and evil (**22:11**), for the end is soon to appear. The time for decision is today (cf. **Heb. 3:7, 13, 15; 4:7**), while the invitation to “*come*” (**Rev. 22:17**) is still available. For the believer, however, the desire for Christ to fulfill his promise to “*come soon*” (**22:7, 12, 20a**) is an ever-present reality, and we can only affirm, “*Amen, come, Lord Jesus*” (**22:20b**). Yet “*all*” of us, unbeliever and believer alike, can find hope only in “*the grace of the Lord Jesus*” (**22:21**). Without his grace, belief and strength to persevere are impossible goals.

John MacArthur: You should, after reading this book, love Christ more than you ever loved Him for the sake of His coming glory. You should live in the light of the fact that someday you’re going to face Him. You should, by comprehending this book, disconnect yourself from the perishing world and live in the light of the eternal world. You should long for the day when you’re made like Christ, long for the time when He appears and you see Him face to face, long for the hour of your eternal reward, long for your resurrection body as Paul did in **2 Corinthians chapter 5**, that he might be clothed upon with his house which is from heaven. You are to grasp

also the fearful judgment on the ungodly and call them to Christ before it's too late. That is **keeping or heeding** the words of this prophecy.

Duvall: [There are] important **parallels** with the prologue in **1:1-8**, and three central themes that reinforce the overall message of the book:

- 1) the book is an authentic prophecy from God (**22:6-8, 10, 16, 18-19**),
- 2) Jesus Christ's return is imminent (**22:6-7, 10, 12, 20**), and
- 3) those who obey the prophecy will be blessed (**22:7, 9, 11, 14, 17-19**). (*Revelation*, 304)

Buist Fanning: The focus on the person of God or of God and the Lamb in the earlier passages changes in **22:6-21** to a **yearning for Jesus our Savior to return**. He is the groom for whom the bride longs and prepares herself (**19:7; 21:2; 22:17**). The anticipation of the bridegroom's appearance builds, as three times John records Jesus's affirmation that he will come soon (**22:7, 12, 20**). This eager expectation is how the book began (cf. **1:1-3, 7**). After Jesus's second declaration of his coming in **22:12**, John reports the ardent response of the Spirit (who revealed the book), of the bride corporately, and of the individual Christian reading the book, all of whom invite him to "*come*" (v. 17). After the third affirmation, "*Surely I am coming soon*" (v. 20), John's plaintive appeal, "*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*" is the book's fitting conclusion along with the benediction, "*The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all*" (v. 21). The Lord Jesus is the person whose coming every Christian should love, long for, and pray for. His grace and his presence should be the center of our lives from beginning to end and in all our moments in between.

Charles Swindoll: Today, in a world increasingly antagonistic toward biblical truth and the claims of Christ, Revelation's vivid, striking images and dire predictions of doom offer a strangely satisfying form of comfort to us as well. In effect, the persecuted righteous still hear the righteous Judge say, *Don't lose heart; remain faithful; I will vindicate your suffering soon*. The concluding thoughts in this book of comfort come in the form of an invitation, an exhortation, and a benediction, each of which summarizes a major theme for a particular audience. These can be expressed in three succinct statements. Meditate on them. Ruminant over them. Commit them to memory. They will become the support you need to hang on to faith, hope, and love for life.

To those who are **lonely and lost**; *Come!* You're invited to receive God's abundant grace, the free offer of eternal life in heaven with Him. He offers victory over temptation, sin, and Satan; ultimate triumph over death and the grave; and glories unimaginable. Don't let misery or pride keep you from accepting His invitation, which is extended especially to you.

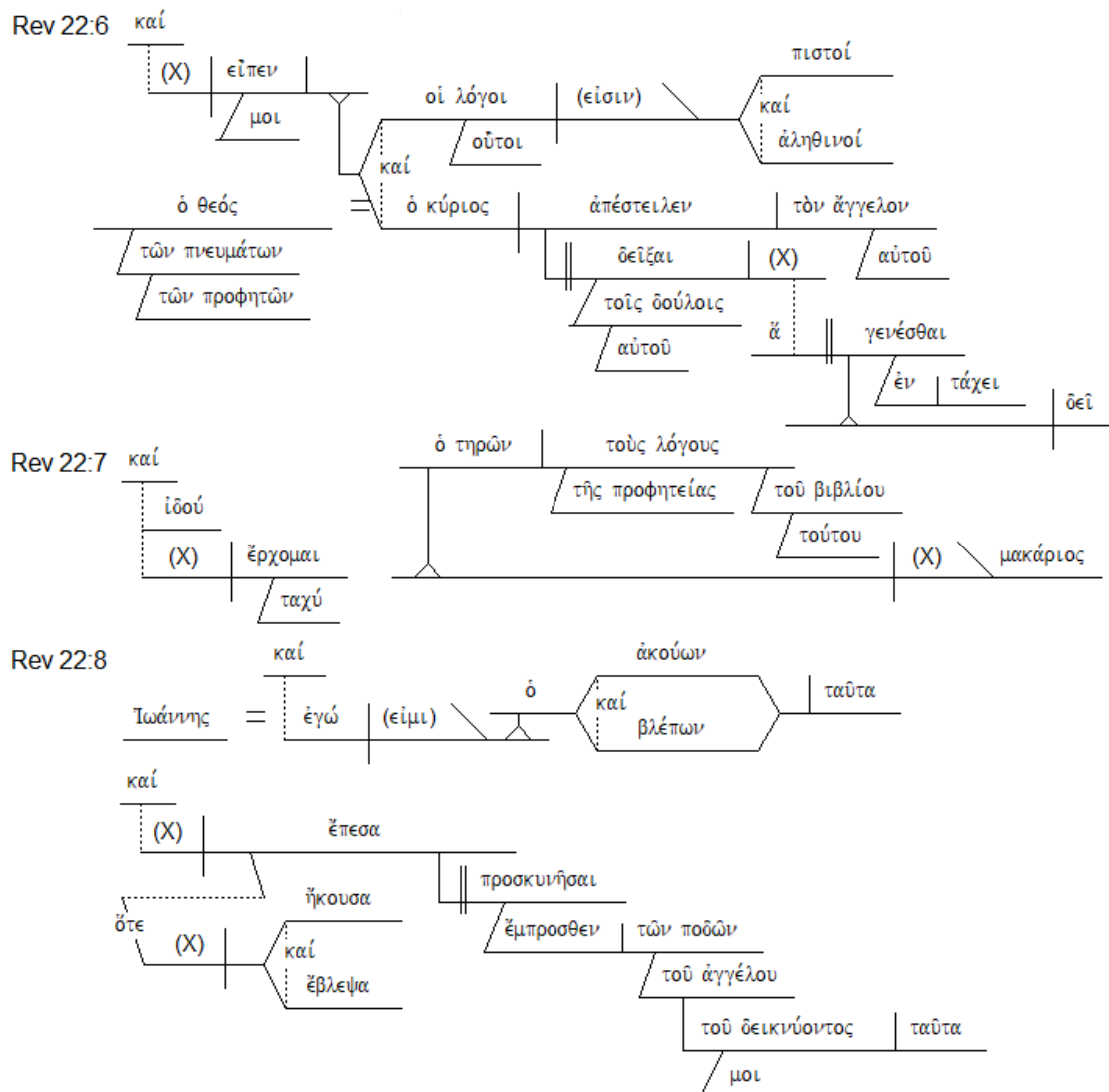
To those who are **indifferent or apathetic**: *Wake up!* Your present choices have eternal consequences. Christ's return could occur at any moment. And even if he tarries, your physical life could end before the day is up. We can't afford to neglect our spiritual lives for another moment.

To those who are **anxious and fearful**: *Grace be with you!* The Lord is sovereign, and He will preserve you to the end. When we place our trust in Him, we realize that persevering throughout our lives isn't something done in our own strength, but something accomplished by His power – the infinite power of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Grant Osborne: [Attempt at providing some structure]

- A. Authenticating the book (22:6–7)
- B. Angel's commands (22:8–11)
 - 1. Worship only God (22:8–9)
 - 2. Do not seal these prophecies (22:10)
 - 3. Choose evil or righteousness (22:11)
- C. Sayings of Christ (22:12–19)
 - 1. Coming soon with his reward (22:12)
 - 2. Identity of the one coming (22:13)
 - 3. Blessing and warning to the saved and the unsaved (22:14–15)
 - 4. Jesus sends revelation to churches (22:16a)
 - 5. Further identity of Jesus (22:16b)
 - 6. Cry for the parousia (22:17)
 - 7. Warning against adding or subtracting from the book (22:18–19)
- D. Plea for Christ's return (22:20)
- E. Concluding benediction (22:21)

Leedy Greek Diagram:



Rev 22:9 καὶ

(X) λέγει μοι

(X) ὅρα

(X) εἰμι σύνδουλος σου

καὶ τῶν ἀδελφῶν σου = τῶν προφητῶν

καὶ τῶν τηρούντων τοὺς λόγους τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου

(X) προσκύνησον τῷ θεῷ

Rev 22:10 καὶ

Rev 22:10 καὶ
(X) λέγει μοι (X) σφραγίσας τοὺς λόγους
μὴ τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου
Rev 22:11 ὁ ἀδικῶν ἀδικησάτω ἔτι ὁ καὶρός ἐστιν ἔγγυς

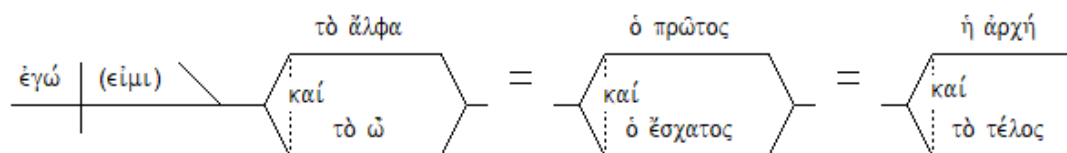
Rev 22:11

	ὁ ἁδικῶν	ἁδικησάτω	γάρ
		ἔτι	
καί	ὁ ῥυπαρὸς	ῥυπαρευθήτω	
		ἔτι	
καί	ὁ δίκαιος	ποιησάτω	δικαιοσύνην
		ἔτι	
καί	ὁ ἅγιος	ἁγιασθήτω	
		ἔτι	

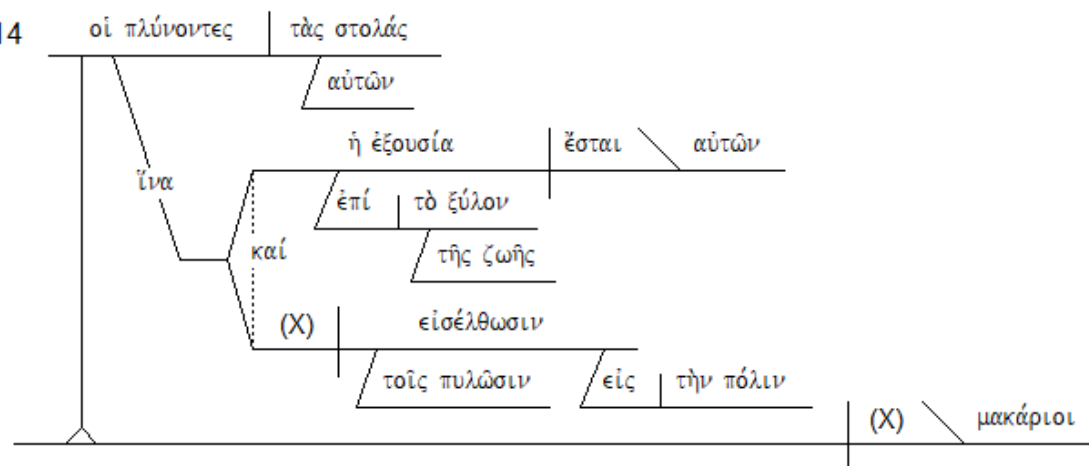
Rev 22:12

ιδού
(X) ἔρχομαι
καί ταχύ
ὁ μισθός μου μετ' ἐμοῦ (X)
ἀποδοῦναι ἑκάστῳ ὡς τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ ἐστίν

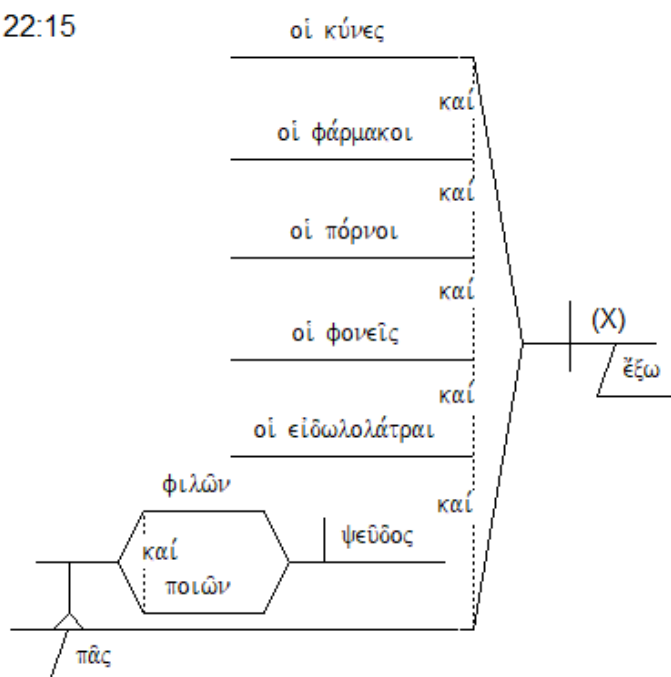
Rev 22:13



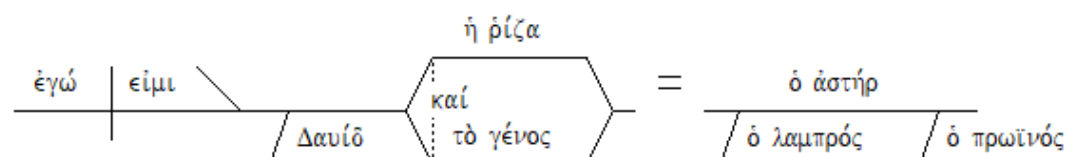
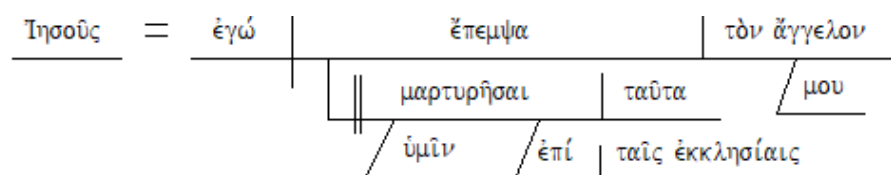
Rev 22:14



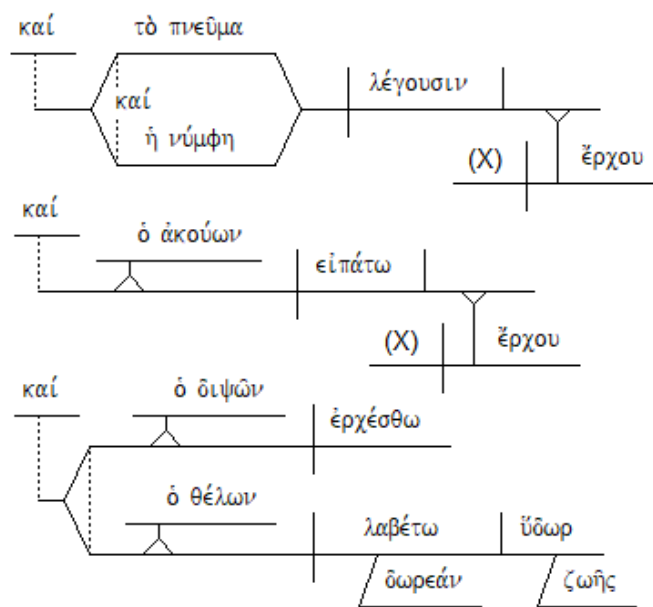
Rev 22:15



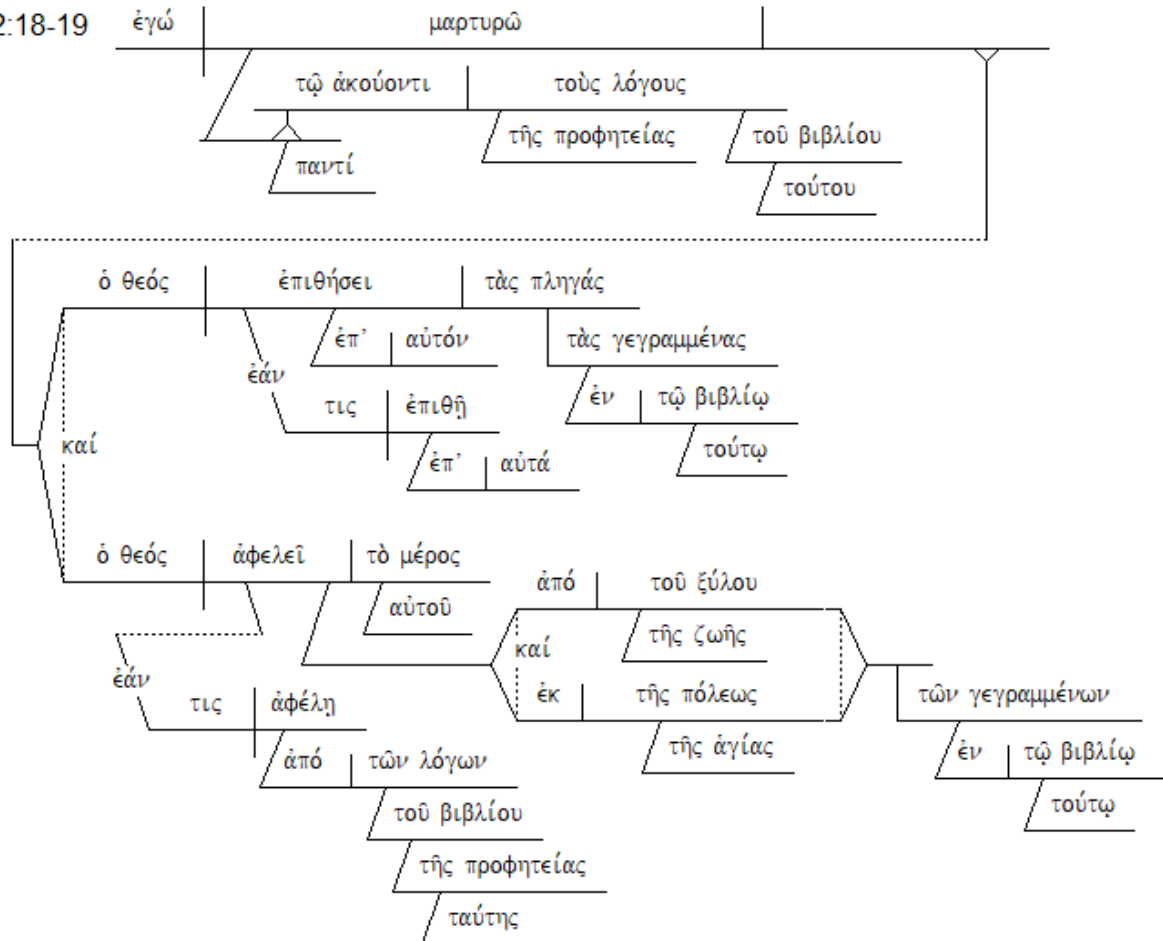
Rev 22:16



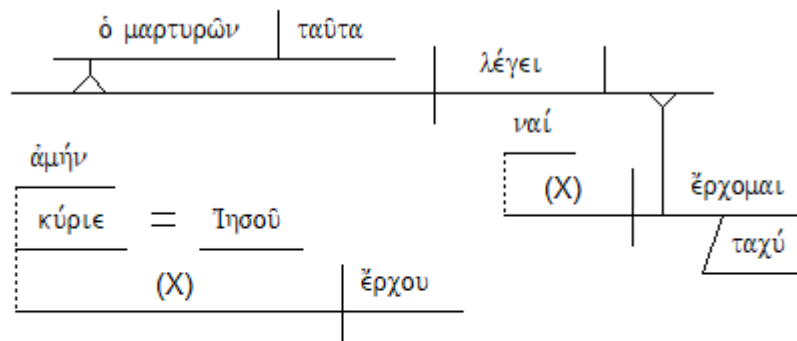
Rev 22:17



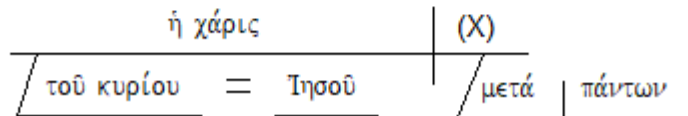
Rev 22:18-19



Rev 22:20



Rev 22:21



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