



THESE WILL PAY THE PENALTY OF ETERNAL DESTRUCTION, AWAY FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD AND FROM THE GLORY OF HIS POWER, WHEN HE COMES TO BE GLORIFIED IN HIS SAINTS ON THAT DAY, AND TO BE MARVELED AT AMONG ALL WHO HAVE BELIEVED—.

2 THESSALONIANS 1:9-10

LAST THINGS

A PRETRIBULATIONAL,
PREMILLENNIAL
INTERPRETATION OF
GOD'S WORD REGARDING
THE END TIMES

WITH FULL-COLOR TIMELINES AND CHARTS

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COMMON ABBREVIATIONS

NASB: New American Standard Bible

NKJV: New King James Version

KJV: King James Version

KJVs: Both King James Version and New King James Version

NIV: New International Version

NIVs: Both/Either New International Version 1984 and/or New International Version 2011

YLT: Young's Literal Translation

ESV: English Standard Version

TLV: Tree of Life Version

OT, NT: Old Testament, New Testament

COMMENTARIES REFERENCED IN THIS STUDY

Principal Works

Walvoord: Walvoord, John F., primarily from his series, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, Copyright, © 1966, The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago.

MacArthur: John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation*, Moody Publishers, Chicago, Copyright © 1999, 2000, John MacArthur.

Guzik: David Guzik, *Enduring Word Commentary*, © 2014 by David Guzik and Enduring Word Media.

Johnson: Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, General Editor, © 1981 by The Zondervan Corporation.

Archer: Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *Daniel, The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank E. Gaebelein, General Editor, © 1985 by The Zondervan Corporation.

Venerable Citations

Seiss: J. A. Seiss, D.D., *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Revised Text*, Eighth Edition., vol. 1 (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1901), i.

Alford: Henry Alford (1810-1871), *Revelation, Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary*.

Barnes: Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*.

Clarke: Adam Clarke's *Commentary on the Bible*.

JFB: *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* by Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown.

Vincent: Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies*.

Robertson: A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*.

Vine's: W. E. Vine, *The Expanded Vine's: Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

Spurgeon: Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Lange: Johann Peter Lange

CONVENTIONS USED IN THIS STUDY

- Directions to read a passage from the Bible are in bold, dark-red type, such as “**Read Genesis 3:14-15.**”
- Footnotes, used for shorter references or explanations, and Sidenotes, used for longer explanations or additional material, are used throughout.
- Directions to turn to a Scripture passage (often other than the one being studied) or chart are in blue type, such as “**Please turn to 1 Corinthians 15.**”
- Passages quoted that are less than a full verse are in *green italics*.
- Greek and Hebrew translations are in italics, such as “*paralambano*”
- All graphic charts are found in the separate file, “Last-Things_Charts.pdf”
- Some sessions include a “handout” (physically handed out to class members in the original class). Some of these are single pages, some double-sided. When included, they will be found as the last page(s) of a session’s notes.

PREFACE

Permit me a few moments to issue a polite warning about that which resides on the following pages. This writer is too old and too set in his ways to bother with trivialities. Thus anyone looking for a brief manual to offer a few questions prompting light discussion in your typical Sunday School class will no doubt run screaming into the night after contemplating a study such as this. If that is what you desire, may your tribe increase; those guides have their place, and you will discover many of that type of study guide from which to choose. If, on the other hand, you are looking for something to assist in a thorough, detailed, down-to-the-bare-metal examination of God's word, then you just might find a use for this volume.

This Bible study—essentially, in content and form, a commentary—consists of my weekly notes for our Sunday morning Adult Bible Fellowship (ABF) class on the *Last Things*, the Eschaton. This is *not* a study of the book of Revelation, but a study of the portions of God's word that pertain to the end times. These would include Revelation, Daniel, Ezekiel, Joel, Zechariah, First and Second Thessalonians, Matthew, and many others.

The discussions herein are geared for adults or, possibly, older teenagers, but probably not young children. These notes may be found useful by teachers of similar classes, by leaders of small groups, or even by those in private study. The individual sessions typically average between thirty and fifty teaching minutes. The goal of this study from its inception was to produce a handy reference for those times one cannot quite recall the sequence of events in the Eschaton. End time prophecies can be confusing and easily mislaid in one's memory. So the accompanying *Charts* booklet serves not just as a handy visual reference for those times, but should be used, as prompted, alongside the study notes. In addition to the charts and timelines, and this study book, the audio versions of the fifty-two weekly sessions—in both live and “studio” versions—remain available at the Bible Studies page ([HTTPS://DLAMPEL.COM/BIBLE-STUDIES/](https://dlampel.com/bible-studies/)) at our web site.

As one can readily deduce from these notes, I do not subscribe to the “Socratic Method” of teaching a Bible class—especially for a topic such as this. From my experience such a method of teaching by posing a series of questions for the class to answer would waste an incredible amount of time in a class in which most participants show up not even aware of the passage that will be studied that day, and certainly will not have done any advance study of their own. No, the teacher is the one who has spent the week in detailed study of the text, so his or her voice should predominate. This does not, of course, preclude healthy discussion, and questions or insights offered by the class members.

I approach any study of the Bible from the perspective that not only is it God's holy word, but that it is an astounding, breathtaking document. Even to say it is “rich” is to damn with faint praise. That the Creator of the universe would entrust to each individual believer such a treasure, from His lips, the human intellect cannot fathom. And to have the privilege of its study, along with the many resources we have in this day and age, is a blessing too great to measure.

As to any credentials I might cite, all I have to offer is experience. As of this writing I have been teaching weekly ABF classes, virtually non-stop, for better than fifteen years; I have been writing devotional publications for more than thirty-three years; and Christian drama since 1983 (I'll let you do the math on that one). All of these products are available, free of charge, at our web site, DLAMPEL.COM.

It is my desire and my prayer that you will find this resource of use in your daily, ongoing walk with Christ, and that it will be put to use for the edification and equipping of the church (Ephesians 4:12). Let all thanksgiving and praise be offered to our gracious God, who equips each of us in sundry ways to serve Him and His Christ, and those in His kingdom.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David B. Lempel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "L".

Winterset, Iowa

April, 2023

SESSION 1: A BEGINNING

PREFACE TO THE CLASS

Early one Sunday morning in November of 2019, while consuming my obligatory two pieces of toast and flipping through the channels to find something more edifying than the latest sports report or a rerun of *Hazel*, I stumbled upon a program with a preacher speaking on the end times. After a while he said something regarding the sequence of events that gave me pause. “Is that correct?” I wondered. And immediately I was convicted by my ignorance. I read the Bible through almost every year; I have researched and answered questions on the topic from members of our class; I have even taught the Thessalonian letters, which required addressing at least some of the details of the *parousia*. Yet, on that particular Sunday morning, I still wasn't sure whether that TV preacher was or was not correct! My very next thought was, “Well, there is no better way to learn it than to teach it.” So here we are.

First let me point out what this class will *not* be:

- It will not be an exhaustive, verse-by-verse examination of The Revelation, Daniel, Christ's words in the gospel accounts, Thessalonians, et al.
- It will not be an exhaustive comparison of the different interpretations of what will happen in the end. These will be mentioned, but only in passing.

No doubt for every one of us there are certain subjects we must repeatedly relearn—we hear it or read it, we may even write it down, but inevitably the occasion will arise when we can't remember that which we thought we knew. Hence the purpose of this class, which is to present a detailed chronology of the end times—including, for each participant, a series of printed charts.*

The ultimate purpose of the class is not just to impart information once in the classroom, but for each person to end up with a handy reference guide for those times when he or she forgets—just as I did that Sunday morning.

This class is going to be unapologetically based on a *pretribulational* (or *dispensational*) *premillennial* interpretation of God's word regarding the end times. This is the approach I grew up with, and it is the official position of this church—a happy convergence. This is what I believe; this is what this church believes. But it is not the only interpretation of what the Bible has to say about such things. There are highly respected scholars, commentators, and preachers—devout men of God all—who hold to different positions. Wayne Grudem, in his *Systematic Theology*, puts well how we should consider and respond to such disagreements.

Grudem: It is important to affirm the genuine evangelical standing of those who have differing positions on these questions. Evangelicals who hold to these various positions all agree that Scripture is inerrant, and they have a commitment to believe *whatever* is taught by Scripture. Their differences concern the interpretation of various passages relating to these events, but their differences on these matters should

* Similar to what we did for an earlier study of *Christ in the Old Testament*, for the original class I produced and distributed a number of charts and informational sheets that were used in class, but also, if the individual so desired, would be bound at the conclusion of the class. The handouts are included in this file, at the end of each session's notes, and the charts and timelines are in the separate companion file, LAST-THINGS_CHARTS.PDF.

be seen as matters of secondary importance, not as differences over primary doctrinal matters.

Wayne Grudem, by the way, does not subscribe to this position on the end times; his position is that of *classic* or *historic premillennialism*, which does not include a pretribulational rapture of the church. That is, according to his interpretation of the text, the church will still be on earth for the tribulation.

So, for example, one camp may believe that Christ will return for His church *after* the Tribulation, while another camp believes He will do so *before* the Tribulation (a few even say in the *middle* of the Tribulation, just before the *Great* Tribulation). But all agree that Christ *will* return for His church and in righteous judgment of the world. They just disagree on the order, which is usually of secondary importance. Most of the respectable differences among the various interpretations tend to center around the Tribulation and/or the Millennium.

I will be referencing, in brief outline, the differences between the various positions on the end times, but we will *not* be covering in-depth the arguments for or against all of them. *The purpose of this class—I tell you up-front—is to lay out and document for easy reference the pretribulational premillennial sequence of events for the end times.*

No matter one's position regarding the order of the Eschaton, or whether much of it is to be understood as literal or just mystical and figurative—the books of Revelation and Daniel are famously difficult to interpret—it is important for us all to remember that all positions have weak and logically vulnerable aspects. That is, there is no one, absolutely fool-proof from beginning to end, interpretation of the Eschaton. Each has its “But what about...” moments.

THE ESCHATON: WHEN DOES IT BEGIN?

While it is common to mark the beginning of the “end times” with the Rapture—Christ's return in the clouds to bring home the dead in Christ as well as the living church¹—the writer to the Hebrews, for one, marks the start of the end times with the *first* advent of Christ Jesus.

Read Hebrews 1:1-2.

That word translated “last” does not mean “in these *recent* days,” or in these *current* days,” but is the key word for this study: *eschaton*, which means the furthest point, the uttermost, final. The apostles Peter² and John agree.

Read 1 John 2:18.

Finally, the apostle Peter began his eloquent sermon on the day of Pentecost by associating the disciples' speaking in foreign tongues with Joel's prophecy about the Eschaton.

¹1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

²1 Peter 1:20

Read Acts 2:14-17.

Peter was saying as much, *You have been waiting for Joel's prophecy to be fulfilled? Well, now it has been. We are now in the Last Days.*

We approach this study from a *heavenly* perspective, that “the beginning of the end,” as it were, actually took place in a stable in Bethlehem. Thus, we are, in a technical sense, already in the *Eschaton*. The Last Things were inaugurated by Christ's first *parousia* (coming, presence).

Beyond that, however, we begin with the perspective that *all* of God's word, from Genesis through Revelation is about Christ Jesus, the Son of God, and His kingdom. This is an important concept. To grasp the magnitude of the Last Things we must understand that the plan for it was laid out in eternity past, and that the first mention of it to man occurs as early as the third chapter of Genesis.

Read Genesis 3:14-15.

Many refer to v15 as the “fifth gospel”—or, perhaps more accurately, the *first* gospel—for here we have the first mention of the Savior (“seed,” *zarah*, singular). Here we have the prophecy that sets up the cosmic battle (“enmity” (*eba*), hostility, hatred) between Satan and Christ Jesus. The operative verb here is more often than not translated “bruise,” which really doesn't sound so bad. But the Hebrew word is *shuph*, which here means to break, smite in pieces, crush; to greatly injure or wound. Just as important as the verb is the *location* of each wound:

- The Son of God will receive His fatal blow at the cross, but since He will be raised from the grave, it will be as if He was only wounded “on the heel.”
- Satan, however, will have his “head” crushed, and there will be no recovery from that.

Even before his demise, the prophecy says that he will be henceforth cursed, and “dust [he] will eat all the days of [his] life.” In the OT “eating dust” carries the meaning of total defeat. Notice how the prophet Isaiah describes the serpent's—not Satan, but snakes—status during even the glory days of the new heavens and new earth.

Read Isaiah 65:17, 25.

From the beginning days of Creation, Satan's fate was sealed. Christ will have the ultimate victory over His ancient nemesis when Satan is destroyed forever, in the lake of fire, during the very Last Things.

The apostle Paul speaks of this flow of history focused on Christ in a slightly different way in his letter to the Ephesian church.

Read Ephesians 1:9-10.

And he³ made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (Ephesians 1:9-10 NIV)

One thing Paul brings out here is that the entire economy of the universe—not just religion, not just salvation, but *everything* “in heaven and on earth”—will one day be under the authority of just “one head”: Christ Jesus. From the very beginning of time itself, it has *all* been about Him.

- only He—the Lion of Judah, the Lamb that was slain—is worthy and able to open the seven-sealed book.
- Christ is the one who will sit in judgment of the nations;
- He is the one who will separate the goats from the sheep;
- He will be the one to reign for one thousand years on earth after the Tribulation;
- and He is the one to sit on the throne of David “forever and ever.”

The story of the Last Things is the story of the victorious Messiah coming into His own; to put it in base human terms, it is what He was born to. The story was written by the Godhead before time even began:

Read Isaiah 46:8-10.

Before Time was even created, the Last Things were already mapped out. And Christ wins.

God does not just “know” what will happen in the future; He has designed the whole thing, from beginning to end, at the outset of this earth’s history. During those earliest days when He walked the Garden path with Adam, He had already mapped out the events of the Eschaton—beginning with the Son of God being incarnated in Bethlehem so that He could die on a cross for the sins of man, because the *first* man would ultimately fall out of fellowship with his Maker.

The Son of God, second member of the Godhead, would be incarnated on earth; in humility and obedience He would take on the flesh of man, and as a man He would suffer and die as a helpless lamb. His ministry to mankind would be one of love and grace, mercy and forgiveness. Even in that, however, He did not suffer fools, offering just a glimpse of what He would one day reveal to the universe. There will come a day when Christ will no longer show Himself as the meek and humble Lamb, but now a fierce, ruling King who will go to war against unrighteousness, and the unholy ministrations of a fallen world, ruling it with a “rod of iron.”⁴

³i.e., God

⁴Psalm 2:9

The beauty and poetic symmetry of God's word is seen in that this creation begins *and ends* with dwellings that are righteous and pure: perfect and sinless. His word begins in Eden, where God lived and walked with the first man and woman. He intended the earth, from the beginning, to be an idyllic paradise for His creation. But sin entered into that perfect dwelling, and the bulk of His word is the story of God's plan and efforts to *restore* His sinless creation—both the land and its people.

By the next to the last chapter in God's word this is accomplished. In Revelation 21 John describes a perfect, sinless world—"a new heaven and a new earth... and no longer any sea," that is, no longer any sin or evil. There will be a new Jerusalem, and, even better, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.'"

Even though the purpose of this class is to define and document a timeline for the Last Things, we must never get so lost in the details of sequence, the minutia of eschatology, that we miss the breathtaking wonder and glory of this story—and the clear truth that the Son of God came into this world as flesh, so that He might die for the sins of all those who would place their trust, their eternity—their Eschaton—in Him.

SESSION 2: THE KINGDOM NARRATIVE

PREFACE

The study of eschatology, the Last Things, is ultimately a study of the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom. If the Messiah is the recurring motif throughout God's word from Genesis to Revelation, then the gravitational flow of the Bible runs inexorably toward Christ the King assuming His place of ultimate judgment and Lordship upon His throne.

To appreciate the kingdom's importance and centrality to all of God's plan for man, as well as its overwhelming importance in the Eschaton, before we can move forward we need to look backward, to trace the development of the timeless kingdom of God—which, in the end, will be handed over to His Christ by the Father. The earliest reference I could find to this kingdom is in the second book of the Pentateuch, in the words of God given to Moses to speak to Israel.

KINGDOM BEGINNINGS

Read Exodus 19:5-6.

Regarding this Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. writes,

Israel was to be kings and priests to God on behalf of the nations; they were to be mediators of the gospel as missionaries to the nations (“in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,” Genesis 12:3b), and they were to be partakers in *the present aspects and coming reality* of the “kingdom of God” (emphasis added).

We get our most important reference to the “everlasting kingdom” in the narrative about the first king of Israel, Saul, and his successor, David. [Please turn with me to the first book of Samuel](#). From the beginning, the Lord God's plan was that He would establish an *eternal* kingdom, which would be ultimately handed over to the second member of the Godhead: Christ Jesus. If he had been faithful to the Lord, Saul and his house would have inaugurated that kingdom. But Saul was *not* faithful; in disobedience to Yahweh, instead of waiting for Samuel to arrive, he impatiently assumed the role of priest and made the offerings before the Lord. Immediately thereafter, Samuel shows up.

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

Read 1 Samuel 13:13-14.

Don't miss that important word in v13: “forever.” Samuel is referring to the eternal Messianic kingdom that would ultimately be assumed by Christ Jesus.

That man “after [God's] own heart,” mentioned in v14, was David, son of Jesse. Before anyone outside his immediate family knew anything about him, God had already appointed David to be king over Israel. But David was far more important than just that. [Now turn to Second Samuel, chapter seven.](#)

The Lord God is giving to the prophet Nathan instructions that he is to declare to King David. In v17 we have the confirmation that Nathan did just that, telling the king every word from Yahweh. In one of the most beautiful passages of Scripture—another “now-not yet” prophecy—King David expresses his desire to build a permanent “house”—not a temporary, portable tabernacle (or tent), but a “fixed residential structure” for the Lord. This was no fickle daydream, but an earnest, reverent act of devotion to build for Yahweh a permanent temple. King David had all the right reasons to build the temple, but God had something else in mind. He *would* have His house built—not by David, but by his son, Solomon—but God wanted to talk about another kind of “house.”

“... and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. ‘When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men, but My lovingkindness shall not depart from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.’” (2 Samuel 7:11b-16)

With a working knowledge of human nature we might wonder if this turned David’s head. Would his sons, grandsons, et al, continue on, ruling forever in perpetuity? We don’t need to wonder; [please turn to Psalm 145, a psalm of David.](#)

Read Psalm 145:10-13.

Whatever King David’s mental response to this declaration from the Lord, He understood that God was not referring to a mortal succession. It would indeed be a king from David’s line, but the throne would not be filled by an endless succession of men, but the *eternal* king would be just One: the Messiah.

And we need no more proof that David understood the pecking order than what he penned in Psalm 110, which begins,

The LORD [Yahweh] says to my Lord [Adonai]: “Sit at My [Father God] right hand Until I make Your [Messiah’s] enemies a footstool for Your feet.” (v1)

We cannot know what was in David’s mind, how much of what he wrote he understood when he wrote this prophecy, but he knew that he had a Lord be-

tween himself and Yahweh, and that at the end of all things *that* Lord would reign with unquestioned and unlimited authority.

The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. He will judge among the nations, He will fill them with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country. (vv5-6)

LATER PROPHECIES

Three later OT prophets spoke of this eternal kingdom: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. All three speak of an everlasting kingdom ruled over by, as Daniel puts it, “the Most High,” but the other two explicitly tie this to the Davidic covenant and the Davidic line of kingship—and all three make it clear that this ruler will be, essentially, synonymous with the Lord God.

Read Isaiah 9:6-7.

Read Jeremiah 23:5-6.

Read Daniel 7:13-14.

Later in the same chapter Daniel sees in the vision the fall of the “beast’s” rule when Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation (vv26-27):

But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.

IN THE NT

[Please turn to 1 Corinthians 15.](#)

I have made the point before that in the Eschaton—throughout God’s word, but especially during the Last Things—the line between God the Father and God the Son is blurred. For example, in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians Paul writes in v24,

then comes the end, when He [Christ] hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He [Christ] has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

Yet, in v27, the apostle writes,

For HE [Father God] HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS [Christ’s] FEET. But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He [Father God] is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him [Christ].

Paul clarifies the relationship of the two, as regards the Lord's rule over the kingdom, in v28:

When all things are subjected to Him [Christ], then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One [God the Father] who subjected all things to Him [Christ], so that God may be all in all.

So is it Christ's kingdom or the Father's kingdom? Answer: Yes. The Son is the "exact representation" of the Father¹; what the Father does, the Son does. Christ hands the kingdom over to the Father, but the Father gives it back, having the Son be sovereign over all.

The picture I have in my mind is a blending of v24 and the Daniel prophecy from Chapter Seven. Christ, the Son of Man, approaches the Father's throne carrying in His arms "the kingdom." He ceremonially places it into the Father's hands, declaring, *It is done. It is finished.* The Father then hands the kingdom back to the Son (paraphrasing Daniel 7:14), *To You I have given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language would serve You. Your dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and Your kingdom is one which will not be destroyed. Now go down and rule! Be King over all.*

A similar blurring is going on in the gospels in most places where we see the word "kingdom."

Read Matthew 3:1-2.

A Jew hearing "the kingdom of heaven" would rightly conclude, *Ah, he's referring to Yahweh's kingdom.* Yet by saying "at hand" John is referring to the imminent arrival of the Messiah—His kingdom. And after His temptation in the wilderness, when He learns of John's arrest, Jesus says exactly the same thing: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

In a sense, Christ's kingdom—the fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant—was realized in Bethlehem, because Christ the king was *now* present on earth. In another sense, Christ's kingdom is here now because His church is here. He has always been a king, and we are part of His kingdom.

Yet in the *truest* sense, the kingdom is not yet here because Christ Jesus does not yet reign as He will one day. God's word defines the moment when Christ will at last assume His role as true Davidic king of His kingdom as the moment He comes to earth—publicly, visibly—for the second time. In this moment the entire world will suddenly know that there is one King over this earth, and His name is the Son of Man, The Word of God, Christ Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This will occur at the end of the Tribulation, before the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth.

In a strict, *dispensational* sense, any mention of "the kingdom" refers specifically to the reign of Christ on earth during the Millennium, and has Israel as the focus. We will delve deeper into this when we study the Millennium.

¹ Hebrews 1:3

The writers in God's word have described this moment in a number of ways; the late great Bible teacher, M. R. De Haan, succinctly writes that this return of Christ will be "Public, Paralyzing, and Punitive." We close with this scene as painted by John in the Revelation.

Read Revelation 19:11-16, 19-21.

SESSION 3: THE CHURCH AGE

Charts: The Church Age: #1, The Dispensations: #2, The Generative Cycles: #3

PREFACE

Because God’s word, in its entirety, is an intricately interwoven tapestry with Christ Jesus as its central figure, it can be difficult to know where to break into the narrative to begin a study of the Last Things. But since I have argued for the inaugural event of the *eschaton* being Christ’s *first* advent—that is, Bethlehem—we will begin there. [Please refer to the accompanying chart: “The Church Age.”*](#)

Approximately thirty-three years after his incarnation in Bethlehem, Christ is crucified, and a few days after that He is resurrected from the dead. Then for about a month and a half Jesus appears to and speaks with different individuals and groups before ascending to the Father.

Jesus was arrested on the first night of the Passover. Fifty days later Jews celebrated the Day of Pentecost/Day of First Fruits/Feast of Weeks, as dictated by the Law.

Read Deuteronomy 16:9-10.

Later in the first century, the day was celebrated as the anniversary of the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. So it is with poetic irony that God chose to send the Holy Spirit to inaugurate the church era on the very day Jews celebrated the giving of the Mosaic Law.

Read Acts 2:1-4.

This is theology on which individuals may disagree. That the “church” began in Acts 2, with the giving of the Holy Spirit, is a dispensational position, for, different from some, we see Israel as separate and distinct from the Christian church. To put it succinctly for the moment, during the Last Things, Israel and Christians play different roles, and are treated by God in different ways. As stated in our church’s Articles of Faith, regarding the Millennial period,

This 1,000 year period has its foundation in the great unconditional covenants of the Old Testament – **Abrahamic** (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17, 15:9-18, 17:1-9), the **Palestinian** (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), the **Davidic** (2 Samuel 7:10-16; Psalm 89), and the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Christ will be the king of this millennial or Davidic Kingdom with the nation Israel occupying an exalted position within the kingdom (Isaiah 11:1-10). [more on this when we study the Millennium]

Of course, we believe “the church,” the redeemed in Christ, will have been removed from earth at the Rapture, returning then with Christ when He comes in judgment. Thus, the NT church is not to be lumped together with the OT

* Please note one feature of the charts. Instead of including Scripture references in-place in the body of the timeline—which I find clutters it unnecessarily—I have treated the references as “footnotes,” adding them in a separate area at the bottom of the page. Typically there is not just a number or title (as in Chart 2), but a corresponding color to match it to the item above. Not all charts include these footnotes, but most do.

Jewish believers by faith (e.g., Abraham), nor do we say that the church represents the “new Israel.” The two are, and remain, separate.

THE DISPENSATIONAL POSITION

Before we get too far along in this study of the Last Things, it is time to include a bit more about *dispensationalism*—a term I have mentioned more than a few times already. [Please refer to the accompanying chart: “The Dispensations.”](#) I will make every effort to limit the discussion to only those aspects pertinent to our study. Even so, for many of you this may be relatively new and rather detailed information. But we must include it because it plays an important role in not just what happens in the Eschaton, but why, and to whom—especially regarding Israel.

We get a general definition of dispensational theology from an essay written by Michael J. Vlach, professor of theology at The Master’s Seminary, and an expert on “the nation of Israel and issues related to refuting the doctrine of Replacement Theology”—that is, the (errant) doctrine that the church has replaced Israel as God’s chosen people.

Vlach: Dispensationalism is an evangelical theological system that addresses issues concerning the biblical covenants, Israel, the church, and end times. It also argues for a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies involving ethnic/national Israel, and the idea that the church is a New Testament entity that is distinct from Israel.

In *Webster’s Second College Edition* (1980) definition number seven for the word “dispensation” is “the ordering of events under divine authority.” At its root, dispensationalism says that God has worked in different ways in a number of distinct time periods or epochs (dispensations) in human history. For one obvious example that we can easily understand, there was the “Legal Dispensation” (Law: Moses to Christ) during which God said that to be righteous (right with God) one must follow the precepts handed down in the Mosaic Law. After this, however, there was the Dispensation of Grace, or the Church Age (in which we are presently), during which righteousness is determined by faith in Christ Jesus.†

† God does not change, and dispensationalism affirms that salvation has always been by grace through faith alone (Genesis 15:6, “Then [Abram] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness”). But throughout the history of man God has initiated different covenants, or agreements, for different people at different times. All is part of His plan, and it is my personal view that God Himself does not reckon in epochs or dispensations, but just sees His economy working its way seamlessly, an unbroken thread through man’s history. His purpose, His goal has never changed; from the beginning it has always pointed to Christ’s kingdom.

The classic *number* of dispensations has been seven:

1. innocence, or Edenic dispensation (Adam before the Fall);
2. conscience, or antediluvian (before the flood) dispensation (Adam to Noah);
3. human government, or post-diluvian (after the flood) dispensation (Noah to Abraham);
4. promise, or patriarchal dispensation (Abraham to Moses);
5. law, or legal dispensation (Moses to Christ);
6. grace, or ecclesiastical dispensation (Pentecost to the rapture); and
7. kingdom, or Messianic dispensation (Millennium).

But not all dispensationalists agree on the number—and all *need not* agree. In my chart of The Dispensations I have listed eight; in my Generative Cycles chart I have added “Creation” as a subdivision to the first Innocence dispensation.

Dispensationalism is not synonymous with *pretribulationism* and/or *pre-millennialism*, but the three are often associated with each other. That is, if one subscribes to the first, one typically subscribes to the other two. Most—but not all—dispensationalists believe in a pretribulation rapture. We believe the rapture of the church is described, for example, by the apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians.¹

There are two key passages in God’s word that pretribulationists reference for their position:

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10.

The word translated “wrath” is *orge* (or-gay’), meaning anger, indignation, vengeance, punishment. Our position is that those in Christ—redeemed, sanctified, justified saints—will not and *cannot* suffer that.

Read Revelation 3:10.‡

Let me touch on just a few points as we wrap this up.

Israel

Regarding the issue of Israel, as mentioned earlier there are some who claim that the Christian church *replaces* Israel as God’s chosen people. Many non-dispensationalists “hold that the OT as a whole is comprised of types and shadows of greater NT realities. In line with this idea, some assert that national Israel in the OT functioned as a type of the NT church” (Vlach).

Dispensationalists believe that God’s word clearly differentiates between the two, and that God’s promises made to Israel will be fulfilled *to Israel* during the Last Things. I love how Michael J. Vlach puts this succinctly: “God keeps His promises to those whom the promises were made.”

We will look at this in greater depth when we get to the Millennium—and, by extension, the Tribulation—for Israel will play a vital role during those periods.

The Dispensations Chart

During the sessions of this class I do not intend to walk you through every minute detail of each chart. In most instances, as today, I will offer an overview during the session, but leave the rest of the discovery to you. That is not laziness on my part; it is my view that it will be to your benefit to work through these details and references for yourself—in that personal discovery and realization will be found much of the fascination and joy of this topic that I have already been blessed to experience.

¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, which we will look at in the next session.

‡ Anticipating questions about Revelation 2:10, “...you will have tribulation,” that speaks of a briefer time of persecution and imprisonment for members of the church in Smyrna, not the Tribulation.

The body of this chart is self-explanatory. There is really no point in assigning dates or, in most cases, even a precise length to the individual dispensations. The true wonder and depth of the dispensations is found in the references, below, that accompany each epoch, for almost every dispensation is inaugurated, or at least associated with a declaration or agreement—a covenant—established by God Himself, with either an individual or a people. Spend some time on your own reading through these passages to obtain a picture of how the Lord God has generously—yet righteously—moved His will and purpose through the generations from Adam to those who will dwell with Him in the new Jerusalem of the “new heaven and new earth.”

The Generative Cycles Chart (#3)

For me, the value of the Generative Cycles chart is in how it visualizes the eternal structure and order of God’s economy for man in Christ—and how, even if one breaks it down, as I have in the three aspects: Generational, Dispensational, and Believers, there is continuity.

We won’t take the time here to digest every component of the chart, but it would be well worth your time to sit down with it on your own, examining each column downward, and each row from left to right. It all speaks to the genius of the Godhead in how this world, and its destiny under God and in Christ, were created in a poetic symmetry.

THE END

Let’s close by reading the history of the beginning of the church.

Read Acts 2:41-47.

We hold that the end of the dispensation of Grace—the closing of the church age—will come when Christ Jesus returns for His church at the Rapture, just before The Tribulation.

SESSION 4: THE RAPTURE (PART ONE)

PREFACE

At long last we come to the event which many (erroneously) think to be the starting point of the Eschaton: what us “pretribs” like to refer to as The Rapture. The word “rapture” is derived from the Latin *rapiō*, meaning “seize, snatch, carry away.” [In this session we will make the case for the Rapture; in parts two and three we will examine the events of the Rapture itself.](#)

The pretribulational position is that the church will not go through the seven-year Tribulation—also known as “Daniel’s Seventieth Week” (more on that in a subsequent session)—because it will be removed from the earth, by Christ Himself, just before the period of Tribulation commences. In fact, it is easy to conclude that the Rapture event itself is actually the trigger that releases the events of the Tribulation.

That is, from an earthly perspective, waiting in the wings is Antichrist, who sees the elimination of the church from the earth as his opportunity to begin his campaign.

Why might Antichrist consider this his perfect opportunity? [Turn please to 2 Thessalonians 2 and Read vv5-7.](#) Now understand, many do, but not everyone agrees with the position I am about to state; this has been debated for the last two thousand years. I believe this passage refers to the removal of the Holy Spirit from earth, along with the church, at the Rapture. (I’ll not take the time here to substantiate this; if you wish to take issue with me, I recommend you read p160-161 of my Thessalonian study, which details this. Then we can talk.)

There will come a moment in time—a season, a proper time in the life of the Antichrist—when Father God will declare, “Now!” Suddenly, without warning, the righteous force of the church will disappear from earth, and with it the exerting influence of the Holy Spirit. In their place will flood in evil of all sorts, and the “man of lawlessness” will gradually show himself to be the savior for which the world has been waiting. He will be winsome, agreeable, helpful, because, like his father, he will be a liar of the first order.

Then, after a few years, when he takes his seat in the temple of Jerusalem, he will be revealed for what and who he truly is: the Antichrist, evil incarnate, and the period that follows—the *Great Tribulation*—will make the previous three-and-a-half years look like a walk in the park.

From a *heavenly* perspective, however, it is *God’s* opportunity; of course, He is the one orchestrating it all. If one appreciates symmetry, think of the Rapture as the end times reenactment of Noah’s Ark, and the Tribulation as the end times reenactment of the flood.

Read Genesis 6:5-7.

Read Revelation 6:12-17. (during the Tribulation)

*M. R. DeHaan refers to this as the first of two “phases” of His Second Coming.

Tradition, as well as specificity, says that the Rapture is not literally Christ’s “second coming,” because he does not literally return to earth, but remains “in the clouds” and is not seen by everyone on earth.* His *true* second coming is when he returns in triumph, in judgment, in righteousness between the Tribulation and Millennium. That one will *not* be private, but universal; that one will *not* be silent to the unregenerate, but deafening.

The different position closest to ours regarding the Eschaton is called *Classic* or *Historic* Premillennialism. This position has the events roughly in the same order, but with two important differences from ours. In Historic Premillennialism,

- the Church Age is extended through the Tribulation. That is, Christ does not return for His church until after the Tribulation. Christians alive at the time will suffer the Tribulation; and
- between the Tribulation and the Millennium, Christ “catches up” the church (dead and alive) and immediately returns to the earth with the church to inaugurate the Millennium.

Thus, in historic premillennialism there is no Rapture of believers separated by the Tribulation from Christ’s second coming, there is only one “return” of Christ, and, worst of all, the church must suffer the events of the Tribulation.

Before we dig into the details of the Rapture—as to those details, there are about ten individual components to the event—let us pause for a moment to appreciate it for what it is. Upon departing the upper room after the disciples’ last supper with Jesus, He comforted them with the promise of His return.

Read John 14:1-3.

That word translated “receive” or “take” is a wonderful word-choice by the Savior in this context. The Greek *paralambano* means to “receive near”; but it is far more than just physical proximity. It includes the idea of “associat[ing] with oneself in any familiar or intimate act or relation.” This is a picture of Christ Jesus returning to warmly embrace those who are His own.

I can think of no better illustration of the contrast between the perspectives of earth and heaven. Thinking in human, fleshly terms, if any one of us had made the kind of sacrifice Jesus made for sinful humans, I imagine our response might be something like, “Hey, after what I did for you, you *owe* me. You can find *your own way* up to heaven. I’ll see you when you get here.”

But, of course, that does not at all reflect the perspective of heaven, nor the heart of our Savior. The same measure of love that agreed to be nailed to a cross for sinners is the measure of love that sends “the Lamb that was slain”¹ rushing down to the proximity of earth once again to bring home those who have given their lives to Him—to call them to Himself, to conduct them personally, safely, to their new home with Him. It will be a *glorious* moment.

¹ Revelation 5:12

THE CASE FOR THE RAPTURE

Please turn to [1 Thessalonians, Chapter Five](#).

Although it is mentioned elsewhere, the best sources for detailed information about the Rapture are found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and his two letters to the Thessalonians.

One of the challenging aspects of eschatology is that some terms or titles of events seem to be moving targets, difficult to place. And one of the more obvious examples of this is "the day of the Lord," which the apostle Paul references in the first few verses of Chapter Five.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2.

By using the phrase "the day of the Lord," Paul refers to far more than just the initial moment of the Rapture. That phrase is used elsewhere to refer to and include

- the ultimate overthrow of God's enemies, which can include the idea of judgment (Isaiah 2:12; 1 Corinthians 4:3-5);
- a day of national deliverance for Israel (Jeremiah 30:8-11);
- a day of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:9);
- the day of God's wrath against His enemies (Isaiah 13:6-11);
- the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:20-21 with Jeremiah 30:7-8);
- Christ's second coming (Revelation 19:11-21); and
- the destruction of the present earth and heavens (2 Peter 3:10).

Paul proceeds into this passage and very soon, in v3, we realize that he is *not* describing the Rapture when he mentions "a thief in the night."

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.

Now we see that "the day of the Lord" here does *not* refer to the Rapture—for that verse has nothing to do with a silent and instantaneous Rapture—but to Christ's more public second coming in judgment and wrath. Paul then proceeds to contrast those in darkness (i.e., those who will suffer God's wrath) with those in the light, or day, and that "you, brethren, are not in darkness." And he concludes his thoughts on this with vv8-10.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8-10.

The key verse for our purpose is v9; "God has not destined us for wrath"—i.e., "us" = those *not* in darkness, those ("you, brethren") "who are all sons of light and sons of day" (v5). Believers have obtained "salvation" (*soterias*) from that wrath "through our Lord Jesus Christ."

As mentioned in our previous session, regarding 1 Thessalonians 1:10, the word translated “wrath” is *orge* (or-gay’), meaning anger, indignation, vengeance, punishment. It speaks of God’s anger and retribution; it speaks of the punishment God will inflict on those who have rejected Christ.

So why would He inflict this on those who *have* embraced Christ? The seven-year Tribulation period—and especially the second half (The Great Tribulation)—will be a terrible time to be alive on earth. When one reads in The Revelation the heavenly perspective of the Tribulation period—the hideous plagues and pestilence and utter destruction inflicted on the earth’s inhabitants by God and His Christ—there is no better picture of God’s wrath inflicted upon the sin and depravity of this world.

What the Lord God will release upon the earth during the Tribulation no sane human being would wish to experience. It will be a hideous time to be alive on earth.

So why would He inflict this on His church? We believe He will not. We believe His word *says* that He will not.

SESSION 5: THE RAPTURE (PART TWO)

Charts: The Events of the Rapture, The Resurrections

PREFACE

In our last session we made the case for the pretribulational Rapture, why we believe it to be a part of the Eschaton. As I said before, the word “rapture” is derived from the Latin *rapio*, meaning “to seize, snatch, carry away.” In this session and the next we will detail the events of the Rapture—their order and significance. Before we begin, however, an important reminder is in order.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

Our important reminder is in v52: “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” As we proceed to detail the events of the Rapture, remember that *it all—every last detail—occurs in the blink of an eye*. While it may take us an hour to discuss the Rapture’s individual events, in real-time all of those events take place within the time it takes to blink your eye.

Our principal text for the events of the Rapture is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, which is included on Chart 4: The Events of the Rapture. [You should keep this chart handy during this session as well as the next.](#)

I have also included Chart Five, which places all the different resurrections described in God’s word. [Both of these charts will be used in our next session.](#)

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven...**

Although this is not Christ’s official second coming—which occurs between the Tribulation and the Millennium, when He returns in breathtaking power, wrath, and judgment—even so in the near-touchdown of the Rapture He still comes in great authority, as a commanding general. All the underlying Greek substantiates this:

the Lord = *ho kyrios* = the master, the one supreme in authority, controller
with a shout, with a cry of command = *en keleusmati* = from *keleuo*; a command, a summons, an order

voice of the archangel = *phone* (fo-nay’) = voice, tone, noise; a disclosure of some sort

the trumpet of God = *salpingi* = a quavering or reverberation

In the Pentateuch we have a perfect illustration of what sort of effect the “trumpet of God” might have on mere mortals. Yahweh instructed Moses to consecrate the people and bring them to the foot of the mountain so they can hear Him speaking to Moses.

Read Exodus 19:16-19.

*What precious truth, what compassionate condescension is announced in that brief phrase, “the Lord Himself.” Heaven often employs its angels for getting things done on earth or delivering messages (which is what the word [Hebrew: *malakh*, Greek: *angelos*] means: “messenger.” This time, however, it is the second member of the Godhead Himself—no lieutenants, no underlings, no emissaries. Our Savior personally comes to collect His own.

Later,

All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die." (Exodus 20:18-19)

In the very first split second of Christ's return He announces that He is no longer showing Himself as the gentle, humble, Servant of before. He is Lord, and now, with the same voice He used to bring into existence Creation itself, He issues commands that must be obeyed. And His first command is that the graves of the redeemed be emptied.

Let us not force this supernatural event into the earthly rules of physics. God plays by His own rules, and is under no obligation to fit His ways into our understanding. Some have used this verse to be critical of the position that the rapture will be something that is relatively "secret"—that is, in contrast to when Christ comes back to earth itself for the Millennium, and the whole world will witness Him. During the Rapture Christ remains at some lofty place between heaven and earth, and deals only with the redeemed. The critics posit that with these three audible signals—the Lord's shout, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet call—the entire world will know what is going on. But who among us can say what this will sound like?

Will these sounds be in sequence, one after the other, or all at once? Do you know what the voice of an archangel sounds like? Do you know what the trumpet of God sounds like? How will three heavenly sounds, whether distinct from one another or in unison, sound to earthly, human ears? The sound of a lightning strike ten-miles distant can be an extended, rolling rumble, often pleasant to the ears.

That same lightning strike outside one's window is a sharp crack of doom, and decidedly *unpleasant*.

Perhaps the cry of command from the Lord will be a warm, inviting melody, with harmony contributed by the head angel, the duet accompanied by God's trumpet. Or it may be the jolting crack of a lightning strike outside one's bedroom window. David Guzik points out another possible aspect of this.

David Guzik: It may be [that] all three descriptions (shout, voice, and trumpet) refer to the same sound, or there may be three distinct sounds. The rapture will not be silent or secret, *though the vast majority of people may not understand the sound or its meaning.* (emphasis added)

With that possibility, the unregenerate may hear something, but will probably not know what it is. Paul, on the road to Damascus, saw and heard something different from his companions (Acts 9:3-7). God the Father and Jesus have a conversation in John 12:28-29. The bystanders had different opinions about what they heard:

[Jesus said,]“Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” (John 12:28-29 ESV)

Finally, even if these three sounds, either individually or collectively, are so thunderous that those being raised (either from the grave or from the earth) must cover their ears, do we imagine that the one who created all things cannot tune the frequency to just a subset of the population? Do they not each have the Holy Spirit in residence who might act as a receiver tuned to the frequency of Christ’s voice—a frequency inaudible or at least incomprehensible to the unregenerate? Does not the one with the Spirit comprehend God’s written word where others do not?

...and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Whether the summoning sounds are in unison or a sequence, their immediate purpose is to call the dead up from out of the ground—or from wherever they are, be it coffin, urn, sea bottom, or nothingness. God is not stymied by the nature of our remains; whatever and wherever we are, we will be raised to new life in Him.

Some in the church in Thessalonica were afraid that if they died before Christ’s return, they would have “missed the train” as it were. If the Thessalonians had been familiar with Jewish Scripture, they would have been encouraged by something Job said—a very, very long time before the first century.

Read Job 19:25-27.

It is usually profitable to look around the corner of what we read in God’s word—to come in by the side door, as it were. In speaking of the resurrection of believers I have made the point that there is little value in being saved by Christ if one is *not* raised from the grave. What good would *that* be? But because *He* was raised from the dead, those who are “in Christ,” will be as well. Paul goes out of his way to lift the Thessalonians out of their ignorance about this.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-16.

Paul makes it clear: Those who have died prior to Christ’s return will not just be raised from the grave; their situation will be addressed *first*. They will be the priority.

Still looking around the corner, we should wonder, What good would it be to just be raised from the dead? Knowing what will be occurring after the Rapture, who would want to go from the grave to that? But v14 in the passage just read says, “... even so *God will bring with Him* those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (emphasis added).

The promise from God is that if we are in His Son—if our body enters the grave belonging to Christ—it will one day be raised *from* the grave to live with Him and the Father for all eternity. That is our hope; that is *real* salvation, as Jesus put it so eloquently in John 14:6. We can read this familiar passage now in a new light because of the Thessalonian passage.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; *no one comes to the Father but through Me.*”

Doesn't that last clause take on extra meaning in light of the passage in Thessalonians. We typically think of John 14:6 to mean that the only way to God the Father—i.e., the only way to obtain eternal life with God rather than the alternative—is through *faith* in Christ, which is perfectly true. But it also means that in the day of resurrection, when Christ returns, the way upward to the Father for saints both living and “asleep” will be through—and *with*—Christ. He will come to personally conduct us into the presence of our heavenly Father.

For this reason one of the most comforting and encouraging words in the Bible are the ones at the end of v17: “...and so we shall always be with the Lord.”

[In our next session we will continue with the events of the Rapture.](#)

SESSION 6: THE RAPTURE (PART THREE)

Charts: The Events of the Rapture, The Resurrections

PREFACE

In our last session we began examining the events of the Rapture as described in v16 of 1 Thessalonians 4. In this session we will finish by addressing the events in v17. [The chart for this is #4, “The Events of the Rapture.”](#)

Let’s begin by reading the passage.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.

v17: Then we who are alive and remain...

I have made the point that all these separate events take place in the blink of an eye. My personal hope, however, is that in our resurrected, glorified state, time will become as relative for us as it is for the Godhead. For this will be a glorious, astounding event that the believer will wish to savor. Believers on this fallen earth have spent the last two thousand years longing for the day we will at last see our Lord, as Paul puts it, “face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12). [Please turn to 1 Corinthians 15.](#)

In Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians he offers us a detailed treatise on the resurrection process—specifically of the dead, but which also applies to those still alive when Christ comes, because in it he addresses the difference between the earthly bodies with which we are born, and the glorified bodies in which we will spend eternity with the Lord. [I have included a chart for the various resurrections during the Eschaton—beginning with Christ’s, and those that took place in Jerusalem at His resurrection.*](#)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:40-44.¹

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-53.

No one can say with certainty what he or she will look like after the Rapture. But God’s word tells us that it will be a body made for eternity (“imperishable”), it will possess a new and improved “glory,” and in place of weakness it will possess a new “power.” Instead of being a natural, fleshly body, it will be a “spiritual” body—that is, we are born into this world in a condition *for* this temporal world: natural, sensual, fleshly and fleshly. At the Rapture event we, living or dead, will become something else—*pneumatikon*, of the s/Spirit—that is, we will now be changed into a form suitable not just for eternity (immortal), but suitable for living in the presence of a holy God without being instantly vaporized by His holiness.

¹ The best way to understand Paul’s use of the Greek *speiro*, translated “sown,” in this context is describing the totality of a life from birth to death.

* We do not have time to delve deeply into the challenges of the Matthew passage (27:51-53) that speaks of the dead rising at Christ’s resurrection, for it is a controversial text that raises more questions than it answers. Let me just point out that the punctuation is critical to understanding and accepting what is described. The NASB is not bad; the original NIV is worst; the ESV is best in describing the tombs **being broken open at the death of Jesus, but the inhabitants not being raised and emerging from the tombs until He was (first) raised.** In other words, just as with Jesus, the tombs were opened not to let out the dead (immediately), but to let in any witnesses. In its strangeness, however, it is almost a “Melchizedek” moment.

Read Philippians 3:20-21.

Christ in this moment is not yet enthroned over His kingdom; that must await the end of the Tribulation. Nonetheless, during the Rapture event He is already beginning to reveal some of the power He will hold then—“the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

We learn from Jesus Himself the *nature* of our glorified body: from Luke 24 we learn that His body was material and could consume food (vv39-43), yet it was not bound by the laws of nature (vv31, 36-37).² In John’s gospel we learn that Christ’s body was not “pure spirit,” as an apparition, but still possessed a level of physicality (John 20:26-27).

M. R. Vincent: The expression natural body signifies an organism animated by a soul; that phase of the immaterial principle in man which is more nearly allied to the flesh, and which characterizes the man as a mortal creature; while spirit is that phase which looks God-ward, and characterizes him as related to God.

As Vincent points out, although the two are easily confused, I contend that the soul and the spirit are not always synonymous. The human soul is related to the material body, and is often used to refer to the totality of the being, including material (body) and immaterial (spirit) aspects—“a living being”³ Paradoxically, however, the soul is also distinct from the body, and can exist without it. At death the soul detaches from the body; the body, the material portion of our being, remains on earth, while that body’s soul goes to be with the Lord.⁴ If one has already passed away, prior to the resurrection, the believer is not just brought back to life, but is, as it were, put back together again; the two, body and soul, are reunited in what is now a new and glorified state.

[we] will be caught up together with them in the clouds...

Oh, how I wish that this took longer than the blink of an eye—and why I hope that once we are in our new, glorified bodies, we will gain some of that heavenly perspective on events—in which time can either stand still or leap ahead at will—for I would like to savor this moment. Can you imagine anything sweeter than rising into the air to meet our Savior and Lord?

First, however, we must join the company of the redeemed. Here again, the imagination stumbles in trying to picture this moment. The dead will rise first; those still alive will follow. We assume from the text that the dead emerge from the grave (or from being reconstituted) *already changed*—the apostle writes that “the dead will be raised imperishable”—i.e., below ground, perish-

² We learn from the road to Emmaus narrative that Jesus was not immediately recognizable to the two disciples, but that their inability to recognize Him had more to do with “their eyes [being] prevented [by God or Jesus] from recognizing Him” than from Christ’s physical appearance.

³ Genesis 2:7

⁴ Genesis 35:18

able; above ground, imperishable. We also assume that those “not asleep” will be changed either immediately or at least prior to rising into the presence of Christ.

We find the Greek for our word “rapture” beneath the phrase “shall be caught up”—the verb *harpagesometha*—meaning to snatch away, take away, seize, followed by the adverb *hama*, translated “together,” meaning at the same time or at once. We take this to mean that all believers, dead or alive at the same time, will rise into the sky and clouds toward our awaiting Lord.

My personal picture of Christ Jesus in this moment is of Him as a symphony conductor. He is orchestrating this entire supernatural phenomenon. I picture the Lord, accompanied by the archangel and whomever is playing the trumpet of God (might it be God the Father Himself?; [I doubt it]), descending to earth’s environs. They position themselves and draw breath; then, at the downbeat of Christ’s shout, He raises His arms to draw out the dead from their tombs, and all believers from all around the globe, up to Him.

to meet the Lord in the air,

We have a habit of either spiritualizing certain statements in God’s word or interpreting them from a cold, earthly perspective. I love it when portions of God’s word are illuminated with fresh light by other portions. [Turn please to the story of the raising of Lazarus from the tomb in John 11.](#)

This event was different from the other resurrections we see in the Eschaton because, while Lazarus was indeed brought back to life, he was raised to the same body in which he died—not a *glorified* body—and he certainly died again subsequently.

Once again we tend to read this passage, beginning with v21, in light of the ultimate salvation we have by faith in Christ Jesus: because we believe, we will have eternal life in Him. There is nothing wrong with that. But as I read this, notice how Martha acknowledges the *general* resurrection of the dead in which most Jews believed, but watch how Jesus clarifies for her that there will be *another* “resurrection” in which some will be dead and some will be alive—i.e., the Rapture.

Martha then said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “*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. Do you believe this?*” She said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.” (John 11:21–27 [emphasis added])

In that reassuring, victorious statement we can see the immediate moment regarding Martha's dead brother ("he who believes in me will live even if he dies"); we can see the promise of eternal life for all who believe; we can see hints of the Rapture (the dead will live and those who live will never die); but we also see Jesus the Christ revealing His lordship over all ("I am the resurrection and the life"): *This life we are talking about—I am the one making it all possible, and there will come a day when I personally will come to conduct you into that life.*

and so we shall always be with the Lord.

Here is the best news of all—and the best part of the Rapture event. The Thessalonian passage ends with v18: "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

Christians and unbelievers alike commonly speak of "going to heaven," as if the *place* of our eternity is what is important. But that is not true; it is not the *place*, but the *company*. From the Rapture on, we will "always be with the Lord"; wherever He is, there we will be with Him.

What makes heaven paradise is not the environment, the climate, the gold-paved streets or the accommodations. What makes heaven paradise is that it is the home of the Lord God and His Christ, our Savior.

SESSION 7: THE TRIBULATION FORK: CELEBRATION OR TRIBULATION

Charts: The Tribulation Fork

PREFACE

As we approach the tumultuous time of the Tribulation there are a few things we need to keep in mind to set the stage.

First, a split-second after the Rapture, there is not one Christian on earth. The population of this planet will consist entirely of those who have rejected Christ Jesus for who He truly is.

Second, just as in the Flood, God has every reason and every right to inflict on this unbelieving generation the wrath that is about to come. God's word testifies over and over again of God's longsuffering; even as He has released measured out portions of it over the millennia since Adam, God has held back the full force of His righteous fury until the day after the Rapture of the church (as well as at the close of the Millennium).

Third, don't fall into the easy habit of thinking the events of the Tribulation are being orchestrated by Satan or his servants—Antichrist, the false prophet, et al—or that the misery of the period is all *their* idea. The Bible makes it clear that God and His Christ are running the show. Just as He did in the life of Job, God, for a brief period, grants Satan the opportunity to do his worst—but in that, Satan is only implementing the foreordained plan of God.

THE WORD ITSELF

Any study of what we call the Tribulation would be made easier if the writers in the Bible had used a unique term for that period in future history. But they did not. The same Greek word, *thlipsis*, translated "tribulation," to refer to the seven-year period immediately following the Rapture, is also used

- by Paul to describe what awaits him in his journeys: "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me" (Acts 20:22-23).
- in 1 Corinthians 7:28 to describe what awaits one if they marry: "But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you."
- by James to describe the lives of orphans and widows: "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27).

Because of this it can sometimes be challenging to isolate references to *the* Tribulation. Then, as well, we have the two terms: "Tribulation" and "*Great* Tribulation," both of which refer to the period immediately after the Rapture, but which are used in different ways in different contexts. I suggest the following guidelines:

- In comparison to the common tribulation we experience simply by dwelling in flesh on this earth, the entirety of the seven-year period can rightly be called “The Great Tribulation.”
- If, however, we are confining the context to just those seven years, then the second three-and-a-half years of that period comprise the “Great Tribulation,” for it will be decidedly worse than the first half.

PLACING THE BEMA SEAT AND MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

As one peruses older eschatological charts and books that address the eschatological events, one sees these two components of the Last Things—the *Bema* Seat and Marriage Supper of the Lamb—floating around to different places on the timeline. That is, these are events that are challenging to place, and cases can indeed be made for the various options. The events, in general, described in Revelation do not necessarily represent a contiguous narrative thread; sometimes they do, sometimes they do not. The “bride” preparing for the “marriage of the Lamb” is referenced both in Revelation 19:7-9 and in 21:2; in the first it seems clearly to refer to the redeemed, while in the latter it states clearly that it refers to the “new Jerusalem” ([more on this in a moment](#)). Some see the “supper,” or feast, of this marriage being never-ending, some see it as a singular event.

I will be addressing my reasons for their placement in a moment, but right now I would like to focus, once again, on the poetic symmetry of what I have termed “The Tribulation Fork”—as in “fork in the road.” When I comprehended this, it represented for me one of those glorious, breath-taking revelations one periodically discovers when studying such things. As I mentioned in the fourth session, think of the Rapture (along with the subsequent events in heaven) as the end times reenactment of Noah’s Ark, and the Tribulation (on earth) as the end times reenactment of the flood.

While everything is going south on earth, where subterfuge and misery are seemingly being orchestrated by Antichrist—and where the Lord God and His Christ will soon pour out their wrath upon those who have rejected Them—all believers in and followers of Christ Jesus (prior to the Rapture) are safely with Him in heaven, having their work for Him judged, receiving their various rewards, and sitting down to a joyous wedding feast.

THE BEMA (OR JUDGMENT) SEAT

Bema (bay' ma) is the Greek word translated “judgment seat” (of Christ) in 2 Corinthians 5:10. There the apostle Paul gives us the reason for it.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.

Frankly, the case could be made that this passage in Paul’s second letter could refer to either the (first) judgment of believers or the (second) Great White Throne judgment. The wording is rather flexible—especially that word

translated “bad,” the Greek *kakon*, which can mean something evil, or simply something of no worth. In his first (extant) letter to the Corinth church Paul goes into greater detail about this judgment.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

With his mention of the element of fire as a component of the judgment, depending on one’s position on the Last Things, some say that Paul is speaking of the final Great White Throne of judgment that takes place at the end of the Millennium. I do not believe this to be the case; at that *last* judgment it will be the *unbelievers* who are consigned to an eternity of flames—*not* their works—while at the judgment of believers only (wherever it takes place) it will be some of their *works* that are consumed by fire, not the individual. The picture in this passage is that if much of his or her deeds are required to be burned up, because they were worthless, then the believer just might leave the place smelling of smoke. But, indeed, “he himself will be saved.”

Every believer will stand before his or her Lord for an examination of the work they have turned in in His name. Some of the works will survive the trial, and a reward will be rendered; other works will not survive, but be consumed by fire, and no reward for them—those works burned up—will be forthcoming. Yet none of this will threaten the believer’s eternity with Christ.

Placement

These passages do not tell us *where* to place the believer’s judgment on the timeline of the Eschaton. In a number of older charts I have included in my resources, the authors blithely insert, under the “judgment seat of Christ” for believers, a reference to Revelation 4-5 (chapters four and five).

Well, I have read and re-read those chapters and cannot find anywhere in them a mention of believers before the *bema* seat. Chapter Four is all about the overwhelming majesty and glory and holiness and power of God the Father. Chapter Five introduces the “Lamb standing, as if slain”—that is, Christ Jesus—whose role in this scene is to open “the book...with seven seals” and release the corresponding events upon the earth, inaugurating the Tribulation.

Some take the position that since chapters two and three are all about the churches on earth, and chapter four immediately (“After these things...”) switches to heaven, with no more mention of the churches on earth, that this indicates that “the church” is no longer there but now in heaven. Even if that be the case, that doesn’t mean that the *bema* seat occurs immediately after the Rapture. What we have instead of solid statements of sequence are hints in sub-text. So permit me to set forth my reasons for placing the *bema* seat where I have.

- First (and least), at the end of Luke’s abbreviated version of the Olivet Discourse Jesus says something that hints at a connection between the Rapture and our standing before His throne.

Read Luke 21:34-36.

This is, admittedly, thin, but one can at least see a logical progression from the Rapture (“escape all that is about to happen” to “those who live on the face of the whole earth”) followed by standing “before the Son of Man.”

- Second, in Luke 14 Jesus, invited to a Pharisee’s house for a meal, offers His host some counsel on who to invite to a meal the next time.

Read Luke 14:12-14.

Here again the idea of reward is closely associated with the “resurrection of the righteous,” clearly speaking of the Rapture.

- Last, not only is there poetic justice in believers being judged for their works for Christ, while unbelievers on earth are receiving His wrath for their rejection of Christ, there is also a logical order to each believer’s work being, as it were, put through the furnace of refining to get rid of the chaff, before sitting down to the celebratory wedding feast. Twice in the Revelation we read of Christ’s bride being “made ready” for the Groom.

Read Revelation 19:7-8.

If we are clothed in (only) “the righteous acts of the saints” for the wedding, it certainly must mean that we have already passed through the cleansing judgment that rids us of any acts (“works”) worthy only of being “burned up”.¹ We cannot say if the believers’ judgment occurs *immediately* after the Rapture, but it is my contention that it occurs before the marriage and subsequent marriage supper of the Lamb.

THE MARRIAGE AND MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

In Chart #6 there is no significance to the spans, or widths of the blocks “Bema Seat” and “Wedding and Marriage-supper of the Lamb.” I have made the case for the *bema* seat judgment taking place prior to the marriage, and thus the marriage takes place next. It is doubtful, however, that the bema seat and marriage and supper each literally fill the entirety of the seven year Tribulation.

If we take the latter portion of the Revelation text as a relatively sequential timeline of events (which we do), the marriage comes just after the fall of the harlot “Babylon” and the four-fold Hallelujah celebrating God’s victory over the evil that has transpired during the seven-year Tribulation. If you are struggling to understand the purpose of the Tribulation, and the need for God to pursue it (and if you are *now*, just wait until we detail all that occurs during that period), vv1-6 will help place it into the heavenly perspective.

Read Revelation 19:1-6.²

¹ 1 Corinthians 3:15

² Hallelujah = Praise the Lord

Some commentators conclude that vv7-8 represent John's *foreshadowing* of the later passage (21:2) that refers to the descending new Jerusalem "coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." Perhaps.

But note:

v19:7 - "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come **and His bride has made herself ready.**" (emphasis added)

v21:2 - "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, **made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.**" (emphasis added)

There is no more beautiful sight for a groom than the sight of his bride coming down the aisle toward him. And that's how beautiful will be the sight of the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, as beautiful as a bride adorned for her husband. But this does not seem to be the actual wedding moment.

Most older charts show the marriage supper taking place near the end of the Tribulation period on earth, just before Christ returns in judgment *with His church*—and that is where I would place it.

We cannot say what the heavenly wedding and marriage supper will be like; we have only the biblical picture of the earthly version to go by: "In Jewish culture, the marriage supper was the best banquet or party anyone knew; it always was an occasion of tremendous joy," (David Guzik) and went on for days.

In the "Tribulation Fork" we see the unfiltered wrath of God against those who reject His Son, set against the love and care of His Son for those who did not. I can think of no more dramatic contrast than this: for some, Tribulation; for others, Celebration.

SESSION 8: THE TRIBULATION, AN INTRODUCTION (PART ONE)

Charts: Daniel's Seventy Weeks

PREFACE

Invariably there is a moment in any study—it came in our studies of Hebrews, of Thessalonians, and *really* showed up in First Corinthians 7—there comes a moment when one is almost sorry one has decided to tackle the study. The text is so challenging, so troublesome, so fraught with peril, that all one can do—short of running, screaming into the night—is gulp twice, pray *really* hard, take a deep breath, and forge ahead.

We are now at that point in this study of the Last Things. The Tribulation portion of the Eschaton is without question the most troublesome, most controversial, most argued and debated portion. The Tribulation occupies the lion's share of the book of Revelation—out of the book's 22 chapters, 16 of those chapters deal with events in or immediately surrounding the Tribulation.

Any deep study of the Tribulation produces much... well, tribulation. Reiterating what I said in our first session, one of the more troublesome aspects of this is that highly respected, knowledgeable, wise, Spirit-filled Christian scholars disagree with each other—especially regarding the portions of Scripture that pertain—or some insist do *not* pertain—to the eschatological environment. While many commentators and biblical scholars are in agreement with this church's position, many commentators I have repeatedly used for other studies embrace a different position regarding the Tribulation—or, more often the case, disagree on some of the details. Add to all this the contemporary, *non*-scholarly ideas based more on headlines than textual analysis, and one can soon regret opening such a can of worms. Yet, there can also be tremendous joy of discovery in such an enterprise. My prayer is that you have already experienced some of that joy—or will in due course.

Before we begin examining what takes place during the Tribulation, we need to lay the groundwork for understanding it as a whole. We need to look at the forest before we examine every individual tree.

In this session we will begin our examination of Daniel's "Seventy Weeks," in broader terms; then in our next two sessions we will carefully step through the Daniel 9 prophecy with the accompanying chart as our guide. [So be sure to have this chart \(#7\) with you for our next two sessions.](#)

ISRAEL

As Oliver Greene puts it in his book, *Bible Prophecy* (1970), "The Great Tribulation has nothing to do with the church. The Scriptures which describe the Great Tribulation speak of Israel (Jacob), and *the church* is not once named—which, of course, makes perfect sense, since the church has just been removed from the earth.

- In Jeremiah 30:6-7 the Tribulation is called ‘the time of Jacob’s trouble’ [or distress]
- In Ezekiel 22:18-22 we note that it is Israel, not the Church, that will be cast into God’s melting pot to be melted and refined in the fires of God’s wrath.”

Read Ezekiel 22:17-22.

- “In Malachi 3:2-3 it is Israel who will go through the fire for purification, and again in Zechariah 13:9 it is God’s people (Israel) who will pass through the fire to be refined as silver and gold are refined.” (Oliver Greene)

Thus, immediately after the Rapture, there will be no Christians—only unbelieving Gentiles and Jews who have rejected Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah. Over the next seven years that will change; while some will have their hatred for Christ deepen, others will turn to embrace Him, and many Jews will place their faith in Him as the true Messiah. A great number of *them* will be not just persecuted, but killed.

DANIEL’S SEVENTY YEARS

From where do we get the idea of seven years—or two halves of three-and-one-half years—for the span of the Tribulation? For that we need to begin with the prophecies given to Daniel. [Turn please to Daniel 9.](#)*

Read Daniel 9:24-27.

This is the foundational passage for both “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks” and “Daniel’s *Seventieth* Week.” In upcoming sessions we will be digging into the details of the events of which the angel Gabriel speaks; for now we want to just note the numbers ([follow along with the chart](#)):

- v24: “Seventy weeks have been decreed...”
- v25: “...from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks [i.e., 69 weeks total]; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.”
- v26: “Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing...”
- v27: “And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering...”

All our common versions except for the NIVs translate this “weeks”; the NIVs supply the meaning behind it: units of “seven.” And this is to be under-

* In addition to The Revelation (chapters 5-20), principal sources for the Tribulation include Daniel (chapters 7-12); and Christ’s eschatological (“Olivet”) discourse, found in Matthew 24:1-25:46, Mark 13:1-37, and Luke 21:5-36. Most of what we believe to substantiate our position comes from harmonizing these and other passages from God’s word.

stood—especially in evangelical/dispensational circles as 490 years (70 x 7 = 490). But how do we get from “weeks” or “units of sevens” to years? [Keep your finger here, then turn to Leviticus 25.](#)

Read Leviticus 25:8.

Depending on your version, the key word is translated either “sabbaths” or “weeks,” but the connection is clearly drawn here for using “weeks” to stand for “seven years.” So to wrap it back to v27 in Daniel’s prophecy, where we see the events of the Tribulation in shorthand,

“And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, [7 years] but in the middle of the week [after the first 3½ years] 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.”

Once again, ours is a *dispensational* position.

- Some see Daniel’s “Seventy Weeks” prophecy being fulfilled in its entirety by historical events that culminated in the events of AD 70, when Rome destroyed the Jerusalem temple and the city.
- Some assign the activity of the “horn” (i.e., the beast, Antichrist) to a Roman Catholic Papal power.
- Many biblical scholars see this prophecy fulfilled in the brutal subjugation of Jerusalem by the Syrian king Antiochus IV, who came to power around 170 BC. He is commonly referred to as Antiochus Epiphanes—“epiphanes,” which means “god manifest” (Antiochus claimed to be Zeus incarnate). Let me read from an article from the venerable *Biblical Archaeology Society*:

Antiochus arrived in Jerusalem to find the people in an open state of revolt against him and each other. The chaos he found in Judea immediately followed a humiliating defeat in Egypt, and the ruler took out his frustrations on the Jewish people. Antiochus took control of the situation by slaying many innocents and brutally enforcing his cultural and religious policies on the population. A time of great tribulation occurred as traditional practices such as circumcision were outlawed, sacred scriptures were burned, and violators were brutally punished even unto death. Having already laid siege to the Temple Mount and destroying many of its fortifications, Antiochus built a new fortress known as the Acra (literally, “the Citadel”) to consolidate his power over Jerusalem and strengthen his political agents. As a culmination, he proceeded to profane the Temple of Yahweh by erecting idols within it and even going so far as to sacrifice pigs upon the altar, presumably to Zeus. (*Biblical Archaeology Society*)

Antiochus does indeed fulfill much of the description and prophecies regarding Antichrist; dispensationalists would say that he was an historical *type* of Antichrist—not the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy, but a “now—not yet” foreshadowing of Antichrist—just as Melchizedek, for one example, was a type of Jesus the Christ.

There are two more ways in which the duration of the Tribulation (or portions thereof) are described. [Back to Daniel, Chapter Seven this time.](#)

Read Daniel 7:25.

The “he,” in v25 is the beast, Antichrist; the “time, times, and half a time” —one year + two years + half a year = 3½ years— represents the last half of the seven-year Tribulation, i.e., the Great Tribulation. Halves of the seven year Tribulation are also described as “1,260 days”¹ and “forty-two months”.²

As the accompanying chart shows, Daniel’s “Seventy Weeks” begins in 457 BC, so those who are better than me at math might have already deduced that we have a problem here. If Daniel’s “Seventieth Week” is yet future, well, that would obviously be more than just a tad beyond 490 years from 457 BC!

The dispensational position on this is that the church, and hence the Dispensation of Grace (the church age, a period of indeterminate length) was not revealed to Daniel. This creates a “gap,” or indeterminate “interlude” between Week 69 and Week 70 of Daniel’s Seventy Weeks. The math works when that gap lying between Christ’s baptism and the Tribulation is removed.

Eyebrows may indeed rise over the formidable “gap” or “interlude” in the seventy weeks that, so far, has lasted better than two thousand years—and may appear all too convenient. J. C. J. Waite, in the *New Bible Dictionary*, points out that, “Such prophetic gaps are not uncommon in the OT.” Then he cites the example of Isaiah 61:2, part of the passage Jesus read in the Nazareth synagogue when he presented Himself as the fulfillment of that prophecy. Here is what Jesus read, as recorded in Luke 4:18-19.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

In the synagogue, however, Jesus did *not* read the next line in the original Isaiah passage; v2 in Isaiah 61 reads,

to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, *and the day of vengeance of our God*; to comfort all who mourn; (emphasis added)

¹ Revelation 11:13 and 12:6

² Revelation 11:2

Jesus said that He was there to fulfill “the year of the Lord’s favor,” which included His vengeance. Yet Jesus did not implement that vengeance during His first time on earth, but most certainly will in His second, which will occur, at last count, at least two thousand years after He declared that prophecy fulfilled in Him. More on this interlude, or gap, in our next two sessions.

HOW LITERAL IS THE TIMELINE?

Much ink has been spilled and many trees have gone to their doom over the last two thousand years to rationalize the math of the various eschatological positions.

Generally speaking, the dispensational position is to interpret God’s word literally: if it says seven years, then we take it to mean just that; if it says that Christ will reign on earth, and Satan to be chained in the abyss, for one-thousand years, then we take it to mean what it says: one thousand years. Critics raise their voices especially when years switch to months or days, for it’s true that calendars change. In ancient times a year was not always, nor everywhere, 365 days. Some times a year was twelve thirty-day months; at times five days were tacked on at the end to balance it out—at times not. Leap years? Nope.

My personal position is this: While I interpret the lengths to be literal, I also know that it is too easy to pinpoint an event on a chart—an event that might take quite a while to run its course from beginning to end. We can quite accurately pinpoint—but of course, not *date*—the Rapture, because Paul tells us it occurs in the blink of an eye. Just so, it is easy to draw an arrow to a point in the timeline to mark the occurrence of The Great White Throne, but no one on earth can say how long that judgment process will take. Will Time itself grind to a halt during that event, or will it keep moving?

So, speaking personally, my devotion to God’s inerrant word is not going to be compromised if some of these sharp edges are rounded off, or if one period spills over into the next—or, a more probable circumstance, the various event groupings that we so neatly arrange on our charts do not always *immediately* follow one another. That is, there may be “interludes” scattered about between, say, The Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation, or between The Tribulation and the Millennium.

THE HISTORICAL DATES

The data for the accompanying chart has not been copied from any one source, but reflects my conclusions after consulting many sources. The commonly used events and dates cited for the beginning and midpoints of the seventy weeks are, in the opinion of many, in error. In preparation for this study of the Last Things I have referenced primarily two older chart series—the most recent published in 1970 by evangelist Buel L. Liming, and (the better of the two) the charts published by Clarence Larkin in 1919. I have consulted respective commentaries—not least, Gleason L. Archer, Jr.’s on the book of Daniel;

Archer was the highly respected professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

I have also referenced my own legwork from an earlier study on Ezra and Nehemiah (in 2014). Finally, because the process involved math my good wife, Linda, was brought in to supervise and check the calculations (for in that regard I cannot be trusted). After sifting through all the various schemes for Daniel's seventy weeks, the events and dates on this chart, I believe, track the best.

SESSION 9: THE TRIBULATION, AN INTRODUCTION (PART TWO)

Charts: Daniel's Seventy Weeks

PREFACE

We have a few more long-range considerations of The Tribulation before we open the door onto the period itself—not least a more detailed examination of the essential Daniel 9 passage, which, in itself, takes a long-range view.

Read Daniel 9:24-27.

v24

As I began a close examination of v24 I made a mistake that we should all guard against in our study of this period. I began interpreting the six achievements—either accomplished within, or brought about as a result of the seventy weeks—from a general, or even Christian viewpoint. But, I finally reminded myself, I have repeatedly said that the seventy weeks, and especially the seventieth week, are all about Israel. Gabriel in the text says that the seventy weeks with their achievements are all “about your people and your holy city.” Daniel was a Jew; his “people” was Israel, and his holy city was Jerusalem. The *overall* purpose of what follows is to bring about national and spiritual redemption for Israel. The first three relate to the removal of sin, and the second three to the restoration of righteousness. (Archer)

finish the transgression

make an end of sin

make atonement for iniquity

The first two are related, but not synonymous. The first (*pesa* [paysha]) implies a revolt against authority, while the second (*hataot*) speaks more of missing the mark, hence requiring some sort of expiation or sacrifice.

Neither of the first two would be possible without the sacrifice the Messiah made on the cross for the once-for-all atonement for our sins. The second three relate to the restoration of righteousness.

bring in everlasting righteousness

seal up vision and prophecy

anoint the most holy place

Because of the work done by the Messiah the ground will be laid for an eternal time of righteousness, and there will no longer be need for visions and prophecy, for they all will find their fulfillment in the Christ—Israel’s long-awaited Messiah now acknowledged by Israel *as a nation, as a people*—enthroned. Finally, the most holy place in the millennial temple will be consecrated.

My reading of v24 is that these six goals, or *purposes* of the seventy weeks, do not see their fulfillment necessarily *within* those seventy weeks, but that the

seventy weeks—and especially the seventieth week—represent the required trial by fire, as it were, for these to be accomplished in Israel as a people. The time of Tribulation will mean *both* for Israel: both trial by fire and ultimate redemption. [Turn please to Jeremiah 30](#). Here, as well as in other prophecies, Yahweh makes clear that He will keep His promise to restore Israel—but it will come at a price; they must pass through the refining furnace to get there.

(Jeremiah 30:1–3) The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book. ‘For behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.’ The LORD says, ‘I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.’”

All good news, but Israel must first receive its due punishment.

(Jeremiah 30:11) ‘For I am with you,’ declares the LORD, ‘to save you; For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, Only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly And will by no means leave you unpunished.’

(30:5-7) For thus says the LORD, ‘I have heard a sound of terror, Of dread, and there is no peace. ‘Ask now, and see If a male can give birth. Why do I see every man With his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale? ‘Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob’s distress, But he will be saved from it.’ [Now look at Jeremiah 31:31](#).

(Jeremiah 31:31) “Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

(Jeremiah 31:33) “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

Implied in v33 of Jeremiah’s prophecy is what the prophet Ezekiel states explicitly.

(Ezekiel 36:26–27) “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

Christ Jesus, Son of Man, Son of God, the Jewish *and* Gentile Messiah, bookends it all. In Him sin is defeated and ultimately vanquished, and in Him righteousness will reign not just for the Jews, but for *all* who acknowledge Him as Lord.

v25

“So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

Gabriel announces to Daniel that the beginning point (*terminus a quo*) of the seventy weeks will be a decree issued to “restore and rebuild Jerusalem.”

Scholars, interpreters, commentators—and seemingly everyone else under the sun—have been and are still debating this. The logical options for the *terminus a quo* are typically reduced to three or four possibles. I have concluded that the only one that properly fits the definition *and timeline* is **the decree issued in 457 BC by Artaxerxes to Ezra**.*

The common criticism of the Ezra decree is that it speaks only of the temple, not the city, being rebuilt. It does, however, if one looks deeper. [Please turn to Ezra 7](#). Ezra, the priest and scribe, was in exile in Babylon and, “because the hand of the Lord his God was upon him,” set out for Jerusalem with others, carrying with him a copy of the decree given him by the Persian king Artaxerxes.

Artaxerxes did not just give permission; he sent Ezra and his companions back to Jerusalem laden down with silver and gold, money from a freewill offering from Babylonians, the utensils that had been stolen from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, and essentially *carte blanche* to do whatever he wanted, no matter the cost—including make everyone involved exempt from taxes or tolls. Now note v25-26:

“You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in the province beyond the River, even all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant of them. Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment.”

*The only other decree remotely possible is the decree by the same king to Nehemiah, but that timeline does not harmonize with the accepted dates for the life of Jesus on earth.

And now listen to what Ezra includes in his prayer of confession in Ezra 9:8-9.

“But now for a brief moment grace has been shown from the LORD our God, to leave us an escaped remnant and to give us a peg in His holy place, that our God may enlighten our eyes and grant us a little reviving in our bondage. For we are slaves; yet in our bondage our God has not forsaken us, but has extended lovingkindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, *to give us reviving to raise up the house of our God, to restore its ruins and to give us a wall in Judah and Jerusalem*” (emphasis added)

It seems clear that Ezra assumed his mandate from the king to be well beyond simply the repair and rebuilding of the temple, but to include the restoration of the city itself. More than that, we can see that Ezra—and Nehemiah, who would come later to address the situation with the wall—was there there to reestablish a Jewish *society* and culture in Jerusalem. He is told explicitly to “appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in the province beyond the River, even all those who know the laws of your God.” This was not just reestablishing the temple system, but a *civic* system—which was begun by Ezra and Nehemiah, but only completed forty-nine years later, thus comprising the first seven weeks.

Why is this important? Because the Hebrew word translated “restore” in v25—literally, cause to return—here means to return (restore) Jerusalem to its former condition as a place of Yahweh worship. “It was evidently the purpose to cause it to return, as it were, to its former splendor; to reinstate it in its former condition as a holy city - the city where the worship of God would be celebrated, and it is this purpose which is referred to here” (Albert Barnes).

from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks;

Taking 457 BC as our starting point, followed by 408 BC to mark the completion of the restoration of Jerusalem (seven weeks), we next look to a point 434 years later to mark the end of the sixty-nine weeks. We find that to be AD 27, when Jesus was baptized and began His ministry.

The NASB and ESV “Prince” is not the most helpful for the Hebrew *nagid* (nah-geed), which is better translated here “ruler” (NIV: “the Anointed One, the ruler”)—and, because of the Hebrew word order, points specifically to their use as a proper pronoun for a distinctive personage, i.e., “Messiah the Ruler.”

So what is it about that moment of His baptism that would designate it the end of the sixty-nine weeks? Well, it was the moment of His “anointing,” which is what the word “messiah” means: anointed one. If we consider the various milestones of Jesus’ time on earth—His incarnation, the inauguration of His public ministry, His transfiguration, His trial and death, resurrection and as-

cension—out of all these it is the moment immediately after Jesus’ baptism by John, when His heavenly Father declared Him to be His Son, that best fits “until Messiah the Ruler” (“unto,” YLT; “coming of,” ESV) during His life on earth: “After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased’” (Matthew 3:16–17). Having received public sanction from His heavenly Father, it was now time for Jesus to pass through His own furnace of testing, and begin His ministry.

it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress.

Both of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah attest to the fact that Jerusalem in their time was encircled by those who were doing everything possible to bring its restoration and rebuilding to a grinding halt.

Thus the sixty-nine “weeks” (483 years) comes to a close at the baptism and public authorization of Jesus by God the Father in c. AD 27—which works well with the generally accepted year of his crucifixion, c. AD 30.

SESSION 10: THE TRIBULATION, AN INTRODUCTION (PART THREE)

Charts: Daniel's Seventy Weeks

PREFACE

In our study of the foundational Daniel 9 passage we have thus far examined vv24-25, covering the first sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years (sixty-nine “sevens” of years). Let’s begin with a quick review:

- The seventy weeks begin with the decree given to Ezra the priest and scribe by the Persian king Artaxerxes in 457 BC.
- The end of the first seven weeks (49 years) is marked by the completion of the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem—not just the walls, not just the temple, but the city as a whole as a working civic entity—in 408 BC.
- The end of the next sixty-two weeks, and the terminus ad quem (or end point) of the sixty-nine weeks is 434 years later, marked by the presentation and “anointing” of Christ by His Father at His baptism. This took place in c. AD 27.

We are now ready to proceed with v26.

Read Daniel 9:24-27.

v26

Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

This prophecy given to Daniel by Gabriel says nothing about the period between the seventh and sixty-ninth week. Once it describes the conditions under which Jerusalem will be rebuilt and restored, it switches, in v26, to events “after” the sixty-nine (literally, “sixty-two”) weeks. It gives us the time span, but mentions no episodic mile-markers (e.g., as with the completion of Jerusalem at the end of seven weeks).

Some ancient and modern commentators have made the mistake of interpreting the end point of the sixty-nine weeks as the point where “the Messiah will be cut off”—i.e., Christ’s crucifixion. But that’s not what it says; “the Messiah will be cut off” *after* the sixty-two weeks—that is, *after* AD 27.

Messiah will be cut off and have nothing

There is a variant reading, as seen in the KJVs: “Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.”¹ Perhaps, as usual, the Bible itself is our best interpreter.

¹ You wouldn’t believe all the many different interpretations of both of these variants.

Read Isaiah 53:7-8.

Isaiah illumines the second variant: Christ did not die for anything *He* had done, but “for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due.” And as to the majority rendering, He left this earth having nothing to call His own, save, perhaps those who had believed on His name. A commentator writes, “Born in another man’s stable, cradled in another man’s manger with nowhere to lay his head during his life on earth, and buried in another man’s tomb after dying on a cursed cross, the Christ of God and the Friend of the friendless was indeed cut off and had nothing” (Heslop).

and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary.

The Hebrew text does not have the definite article (the) in front of the word translated “prince” or “ruler” (as in v25, the Hebrew *nagid*). Gleason Archer suggests a better translation would be, “The people of a prince who shall come will destroy both the city and the sanctuary.”

There are some, mostly older, commentators,² who claim that “the P/ prince” refers to Christ Jesus throughout vv25-26, along with the “he” of v27. That is, they do not recognize a different entity once “Messiah [is] cut off,” that the Messiah will return and do all that is described in vv26-27, and refers to His interactions with the Jews. Frankly I don’t see it; their rationale is tortured in the extreme—especially when they try to fit this prophecy into His earthly ministry. Although some questions remain (which we will courageously address), the dispensational position is far more logical, as well as befitting the original text.

To wit, *a ruler, a leader* will come after the sixty-second/ninth week who will wipe out the city of Jerusalem, including its temple. Pretty much without exception most take this as a prophecy of General Titus Flavius Vespasianus, at the time the older son of the Roman Emperor Vespasian, sent by his father the emperor to put down the Jewish revolt against Rome. He succeeded most thoroughly: the city and its temple were utterly destroyed.³

This destruction took place in AD 70—forty years after Christ’s crucifixion, and forty-three years after the end of the sixty-ninth “week.”

And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.

Gabriel’s use of “flood” here is a metaphor for armies sweeping down onto Judah as a “flood.” We see the same imagery in Isaiah. [Please turn to Isaiah 8](#). Note how in v7 he speaks of “strong and abundant waters of the river Euphrates,” but immediately connects that to “the king of Assyria and all his glory.”

² e.g., Matthew Poole, Matthew Henry, Albert Barnes; but contra K & D

³ Upon his father’s death in 79, Titus became emperor, but ruled for only two years, dying of fever.

Read Isaiah 8:7-8.

Jesus spoke of this as well in His Olivet Discourse, as recorded in Matthew's gospel.

Read Matthew 24:6-8.

And don't miss that last clause: "desolations are determined," which could be translated, "a strict determination of desolations," or "the determined amount of desolations" (Archer). It is all planned out, written down (as we will see later), *necessary*, as determined by the Godhead in eternity past.

Note that in the Daniel prophecy everything in v26 occurs *after* the sixty-two weeks (or sixty-nine), but *before* the seventieth week—which would make it difficult to imagine that the final, seventieth week were meant to immediately follow the sixty-ninth. The "gap," or interlude of the intervening centuries would seem to be a necessary component to work out all that God intends as preamble to the final chapter of the Last Things.

v27

Here, in v27, is a compressed outline for the seven years of the Tribulation. This verse has also revealed that there is a certain level of freedom in interpreting a passage for which there is no consensus. One expects a variety of opinions from those not in the dispensational camp, but what I discovered is an unbounded number of positions even from supposedly pretrib, premill, dispensational interpreters. Understand: This is not license to subscribe to just any fanciful notion one might make up, but it does mean the freedom to hold to an interpretation that *some* scholars assert, even if many other scholars do not—for it can be just as valid as the next.

Something else is revealed, however, by the study of this passage—and many other passages that have been and will be part of this class. To wit, Every one of us is free to hold certain positions—even contradictory positions—regarding prophecy in God's word. That is the believer's privilege. But a deep study of, for a good example, v27 in this passage, reveals that not one of us has the right to be dogmatic about his or her interpretation. If brilliant, highly respected scholars hold to opposing positions, who are *we* to declare, "This is the way it is. End of discussion." Verse 27 should stand as a warning to all of us to put away that righteous gleam in our eyes and to be respectful of differing interpretations by fellow Christians.

And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week 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.

Before we dig into the specifics, let me outline the big chunks of this verse:

- During his rise to power, Antichrist will make an agreement with the Jews to permit or even encourage their faith and practices.
- At the midpoint of the Tribulation he will renege on that agreement and halt their sacrifices—both bloody and unbloody.
- Thus begins, as Jesus said, “a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will” (Matthew 24:21).
- At the end of which Antichrist (“the one who makes desolate”) will be “completely destroyed” (i.e., along with the false prophet, cast into the eternal lake of fire).

The Nazi regime desired “a complete extirpation⁴ of Christianity,” as the U.S. government concluded after combing through Nazi records, but “considerations of expediency made it impossible” to do so in one fell swoop. So Hitler employed a policy of gradualism: lying to church leaders about the Nazi program and then lying about church leaders to the German people, abrogating laws protecting religious independence, seizing control of church institutions, shuttering religious schools and seminaries, declaring certain denominations illegal, fomenting violence against church leaders, sending anti-Nazi church leaders to concentration camps and murdering others. (Alan W. Dowd, in *American Legion Magazine*, January 19, 2016)

Our interpretation of v27 is that the “he” is not Antiochus Epiphanes, not Titus Flavius, not Christ Jesus, but Antichrist; this is the branch we will follow—though there will be a second branching point coming up.

The “he” spoken of in this verse points back to “the [a] prince who is to come”—i.e., Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70—whom we see as *foreshadowing* the Antichrist, who will become a world-wide dictator during the seventieth week.

Thus in v27 we are now beyond “types” and now talking about the real thing. Like Adolf Hitler and countless other leaders and rulers throughout history, the Antichrist will be an inveterate liar, doing everything and anything he can to further his intended goals.

he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week,

The Antichrist—this new leader on the world stage, this charismatic, win-some politician and general—will make an agreement, a covenant chiseled, as it were, in granite with “the many”.⁵ The form of the Hebrew vowel translated “many” (*larabbim*) “clearly indicates ‘the many,’ rather than ‘many’—which would have been *lerabbim*” (Archer). And here is the second branching point I

⁴ I.e., extinction

⁵ only in the NASB

mentioned. I normally try to avoid doing this, but here I believe it to be circum-spect to present two possibilities.

First, Gleason Archer takes one branch when says that this refers to Messianic Jews newly in Christ (since the rapture). Just as Hitler signed a non-aggression pact with Stalin in 1939, then subsequently reneged on the agreement and *viciously* invaded the USSR, the Beast will make a covenant with these Messianic Jews to permit their continuation of the temple practices (there will be at this time a temple in Jerusalem), then after three-and-a-half years (the “middle of the week”) he will abruptly, and blasphemously, break this agreement.

but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering;

You might wonder, as I did, *If they (Messianic Jews) are now followers of Christ, what are they doing making “sacrifice[s] and grain offering[s]” in the temple?*

Archer: Since these Jewish believers trust in Jesus as their Messiah, it may well be that the sacrifices will be conducted as memorial services like the Lord’s Supper, rather than for atonement purposes as in OT times. This will certainly be the case during the Millennium—if indeed Ezekiel 43 pertains to that age.

Perhaps. I suppose it is possible that this might be the case, but it doesn’t quite track for me. Since this agreement between the Jews and Antichrist will be established during the earlier period of the Tribulation, these may just as well be Jews clinging to their ancient traditions, celebrating the reestablishment of the temple as God’s sanction of a revival of the Mosaic Law and its sacrifices.

Either one *could* be the preferred interpretation, but I think the latter tracks better—as agrees the late, esteemed Dr. John F. Walvoord, long-time president of Dallas Theological Seminary—so that is the one I think we should follow. Even so, we will develop this further later, as we begin working our way through the Tribulation period as recorded in the Revelation. Now, what might be the Beast’s reason for stopping all Jewish religious practices? From the next portion of the verse we get a clue.

and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate,

The Hebrew text in the second half of this verse is challenging, and about as opaque as it can get. (Something that gives this away is the variety of renderings in our common translations.) The two NIV versions add words that are simply not there in the Hebrew.⁶ Here is a more literal translation offered by Archer: “And on the wing of abominations [he is going to] commit abominations, and towards the end [or, up until] the predetermined [judgment] will be poured out upon him.” The NIVs take the noun “wing” (*kenap*, ke-naph) to mean something like a wing of the temple, but, like “flood” in v26, here “wing” is probably used metaphorically, describing “the vulture-like role of Antichrist

⁶ e.g., “temple,” “set”

as he swoops down on his victims” (Archer). We benefit in our understanding of “makes desolate” by the words of Jesus Himself in Matthew 24, as He describes this moment.

“Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.” (vv15-21)

Antichrist is all about taking and holding power. Satan, the author of all this depravity, will know the truth, that all this is fleeting, because Christ’s return is imminent. But Satan is a better liar than his servant, and he has been stringing along Antichrist all the time, using him as a pliant tool to meet *his* purpose—Satan’s purpose: to destroy as much of this world before it is taken away from him.

even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.

This world dictator, Antichrist, will hold sway until he himself is made “desolate” (*somem*, sha-mom; uninhabited), which means until the wrath of God is poured out in His fury—if not before, at least at the climactic Armageddon.

AN ASIDE (IN PREPARATION FOR UPCOMING SESSION 11)

Let me offer some perspective regarding the person Scripture refers to as the “little horn,” the “son of perdition” and “man of lawlessness,” “the beast”—that is, Antichrist. I have mentioned in class that we might think of Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet as a perverse, Satanic, reverse-image of the Holy Trinity: Satan for God the Father, Antichrist for the Son of God, and the false prophet for the Holy Spirit.

Frankly, we cannot say much about the man who will later become Antichrist. We might make an educated guess that he will be a man of ambition and drive, a man with a talent for winning the hearts and minds of the masses, a persuasive, charismatic man. However, just as Judas Iscariot was indwelt by Satan (John 13:27) and made to sell out Jesus and betray Him to the chief priests, so this person will be, for this period on earth, Satan incarnate (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Interestingly, the late M. R. De Haan goes so far as to state that the Antichrist will literally be Judas incarnated, thus indwelt by Satan for a second time—but I do not subscribe to that.

For His time on earth, Jesus was Immanuel: God with us, God incarnate (in flesh). His darker opposite, Antichrist, will be Satan in flesh. We might safely assume that since Jesus was righteous and holy before He became God incarnate, the man who will become Antichrist will be evil—or at least having a proclivity toward evil (certainly not a believer)—before he is taken over by Satan.

“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:10-13)

We know God the Father because of the words and works of Jesus. God was at work on earth through Him. Just so, those alive on earth at the time will be able to know Satan because of the words and works of Antichrist, who will be at work through him. As we go deeper into this future history we need to keep in mind that the work of Antichrist is really the work of Satan—and above and beyond that, Father God and the true Christ are ultimately running the whole show.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES FOR THOSE STRUGGLING WITH THE MATH OF THE SEVENTY WEEKS

(from Gleason Archer on Daniel 9:25-26, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, page 115)

“Robert Anderson (pp. 67-75) calculated what he called "prophetic years" as consisting of 360 days each. The 360-day year was known, to be sure, in Egypt, Greece, Assyria, and Babylon, all of which made some use of a system of twelve months having 30 days each. All of them, however, used some sort of intercalary month in order to make an approximation to the 365 days of the solar year—whether 5 days added after the twelfth month or an additional month every six or seven years. In other words, they all used various devices to mark the phases of the moon (29½ days from one new moon to the next) and yet reconcile these twelve lunar units with the solar year of 365¼ days. The Assyrians usually alternated between 29-day months and 30-day months (which therefore totaled 354 days) and the needed 11 extra days were supplied by varying methods, depending on the decision of the local or national priests. The same was true with the Babylonians and Sumerians (cf. P. Van Der Meer, *Chronology of Ancient Western Asia and Egypt* [Leiden: Brill, 1963], p. 1).

“As for Egypt, the 365-day year was followed—but without the insertion of an extra day every fourth year ("leap year") as was later done with the Julian calendar. The unhappy result for the Egyptians was that over a cycle of 1,460 years, their three seasons would gradually work their way around the calendar, till "winter" (p-r-t.) would occur during the summer, and so on. But even at that, the Egyptians never used a 360-day year, as Anderson supposed; they simply used the fraction 1/360 as a rough estimate for daily quotas (cf. A.H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3d ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1957], pp. 203-5). It remains completely unsubstantiated that any of Israel's ancient neighbors ever used 360-day years in complete disregard for the solar cycle. Nor did they ever use long series of 360-day years without some form of intercalation. If, then, the Hebrews did this, they would be the only nation in world history ever to do so.

“Anderson finds support for the 360-day year in the reference to 1,260 days in Revelation 12:6 as the period of persecution during the Great Tribulation; in 12:14 this interval is referred to as "a time, times and half a time or 3½ years. While it is perfectly true that 3½ times 12 times 30 comes out to 1,260, it seems most unlikely that the figure of 3½ years was intended in that context to be any more than approximate. Twelve hundred and sixty days is only 16 or 17 days short of 3½ solar years, and even in modern usage we would have no hesitation whatever in speaking of 1,260 days as "about three and a half years." This evidence from Revelation 12 therefore furnishes very slender support for the supposition that the Hebrews of the first millennium B.C. differed from all others in the ancient (or modern) world and used 360-day years rather than solar years in reckoning prophetic time. Certainly in their numerous chronological statements in Kings and Chronicles, the OT authors used nothing but true solar years. This consideration alone ought to be decisive against Anderson's theory.”

SESSION 11: THE TRIBULATION (PART ONE): CAUSE AND EFFECT

Charts: The Tribulation: Charts 8 & 9

A WORD ABOUT THE CHARTS

Traditionally the seals and trumpets and bowls of the Tribulation (“Daniel’s Seventieth Week”) have been charted in sequential order from left to right. From this, one might infer that they and their corresponding signs or events are to be understood as occurring sequentially during the seven-year Tribulation: this happens, and then *this* happens, then this. The trumpets follow the seals, and the bowls follow the trumpets.

If it were only that simple.

We know that God does not experience time as we do. In the eyes of the Godhead time, with its events, can wrap back upon itself—as seen in one of my favorite passages in Scripture. Responding to the Jewish leaders, Jesus said,

“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” (John 8:56-58)

Jesus’ last statement is awkward grammar, but *wondrous* theology. The Jews got it. They got that Jesus was calling Himself God, so they started picking up stones to kill Him. [Please look at Chart #8.](#)

My guess is that you have never seen the Tribulation charted like this. Chart #8 is an overall, organizational arrangement for the Tribulation period; there will be subsequent charts in which we will zoom into the various sections—seals, trumpets, bowls—for greater detail. But this shows the forest as a whole. Note:

- Between the sixth and seventh items of each series there is a pause, an interlude, what I have termed “parenthetical visions,” which break out of the narrative. These are shown as yellow cartouches.
- In addition to that, there is a larger sequence between the trumpets and bowls that have traditionally been placed at the midpoint of the tribulation. That placement, however, while convenient, really does not accurately categorize some of these parenthetical events. Some do take place at the midpoint, some do not, or they are more problematic in their placement.
- Finally, and most important, this chart more accurately reflects the relationship of the seals, trumpets, and bowls to each other. That is, rather than taking place in orderly sequence, one after the other from Seal One to Bowl Seven, **everything is actually contained within the seals**. That is, the seventh seal does not release the seven trumpets, but **is** the seven trumpets; likewise the seventh trumpet does not release the bowls of wrath, but **is** the seven bowls of wrath. Thus **all** is contained within the seals.

THE CURTAIN RISES

The apostle Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians reveals that there is a real cause-and-effect between the rapture of the church, with the concomitant departure of the Holy Spirit, and the inauguration of the Tribulation with the entrance of the Antichrist onto the stage.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:6-10.

That, in condensed form, is a portrait of the last seven years in the life of the individual referred to as Antichrist, the beast from the sea, and the rider of the white horse released by the opening of the first seal.

Because we are in the middle of it, we do not sense that the worldwide church—consisting of every follower of Christ Jesus, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit—effectively stifles, “restrains,” the work of Satan and his disciples on this earth. From our perspective we think it couldn’t possibly get any worse than it is; believe me, it will, and to a level of depravity and horror we cannot even imagine. That horror will be made possible by the sudden absence of righteousness on earth. As Paul states in v7, not just multiple antichrists, but *the* Antichrist will already be here working, preparing. But the Rapture will cause the curtain to rise on a seven-year period in which they, servants of Satan, will indeed be free to do their worst.

[Please turn to Revelation 5, and look at Chart #9>](#)

There is a scroll, or a “book” of folded sheets, in heaven. Although the word in the Greek, “*biblion*,” can refer to either, from its description in v1 this seems to be a scroll, since it is “written inside and on the back,” and “sealed up with seven seals.” Important documents in the first century—say, for example, kingly edicts or treaties—were sealed with seven seals, and only those whose names were on the seals could open them to reveal the contents. These documents would have all the seals on the outside, so that all seals would have to be broken to open the scroll at all. *This* scroll, however, seems to be different, as Chapter Six tells us. Each seal, when broken, causes different events to take place immediately, or reveals a scene from the future.

Thus I believe this describes a scroll which has multiple seals *within* the roll, rather than all outside. One breaks the first seal, which permits access to a first “page,” as it were, stopping at the next seal. Breaking that seal gives access to the next page, and so on. Or, if you prefer, seals on the top or bottom *edges* of the papyrus, prevent further unrolling of the scroll.

So what is inside this scroll that can be opened only by “the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (v5), “a Lamb standing, as if slain” (v6)? Opinions vary as to its content; some say the entirety of the Bible; some say it is the message of the gospel. My position is that this scroll contains all the details of the Eschaton—that is, everything that follows—recorded by the Godhead back beyond time immemorial. Only a member of that holy Godhead can reveal its contents and set in motion what it contains—and the prophet

Daniel tells us why it must be the Christ.

Read Daniel 7:13-14.

Only the Son of Man—which was Jesus’ favorite way of referring to Himself—can open the scroll, because its contents declare *His* Lordship over all, *His* everlasting dominion, *His* kingdom upon the throne of David. It is, beyond everything else it describes, the narrative of the eternal, unshakable rule of Christ Jesus. And the chorus of praise from the “myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands” confirms this in vv12 and 13:

“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” 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, 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.”

THE FIRST SEAL (REVELATION 6:1-2)

After this time of worship and praise, the Lamb breaks the first seal.

Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, “Come.”*

I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

The breaking of the first seal, releases the first rider, who sits upon a white horse. He is armed with a bow, which seems to suggest that it is a “symbol of distant victory,” and has been given a crown (*stephanos*)—not the crown of a sovereign, but the wreath given as a prize to a victor. His purpose and goal is to conquer.

This rider is Antichrist, the principal *earthly* character for most of the next seven years on earth. As a first example of the challenge inherent in this prophetic book for plotting out a coherent timeline, Antichrist is presented right off the bat—which makes perfect sense, since he is no doubt already at work, making plans. Yet much later (in the text), in Revelation 13, he is presented again, as if making his entrance for the first time, as the “beast coming up out of the sea.”

Read Revelation 12:17-13:1.

As we read further in the passage it is clear that “the beast out of the sea” is Antichrist, the “dragon” is Satan, and “the beast out of the earth” is the false

*The KJVs, working from a different Greek manuscript, have “Come and see,” (here and in vv3, 5, and 7) which is interpreted by quite a few earlier commentators as directed toward John, the witness and narrator, as in “Come and see, John, what is about to happen.” In support of this, the text immediately following has John recording, “And I saw...” A few interpreters even say it is directed toward Jesus Himself, which seems rather bizarre. But the better, more reliable manuscripts have just the one, thunderous command, “Come!” as seen in all our other common versions. Thus it is apparently directed toward each of the four horses and riders, as in, “Come forth!”

† Here, with this first and subsequent handouts, each will be appended as the last page of its associate session. Each is formatted so that the page(s) can be printed without page number or heading from this book.

prophet—all three comprising an unholy, obscene caricature of the holy Father, Son, and Spirit—comprising the anti-godhead. [Please refer to the handout.](#)† Because the nomenclature of prophetic text can sometimes be confusing, I have included in the handout the various ways to which the principal characters of the Tribulation are referred. On the backside of the handout is a handy harmonization of Chapter Six and Christ's eschatological (Olivet) discourse from Matthew 24.

Anyone who has sufficient years behind them knows that most politicians will present one face when they are running for office, and another face once they have attained that office. Our current president is perhaps the ultimate example of this; he was sold as a wise, experienced statesman who would bring together into harmony all the warring factions within our nation, as well as bring harmony between the United States and other countries. I don't care whether you are a democrat or republican: it is an empirical fact that that does not at all describe the behavior or mindset of the one now sitting in the oval office.

This illustrates the career of the Antichrist during the Tribulation. Generally speaking, for the first half of the Tribulation the Antichrist is coming onto the world stage. He is clever. He is winsome. He is a strong leader who has all the answers to the world's problems. People are drawn to him like flies to honey—or should we say like a dog to its vomit. He will eventually be recognized as the savior of the world. This describes him during the roughly first half of the Tribulation. He is working, he is plotting, he is setting in place those who will assist him in his plan, but his true purpose remains secret, shielded from the rest of the world.

F. A. Tatford: The brilliant career of this imperial rider on the white horse has been interpreted by the historicists as applying to the golden age of prosperity and good government that elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus. It is far more probable, however, that the reference is to the rise and career of a mighty imperial ruler after the rapture of the Church, who brings under his sway a vast territory in an endeavour to maintain peace, order, and prosperity.

This is just the beginning of the public career of the individual we call Antichrist. We will be encountering him at most every turn as we journey through these tumultuous seven years. As we do we will see this human puppet of Satan become more ambitious, more authoritative, more arrogant, more reprehensible, more beast-like—that is, more like his father, the Dragon.

THE TRIBULATION

Principal Character Synonyms

The Great Red Dragon

also: Satan, the devil, “the serpent of old,” “the anointed cherub who covers” (Ezekiel 28:14), Beelzebul (Matthew 12:24), Belial (2 Corinthians 6:15), “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31), “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4), “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2)

The Beast from the Sea

also: Antichrist; the beast; “the little horn” (Daniel 7:8), “man of lawlessness,” “son of destruction [perdition],” “that lawless one” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-8); devil incarnate; false messiah

The Beast from the Earth

also: “the false prophet”

Jesus, the Christ

also: “the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah,” “the Root of David,” “a Lamb standing,” “the Lamb that was slain,” “a son, a male *child*” (Revelation 12:5), “one like a son of man” (Revelation 14:14), “Lord of lords and King of kings” (Revelation 17:14), “Faithful and True” (Revelation 19:11), “the Word of God,” “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16), “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13), “the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16)

THE TRIBULATION

Harmonizing Revelation 6 with Matthew 24 (Christ's Olivet Discourse)

“There is a remarkable similarity between the progress of chapter six as a whole and the description given by our Lord of the end of the age in Matthew 24:4-31. In both passages the order is

1. war: (Matthew 24:6-7; Revelation 6:3-4),
2. famine: (Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:5-6),
3. death: (Matthew 24:7-9; Revelation 6:7-8),
4. martyrdom: (Matthew 24:9-10, 16-22; Revelation 6:9-11),
5. the sun darkened, the moon darkened, and the stars falling: (Matthew 24:29; Revelation 6:12-14),
6. a time of divine judgment: (Matthew 24:32-25:26; Revelation 6:15-17).

The general features of Matthew 24 are obviously quite parallel to the events of the book of Revelation beginning in chapter six.”

John F Walvoord

from the series: *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*

SESSION 12: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWO): THE BEGINNING OF BIRTH PANGS

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #9

PREFACE

The title of last week's session was "Cause and Effect"—regarding the *cause* of the Rapture being the event that makes possible the *effect* of the Tribulation—and we will see a second cause-and-effect being played out, as we examine the first four seals in the scroll just opened by the "Lamb that was slain."

The events triggered by the breaking of the first four seals have traditionally been referred to in popular culture as "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse." But we are more interested in what they *do*, than what they are called. What we know from the narrative is that everything that transpires from the breaking of these seven seals is of God (for the document was written in eternity past *by* the God-head), and, especially with the first four seals, is part of what Jesus referred to as "merely the beginning of birth pangs",¹ which means it is just Act One of the final and full-flowering of God's wrath upon a humanity clinging desperately to its sin.

Note: During my preliminary sketching out of this study, I followed the traditional—and, admittedly, textual—perspective of dividing the Tribulation into two, three-and-one-half-years parts, intending to eventually assign every event to one or the other, or to the dramatic midpoint. Further study, however, has steered me away from that. The Tribulation events recorded in the prophecies are not so neatly assigned to a sequence corresponding to the manner in which they have been recorded. We will see that clearly in just the first seven events contained in the seals. Thus it is not just difficult, but ultimately (in my opinion) inconsequential, to force an event into one half or the other. God's word—and thus God Himself—does not so neatly package the events of the Tribulation. Taking the prophetic references as a whole—not just Revelation, but Daniel, Isaiah, Zechariah, Jeremiah, Joel, et al—the impression one gets is that the Lord God sees all of this as one, seamless tapestry. Now, to be clear, this is not to say that we cannot put it into some coherent order; it *is* to say that it is not *written* in that order, to the extent that there will be some events, or mile-markers, that cannot ultimately be assigned to one half of the Tribulation or the other. What is demonstrably clear, however, is that from beginning to end, the events of the Tribulation comprise a steady crescendo of violence, pain, and suffering for those on earth.

¹ Matthew 24:8

THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES

We may not be able to identify the next two riders, but we can certainly identify the ones *calling out* the four riders. In Chapter Six we are told that the ones “saying as with a voice of thunder”—that is, with a sound of an approaching storm—“Come!” are “the four living creatures” (v1). These creatures were introduced in Chapter Four.

Read Revelation 4:6-8.

zoon (dzo'-on) = (neuter) a *live* thing, i.e., an animal, a beast.²

We need not dwell on their appearance, which is bizarre, to say the least. But remember that John, like all the prophets being favored with visions, struggles to put into earthly words what he is seeing in his vision of the throne of heaven. These are the creatures—so strange from an earthly perspective, yet so favored as to be the things stationed closest to the holy throne of Father God—who call forth each of the four riders on the colored steeds.

Please turn to Revelation 6; you also may wish to refer to Chart #9, which was distributed with Session 11 notes.

The first rider, pictured as he is as a victorious warrior on an historically appropriate white steed—i.e., the white horse of a victorious general in his victory procession—we have identified as Antichrist.*

I would add to this that this would mean that Christ continues to break the subsequent seals in the scroll *after* He has just departed on the white horse!

Arthur S. Peake: Moreover it brings Him on the scene much too early; for it is not till a very late point in the development that He enters on His victorious career. This identification should therefore be set aside without hesitation.

The next two riders can only be identified by what they *do*, not by who they *are*.

THE SECOND SEAL: WAR (REVELATION 6:3-4)

And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.

Here is a reverberating echo of the cause-and-effect that inaugurated the Tribulation in the first place—both of which put the lie to the popular notion that “all people are basically good.” What will be required for the appearance of Antichrist and the start of the Tribulation? Only the *removal* of the church and the Holy Spirit. What will be required for wars to break out, with men slaying one another? Only the removal of peace. Appreciate the sublime truth of that simple statement: to the rider “it was granted to take peace from the earth.” It will not be

²The KJV always translates this as “beast”.

*Let me add just a few more thoughts on the position that the first rider upon a white horse is not Christ. Isbon T. Beckwith writes, “the first rider unquestionably symbolizes the victorious warrior, ... it is hardly conceivable that Christ should be represented here as the Lamb in the court of heaven breaking the seal, and at the same time by that act revealing himself as a figure coming into view from another quarter, and in another form, in response to a summons from an archangel...”

necessary for him to *create* war, for that proclivity already dwells within the hearts of men. He need only remove the restraint of “peace.” Thus, early on at the outset of the Tribulation, when peace is removed from the earth, from then on it will be no holds barred. All restraints will have been removed.

THE THIRD SEAL: FAMINE (REVELATION 6:5-6)

I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard something like 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 damage the oil and the wine.”

Now we are beginning to see the second instance of a cause-and-effect during the Tribulation:

- the first seal introduces to the world the one who is up to no good: Antichrist;
- the second seal removes the existence of peace, which results in war;
- the third seal, as is customary with war, results in famine;
- the fourth seal will bring the ultimate effect of war and famine: death.

John F. Walvoord brings v6 into perspective for us.

Walvoord: In order to determine the meaning of this vision it must be understood that the silver coin designated as a penny [KJV] is actually the Roman denarius, worth about fifteen cents. In the wage scale of that time it was common for a person to receive one denarius for an entire day’s work [NIVs]. For such a coin, one measure of wheat or three measures of barley could be purchased in the vision here. The explanation seems to be this: A measure of wheat is approximately what a laboring man would eat in one meal. If he used his penny to buy barley, a cheaper grain, he would have enough from an entire day’s wages to buy three good meals of barley. If he bought wheat, a more precious grain, he would be able to buy enough for only one meal. There would be no money left to buy other things, such as oil or wine, which were considered essential in biblical times. To put it in ordinary language, the situation would be such that one would have to spend a day’s wages for a loaf of bread with no money left to buy anything else. The symbolism therefore indicates a time of famine when life will be reduced to the barest necessities; for famine is almost always the aftermath of war. The somber picture is emphasized by the color of the horse, black being the symbol of suffering.

Jesus describes these early days of the Tribulation, and it sounds pretty grim, but He points out that this is just the beginning.

Read Matthew 24:6-8.

† Some commentators conclude that Jesus' remarks are indeed limited to His and our time—i. e., for believers during the dispensation of grace, the church age.

We have to admit that at this point, this all sounds disturbingly familiar; Jesus and even the Revelation narrative could be describing the world in which we live now.† We might even shrug our shoulders and respond with, “What’s the big deal?” We know that, historically, there have been periods in world history when it has been far worse than it is today. So it is easy to see how some could deduce that we are indeed living in the Tribulation now—or that the world has already passed through it. Inflation was so bad in Germany prior to WW2 that it was said that people would need a wheelbarrow full of marks just to do the grocery shopping. There are people literally starving to death today, and wars of conquest are occurring—even as they have occurred *throughout* man’s history. Death—even violent death—has never left us.

As Jesus said, however, this moment in the Tribulation is just the beginning; the suffering and havoc are just getting started. Musically, this is just the start of the seven-year crescendo, with its end—its crashing *fortissimo* climax—at the moment Christ Jesus returns in judgment and stands astride the hills around Jerusalem.

THE FOURTH SEAL: DEATH (REVELATION 6:7-8)

I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. 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.

With the breaking of this fourth seal things are getting serious. Now we can no longer shrug our shoulders and assume that this all refers to the world in which we presently live. Never before in the history of Man has Death been granted “authority over a fourth of the earth.”

We had better define some terms before we proceed. The word in v8 translated “ashen” or “pale” (*chloros*) in our other versions does not mean a light gray or dappled color, but more of a pale, sick, yellowish green. It was the color of my face in the first couple of days on ship bound for Vietnam—green around the gills—before I acquired my sea legs. It is the color of flesh when all the blood has been drained away—thus, the cadaverous color of death.

And the rider of this horse is, by name, Death (*thanatos*)—literally, *the* Death. In the Revelation “death” is personified which, to my mind, reveals and emphasizes God’s power over it. There will come a day, at the Great White throne of Judgment, when death itself, along with Hades will be “thrown into the lake of fire.”

Read Revelation 20:13-15.

Dr. Walter Schmithals (in Dictionary of New Testament Theology): In the NT death is regarded not as a natural process, but as an historical event, indicating clearly the sinful condition of man. In this historical sense death is seen as a power which enslaves man in the course of this life (Hebrews 2:14-15). Hence it appears sometimes in a quasi-personal form (Revelation 20:14).

Right now, as the Hebrews text reveals, Satan holds the power of death. But even before the Great White Throne Judgment, Satan will precede death and Hades into the lake of fire, where they all “will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

As to “Hades,” (in all our versions but the KJV, which has “Hell”) things get murky. The word, faithfully transliterated from the Greek *hades*, means something different in secular Greek to the OT Septuagint, and different in the Septuagint to the NT. Generally, this word corresponds to the OT “Sheol,” and is “a temporary place or state.” In the NT, in Christ, it takes on a new meaning: through the power of his resurrection, Christ has taken the power of death and the devil from them; He is now Lord of the dead and of the living.³ Hades cannot affect the church,⁴ and any believer who dies is united with Christ, even if not yet in a glorified body.

It is not clear from the text whether Hades follows along behind Death separately or on the same horse. It is a small point. The larger point is, this is the first instance in the seals and the Tribulation of measured, incremental, earthly destruction. These two “beings”—Death and Hades—are granted authority, power over one-fourth of the earth (*ge; yee*), “a general word referring to the inhabited world and in this context apparently extends to the entire earth” (Walvoord).

Are they given this authority for the benefit of mankind, to encourage righteousness and justice for all? No, “to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.” This describes an unprecedented level of death and destruction. The world population is presently around eight billion people; one quarter of that would be *two billion* killed.

The text describing the events of the fourth seal demonstrate the amorphous structure of the Tribulation narrative. This text (v8) surely describes a level of death and destruction that fits what Jesus calls “a great tribulation.” Yet it is placed here in the early days of Daniel’s Seventieth Week. So we have to ask, Does this point to or foreshadow later events, those that take place during the second half of the Tribulation? Or does it mean that “Death and Hades” are just here *beginning* their work of culling one quarter of the world’s population, a process that will be spread over the next seven years? It is impossible to say conclusively, so *this* teacher, for one, would rather not say.

³Romans 14:9

⁴Matthew 16:18-19

We *can* say this: v8 truly describes a level of devastation heretofore unimaginable, which means it fits perfectly into all prophetic passages regarding the Eschaton, whether OT or NT. It will be a time when those on earth will wish they weren't.

Blow a trumpet in Zion,
And sound an alarm on My holy mountain!
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.
As the dawn is spread over the mountains,
So there is a great and mighty people;
There has never been anything like it,
Nor will there be again after it
To the years of many generations.
A fire consumes before them
And behind them a flame burns.
The land is like the garden of Eden before them
But a desolate wilderness behind them,
And nothing at all escapes them.
Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;
And like war horses, so they run.
With a noise as of chariots
They leap on the tops of the mountains,
Like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble,
Like a mighty people arranged for battle.
Before them the people are in anguish;
All faces turn pale. (Joel 2:1-6)

SESSION 13: THE TRIBULATION (PART THREE): MARTYRS

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #9

PREFACE

With the opening of the fifth seal we leave behind the four horses and their riders. What the first four seals had in common was that something in heaven was inflicted upon the earth. The breaking of each seal released upon the inhabitants of earth, in turn, Antichrist, War, Famine, and Death—each being the logical result of the previous.

The scene that is revealed in vision to John when the fifth seal is broken is reversed from the first four: the vision shows *in heaven* the result of what happened *on earth*—specifically, martyrs for the “word of God” and their “testimony.”

THE FIFTH SEAL: MARTYRS (REVELATION 6:9-11)

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

We must remind ourselves that a prophetic vision (“I saw”) is not unlike some of our nocturnal dreams and imaginings, wherein things described may not be as they seem. We have dreams in which we are around people we know—yet in appearance we have never seen them before. In our dreams we are in a house that is clearly ours—yet looks nothing like the house in which we currently dwell. In some instances the imagery in biblical prophecy can be taken as literal; for example, there will indeed be vast numbers of people killed by war and famine and the beasts of the earth as a result of the fourth seal being broken in heaven. Very often, however, the imagery is to be seen as *metaphorical, representative, or allegorical*. For example, John describes the effects of the sixth seal being broken (vv12-14) as “the whole moon became like blood,” “the stars of the sky fell to the earth,” “the sky was split apart¹ like a scroll when it is rolled up.” The tone of that passage seems to be one of the apostle struggling for ways to describe supernatural events to mere earthlings—not least, himself.

John sees an “altar” in heaven. Some say this is the golden altar of incense; some say it is the brazen altar of sacrifice. I’m not sure it matters that much;

¹ or ‘vanished’ (ESV)

which altar it is is the least of our considerations.

John reports that “underneath” the altar he sees “the souls of those who had been slain.” Why were they slain? Because they maintained an allegiance to and a determined testimony, even in the face of death, for “the word of God.” Some say these represent *all* the saints ever martyred for Christ, but there are clues embedded in these three verses that lead us to conclude that these are those who have been martyred—thus far—during the Tribulation:

- The text of v10 would indicate that those who persecuted and killed these martyrs are still alive on earth: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (emphasis added)
- If this group included Christian martyrs from all time (i.e., not just the Tribulation), then that would not track with the events of the Rapture, in which all previous martyrs would have been resurrected and now be happily with the Lord in glorified bodies. These martyrs are not yet glorified, but seem to be held in the same state in which believers would find themselves who have died prior to the Rapture: “souls” (psychas) of those killed.

Alan F. Johnson: This is generally understood to mean the disembodied souls of these saints. However, the Greek word (*psyche*) has several meanings and probably stands here for the actual “lives” or persons who are very much alive though they have been killed [probably] by the beast.

Walvoord: Scholars have been divided as to whether saints who die receive temporary bodies in heaven prior to the resurrection body, or whether only their spiritual beings are in heaven before the resurrection. In this verse there is a contribution to an answer to this question. The martyred dead here pictured have not been raised from the dead and have not received their resurrection bodies. Yet it is declared that they are given robes. The fact that they are given robes would almost demand that they have a body of some kind. A robe could not hang upon an immaterial soul or spirit. It is not the kind of body that Christians now have, that is, the body of earth; nor is it the resurrection body of flesh and bones of which Christ spoke after His own resurrection. It is a temporary body suited for their presence in heaven but replaced in turn by their everlasting resurrection body given at the time of Christ’s return.

I would add to this that they obviously also have voices with which to communicate. If they have not yet been resurrected and glorified, when will they be? Answer: When Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation and prior to the Millennium.

Read Revelation 20:4-6.*

An initial reading of vv9-11 may evoke an image of struggling figures pinned down beneath a heavy stone or metal sacrificial altar. Once again, this is a prophetic vision—not a literal narrative. Turn please to [Leviticus 4](#). The scene in these verses, though bizarre, harkens back to Yahweh’s instructions to Israel regarding its sacrifices.

Read Leviticus 4:5-7.

There in v7 is the connection. In imitation of their Lord and Savior, these martyrs have shed their own blood out of their obedience and devotion to God’s word. It is likely these are the ones spoken of in Revelation 13:15 who are killed because they refused to “worship the image of the beast.” An even closer connection would be with the martyrs in Revelation 7:14, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Interestingly, in v10 they refer to God not as *adonai*, but *despotes* (from which we get the word “despot”). *Despotes* means an absolute ruler, and implies ownership.²

Just as the psalmists, these martyrs are calling out for God’s justice—for Him to do as He promised: “...and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” Note the admixture of imagery in this scene:

- John describes them as “souls,” but whatever their form, they represent the blood they have shed for the Lord God, for they are “underneath” (at the bottom of) the altar, just as the sacrificial blood was poured out at the base of the altar.
- Just as the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, was poured out upon the soil at the base of the cross, and, as in Hebrews, once for all upon the tabernacle altar (Hebrews 9:11-14).
- So it is, as it were, the martyrs’ blood itself crying out for God’s vengeance.

This is not new imagery; indeed, it points back to the very first family on earth.

Read Genesis 4:8-11.

The blood that gives life to flesh is important in God’s economy. He places great emphasis on it. Also in Genesis He told Noah,

*Note here that the thousand-year Millennium is covered in less than four verses, while the seven-year Tribulation takes up fourteen chapters. I take that to mean that God’s priority in communicating to John, and thus to any readers of His word in The Revelation, is less the wonder and glory of one thousand years under the righteous King, than the wrath and pain and suffering inflicted upon an unrighteous kingdom under the rule of Satan. The predominate message of The Revelation is expressed by the writer to the Hebrews, (citing Deuteronomy 32:35-36), “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.” And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.” It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:30-31)

²The ESV and NIVs add “Sovereign” to make the point.

And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. (Genesis 9:5-6)

In v11 we have the Lord's answer to the plea of the martyrs. Each of them is given a white robe—which, as mentioned before, seems to indicate that they have some sort of body, probably temporary, upon which to drape the robe. The white robe is a sign of righteousness (also 7:9, 13-14). I would place it in the same category as the “crowns” believers will be given, that is, a reward, a sign of the Lord God's approval.

Nonetheless the martyrs' pleading request will not be immediately granted. God stands by His promises to His people, but He does *not* promise that it will be immediate. They are told that “they should rest” for a little while longer. *Anapausontai* means to give intermission from labor, to remain quiet. How long? “...until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.”

Sovereign indeed. Here we have evidence for the omniscient, omnipotent hand of God. He knows the precise number of those who will be martyred in His name during the Tribulation, and to this early group he says that that number has not yet been reached. There are two things going on here: First, God *knows* the number, but, second, God *wants* the number.

To the misguided minions of this fallen world this is not the behavior of a “loving God.” But it is; God loves justice and righteousness, and the Eschaton is all about a just, righteous God demonstrating His sovereign rule over all things. We cannot in the same breath call Him “sovereign” or *despotes*, absolute ruler, then question His judgments.

This means that God's tangible response to the plea for vengeance from these martyrs will have to wait until at least the end of the Tribulation—the return of Christ in judgment—or perhaps even until the Great White Throne judgment after the Millennium.

During the Tribulation there will be a price to be paid for being a Christian. At that time it will be very much as it was in the thirties and forties in German-occupied Europe. Then if you were a Jew, even nominally, it didn't matter who or what else you were: even just a small measure of Jewish blood was sufficient for you to be carted off to a camp, and in most cases, certain death.

Christians, those who convert after the Rapture, will suffer much the same fate under the rule of Antichrist as the Jews did under Hitler. Although the text is not explicit, we conclude these martyrs are Christians—slaughtered for their faith in Christ Jesus—because the Tribulation is intentionally a time of God's wrath focused on Israel; any Jews who reject Christ will suffer the wrath of God and be consigned to the lake of fire; they certainly will not be receiving His reward and consolation.

Earlier in this study we looked at the various dispensations.³ Here in the scene from the fifth seal we have evidence that God's economy is now passing through a different dispensation from which we have dwelt since the time of Christ on earth. Note once again the entreaty of the Martyrs under the altar: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

From the cross Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Stephen prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60). But the prayer of these martyrs is, to put it in our contemporary vernacular, "Sic 'em, God!"

Heaven deals differently with sin during the different dispensations. During the OT era, *law* was the principle on which God dealt with wicked men. *Grace* is the principle of our present dispensation. But in the narrative of the Last Things, sin will no longer be addressed by the principle of grace; then the active principle will be *judgment* and *wrath* against the wicked (Oliver B. Greene).

Never forget that it is only *by* God's grace that we who are alive now live during the dispensation of, and are governed by Him under the principle of grace. At some point in the future, that will end.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then 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 3:9-10)

³ Charts #2 & 3

SESSION 14: THE TRIBULATION (PART FOUR): CATASTROPHE

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #9

PREFACE

I don't believe I can improve on the way John F. Walvoord prefaces the breaking of the sixth seal.

Walvoord: It would be difficult to paint any scene more moving or more terrible than that described at the opening of the sixth seal. All the elements of a great catastrophic judgment of God are here present, namely, a great earthquake, the sun becoming black, the moon becoming as blood, the stars of heaven falling like ripe figs, the heaven departing as a scroll, and every mountain and island moving. This is an awe-inspiring scene, but what does it mean prophetically?

Indeed, that is what we are about: As a prophecy, what does it mean—and, for our purposes, where are these events to be placed in the timeline of the Eschaton? Let's begin by reading this dramatic and disturbing passage.

Read Revelation 6:12-17.

Although it is true that God is ultimately behind *every* event of the Eschaton, we have here in the breaking of the sixth seal the first instance of God working directly. The results of the first four seals—war, famine, death—and even the martyrdom of the saints in the fifth seal, were largely the results of human agency, springing from the evil heart of man. In the sixth seal, however, we see “divine punishment inflicted upon a blasphemous world” (Walvoord), through what insurance agents here on earth would term “acts of God.”

There are those who reject a literal interpretation of this passage because of its placement—i.e., far too early in the Eschaton for this to take place. But these, too, are often the ones who interpret just about everything in the end times prophecies from an historical perspective (“historicists”).

Then there are a few who take their literalist interpretation to the point of absurdity: if the KJV says “the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places,” then they see a sky literally disappearing and mountains dancing freely across the plains.

I recommend a calm, measured method of interpretation that falls somewhere in-between. We can interpret these catastrophic events described in vv12-17 literally—that is, actual geologic, atmospheric, and celestial events that are unnaturally calamitous—yet keep in mind that the narrator, John, is grasping at terrestrial imagery with which to describe them. Let's first examine the details of the text to understand the events and imagery; then we will determine how and where to *place* them in the Tribulation.

The dramatic occurrences described in this passage are prophesied in a number of other places in Scripture—OT and NT alike. These events were foretold as early as the time of Joel (800s BC), Hosea (c.746 BC), and Isaiah (c.740 BC), as well as by Jesus in the gospel accounts.

v12

I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;*

*The typical tents of the Bedouin in the Middle East, and those made by the apostle Paul, were made of black, woven goat hair.

I recall one fine morning, sitting at my desk in our home in San Diego, when I sensed something approaching in the ground beneath my feet. The sensation became stronger, and stronger, then it rolled past beneath me and continued on until I felt it no more. It was the unmistakable sensation of someone snapping the earth as one snaps a rug, with the concrete slab on which our house was built reduced to little more than chocolate pudding as the waves passed through it. Then it was gone. Most extraordinary to this Midwesterner.

That is *not* the sort of earthquake we are talking about in v12. *This* one will change the order of the landscape. It will be so strong that it will produce even *atmospheric* changes.

Read Jeremiah 4:23-26.

This will be a global temblor far worse than anything previously known to man. Now, let us be clear: The Lord God is capable of doing anything He pleases with the universe He created. There is no limit to not just His power, but His artful imagination. If God so chooses, He can literally switch off the atoms and gases that create the light and heat of our sun, leaving it dark. He also can speak and turn the surface of the moon from gray to the color of blood—He could even turn the surface of the moon *to* blood, if He was of such a mind. But is that what is being described here?

We know even from this last week that when the moon is thrown into eclipse, it takes on an orange or reddish cast. To someone living in the Middle East in the first century, probably the most readily available example of the color red would be blood. And we also know that violent earthquakes can raise a lot of dust into the air, not to mention that volcanic eruptions often accompany earthquakes—or the other way around—which can thoroughly mask out the sun for days.

The prophet Joel wrote,

[The LORD says,] “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth,
Blood, fire and columns of smoke.
The sun will be turned into darkness
And the moon into blood

Before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.”
(Joel 2:30-31)

v13

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’s imagery reminds me of when Linda and I are collecting wild plums. Very often the easiest method is to lay a sheet beneath the bush (as best as one can in the sloping, weed-infested brush) and give a good shake to the branches to send the plums raining down onto the sheet. In our case it is the ripe plums which fall, and the unripe that cling to their stems. Some of the other versions of v13 help us out better than the NASB, as in the NKJV: “as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind.” That is, the apostle refers to figs which form too late in the season to ripen before winter, and thus are shed when spring arrives.¹

As to the stars of the sky falling to the earth, we can imagine a number of possibilities that might be so described by someone—a non-scientist—in the first century. First, the text does not say that *every* star fell. What do many “non-scientist” people today call a meteor? A “falling star.” If even *one* literal star fell literally to the surface of the earth—that’s all she wrote; end of story; end of everything. There would be no one to “hid[e] themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains,” for the mountains—indeed, the earth itself—would no longer exist.

It seems rather obvious that John probably describes a meteor storm, a visually dramatic and potentially lethal cascade of meteors toward earth.

v14

The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

The imagery here is confusing—even contradictory. If one imagines a scroll (such as the one in Chart #9), one could split it apart *or* one could roll it up—one or the other, but not both. The word translated “split apart” in the NASB (in others, “vanished,” “receded,” “departed”) is *apechoristhe*, which means to separate, rend apart, or depart. The KJV seems to track the best: “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together.” Again, with all this going on—great upheavals on the earth, meteors crashing down—one would expect the stars in the night sky to vanish, that is, to be utterly obscured to human vision. Isaiah puts it this way:

And all the host of heaven will wear away,
And the sky will be rolled up like a scroll;
All their hosts will also wither away

¹ Rev. Robert Tuck, B.A., 1892

As a leaf withers from the vine,
Or as one withers from the fig tree.
(Isaiah 34:4).

With this cataclysmic earthquake occurring, topography is going to be changed. Contrary to the image of mountains dancing across the plain, however, the word translated “moved” or “removed” is *ekinethesan*, from *kineo*, which means to move or shake, as in shaking one’s head. It mean something like “moving about,” which does not necessarily require them to be walking across the countryside. A sensible interpretation is that the mountains and islands are being fiercely shaken, even some mountains reduced to rubble, or islands disappearing beneath the waves. If a mountain is standing still in one spot for thousands of years (in its “place”), and suddenly is shaking and crumbling before one’s eyes, it could reasonably be said that the mountain was “moved out of [its] place.”

Another way to interpret these “moving” mountains is the prophet Zechariah’s description of Christ’s return:

In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. (Zechariah 14:4)

That description fits well with what happens in places to the earth’s crust, as one side of a fault line slides in one direction and the other side of the fault line in slides the opposite direction, grinding against each other.

v15

Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;

Perhaps the most repeated element of this cataclysmic prophecy is that this time will be so bad that men will seek refuge in the rocks and caves of the mountains.

Read Isaiah 2:12, 17-21.

Is it not interesting that even as the mountains are quaking and shifting, men of all stations choose *there* to hide. Verse 16 explains why.

v16

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...”

Is it too late? One wonders, instead of running to hide—effectively committing suicide—could these people have just repented and accepted Christ Jesus—the Lamb—as Lord and Savior? Is it now too late for that decision? Do they know their time is up and they are out of options? Or are they so terrified by the cataclysmic events that they are reduced to unreasoning, bestial behavior? It is impossible to say; we can only praise God that we, as believers, will not find ourselves in that terrible situation.

Note that they seek refuge from the “presence” or “face” of Father God (*prosopou*), but the “wrath” of the Lamb. We discussed earlier how in a very real sense Father and Son in the Eschaton are almost interchangeable. But, to put it in base human terminology, Christ Jesus is the star of the show. *He* is the one coming in judgment to rule the earth; *He* is the one wielding the “rod of iron.” *He* is the one to fear.

v17

“...for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

Now those seeking shelter or quick death reveal that it is the wrath of *both* Father and Son they fear. Their anguished question—“and who is able to stand?”—answers itself: No one. No one by their own merits. No one not already aligned with Jesus the Christ is able to stand.

PLACING vv12-17

Jesus Himself gives us a clue to when these events will take place. [Turn please to Matthew 24](#). Note first how His prophecy ties in so well with our passage in Revelation. Let’s begin with v29.

“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.”

Now, what Jesus says next tells us when this occurs in the Eschaton.

“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.”

That is the second coming of Christ immediately at the end of the Tribulation. That passage we read earlier from Zechariah 14 of Christ standing on the Mount of Olives, with the mountain being split and the halves moving in different directions—that, too, is all at His return.

So what are we to make of this narrative being situated beneath the sixth seal, so near the beginning of the Tribulation?

Walvoord: The day of wrath in one sense is the whole period of the great tribulation, when God will deal in direct judgment with the world, climaxing with the return of Christ in power and glory and divine judgment upon all who oppose His coming. E. W. Bullinger describes the first six seals as “a summary of the judgments distributed over the whole book; a brief summary of what will occur in ‘the day of the Lord,’ up to the time of His actual Apocalypse or Unveiling in chapter 19.” In some sense chapter 6 is the outline of the important facts of the period of great tribulation, and the rest of the events of the book of Revelation are comprehended in the seventh seal introduced in chapter 8.

Thus I believe that the events portrayed with the breaking of the sixth seal—Revelation 6:12-17—are a “preview,” as it were, for the apostle John of the final days of the Tribulation just prior to the coming of the Lord. They do not speak at all of events in the early days of the Tribulation, but foreshadow the climactic end of the First Act of the Eschaton, still seven years away.

SESSION 15: THE TRIBULATION (PART FIVE): THE FIRST PARENTHESIS

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #10 (with references to Chart #8)

PREFACE

If one required more proof that the account of the Tribulation in Revelation was not recorded in the fashion of a linear narrative, all one need do is look at the sixth seal and what immediately follows. The events revealed by the breaking of the sixth seal clearly foreshadow—they offer a “coming attractions,” as it were—the very *end* of the seven-year epic. <See Chart #10>

As we will see momentarily, the events portrayed in the first of what I have termed “parenthetical visions” (what others have called “interludes”) is something entirely different—it is cinematic in its composition. Here the camera lens zooms out to encompass the entirety of the Tribulation, from beginning to end. Then it pans toward the beginning and zooms in to tight focus on an event not mentioned at the beginning of the scroll, but nonetheless occurring around the same time: the sealing of the 144,000, a remnant of Israel.

After that, it zooms out once again, pans to the other end and zooms in to focus on something that will occur nearer the *end* of the entire Tribulation: a glorious scene taking place around the throne of heaven of those martyrs—and others—that we last saw under the altar at the breaking of the fifth seal.

Chapter Seven reads like the script for a C. B. DeMille epic.

THE HALTING OF THE “WINDS”

Read Revelation 7:1-3.

One learned commentator from the first part of the previous century writes, “These words describe the continuation of the action and course of events signified by the breaking of the sixth seal. It is, therefore, still the period of the judgment with which we here have to do. But in the midst of wrath, God remembers mercy” (J. A. Seiss, 1901).

With respect, I beg to differ. If the action described at the breaking of the sixth seal—so cataclysmic and literally earth-shattering—has already begun, it is no doubt *too late* to protect the 144,000 “sons of Israel.” At great risk of being struck by lightning, I suggest that instead of “remember[ing] mercy,”—something I am sure the Lord God never forgets—God might have thought to Himself, *Before we proceed further in this chronicle of judgment, I need to tell everyone what I did before this all started, as well as tell them what will happen at the end.*

What lies before us in Chapter Seven is the first of four “pauses” in Scripture’s narrative of the Tribulation. Others refer to these as “interludes,” but I prefer to call them “parentheses,” for they contain important information critical to understanding the totality of the Tribulation. They are not “time-outs,” but relay vital information bearing upon the whole. <See Chart #8> These occur,

- between the sixth and seventh Seals,
- Between the sixth and seventh Trumpets,
- between the Trumpets and the Bowls,
- between the sixth and seventh bowls. <[Back to Chart #10](#)>

My basis for placing what is described in vv1-8 at the beginning of the Tribulation is that even as early as the second seal we have taking place war, which results in famine, and famine, which results in death; this is followed by the voices of martyrs for Christ crying out for justice and vengeance. By then it would be a little late to be sealing from harm a large group from Israel.

Contributing to this placement, too, is the narrative of the first three verses—especially v3: “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.” Well, if this were placed *after* the sixth seal, all three of those would already be greatly harmed.

Finally, except for the act itself of sealing the 144,000, these three prefatory verses are filled with the metaphorical language of prophecy. Even so, as we will see, it is metaphorical language and imagery common throughout God’s word.

John sees four angels (supernatural messengers) “standing at the four corners of the earth.” Well, a globe does not have “corners,” but this language was used in antiquity much as we might say “the four points of the compass.” Since we hear nothing in the rest of the Revelation of these winds actually blowing in a harmful manner, the “winds” would seem to represent in general the earthly and atmospheric violence to be inflicted (or permitted) by God. These four angels possess the authority and power to inflict this damage (they are “granted to harm the earth and the sea”), but are here commanded to “hold back” that force temporarily, until the “bond-servants of our God” have been sealed “on their foreheads.”

This command comes from “another angel ascending from the rising of the sun”—that is, from the east. Some older commentators say this is Christ Jesus Himself, but I do not subscribe to that. It says “another angel”; even in the OT the Son of God when active on earth was called “*the* angel of the Lord,” never just another angel (and after the Son’s incarnation on earth and ascension, there is never again any reference to “*the* angel of the Lord.” This angel may well be, however, one of higher rank than the other four, for he bears “the seal of the living God.” This presumably strong angel commands the four to hold back their respective “winds” until “we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.”

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL REMNANT

Read Revelation 7:4.

We take this text at its word; these are not Gentiles, nor do they represent the *church* as the “true Israel”; this passage speaks of Jews drawn from the

twelve tribes of Jacob (“sons of Israel”). Likewise, while it is *possible* that John employs the number twelve, times twelve thousand, symbolically to represent *all* Israel, why not just *write* that? Why itemize so precisely an effective end-times “Schindler’s List” of Jews that will be protected and saved through the trials of the Tribulation if what you really mean is *all* Israel—or even worse, the Christian church?

The apostle Paul, in Romans 11, assures Christians that God has not forgotten what He promised Israel. And what we are seeing here, as well as in other portions of the eschatological narrative, is confirmation of that.

Read Romans 11:25-29.

And he goes on to remind the Christians in Rome that, “Just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy” (Romans 11:30-31).

Many have likened this “seal” to the seal of the Holy Spirit possessed by Christians during the church age—that is, an “earnest” given by God that He will fulfill His promise of salvation and eternity with Him. I see no evidence that this will be a guarantee of an effortless existence; just as with Christians today with the Spirit, they might still suffer trials or even persecution, but the seal will be a promise that they will not be destroyed or killed—that is, they will be kept alive *through* the trials of the Tribulation.

Apparently, however, *this* seal—different from the indwelling Spirit—will include a more obvious, outward component, perhaps that will be recognized and honored by those intending them harm. We get more information on this outward seal in Chapter Fourteen, where we meet these 144,000 again.

Read Revelation 14:1.*

On Chart #10, the seal in the upper left corner of this parenthetical scene has the Hebrew for *Yahweh*; the name “Iesous” or “Yeshua” is left out because of space limitations (and because in our text it mentions only the name of “God.” Some say that because the details are slightly different, that the group in Chapter Fourteen is different from the one in Chapter Seven. But no, the details in Chapter Seven are more general (“our God”), while Chapter Fourteen offers more specifics.

So we take from these two passages that the angel arising out of the east in 7:2 carries with him a seal or stamp, of sorts, with which he seals or brands each of the 144,000. This visible sign is sufficient to turn away anyone wishing to do them harm during the Tribulation—and the passage in Chapter Fourteen confirms that God will keep His promise and protect them to the end.†

These Messianic Jews will be a strong witness for Christ, we can only assume effective evangelists, during the entirety of the Tribulation period.

*The best manuscripts indicate that the expression “having his Father’s name written in their foreheads” [KJVs] should be “having His name, and the name of His Father, written on their foreheads” (Walvoord).

† Permit me to offer some food for thought: How would the conduct of your life be different if on your forehead was branded, “Follower of Jesus the Christ”?

This passage is strong evidence for new believers during the Tribulation.

- If these from the tribes of Israel had been Christians (Messianic Jews) prior to the Tribulation, they would have been Raptured as part of the church.
- If not confirmed by this passage it is in Chapter Fourteen that these are followers of not just Yahweh, but the Lamb; thus they are indeed Messianic Jews.
- Thus they became so after the Rapture.
- It is a pretty safe assumption, then, that their public and obvious allegiance to Christ during the turmoil of the Tribulation will be a factor in even more people converting during this time.

One might rightly ask if the 144,000 represent the *total* number of Jews who come to Christ during the Tribulation. I do not believe it does. This is a *remnant* kept secure throughout the coming trials, so that *at least* this many from Israel will be saved to rule with Christ Jesus.

Throughout the chronicles of His word, recording His relationship with fallen man, God has repeatedly set aside a remnant kept under His protective wings. We see this in

- Noah and his family, kept secure through the Flood;
- Rahab and her household, kept safe as Israel destroys Jericho;
- a remnant of Israel was kept in their homeland as the rest went into exile in Babylon and elsewhere.

In these and others we see the grace, the mercy, the longsuffering of God even when dealing with those who have been in rebellion against Him and His statutes.

SESSION 16: THE TRIBULATION (PART SIX): THE FIRST PARENTHESIS

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #10

PREFACE

Before we launch into the second portion of this first parenthesis, I would like to revisit a question raised by one in our local class about Revelation 14:4. As I wrote to her earlier this week, there are two reasons why I stumbled a bit when answering her question in class. First, I intentionally used only v1 of Chapter Fourteen as a cross-reference to our passage in Revelation 7, setting aside the following verses (vv2-5) in my study for when we would actually be in the Chapter 14 time frame. Thus I had not yet studied that passage in-depth.

Second, as is so often the case in our study of the Last Things, there is no direct, easy answer to the question. Opinions vary, and here in *this* instance there is pretty solid evidence that this is one passage that can indeed be interpreted “spiritually,” or metaphorically, rather than literally—specifically for our understanding of “defiled with women,” and “kept themselves chaste [or are virgins].”

So, to answer her question more thoroughly—and accurately—I did the requisite study, and here are my conclusions:

- We cannot say dogmatically whether the 144,000 are all men or not, nor can we say conclusively that the 144,000 are married or not.
- Because of this group's integral evangelistic and leadership role during not just the Tribulation, but (probably) the Millennium, I would nonetheless conclude that the 144,000 are indeed all men. As to their marital status, the passage does not confirm this one way or the other. The term translated “defiled with women” refers to *extramarital* activity—i.e., visiting prostitutes, adultery, etc.—and *never* in God's word refers to the marriage bed; to the contrary, marital relations are *honored* in God's word. So this cannot be used to show that the men remained unmarried. Correspondingly, it is not conclusive that “they are virgins” (ESV) or “kept themselves chaste” (NASB) means they abstained from any and all sexual relations. Note (as do most commentators) how the apostle Paul used the same term in his second letter to the Corinthians:

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy; *for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.* But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully. (2 Corinthians 11:2-4; emphasis added)

- Here the idea of virginity or purity is applied to those who have remained faithful to Christ, and the same is said of the 144,000 in Revelation 14: “These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (v4).*
- My personal conclusion: the 144,000 are *probably* all men (because of their evangelistic and leadership roles), and they very well could be married, but whether they are or not, they are sanctified as those who were utterly faithful to Christ, and thus, deemed pure.

* Note that key phrase from 2 Corinthians: “I betrothed you to one husband.” So in the metaphor—which, of course is not *really* a metaphor at all—he is saying, *You’re married. You’re married to Christ. Because of that, I hope to present you to Him as a pure “virgin.”*

A SCENE IN HEAVEN

Last week we looked at the 144,000 “sealed”¹ out of the twelve tribes of Israel, while the four angels held back their respective “winds,” which I suggested seemed to represent not moving air, but is a euphemism for the powers granted to the angels to inflict damage on the earth; that’s what was being held back. We next turn to Act Two in this cinematic epic: The multitude gathered around the throne to worship God and the Lamb.

Read Revelation 7:9-12.

Act One of this parenthesis was set on earth; Act Two, vv9-17, is set in heaven—specifically around the throne of God. This scene would be a foretaste of a scene in heaven at the end of the Tribulation—but, I believe it will be shown, *prior* to the return of Christ and His earthly reign during the Millennium. So what we have here, it would seem, is a preview of the triumphant celebration in heaven marking the end of the anguish, persecution, and martyrdom of the Great Tribulation.

As one might expect, the focus of this scene, the center around which everything else takes place, is the throne of God. But note that here John seems to go out of his way to make the point that only Father God is seated upon a throne. Different from other passages of the Eschaton² or John 14:9, here Father and Son are *not* interchangeable. See how John draws the distinction:

- v9: the people are “standing before the throne and before the Lamb”³;
- v10: the people cry out, “Salvation to our God [*theos*] who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb”—i.e., the Lamb is worthy of praise, but is not sitting on the throne;
- vv11-12: God alone is specified here as the recipient of the worship, and the Lamb is not mentioned;
- vv14-17: The two roles are further delineated: the worshipers serve God, and the Lamb serves them; they worship and serve the one on “the throne of God,” but the Lamb’s placement is more ambiguous with, “in the center of” or “in the midst of” the throne.†

† From this and other passages we might conclude that in heaven’s temple (the throne room of God) the principle throne “chair” is placed on a raised dais, and that there are instances where the word “throne” refers exclusively to the chair, but others (as here [see also 4:6]) where the word throne refers to both the chair and the dais. For, though not seated in the chair, the Lamb is said to be “in the center [or midst] of the throne.”

¹ i.e., protected, sanctified, and literally marked

² e.g., Revelation 3:21

³ i.e., the Lamb is not on the throne (“before” = enopion = before the face of, in the presence of, in the sight of)

v9

In many respects this scene mirrors those set in Chapters Four and Five, especially in the cast members closest to the throne: angels, elders, four living creatures. It is easy to imagine these central characters as being on the raised dais as well. But in those earlier chapters there is no mention of people like you and me—except for our inclusion in 5:13, “every created thing”. Here in our passage John gives more specifics regarding this “great multitude.”

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,

How did John know this? How did he know that the crowd before him was “from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues”? That late, great nineteenth-century preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, has the answer:

Spurgeon: I suppose as he looked at them he could tell where they come from. There is individuality in heaven, depend upon it. Every seed will have its own body. There will sit down in heaven not three unknown patriarchs, but Abraham, you will know him; Isaac, you will know him; and Jacob, you will know him. There will be in heaven not a company of persons, all struck off alike so that you cannot tell who is who; but they will be out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue.

...clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;

The fact that they are in “white robes” ties this scene back to the vision of the fifth seal, in which the martyrs are underneath the altar. As we read the passage again, note especially v11.

Read Revelation 6:9-11.

Now we know who these are in white robes, and why they are wearing them. These are the ones for whom the earlier martyrs were waiting: “until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.” Verses 14-17 will add more specifics to confirm this, but v9 is sufficient to identify them. And they were holding palm branches.

Spurgeon: Palm branches were emblems of victory. It shows this great multitude celebrates a great victory. The palm, the ensign of triumph, indicates most certainly a conflict and conquest. As on earth palm would not be given if not won, we may conclude that the Lord would not have distributed the prize unless there had been a preceding warfare and victory.

v10

Don't miss the content of their praise: "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." In their praise they identify the Ones responsible for their being saved: God and the Lamb. They did not die in vain because they and their garments had been "made...white in the blood of the Lamb" (v14).

v11

And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,

As in Chapters Four and Five, we have a picture of the hierarchy in heaven's temple. The four living creatures are apparently nearest the chair, with the elders upon their own chairs in a circle or semicircle around them. Surrounding this dais comes next all of heaven's angels. "And they"—*all* of them—fall down in worship of the Lord God. (The text does not indicate if the "multitude" joins in this worship, or if it is just the "regulars"; Walvoord assumes it includes the multitude.

v12

All of this so far has just been by way of an introduction; the real meat and purpose of this vision is in the passage that follows. But let us pause for just a moment to appreciate what is laid before us here, and in Chapters Four and Five, and later, in Chapters Fifteen and Nineteen. It is not just a picture of our future occupation as believers and servants of Christ, but is a textbook definition of true worship.

Proskyneō, always translated "worship," means to kiss (i.e., adore), do reverence to, bow down before, prostrate oneself. We have, in our day, cheapened that word, "worship." Gather up all these scenes of heavenly worship and you will note that true worship includes nothing of the horizontal; it is all vertical, focused upon either Father God or Christ Jesus—here, "the Lamb." Note the content of their worship:

"Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

In true worship we declare, we proclaim, we ascribe—and thus renew in ourselves—the unique and eternal qualities of our God. We offer up to Him only what He deserves as our sovereign Lord: He is glory, He is wisdom, He is deserving of our thanksgiving and honor, He is power and might, and beyond this, He is holy, and just, and righteous and eternal.

Another form of worship—a slightly lower, but still authentic form—is our obedience and service to Him. [Look at v15](#). What are these doing who surround the throne? "... they serve Him day and night in His temple." That word

translated “serve” is *latreuo*, and is always associated with service rendered to God; it is *divine* service, and is some times even translated “worship.”

Every follower of Christ is going to be doing this for eternity. Are you doing it now?

Read Revelation 7:13-17.

v13-14

†Who are the heavenly elders? I will offer here a condensed version. The short answer is, of course, we don't know for sure. (What else is new.) Most agree they are a representative body—but of which group? Revelation 5:9 is a key passage that illustrates the divide. The KJVs quote the elders in their praise of the Lamb, “...For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation...” The rest of our versions say something along the lines of the NASB: “for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood **men** from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” That is, one set of manuscripts has the elders being redeemed—which would make them men who are representatives of (probably) the church—while other manuscripts (the difference is one letter in one Greek word) leave open the possibility that these are *not* men, but (some claim) angelic beings. Having looked at the evidence, I favor the position that these are redeemed elders of the church—not just because of that one letter in the Greek, but because I do not think a group of angels would be called “elders”; they would be called something else. “Elders” is a very human, earthly descriptor.

Then one of the elders† answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

In a fine example of Socratic teaching, one of the elders approaches John and puts to him a question, which, of course he hasn't the answer, so the elder himself supplies it. “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

This multitude is not comprised of every human being in heaven, but specifically those followers of *Christ*, instead of the beast, who have been killed because of their faith. It is possible it includes all who died for *any* reason, but the emphasis in this passage is on those who have been victorious in death (white robes, palm branches) by standing for their Christ *during the Tribulation*, not giving into Antichrist. The text states literally, “... they which came out of the tribulation, the great one.” That is, if we are to subdivide the Tribulation, this speaks of the worst of it during the second half.

v15

“For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.”

“For this reason...” What reason? They have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb. He has saved them—by merciful death—out of the intense persecution of the Tribulation. For this reason they gladly serve in worship the Lord God.

Walvoord: The expression [“day and night”] can be understood as meaning simply that they will continually serve the Lord, that is, they will not need sleep or restoration as is necessary in earthly toil. They are delivered from the limitations of this life.

v16

“They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;”

Here is the beauty of redeemed death during this horrific time. No longer must they suffer living with hunger and thirst, the misery of a desert-like heat and unremitting sun. They are now home, in the tent of their compassionate God and Savior.

v17

for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

David Guzik asks, then answers, the question, “Doesn’t Jesus shepherd us *now*? Isn’t He close to us and caring for us *now*? Yes, but in heaven it will be so much more.” Then he quotes Spurgeon, with that man’s remarkable gift for imagery:

Spurgeon: The true Christian life, when we live near to God, is the rough draft of the life of full communion above. We have seen the artist make with his pencil, or with his charcoal, a bare outline of his picture. It is nothing more, but still one could guess what the finished picture will be from the sketch before you.

CONCLUSION

This passage proves that there will be Christians on earth during the Tribulation. Whether they were converted by the dramatic Rapture, by the testimony of the 144,000 Messianic Jews, or by the ministry of the two witnesses (which we will encounter later in Chapter Eleven), there will be new believers after the Rapture. And because of their persecution and death for the name of Christ, God holds them in high esteem. There is no better measure of His grace, His mercy, His compassion than the phrase, “He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.”

Even in the midst of His terrible wrath, poured out on earth during these seven years, our God will remain, as always, a compassionate, merciful God who demonstrates a tender heart for those who live in Him.

SESSION 17: THE TRIBULATION (PART SEVEN): PRELUDE TO DISASTER

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #9

PREFACE

As we approach v1 of Chapter Eight we must remind ourselves of the flow of the text. All of Chapter Seven is an inset parenthesis, an interruption of the chronological flow of the end-time narrative. Its first half points back to a scene on earth at the beginning of the Tribulation, while the second half points forward, revealing a scene in heaven that will transpire at the end of the Tribulation—but before Christ returns in power.

Thus Chapter Eight picks up where Chapter Six leaves off: The breaking of the sixth seal, up till then the most terrifying consequences of the Tribulation period. The centerpiece of this event is a cataclysmic earthquake, in which “every mountain and island were moved out of their places” (v14). It is so bad that people from all social strata seek either safety or a quick death by hiding in the very quaking mountains.

Read Revelation 6:16-17.

v1

This is followed by v1 of Chapter Eight:

When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

If your version has “when He...,” you have the more literal translation, but we need the reminder that the “He” is the Lamb, the Lion of Judah, the very Son of God, who is running the show. *He* has been the one—the only one—sufficiently worthy to break open the seven seals of the scroll.

Read Revelation 5:2-5.

Since *all* of the events of the Eschaton are contained within the scroll, then we know that Christ Jesus is the director, the orchestrator of this drama from beginning to end—which brings a poetic symmetry to the narrative. Christ is the one drawing this world to an end that He created in the first place. The writer to the Hebrews describes the creation as God working *through* the Son.

Read Hebrews 1:1-3.

Paul, in Colossians, paints a picture of the Son as not just the Creator, but the focal point of it all—not only the center, but the center who holds it all together and makes it all work.

Read Colossians 1:16-17.

These passages, as well as those to come later in Revelation, give us a proper long view of the life of the second member of the Godhead and help us realize the true depth of His character and importance to the whole.

- In majesty and creative might He made the universe and man within it.
- During the OT He took on the role of the Father's most important messenger: the angel of the Lord.
- Then, in an even more subservient role, Christ Jesus came to earth as the Suffering Servant, the Son obedient unto death, the Lamb—offering us, not insignificantly, salvation.
- And we find Him still in the role of the Lamb as He inaugurates the final days of the earth He created. But soon, in just seven brief years, He will be reintroduced in His full majesty and might as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

A Dramatic Suspension

...there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

It is a common technique in cinema, right before a huge explosion or climactic visual effect, for the director to pull out all sound from the soundtrack—a second of “dead air”—to maximize the impact of the shattering explosion on the audience.

This is precisely how the Lamb orchestrates the introduction of a series of seven trumpets lying within the seventh seal. All sounds in heaven—all worship and praise, all hearing of prayers, all speaking and revelations—are silenced for about thirty minutes to build anticipation for the approaching disasters.

Albert Barnes: The most simple and obvious interpretation is likely to be the true one; and that is...that it refers to silence in heaven as expressive of the fearful anticipation felt on opening the last seal that was to close the series, and to wind up the affairs of the church and the world. Nothing would be more natural than such a state of solemn awe on such an occasion; nothing would introduce the opening of the seal in a more impressive manner.

v2

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.

From this text we cannot identify these angels; these should not be confused with the seven spirits of God from Revelation 5:6, and they are no doubt different angels from the seven who will be later pouring out the bowls of wrath. Yet we are given a clue in the phrase, “who stand before God.”

The angel answered and said to [Zacharias], “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.” (Luke 1:19)

This suggests that the seven are archangels, “angels of the presence,” such as Michael and Gabriel who stand before the throne of God. In fact, seven archangels are identified by name in the pseudepigraphous Book of Enoch.

Pseudepigrapha are early writings that were not included in either our canon or even the Apocrypha (removed from the protestant canon, but still included by Catholics). The word pseudepigrapha comes from the Greek word pseudo meaning false, and epigraphein, meaning to inscribe or write falsely. Thus I include the following because it is interesting (as do scholars and commentators), not because it is Holy Scripture.

- 1 And these are the names of the holy angels who watch mankind.
- 2 Uriel, one of the holy angels, who is over the world and over Tartarus.
- 3 Raphael, one of the holy angels, who is over the spirits of men.
- 4 Raguel, one of the holy angels who takes vengeance on the world of the luminaries.
- 5 Michael, one of the holy angels, to wit, he that is set over the best part of mankind and over chaos.
- 6 Saraqael, one of the holy angels, who is set over the spirits, who sin in the spirit.
- 7 Gabriel, one of the holy angels, who is over Paradise and the serpents and the Cherubim.
- 8 Remiel, one of the holy angels, whom God set over those who rise. (1 Enoch 20:1-8)

While we cannot accept the preceding text as Scripture, it is true that the original text of v2 includes the definite article “the,” which tells us that this is an official, established group of seven angels that holds a special place before the throne of God.

Each of these select angels is handed a trumpet (*salpinges*). We might think of the traditional ram’s horn, but Israel had several types of trumpet, some of which were hammered metal. These horns were used to call men to battle¹ or throw an enemy into a panic, to summon worshipers, to make celebration, as during the Feast of Trumpets,² or to declare that the Day of the Lord has arrived, as in Joel 2.

¹ Nehemiah 4:20

² Numbers 29:1

Blow a trumpet in Zion,
And sound an alarm on My holy mountain!
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.
As the dawn is spread over the mountains,
So there is a great and mighty people;
There has never been anything like it,
Nor will there be again after it
To the years of many generations. (Joel 2:1-2)

v3

Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne.

We cannot say with certainty whether this is another angelic being or, as some say, is actually Christ Jesus. His work here as an advocate of prayers leads some to claim it is Christ, but the Greek behind the word “another” (*allos*) means “another of the same kind,” meaning in this context that the one in v3 is of the same kind as the previous seven. Contra Walvoord, I incline toward it being, as the text states, “another angel” rather than Christ Jesus, who is consistently referred to throughout the Revelation by His divine titles.

Walvoord: This is a beautiful picture of the prayers of the saints as seen from heaven. In the Old Testament order the priests would burn incense upon the altar of incense, and the smoke would fill the Temple or the Tabernacle and would then ascend to heaven. Incense was symbolic of worship and prayer and a reminder that intercession to the Lord has the character of sweet incense.

v4

And this is pictured for us in v4:

And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand.

v5

I find v5 fascinating.

Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Originally these censers or firepans were made of hammered bronze.³ Later, however, for Solomon's temple, they were made of pure gold,⁴ as here in heaven's temple. The Greek word here translated "censer" is *libanoton*. Literally the word means frankincense, the gum of the *libanus*, or frankincense tree, which was the key component of the incense burned on the altar.

Although it is not stated explicitly, it is assumed by most (but not all) that "the prayers of all the saints" offered in vv3-4 were similar to those cried out by the martyrs under the altar in Revelation 6:10: "...How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Thus what the angel does in v5 is taken by most as God's answer to these prayers. They have cried out for judgment and vengeance, and His response is that the time is ripe for just that. Here is the scene: The angel is given (by whom, we don't know) incense which he adds to the glowing fire on the altar; he does not add the prayers, but he adds the sweet incense *to* the prayers. Both are wafted into the "nostrils" of God. Putting action to God's unspoken or at least unrecorded answer, the angel scoops out of the altar some of the burning coals—not the prayers, just the fire—and throws it onto the earth.

Barnes: The new emblem, therefore, is the taking of coals, and scattering them abroad as a symbol of the destruction that was about to ensue.

and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Alan F. Johnson refers to this as a *theophany*, a physical manifestation of the presence of God, and one not dissimilar to how He presented Himself at Mt. Sinai.

Read Exodus 19:16-17.

v6

And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.

Here again I sense a dramatic, anticipatory pause. Verse 6 really isn't necessary except to build tension for the coming events.

As we are now preparing to do battle with the seven Trumpets, this is a good time to remind ourselves of the ground we have covered so far.

- This study began by establishing that the Last Things, the Eschaton, technically began in Bethlehem. In our first chart we designated the starting point of the Church Age at Pentecost, with the giving of the Holy Spirit to all believers.

³Numbers 16:39

⁴1 Kings 7:50

- We currently remain in the Church Age, with the next milepost on the timeline being the Rapture of the church.
- In Chart 6 we established that the timeline splits at the Rapture: believers both dead and alive rise into heaven with Christ Jesus in resurrected, glorified bodies, while the rest of humanity remains on earth to suffer the trials of the Tribulation, or “Daniel’s Seventieth Week.”
- In Chart 7 I made the case for Daniel’s Seventy Weeks beginning in 457 BC, with Artaxerxes’ authorization for Ezra to restore and rebuild Jerusalem and its temple. We traced those seventy weeks through Christ’s crucifixion, the destruction of the Jerusalem temple—the Church Age, which Daniel did not see—the Rapture, and finally the seven years of the Tribulation (Daniel’s Seventieth Week).
- In Chart 8 we presented the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls of the Tribulation period as a nested series of events; that is, everything is contained in the scroll of Seals: the seventh seal is the seven trumpets, the seventh Trumpet is the seven Bowls of Wrath.
- Next we spent several weeks examining, in Chart 9, the details of the seven Seals, along with the first of several parenthetical visions set outside the narrative stream.

Thus we are now ready to launch into the seven Trumpets which, like the Seals begins with four events that are set apart from the even more traumatic—and in this instance, bizarre events—of the last three.

SESSION 18: THE TRIBULATION (PART EIGHT): A QUICK TOUR OF THE TRUMPETS

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #11

PREFACE

We'll use our abbreviated time in this session* to hand out the new chart—Chart #11—and then take a brief tour of it, for there is a lot here to digest.

*On this Sunday our allotted time for class was shortened because of a congregational meeting.

ONE

Everything you see in this chart is contained in the Seventh Seal of the previous. As for the text, the judgments of the Seven Trumpets begin in Revelation Chapter Eight, continue through Chapter Nine, are interrupted by Chapter Ten and the first half of Chapter Eleven with two more “parenthetical visions,” then conclude with the sounding of the Seventh Trumpet in the second part of Chapter Eleven. And, just as with the transition from the Seals to the Trumpets, the seven Bowls judgments are contained in the Seventh Trumpet.

The colors of the Trumpet icons reveal that, just as with the Seals, the first four are different from the others. The judgments of the first four trumpets are directed toward *natural* objects—vegetation, the sea and its creatures, rivers and springs, celestial objects—whereas the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments are directed toward *mankind*; yet, of course, in all of them, mankind suffers greatly and some die.

Two

The first four Trumpets do not crescendo in intensity or effect (as the first four Seals), but are directed at different portions of the natural world; reading from Chapter Eight,

- v7: “The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.”
- vv8-9: “The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.”
- vv10-11: “The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.”
- v12: “The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be

darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.”

Then, like a narrator entering between the acts of a stage play, in John’s vision a speaking eagle flying overhead interrupts the sequence to announce the three “woes” that will befall those who dwell on the earth in the next three Trumpets.¹ In other words, things are about to get much worse for the people on earth.

THREE

- vv9:1-11: “Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him...”

We’ll not continue reading this passage, but it paints a scene that will be “woe” indeed; it is filled with obviously supernatural beasts of evil (from out of the abyss) rampaging over the earth, tormenting human beings until they will seek death—but no death will be permitted, only suffering.

- vv13-21: “Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, ‘Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.’”

Now death will come. The Sixth Trumpet unleashes another group of bizarre, evil, supernatural manifestations, horses and riders who will kill one third of all mankind—or these may be just John’s way of describing modern machinery and weapons of war. Stay tuned.

FOUR

At the bottom of the sixth Trumpet are two parenthetical visions. Chronologically they occur between the sixth and seventh Trumpets, but in Scripture they seem to be associated with the sixth, so I have positioned them at the bottom of the Second Woe.

FIVE

Traditionally (in other charts) the series of parenthetical visions I have positioned at the top of the Seventh Trumpet are placed at the mid-point of the Tribulation, at the 3½ year mark, as if set apart from either Trumpet

Yet the seventh Trumpet is sounded before these are introduced in the text.² So I have placed them where I have, within this series but before the seven Bowls of Wrath; either a separate chart, or the chart for the Bowls will detail these parentheses. The Bowls of Wrath are described in Chapter Sixteen.

¹ The KJVs have “angel” instead of eagle, but the better original manuscripts have “eagle.”

² Revelation 11:14

Six

Finally, note that in the color-coded footnotes for the first four Trumpets there are citations back to Exodus. These reveal the connection—or similarity—between the judgments of the first four Trumpets and the plagues inflicted on Egypt prior to the Exodus of Israel.

In our next session we will begin looking at this fascinating period of the Tribulation with an examination of the first four Trumpets.

SESSION 19: THE TRIBULATION (PART NINE): AN INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #11 (The Trumpets)

PREFACE

Before we turn to an examination of the first trumpet, I would like to address something which some of you may have seen as an omission on my part.

Our focus thus far during our study of the Tribulation period has been on the three series of seven judgments, or plagues, delivered by heaven upon earth: the Seals, the Trumpets, the Bowls of Wrath. Prior to this, in Session Seven,¹ we looked at what *the church* would be experiencing in heaven during the seven-year Tribulation on earth.

With that focus on the three series of judgments we have *not* discussed what *else* will be going on on earth leading up to and during the Tribulation period—such things as the Daniel 2 prophecy about the four kingdoms, the four beasts and the ten horns of Daniel 7, the various passages in Ezekiel, etc.

There are many components to the Last Things, and one cannot address them all at once—nor can one simply address them in logical, sequential order, for none of the prophecies or narratives do that. One must skip around through God’s word to establish a sequence.

Much of these prophecies and others will be addressed when we reach the parenthetical visions at the beginning of the seventh Trumpet, found in Revelation Chapters Twelve to Fifteen. At that time we will look back at the earlier prophecies that laid the groundwork for these judgments. [Look at Chart #11.](#)

As I stated last week, the Trumpet icons in Chart #11 reveal that, just as with the Seals, the first four are different from the others. The judgments of the first four trumpets are directed toward *natural* objects—vegetation, the sea and its creatures, rivers and springs, celestial objects—whereas the fifth and sixth trumpet judgments are directed toward *mankind*; yet, of course, in all of them, mankind suffers greatly and some die. The first four Trumpets do not crescendo in intensity or effect (as did the first four Seals), but are instead directed at different portions of the natural world.

In our session this week we will not make much forward progress; we are not going to go beyond the first trumpet. The reason is that I am going to take this opportunity to illustrate what I believe our approach should be to the increasingly fantastical imagery we will be encountering in Revelation.

To do this I will detail and discuss—even more than usual—the methods and facts behind my conclusions, and why this is important to our study of this most complicated, challenging study.

THE FIRST TRUMPET (REVELATION 8:7—VEGETATION)

The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the

¹ The Tribulation “Fork”

earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

We have a parallel to this judgment in one of the plagues in Egypt.

Read Exodus 9:23-25.

The first sounded...

Some of our versions leave out the word “trumpet” (e.g., NASB, KJVs), some include it (e.g., ESV, NIV, CSB). The Greek is *salpizo*. *Salpinx* is the noun for trumpet, and *salpizo* is the verb which means not just to “sound” or blow *anything*, but to explicitly sound a trumpet. Thus all are correct, but some versions make it more explicit for those reading in English.

and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood...thrown to the earth

There are many interpreters and expositors who favor a non-literal understanding of the judgments, either pointing back to some historic event, political situation—and, for the purposes of this discussion, I include under this term “political,” governmental, cultural, even religious situations—or understanding it as symbolic, metaphorical, or figurative. As to a consideration of the first four trumpets, although they may disagree on precisely *how* they came about, most everyone accepts the plagues of Egypt as literal, physical events. That being the case, there is no good reason to turn around and declare that *these* judgments and plagues in Revelation are merely fanciful descriptions of political turmoil or warfare between nation states. (One commentator I read claimed that the bloodshed under the trumpets spoke of the bloodshed in World War One!) No, unless a strong and explicit *textual* reason—or at least *contextual* reason—can be put forth, we take these to describe events just as they are described in God’s word.

I love the response offered by J. A. Seiss, D.D., in his series of lectures on The Apocalypse, to those who would politicize or otherwise see them as simply metaphorical.

Seiss: I take the language as it stands. **This book does not give things veiled, but unveiled. It is the Apocalypse, the uncovering.** The results here described are heralded by the sound of a trumpet; what is published by a trumpet is no longer a secret. **The phenomena are of a very stupendous sort; but the actors are Archangels, the occasion is the day of judgment, and the business is the closing up of the history of a doomed world. In such a case we may well look for wonders.**

God has also declared His purpose to renew the miracles of Egypt, and to do “marvellous things” like unto what He did in the days of Israel’s deliverance. (See Micah 7:15; Jer. 23:7, 8.) The plagues of Egypt were

literal realities. They were miracles of judgment, such as have never been since on earth. And if it is the design of God to repeat them on a larger scale, or to do again what at all corresponds to that which He then did, the world has yet to witness just such scenes as are literally described under these trumpets. (J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Revised Text*, Eighth Edition., vol. 2 (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1901), 42–43; emphasis added.)

The position with which I approach the passages in Revelation—especially those describing the fantastical or supernatural—is to consider a *literal* interpretation to be the default. That is where I begin. Yet I also know that we cannot always take at face-value the English translation of any one version: no single version of Scripture is 100% correct, and even if not technically incorrect in a given passage, there very well may be subtleties in the Greek that are missed in English. Not to mention there may indeed be occasions when a non-literal interpretation is not just feasible, but even correct. Each must be evaluated in-place.

Mix or Mingle

For example, take the word “mixed” in the first portion of the sentence: “mixed with blood.” Well, the KJVs use the word “mingle” instead. My first impression was that the word “mixed” in the more recent versions is simply a slightly more modern word, so no big deal. Not so.

This third element of blood is the portion of this phrase that has the most varied interpretation by commentators—very few of which see it as literal blood falling out of the sky. Some say that what John describes is just red-colored hail; some, such as Walvoord, based on the passage in Exodus where cattle and men caught out by the hail are bloodily bludgeoned to death by the hail, consider the possibility that *this* is the blood that mixes with the hail and fire: human blood lying on the ground.

All right, let’s go to the text. The Greek word translated either mixed or mingled is *memigmena*, from the root *mignymi*. There is another Greek word that can be translated by the same two words (mixed or mingled): *kerannymi* (care-AH-numee).

The venerable W.E. Vine gives us some help with the difference between the two—and, by extension, help with our interpretation of “blood” in our passage. He writes, “[*Kerannymi means*] a mixing of two things, so that they are blended and form a compound, as in wine and water, whereas *mignymi* implies a mixing without such composition, as in two sorts of grain.”

Since the word in our text is the latter, *mignymi*, we thus conclude that the “blood” is not something that has *mixed* with the ice of the hail to create a new compound, but is something—John calls it blood, so we will go with that—that is *mingling* with the other two elements (perhaps in free-fall from the sky?) without becoming part of them.

Fire or Lightning

Let's quickly look at just one more word from this phrase before you are utterly bored to tears. (I won't be narrating all these details for every trumpet judgment; this is just to illustrate the process for you.) Let's look at the word "fire."

Many commentators just cannot wrap their heads around God sending down literal fire from heaven. Quite a few interpret the word "fire" in "there came hail and fire, mixed with blood," as lightning. For example, Albert Barnes, without explanation, states flat out, "And fire – Lightning." Period. Full stop.

All right, let's consider that. The Greek word translated "fire" is, not surprisingly, *pyre*, pronounced "poor." We get the words pyrotechnic, funeral pyre, pyromaniac from it. I performed a search for this Greek word in both the NASB and KJV and found not one instance of it being translated "lightning." But John in the Revelation *does* use the Greek word for lightning; look at v5: "Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake."

Now, this tells us that John knew the Greek for lightning and the Greek for fire. In v5 he describes lightning (*astrape*), in v7 he describes fire (*pyre*). If by writing *pyre* in v7 what he *really* meant was lightning, why didn't he just write *astrape*, as he did in v5?

I have included these two overly detailed examples to illustrate one aspect to my approach to determining how to interpret these challenging events in the Eschaton. Notwithstanding the Spirit's counsel, we must begin with the text itself, employing, first, common sense and logic, layering onto that the time frame in which it was written—all the while never forgetting that we are talking about *God* here, not human capabilities, and not limited by the physics of a fallen universe. The Lord God and His Christ are sovereign over all. [Now back to the first trumpet.](#)

Let us be brave and take the supernatural event of the first trumpet just as it reads:

There came hail and fire, [mingled] with blood, and they were thrown to the earth;

Now we consider what happened as a result of this phenomenon.

...and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

As is common with just about all these judgments inflicted on the earth—beginning with the early seals—some argue that these consequences are localized in the Mediterranean or Middle East region, or even restricted to Judea, perhaps based on the notion that it is unbelieving Judaism, as a nation that, has the focus during the Tribulation judgments. Yet even with that, one cannot imagine that all Jews will be then dwelling in the land of Israel, but will be scattered around the globe, as they are today.

And the word translated “earth” (*ge*; *yee*) offers us no specificity. In ancient secular Greek, *ge* stood for the land in contrast to water or sky; In the NT it can refer to the soil where seed is sown, to the globe or to a country as part of that globe—and it is often not obvious which is meant.

I incline toward interpreting this to mean the entire earth or globe—not because of the word itself, but for the following reasons:

- Some scholars like to use the phrase “the known world,” meaning the area roughly surrounding the Mediterranean. But that is man’s perspective. These judgments are coming from God, who knew full well at the time of the Revelation prophecy that the globe was “known” and inhabited far beyond the Middle East.
- By the end of the Revelation the entire globe will be either consumed and replaced, or dramatically renovated. His judgment will be universal. So why inflict so many incremental and crescendoing judgments only in one minuscule region?
- The Tribulation and the return of Christ is all about God inflicting His wrath against all those who have rejected His Messiah, beginning with the Jews but including “the nations” (Revelation 19:15). Sin and rebellion and evil are not a localized phenomenon, but universal. They dwell on every square mile of this fallen earth.

For these reason I take “earth” here, and most everywhere else in the Revelation, to refer to the globe. It is a global phenomenon, unless otherwise stated explicitly. Thus in most of our newer versions the first result of the trumpet judgment is that “a third of the earth was burned up”—essentially a summation of the whole.*

If we are so bold as to take “earth” (*ge*) to mean the entire globe, the *planet* earth, then the resulting destruction from the first trumpet is that

- one third of the trees on the planet are burned up,
- all the green grass is burned up, and thus,
- one third of the entire earth is burned up.

As Walvoord writes, “This judgment, great as it is, is only the introduction. Six more trumpets are to sound.”

*There are occasions, such as here, where this rank amateur can only bow to the superior scholarship of others. There are times when no one offers a detailed explanation, but everyone seems to agree, so all I can do is go along. This is one. As M. R. Vincent puts it succinctly, “This [“a third of the earth was burned up”] is added by the best texts.” The KJVs lack this portion, for, I take it, the superior textual discoveries that include the phrase post-date the publication of the KJV, which was based on earlier manuscripts. So in this instance, since virtually everyone says the same, I can only take their word for it. We see a similar situation regarding this business of “a third”; without offering any background details, almost all commentators and expositors I have consulted state that “a third” is not meant to be taken literally. No one I can find wants to tell me why, on what basis do they conclude this, which is, admittedly, frustrating. My instinct is to do just that; if the text says one third, it means just that (as Walvoord). Yet perhaps we can find common ground in agreeing that when it comes to the destruction of nature, one can hardly insist on slide-rule exactitude.

SESSION 20: THE TRIBULATION (PART TEN): TRAUMATIC THIRDS

Charts: The Tribulation: Chart #11 (The Trumpets)

PREFACE

Read Revelation 8:7-9.

As a preface to this study of the next three trumpet judgments, let me read what J. A. Seiss wrote as part of his remarks on the *first* trumpet—but which also pertains to our consideration of *all* these fantastical events of the Eschaton.

J. A. Seiss: Wordsworth says the trees mean princes and great men, and grass the glory and power of men. Lord says the trees mean stronger men, and the grass the young, the feeble, and the aged. Hengstenberg and Williams say the trees mean great men, and the grass people generally. Wetstein says the trees mean apostles and great doctors, and the grass common Christians. Durham says the earth means the visible Church, the trees what seems most strong in it, and the grass its lesser excellencies. The truth is, if earth, trees, and grass do not mean earth, trees, and grass, no man can tell what they mean. Letting go the literal signification of the record, we launch out upon an endless sea of sheer conjecture, turn the whole Apocalypse into an incomprehensible riddle, and force the conclusion that God was mistaken when He named it the lifting off of the veil; nay, that, if it is a revelation, it has not yet become manifest what that revelation is, and never will, by the light which we now possess.

He adds in his discussion of the next trumpet,

The simple truth is, that if it does not mean what it says, as men ordinarily use language, no man can tell what it does mean; and the opinion of one is just as good, and just as *bad*, as that of another.

THE SECOND TRUMPET (REVELATION 8:8-9—THE SEA)

So now we come to the second trumpet, which follows the pattern of the first in that it announces a supernatural event, or judgment from God—this time directed at the sea—then itemizes the effects that result. Different from the first, the text actually lends a hand with its interpretation—at least initially.

The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea;

There is the judgment event, and right off the bat the text tells us explicitly that it is not literally a mountain—John knew it was not an actual mountain being thrown into the sea, but something *like* a mountain.

The Greek is *hos* (ohs), which means “as, or like, just as, or nearly.” So from this we know that the Lord God did not scoop up Mount Vesuvius, for example, and drop it into the sea.

When we add up the clues in vv8-9 we can easily deduce that “something like a great mountain burning with fire”—but not *literally* a mountain—could very well be an asteroid or overly huge meteoroid, which, passing through the earth’s atmosphere, would surely be “burning with fire.” And at the end of v9 we can see the obvious result of such an event: “and a third of the ships were destroyed.” Of course; a mountain-sized asteroid or meteoroid would cause huge, violent surges to ripple out from the impact, destroying shipping for at least hundreds of miles in every direction.*

and a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.

And once again we have an association with one of the Egyptian plagues.

Read Exodus 7:20-21.

Notice that John (back in Revelation) does not say that the sea became *like* blood, as he did the mountain. Just as with the first trumpet, blood is blood (*haimati*), which would explain at least one reason why “a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life died”; the first reason may have been the seismic shock of the object hitting the sea, but those who survived that would then be swimming in blood rather than salt water. Even some expositors favoring a literal interpretation to the judgments say it is possible that the blood mentioned here is the *result* of the sea life dying. But that’s not really how it reads; “a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died.” Wouldn’t that be stated in the reverse if the blood came from the dead sea creatures—e.g., *a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died, and a third of the sea became blood?*

Where the text does not help us is in knowing the *amount* of sea affected by this. Is it one third of just one localized sea—say, the Mediterranean—or is it one third of *all* seas around the earth? What is one third of the sea here will be the *entire* sea in the second bowl of wrath in Revelation 16:3: “The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.”

But that still doesn’t help us to know the scope of this sea. The consensus among commentators—even those in our camp—is that this is localized, and probably the Mediterranean. I prefer to conclude that we do not know either way. Again, as discussed last week, perhaps these judgments are measured, and less than the whole, because God will be giving people a change to repent.

Regarding that possibility I would submit an upcoming passage in Chapter Nine. Note that in the fourth seal and the trumpets, harm to the earth or mankind is measured: in the seal, one fourth; in the trumpets, one third. In the final bowl judgments, however, all such restrictions are removed; the earth and its people suffer the full force of God’s unlimited wrath. Near the end of Chapter Nine we read of the judgment of the sixth trumpet, and its effects.

*You might be thinking, “Such an occurrence, though catastrophic, could be by natural cause. Why call it supernatural?” What renders this event supernatural is the trumpet. Whatever this is that crashes into the sea, the Lord God and His Christ have delivered it at precisely this moment, for this particular reason: an expression of their wrath against an unbelieving, sinful world.

Read Revelation 9:18-21.

I would posit that the mention—twice—that the people “did not repent” suggests that repentance was indeed the intended response. So when even the horrific consequences of the sixth trumpet did not bring about repentance, the Lord God as much as concludes, *All right, then I’m going to remove all limitations and to let loose the full fury of My wrath on the entire earth. No more fourths or thirds; now it will be 100%.* And the narrative of the seven bowls makes that purpose clear: He is now through with giving people a chance to bow down before Christ.†

† Let me add a few more thoughts regarding the “one third,” which we see repeatedly in the trumpet judgments. I first made a closer examination of the word itself (*tritos*). Vine doesn’t even mention it; C.J. Hemer, in *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Brown), writes, “In 14 [of the 72 occurrences of this word] in the Rev.,... it represents the fraction 1/3, referring to disasters in which a “third” part is destroyed.” No mention of it not meaning just that. However, Hemer does point to a comparison of Revelation 12:4 and Daniel 8:10—two accounts of the same prophecy. In the Revelation passage it says, “and his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven....” whereas in the Daniel passage it says, “and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth” (emphasis added). You may make of that comparison what you will.

THE THIRD TRUMPET (REVELATION 8:10-11—FRESH WATER)

The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.

With the third trumpet things get a bit sticky. The word translated “star” is the Greek *aster* (ah-STEER) which is used twenty-eight times throughout the NT, with only five of which clearly referring to literal stars in the heavens. In the first chapter of Revelation, Christ is described by John, in part, as “In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength”.¹ Christ Himself explains in v20, “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.”

The evidence would show that just as in our understanding of the “stars of the sky [falling] to the earth” like unripe figs in 6:13, we must be careful not to press our preferred *literal* approach to the extreme. The Greek *aster* is repeatedly used in a metaphorical sense in the NT, including the Revelation. Many interpreters prefer to read here an apostate falling out of the church to “poison” the waters of the gospel, but I do not think we need to subscribe to something like that.

The first four trumpets are being inflicted—at least to start—on the natural world. And the effect of this “star” plummeting to earth seems to suggest something like a mineral that contaminates the fresh water on a third of the earth’s fresh water: rivers and underground springs. As with the second trumpet, this star could very well be a fiery (“burning like a torch”) meteoroid—yet smaller than a mountain (v8)—that poisons the waters to the extent that people die. The prophet Jeremiah relays the Lord God’s judgment on idolatrous Judah—the “now” to the “not yet” of our passage in Revelation. [Turn please to Jeremiah 9.](#)²

¹ Revelation 1:16

² see also Exodus 7:21

Read Jeremiah 9:13-16.

The term “wormwood” is fairly common in the Bible (10 occurrences), both OT and NT. Literally it is the name for the herb *artemisia absinthium*, known for its intense bitterness. The Greeks called it *absinthion*, which means “undrinkable.” More often than not in the Bible the term “wormwood” is used symbolically to refer to a terrible bitterness of spirit, affliction or suffering. Thus here the object that rockets to earth is called Wormwood, and what it inflicts on the earth, through the fresh water supply, is wormwood. We might conclude that the “star” delivers a particularly lethal strain of *absinthium* since the text states that “many men died from the waters.” In most instances the effects of consuming beverages made from the herb are unpleasant, but not generally fatal. But the waters poisoned by this star will be.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET (REVELATION 8:12—CELESTIAL OBJECTS)

The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.

J.B. Smith: It is of considerable interest to note the progress—one third of the green trees and grass, one third of marine life and shipping, one third of the waters, and one third of the heavenly bodies. Food is destroyed; distribution is crippled; water supply is limited; production is hampered.³

Few natural things speak to the power and grandeur of God for earthlings than the glories of the heavens, be it the arc of the Milky Way or the sun setting in the west. This is not just the perspective of lowly earth-dwellers, but God has designed this universe to evoke such a response.

Read Psalm 19:1-6.

Yet, as we see here, part of God’s judgment on man is to *dim* this splendor, to remove some of those things that most handily pronounce His majestic glory. The darkness that results is the measure of His wrath. The prophet Isaiah foresaw this moment; he wrote of it in Isaiah 13:9-11.

Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, Cruel, with fury and burning anger, To make the land a desolation; And He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not flash forth their light; The sun will be dark when it rises And the moon will not shed its light. Thus I

³ i.e., from lack of sunlight

will punish the world for its evil And the wicked for their iniquity;
I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud And abase
the haughtiness of the ruthless.

The Greek here is interesting; the word *eplege* comes from *plesso* (PLACE-so), which means to strike so as to flatten, much as a blacksmith repeatedly hammers hot metal to flatten or shape it. It is not clear from the text precisely what will be God's method of dimming these celestial objects.

- Will He reduce their lumens by a third, as we would dim the lights in a room?
- Or will He just turn them off earlier than usual?
- Will He throw into place obscuring objects: a partial eclipse of the sun and moon, with accompanying layers of clouds or pollution to reduce visible stars at night?

Whatever His means, this reduction of light could have a devastating effect on the earth, affecting crops—and causing problems for those relying on solar panels for their electricity.

Note that as God's judgments, whether on the natural world or on mankind, move from one quarter, to one third, to eventually far more—note that we are not told that any of them are reversed:

- Sea water that has been turned to blood remains blood.
- Fresh water that has been poisoned remains undrinkable.
- Light that sustains life on this earth that has been either dimmed or turned off early each day will become “the new normal.”

Each new judgment will not replace previous judgments, but will be added to them. That is, conditions on earth will steadily get worse and worse, darker and yet darker. By the last half of the Tribulation life, where it exists at all, will be intolerable. I close with this from the prophet Amos.

Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD,
For what purpose will the day of the LORD be to you?
It will be darkness and not light;
As when a man flees from a lion
And a bear meets him,
Or goes home, leans his hand against the wall
And a snake bites him.
Will not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light,
Even gloom with no brightness in it? (Amos 5:18–20)

SESSION 21: THE TRIBULATION (PART ELEVEN): THE FIFTH TRUMPET, PART ONE

Charts: The Trumpets: #11 and The Fifth Trumpet: #12

PREFACE

During our pastor's recent sermon series on Habakkuk, there has been a focus on God's method of judging the sins of one group by His employing a second group guilty of even *more* egregious transgressions—in the context of Habakkuk, it is Judah (Yahweh's chosen people) being scourged by Yahweh for their faithless rebellion by means of the arguably *more* sinful Chaldean's (i.e., Babylonians).

Look at Chart #11.

We have a similar situation before us as we now consider the fifth trumpet in Revelation 9. The rebellious people on earth—those who have still rejected Christ Jesus as Savior and the true Messiah—are about to be scourged—not yet destroyed, but punished and tormented just short of death. This they are surely due, but, just as in the time of Habakkuk, the Lord God will punish their rebellion by means of beings even more egregiously evil than them: demons from the abyss.

We have so far examined the first four trumpets,¹ all of which have done violence to the natural world of earth (trumpets one to three), and the celestial objects in the sky overhead (trumpet four). Now with the next two trumpets the violence will be aimed directly at *people* on earth: the events of the fifth trumpet (9:1-11) will torment people to the point that they will seek death, but not find it; the sixth trumpet (9:13-21) will kill one third of mankind. Both of these trumpet judgments will be directed at those who are *not* in Christ—thus *not* directed at the 144,000 who had previously been sealed in Him,² and possibly including others who have become believers during the Tribulation.

But first the flow of the narrative is interrupted by an announcement of what is about to occur—delivered by an avian narrator much as the Prologue in *Romeo and Juliet*: there, “Two households, both alike in dignity / In fair Verona, where we lay our scene” but here, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth.”

THE EAGLE (REVELATION 8:13)

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!”

As mentioned in class last week, there is no good reason not to take God's word for what it says. The KJVs alone (as far as I can find) have “angel” instead of

¹ Revelation 8:6-12

² Revelation 7:4-8

*The Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Alexandrinus, and the Codex Vaticanus, the very best and most reliable authorities on the true reading of the New Testament, have *ἀετός*, eagle, instead of *ἄγγελος*, angel. The Syriac has eagle. Griesbach, Scholz, Lachman, Van Ess, Hengstenberg, Stuart, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Wordsworth, Ewald, Alford, and the best critics in general, accept eagle as the proper and original reading. (J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Revised Text, Eighth Edition.*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1901), 66.)

“eagle”—even the NKJV and M[odern]KJV.

I get it that when Thomas Nelson decided to update the KJV in 1975³ they purposely wanted to “preserve the accuracy and poetry of the King James Version,” but every scholar—I mean *everyone*—agrees that it should be “eagle.”*

And why *not* a speaking bird! Just ask Balaam (bi-LAHM) if the Lord God can make animals speak.⁴ There is no reason at all to make this metaphorical—or, as Alan F. Johnson puts it, “This must be taken symbolically.”

No, here we have a bird flying into the scene overhead to announce to everyone—not with a squawk, but in a clear, loud voice presumably so that those of any language can comprehend the message—“Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth...!”⁵ [Look at Chart #12.](#)

THE FIFTH TRUMPET (REVELATION 9:1-11—THE FIRST WOE: DEMONS FROM THE PIT)

Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth;

So far we have seen a “star” that “fell from heaven, burning like a torch,” (8:10) and a “star” called Wormwood that poisons a third of earth’s fresh water, and we concluded that they probably referred in both instances to some sort of meteoroid. Now we have a “star” of a different sort, one that seems to be a person rather than a chunk of rock, for the text says a key was given “to *him*,” and that “*He* opened the bottomless pit.” So who is this “star” that has “fallen to the earth.”

Note first of all—and this is of critical importance in our identification of the star—the tense of the verb: in the NASB, “had fallen”; only the original KJV has “I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth.”

But the verb is in the perfect active tense, which means that this is already accomplished—the “star” (probably an angel) is already down. John did not witness the fall of this angel, but identifies him as an angel that fell earlier.

...and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.

Who is this angel? As always, there have been some very imaginative conjectures on the part of our faithful interpreters; on those we will not dwell. The options seem to logically whittle down to three possibilities: either Christ Jesus, a nameless angel, or Satan, two of which are problematic. Let’s consider these in turn.

Christ Jesus

The book of the Revelation opens with Jesus the Christ, revealing Himself in His glorified state to John, and declaring in 1:18, “...and I was dead, and be-

³The NT published in 1979; entire Bible in 1982.

⁴Numbers 22:28

⁵“An eagle,” literally, one eagle (henos), suggests that there are more messenger eagles like this one in God’s economy.

hold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.” Oliver Greene (*Bible Prophecy*, 1970) cites this as evidence that the individual spoken of in 9:1 cannot be anyone other than the Christ. But 9:1 states that this “fallen” one is handed the key to the pit by someone else. If this “star” is Christ Himself, He already has possession of the key. However, Christ Jesus could indeed be the one who is giving the key to this star.

Then there is the word “fallen” (*peptokota*, from the Greek *pipto*); the associate Hebrew word in the Septuagint means, “fall, collapse; be inferior to, drop; bring to ruin; cast, throw down; let drop, abandon.” Where else in Scripture do we read of the son of God being so described? Nowhere. The Son of God was *sent* from heaven to earth, He *came* from heaven to earth, but He did not *fall* from heaven to earth—not to mention the fact that He is not on earth during the Tribulation, and it would be inappropriate to refer to the glorified Christ in the Revelation as a “star” or “an angel.”

I conclude that while Christ may be the one *giving* the key, He is not the one receiving the key, and thus not the individual who opens the bottomless pit.

Satan

I agree with Walvoord that this *may* be Satan. This option, too, is problematic, but most objections can be answered. If this is indeed the case, this demonstrates once again how the Revelation narrative shifts back and forth in time, and cannot be read in a linear fashion with one event occurring after the other. If this *is* Satan, in this passage, he has already fallen to earth; in Revelation 12:7-13 we have the narrative for the great war *in heaven* between Michael and his angels and “the dragon” (Satan) and his angels. Verse 9 of that passage describes the result of that war:

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Thus the events of Chapter Twelve—in the package of parenthetical visions just prior to the first Bowl of Wrath that most commentators place at the midpoint of the Tribulation—these events occur *prior to* the events of Chapter Nine, but are also prophesied back in the OT and in the gospels, to which Jesus Himself refers in Luke 10:18 (on the surface at least, in the past tense):

And He said to them, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.” †

Read Isaiah 14:12-15.

This raises one of the primary objections to Satan being the one given the key—i.e., the authority—to open the pit. It is pointed out that Satan will be an *inmate* of the pit during the Millennium, not its “king.” True, but that does not

† The verb *Etheoroun* (I was watching, or I beheld) is in the imperfect tense, which means it is what we would call the past tense, yet is continuous or ongoing, which muddies the water a bit when referring to Satan’s fall from heaven. Further muddying the water is that the Son of God ultimately dwells outside of time (Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” [John 8:58]), so it is almost impossible to know the precise time frame for His reference.

prevent God from using him to orchestrate this judgment against those who reject Christ. Many a leader has later found himself an inmate of the prison to which he once consigned others. Besides, it is possible that the “king”—“the angel of the abyss” (9:11) is an angel other than the one given the key in 9:1.

A more tenacious problem with Satan being the one given the key, in my opinion, is the restriction to the horde’s victims, found in v4:

They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. (emphasis added)

For me this raises the point: If he is indeed the one who unlocks the pit to set loose the horde of locusts, *why would Satan want to be a party to the torment of only his own followers?* One possible answer to this might be that, since he has been booted out of heaven by this point, he is even more bound to obey the commands of Christ or the Father. After all, even while he was still in heaven, Satan was restricted by God in his inflictions on Job.⁶ Neither Walvoord nor Seiss speaks to this.

On the other hand, what are the odds that Whomever gives the key to Satan is pulling a fast one on him. Note the action sequence of the first five verses:

1. The key to the bottomless pit is given to someone.
2. This individual uses the key to open the pit.
3. Locusts are released upon the earth; power is given them.
4. Then—and only then—are the locusts told not to hurt nature, but “only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads”—i.e., unbelievers.
5. Further, they may not kill anyone, but only torment for five months.

Is it possible that Satan was hoodwinked?

A Nameless Angel

This is certainly possible; there is nothing in the text that would preclude this individual being (for the next ten verses at least) an anonymous angel. This is also the easiest of the three options to embrace. Other angels besides Satan have fallen from (been kicked out of) heaven. Most assume that whoever this is in v1 is also the one designated king over the demons of the abyss, and whose “name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.” Both of these appellations mean the same: “Destroyer.” So if this is the case, we can readily assume that this individual is an *evil* angel, in cahoots with Satan. However, these could be different angels: the first to open the gates of the abyss, the second to rule it.

⁶ Job 1:6-2:7

Conclusion

Seiss concludes that the fallen angel given the key in 9:1 is Satan, but that he is *not* the king over the locusts and angel of the abyss (9:11). Seiss concludes that this is one of Satan’s archangels, named Abaddon/Apollyon.

Walvoord, albeit less conclusively, *leans* toward Satan being the angel given the key, and because of the name “Destroyer,” concludes that the king of v11 is Satan as well.

For myself, I conclude that the angel *given* the key is *not* Christ, but Christ very well could be the one *giving* the key to him. With Walvoord I *lean* toward Satan being the fallen angel in v1 (but it would be much easier to accept that it is just a generic messenger). However, because the angel of v11 is given a name different—although of the same character—from other appellations for Satan, I conclude, with Seiss, that he is one of Satan’s archangels. As to this question of why Satan would inflict torment on his own followers, there are too many unknowns in that equation to sway my decision in either direction. And I seem to be the only one troubled by it.

v2: He opened the bottomless pit,

Before we close this session, I’d like to just begin v2 and discuss the “bottomless pit” (literally, shaft of the abyss [NIVs]), later, in v11, called “the abyss.”†

From our passage here, along with Luke 8:31 and Romans 10:7, but especially Revelation 20 we learn that the abyss is the secured prison for demons; it will be Satan’s residence during the Millennium.

Read Revelation 20:1-3.

† This is touched on lightly here; the next session includes a handout that discusses and compares the various words used in the Bible for the underworld: e.g., abyss or pit, Hades or sheol, Gehenna or hell, lake of fire.

SESSION 22: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWELVE): THE FIFTH TRUMPET, PART TWO

Chart: The Fifth Trumpet: #12

PREFACE

At the end of our last session we had a spirited discussion about the “literalist” interpretation of the Tribulation events, and in particular the “star” in Revelation 9:1. By the term “literalist” I refer to the method of interpretation that considers a *literal* explanation of an event or actor to be the default, and only veering from that—and then only to the extent necessary—as the passage requires. Regarding this, I believe it will be instructive to take just a moment to demonstrate how actually slight, how relatively minor are the disagreements revealed among ourselves when compared to some of the interpretations by respected, published scholars of God’s word. So let’s take this “star” of 9:1 as an example; how do other learned commentators of the Bible interpret this “fallen star”?

Wordsworth: an apostate Christian teacher

Bengel, Andreas, De Wette: a good angel

Hengstenberg: “The star here, as throughout the Apocalypse, denotes a ruler. The ruler is an ideal person, who appears in history in a whole series of real individuals. The last great embodiment of this star was Napoleon. But he shall not remain the last.”

Matthew Poole: “John is not here told a story of what was in the beginning of the world, but what should be, and that five hundred years after Christ’s coming. And the same reason holds against those who think those seditious persons are meant, who did so much mischief in and about Jerusalem during the siege; this had been to have revealed to John those things which he knew were done many years before. Amongst those who think some particular eminent minister of the church, who apostatized, is meant, those seem to me to judge better, who think that Boniface the Third is meant, who, in the year 606, obtained the privilege of the pope’s supremacy...”

Matthew Henry: “Some understand it of Boniface the third bishop of Rome, who assumed the title of universal bishop, by the favour of the emperor Phocas, who, being a usurper and tyrant in the state, allowed Boniface to be so in the church, as the reward of his flattery. To this fallen star was given the key of the bottomless pit. Having now ceased to be a minister of Christ, he becomes the antichrist, the minister of the devil; and by the permission of Christ, who had taken from him the keys of the church, he becomes the devil’s turnkey, to let loose the powers of hell against the churches of Christ.”

Peter Lange: “Not an angel, either good or bad; certainly not the Devil... we may take the star, which has fallen from Heaven, to be re-

pentance without faith, or the sorrow of this world—so-called Cain or Judas repentance—or the remorse and penance of religious self-torment, whether clothed in a more ancient and mediaeval or a more modern form.”

John Gill: “wherefore by this star is meant antichrist; but whether the western or eastern antichrist, the pope of Rome, or Mahomet, is a question”

As I have referenced here and there in earlier sessions, these variations between scholars are actually rather tame compared to those expressed regarding other events in the Tribulation, but they nonetheless illustrate for us how even *more benign* are our differences with others here in class. No matter our individual positions, when considering this event in the first part of Chapter Nine, I believe that most of us—at least those who have been courageous enough to state their opinion—can agree to the following regarding vv1-5:

Someone who was once in heaven (or the heavens), but now fallen to earth—a *being*, that is, in contrast to an *object*—is given a “key” (i.e., authority over) the gate to the bottomless pit, or abyss in which demonic beings are imprisoned and about to be released upon the earth.

And if you do *not* agree with even that generalized interpretation, then no harm; every believer housing the Holy Spirit is free to form his or her own conclusion about this fantastical, apocalyptic text, so long as we treat each brother and sister with respect and courtesy whenever it is discussed.

Read Revelation 9:1-6.

v2

He opened the bottomless pit,

As promised, this session includes a handout that discusses the various words used in the Bible for the underworld, of which “the pit,” or abyss, is just one category. One of the pleasures of consulting some of the older commentators is the reading of their English. How our language has degenerated; it breaks the heart. Here is how J. A. Seiss describes this passage.

J. A. Seiss: The doors of separation between the earth and the prison of evil spirits are opened, and mysterious and malignant tenants of the underworld are permitted to overrun the globe, and to inflict torture and woe upon its unsanctified inhabitants.

One cannot improve upon that.

and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.

More than once we have conjectured atmospheric reasons for celestial objects being dimmed or going dark all together. Here that is stated explicitly: it

is the smoke rising out of the pit that is responsible for “darkening” the sun and the air.

v3

Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

We will soon see in the coming verses that what John labels here “locusts” are not at all the grasshopper-like insects that can become not just a nuisance, but at times a destructive plague upon the earth. Neither are they “scorpions,” but are equipped with a weaponized tail meant to inflict upon humans “torment...like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man” (v5). I take it from the passage as a whole that John chooses to refer to them as locusts because they emerge from the unlocked gates of the pit flying and swarming in a manner visually similar to a plague of locusts.*

*The way the text describes the emergence of these foul beings—“Then out of the smoke came locusts...”—leaves open the possible interpretation that instead of the locusts emerging from the pit through the smoke, they materialized from the particles of smoke.

The same frustrating phrase as used in v1 is repeated here: “was given,”—in v1, “the key of the bottomless pit was given to him,” and in v3, “power was given them.” But as before, there is no mention of who it is doing the giving. In v1 I concluded that the giver *could* be Christ, but we can’t be sure; here the question remains: Is the power being given from heaven or hell? Considering the explicit restrictions on the *use* of this power (vv4-5), I incline toward Christ, the probable giver of the key, being the one who sets the rules of engagement under the fifth trumpet. Both trumpets five and six are all about a holy God spending His righteous wrath on an unbelieving and rebellious world. Thus, it is logical to conclude that

He is the one calling the shots;

He is the one inflicting these demons on human beings;

He is the one placing restrictions on who they may torment—under the sixth trumpet, the numbers those demons may kill.

And the purpose of the limitations ordered by God are so that men may still repent and turn toward Him—the grace of God remains, always willing, always eager for souls to be saved right up to the last minute. Yet the prophecy reveals that they will reject this offer.

Read Revelation 9:20-21.

v4

They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

The natural food for locusts is the foliage of the earth, the green things, the growing things, the leaves of the trees and bushes. *These* “locusts,” however,

are instructed to limit their “hurt”¹ to “the men² who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.”

...but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

Walvoord offers a pretty good argument, from Scripture, to support this restriction protecting not just the 144,000 (7:3-8), but also anyone “sealed” in Christ during the Tribulation. [Let’s first look at his two references.](#)

Read 2 Timothy 2:19.

Read Ephesians 1:13-14.

The operative word in both of these—as a noun in 2 Timothy and in verb form in Ephesians—is the same as in our Revelation passage: *sphragis*, (sfrah-GEES) “seal.”

Walvoord: Apparently the entire human race is open to [the locusts’] activity except those who are sealed by God in their foreheads. This obviously excludes the 144,000 of Revelation 7, and the protection may extend as far as this plague is concerned to all who know the Lord in that day. According to 2 Timothy 2:19, “the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.” In a similar way, believers in the present age are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise according to Ephesians 1:13-14. It would seem improbable that any true believer in that day would be subject to the torment of the locusts; the torment is rather a judgment upon Christ-rejecting men.

For me, this tracks. If God’s purpose in these two trumpets is two-fold, first to punish evil, and second, to goad the unregenerate to repentance, then why so inflict those who are already “sealed” in Christ?

Yet, we must admit, we must acknowledge that the text may just be speaking of protecting only those bearing the physical “seal of God on their foreheads.” For, why make such a point of specifically sealing (i.e., protecting) 144,000 if you intend to protect from torment *all* believers? Haven’t we seen true believers martyred during the tribulation?³

v5

And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.

¹ *adikesosi*, to do wrong, act wickedly, damage, harm, injure

² “men” = *anthropous* = human being, man or woman

³ Revelation 6:9-11; 7:9-17

And they were not permitted to kill anyone,

Literally this is one more “given” (*edothē* = was given): “it was given to them that they may not kill them” (YLT, NIV84). It’s a minor point, but a distinction nonetheless. The more common rendering sounds as if these locusts were natural killers, but were now being prevented from killing. But the text makes it clear that except for the power in their tails (v10), all the capabilities and action in this fifth-trumpet drama is being not just initiated, but systematically controlled through sovereign grants by Almighty God. First, the key is *given* to Satan; second, power is *given* to the locusts; third, the locusts are *given not* to kill, but only torment; and finally in v6, death itself (literally, *ho thanatos*, *the death*) is withheld from those who seek it as relief from the locusts’ torment. Holy God is meticulously “giving,” granting, bestowing every component of this five-month scene.

...their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.

God in His word likes to use similes, perhaps the most common being, “Pain as a woman in childbirth.” This comparison is made to intense pain with such regularity that the male of the species is forever left in awe of the female for such courageous endurance. Here, however, John employs a different simile for intense pain: “like the torment of a scorpion when it stings.” It is said that the sting of a scorpion, while generally not fatal to adults, is excruciating, and ranks as one of the worst pains humans can experience. (How it compares to childbirth I will leave to others.)

...but to torment for five months;

The passage is not clear: Does this mean that every individual will be tormented by such intense pain *continuously* for five months? or inflicted *intermittently* over five months? All people or just some or most? In any case, the monsters will be “upon the earth” for a duration of five months. Some say the five-month period comes from that being the typical span of earthly locusts plaguing an area. But these are not earthly locusts, but horrific, demonic beings that—absent the Lord God’s restrictions—would surely proceed well beyond that length of time. Whatever the scope of this torment it will be horrible, apparently inflicting mankind to the brink of sanity.

v6

And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.⁴

Walvoord: Literal death is meant here. This is a horrible picture of domination by demons to such an extent that men lose their ability of free choice and are in agony of body and soul.

⁴As pointed out before, the text here is literally, *ho thanatos*, *the death*, which adds a certain weight to this verse.

YLT: and in those days shall men seek the death, and they shall not find it, and they shall desire to die, and the death shall flee from them.

But this is a false hope—as it will be for those seeking to be free of the Lord’s wrath by letting the mountains collapse upon them in the sixth seal.

Read Revelation 6:15-17.

David Guzik offers some sobering context to this verse.

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 & Klebold are dressed and say they are ready for “our little Judgement Day.” Then Klebold, looking tense, says goodbye to his parents. He concludes, “I didn’t like life too much. Just know I am going to a better place than here.” What tragic deception to think—on the day you will commit terrible murders—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.

Albert Barnes: A large part look forward to death as a release, when, if the reality were known, death would furnish no such relief, for there are deeper and longer woes beyond the grave than there are this side of it.

CONCLUSION

Far too many commentators seemingly choose to disregard two important clues that are given to this book’s interpretation, found in its earliest passages.

Read Revelation 1:1.

First, the first verse explains that this will be the *Apokalypsis* of Jesus Christ; the word means an uncovering, a revealing, a laying bare, a disclosure of divine truth. If that is indeed God’s purpose in this book, why should we not take Him at His word? Yes, there is such a thing as *apocryphal language*, just as there is *poetic language* found in the Psalms and elsewhere. This is one reason why the study of this book’s events can be so challenging.

Walvoord: [The book] is a revelation of truth *about* Christ Himself, a disclosure of future events, that is, His second coming when Christ will be revealed. It is as well a revelation which comes *from* Christ.

That being the case, why should we approach its content as if it were “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma” (Churchill describing Russia)?

I contend that the book of the Revelation is not filled with parables which, like many of the parables of Jesus, require some deeper, even select knowledge with which to ferret out their cryptic meaning. If that were the case, it would not be called “the Revelation.”

Second, it is clear in v1 (and v19, as well) that the events so described in this book are yet future. The words translated “in a short time,” or “must soon” (*en tachei*), do not necessarily mean “imminent” in a human sense or even from God’s perspective: “...yet long delay is implied. Expressions like this must be understood, not according to human measurement of time, but rather (as in 2Peter 3:8). The idea is, before long, as time is computed by God” (M. R. Vincent).

Beyond that, the word can also mean, as in YLT, “come to pass quickly” or speedily. That is, once it begins, it will unfold speedily, quickly.

Thus the habit of some scholars to conclude that the events detailed in Revelation find their basis in historical events and characters, some even as near to its writing as a few decades or a few centuries—or even as recent to us as the twentieth century—result in tortuous interpretations far more fantastical than just taking the text as written.

Which we will endeavor to do.

THE TRIBULATION

Terminology for the Underworld

God's word includes a number of words or phrases that speak of eternal damnation, or temporary incarceration and/or torment. In this paper we will examine these and compare the differences between them. Clear, distinct lines are not always drawn between the various terms; there are shades of difference that at times overlap. Likewise these terms often (but not always) mean something different in the Old Testament from the New Testament.

Hell

This is the most common term for a dwelling for the wicked dead. As such, it has become, often with good reason, a catch-all term for all of the rest.

"Hell" translates the Greek *geena* (GHEH-en-nah) and in just one instance (2 Peter 2:4) *tartaroo* (tar-tar-OH-oh) from "Tartarus," the name in Greco-Latin mythology for the underworld abyss where wicked gods and humans were imprisoned in punishment. The KJV, in ten instances, uses "hell" to translate the Greek *hades*, which the other versions transliterate "Hades" (see below).

The term *Gehenna* traces back to the Valley of Hinnom, near Jerusalem, where children were sacrificed by fire to the pagan god Molech. The righteous king Josiah turned this valley into a garbage dump and latrine when he went about ridding Judah of its pagan altars (2 Kings 23:10). To the Jews of the OT this valley would literally become, after the final judgment, the hell of fire. "In time *gehenna* became simply the place of punishment and so attracted the corresponding ideas about Hades. *gehenna* thus became a temporary place of punishment until the final judgment" (*Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Brown).

Hades

The term "Hades" is far more prevalent in the OT than the NT, by a factor of ten, and more often than not translates the Hebrew *sheol*, which is the place to which people descend at death. Originally in the early OT and in Greek thought, Hades is the underworld, a place of darkness in which God is not remembered (Job 10:20-21; Psalm 6:5). In Rabbinical Judaism, and later the NT where Jesus establishes and confirms the belief in bodily resurrection, *hades* lost its role as the eternal resting place of souls and became a preparatory, temporary resting place for souls until the resurrection (Revelation 20:13).

In the NT Hades lies within the earth, so that one has to go down to it (Matthew 11:23; Luke 10:15). It is a prison with gates (1 Peter 3:19; Matthew 16:18), and Christ Jesus holds the key to these gates (Revelation 1:18).

Bottomless Pit, Abyss

The Greek *abyssos* is an adjective that when used by itself with the noun *ge* (earth) understood, means a bottomless place. In the OT the word usually translates the Hebrew *tehom*, and often refers to the primal ocean, the deep, and the realm of the dead (the underworld; Psalm 71:20).

In Romans 10:7 (after Psalm 107:26), the apostle Paul refers to a subterranean place that is the realm of the dead. In the Revelation, however, it is a prison reserved for demons (Revelation 9), Satan (Revelation 20:1-3), ruled by a demonic prince named Apollyon, or Abaddon (Revelation 9:11). In Revelation 11:7 and 17:8 the beast (Antichrist) emerges from it.

The pit or abyss is not a final, eternal dwelling, for Satan is imprisoned there for one thousand years, released from it, then cast into "the lake of fire and brimstone": "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

Conclusion

Amid all these overlapping terms for the underworld there is only one place spoken of in God's word that is permanent, eternal, from which no one will ever emerge. It is referred to as a place of "burning fire" (Daniel 7:11); "fire and brimstone," where those who worship the beast and receive his mark "will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb" (Revelation 14:9-11); and "the lake of fire" and "the second death" (Revelation 19:20; 20:10,14-15), where Satan, the beast and the false prophet, as well as anyone who rejects Christ, will spend eternity ("day and night forever and ever").

SESSION 23: THE TRIBULATION (PART THIRTEEN): THE FIFTH TRUMPET, PART THREE

Chart: The Fifth Trumpet: #12

PREFACE

We have cited the prophet Joel before to illustrate, as one heading in my Bible has it, God's "Terrible Visitation" during the end times. But in the second chapter of his prophecy we have an explicit reference to the events of the fifth trumpet, even to the description of the beings inflicting the earth. [Please turn to Joel 2.](#)

Read Joel 2:3-11.

Even so, as we have noted at the end of Revelation Chapter Nine, the Lord God still invites people to repent, as Joel confirms.

Read Joel 2:12-13.

By my reckoning, the emergence of the "locusts" from the bottomless pit gives us the first appearance in the post-Rapture Eschaton of truly demonic beings. There is no way around it: even if one believes they are real locusts, their appearance reveals them as locusts quite literally from hell. But indeed from their description, their behavior, and their marching orders we conclude these are not insects at all.

Seiss: These horrible creatures have a certain degree of intelligence. Commands are addressed to them. They are able to distinguish between those who have the seal of the living God upon their foreheads and other people. They have a king whom they obey. Earthly locusts have no king (Prov. 30:27); but these have a king over them.

These are unnatural but thinking, reasoning beings: they receive and obey their orders not to harm or destroy any foliage, and not to do harm to anyone bearing the seal of God on their foreheads, and not to kill anyone. Furthermore, actual locusts do not have tails that sting men like the sting of a scorpion.

The occasional commentator will state that these locusts have riders.¹ I've scoured the text and I can find no reference at all to riders; under the sixth trumpet, yes, but not this one. All descriptions pertain to the beasts themselves. And all power and all instructions for the campaign are given and addressed to the locusts themselves, not anyone mounted upon them. So we are left with a plague of supernatural beings, or demons, with an appearance and behavior so bizarre, so frightful as to inhabit our worst nightmares.

Let us now examine the appearance and nature of these beings in Chapter Nine, paying close attention to what the text actually says.

¹ e.g., Seiss

v7

The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men.

Eight times in his description of the locusts John uses the Greek *hos*, translated “like” or “as.” This confirms that the apostle, for the benefit of readers of this revelation, is doing his best to paint a picture of thoroughly otherworldly, demonic design. Thus he cannot describe the *whole* of each, for it could not be compared to anything in the history of man. No one at all has ever seen or even thought of creatures like these. The best John can do is describe its *component parts* as “like” things with which the average person would be familiar.

The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle;

The nearest earthly being John can compare to the overall structure and look (perhaps even size?) of these monsters is the horse. Here we may have the first clue that these are something more than just demon-sized insects: Look at a picture of an earthly locust; the word “horse” does not spring to mind.

These were not just like horses, but like horses “prepared for battle.” That is, horses with a lot of stuff all over them, armored plates, etc.; typically for protection, but here perhaps for brutality.

and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men.

Here again we must not give into the easy mistake of shaping the description into a more palatable or sensible image. It does not say that there were riders wearing crowns who were human beings because they had the face of a man. No, the pronouns “their” and “they” in this passage always refer to the beasties; no rider is mentioned. Even on the heavenly, righteous side of things, created beings can have a bizarre, even hideous to our sensibilities, description. [Please turn back to Chapter Four](#). Beyond the Trinity itself, these are the created beings closest to the throne, probably the most holy of any created being in heaven. But listen to how they are described.

Read Revelation 4:6-8.

My guess is that if any one of us met those creatures on the street, outside the environs of heaven, we would be horrified, we’d run screaming from them. But not in the precincts of heaven. To my mind this plays a part in the resurrection, to the acquisition of new bodies suitable for heaven. At the resurrection—and perhaps even before, when at death our spirit is united with Christ prior to receiving our resurrection body—but certainly at the Resurrection, we are outfitted with tangible flesh suitable for a holy environment (just as the unregenerate are outfitted with flesh that will not be consumed in the lake of fire). And that

new body for believers may certainly include a new *perception*, which allows us to recognize beauty, where once, in our corrupt earthly flesh, we would have seen only ugliness.

There appeared to be something the color of gold encircling—which is what the Greek *stephanoi* means—the heads of these creatures, as before (6:2) less a crown of royalty than an honorific, like the wreath given as a prize to the victor. Thus it could be something as simple as a gold-colored band. As to the faces, were they literally a human-like countenance, or an arrangement that, from a distance gave the *impression* of eyes and a nose and a mouth, much as people referred to “the man in the moon” from the arrangement of craters and such on the surface of the moon? Hard to say.

v8

They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions.*

More than one commentator passes along the tidbit that this refers to “the antennae of the locust,” because “There is said to be an Arabic proverb in which the antennae of locusts are compared to girls’ hair” (Vincent). To be kind, I don’t see it. Two stray antennae, no matter how tall or long they are, do not at all bring to mind the hair of women. Is it not possible that, since he described them in the previous verse as “like horses,” this refers to long, flowing manes, as some true horses have?

Since horse’s teeth are larger than those of lions, I wonder if this remark might have more to do with the manner in which the mouth and teeth are used, rather than their size.

v9

They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.

As any properly outfitted war-horse, these are equipped with “breastplates like breastplates of iron,” which I take to mean a massive or heavy appearance (true iron would be too heavy). And supporting the view that these are *some* sort of locust, John points out that they have wings, and their sound “was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.” Just as the prophet Joel said:

Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;
And like war horses, so they run.
With a noise as of chariots
They leap on the tops of the mountains,
Like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble,
Like a mighty people arranged for battle. (Joel 2:4-5)†

* It’s funny what the book of the Revelation does to otherwise sensible scholars. It’s amazing some of the things one reads. It seems to send them off into la-la land. Take, for example, the old but perfectly respectable commentator Adam Clarke (1800s), who writes in reference to “they had hair as the hair of women” this: “No razor passes upon their flesh. Their hair long, and their beards unshaven.” Really? Where in the world does it say anything about *beards*? Nothing. Where did he come up with that? Let’s try very hard to stay with the text; what it says, not what it doesn’t say.

† Joel’s text is a “now—not yet” prophecy. The “now” is two-fold: an actual plague of locusts (Chapter One), from which he draws his imagery, and the Assyrian army’s invasion of Judah; the “not yet” is the eschatological setting of our study.

v10

They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.

We will see that under the sixth trumpet the lethality of *those* beasts (again, horses, this time with riders) will be “...by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths.” They will have stinging tails as well, but only to “harm.” Here, under the fifth trumpet, the stinging tails will be the instrument, the body part, that inflicts the misery and torment during the five-month period—without any killing.

v11

They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.

Proverbs tells us that

The locusts have no king,
Yet all of them go out in ranks; (Proverbs 30:27)

These “locusts,” however, have a king over them. Curiously John gives his name in both Greek and Hebrew, perhaps to indicate that his administration—his work, his impact—will affect both Gentile and Jew. In the Greek his name is *Apollyon* (Ah-poh-LOO-ohn), and in the Hebrew, *Abaddon* (Ah-ba-DOHN). The Hebrew means “place of destruction” personified; the Greek means “destroyer”—essentially the same.

The Hebrew version, *Abaddon*, has a pedigree in the OT Wisdom literature.

Read Job 26:5-6.

The NIVs and KJVs use “Destruction” (as a proper noun) in place of Abaddon; the point of that passage in Job is to confirm God’s sovereignty over even the underworld. Nothing, not even there, is hidden from His sight or is outside His rule. The word is used several more times in Job, Psalms and Proverbs.

Read Psalm 88:10-12.

I have concluded that the fallen angel handed the key, who opens its gates to release the horde of “locusts,” is almost certainly Satan, and that the “angel of the abyss,” the king of the locusts (and anyone else in the pit), is an archangel of Satan, one of his archons (rulers).

The word and name “Destroyer” stands in marked contrast to its opposite: Christ Jesus, who is the Savior. Jesus saves; Satan and his minions destroy.

v12

The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.

Back at the end of Chapter Eight, after the narrative for the first four trumpets, an eagle flying overhead offers a preview of things to come.

Read Revelation 8:13.

When Jesus, in Matthew 23, repeatedly exclaimed, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” He was either—or both—expressing grief over, or denouncing their behavior and philosophies. Here the same word (*ouai*, oo-WEH) declares a statement of empirical fact: distress *will* come upon you—three times.

Verse twelve in Chapter Nine announces that the first woe (the fifth trumpet) is now behind us—at least its execution—but there are two more woes waiting in the wings. Those will be the sixth trumpet and the seventh, which encompasses all the “bowls of wrath.”

In Revelation 11:14 a similar announcement is made that, “The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.”

These are “woes” indeed; not just with their suffering, torment, and death, but in the disruption of the very nature of the tripartite intersection of God and Man and Satan. Believers at the time of the Rapture will not be experiencing this firsthand, but just imagine for a moment that you are someone left on earth after that dramatic moment. Set aside your spiritual condition; you are just someone who lived through things the way they used to be, and are now living through the changes taking place during the subsequent seven years of the Tribulation.

Before, before the Rapture, before the Tribulation, there was God in His heaven and Satan somewhere below, with Man in the middle. As someone dwelling on earth, you perceive—in an admittedly simplistic sense—God as goodness and love, and you perceive Satan as evil and hate. But for the most part this is all academic to you; both of these forces—good and evil—are extraneous to your daily life, more philosophical than pragmatic, more thought-experiment than having any practical application to your existence. If pressed, you can imagine these two as actual, living beings, but they are so far distant, so amorphous to your senses that neither occupy much space or time in your life.

As the period of the Tribulation (which, of course, you do not know by that name) begins and proceeds, things on earth begin to get uncomfortable; life becomes increasingly a struggle, with wars, food shortages, peculiar atmospheric effects and cataclysmic upheavals on the earth. An individual in the military-political sphere is making himself known, gathering supporters. Soon he has taken center stage—not just in one nation, but in all. He seems to have all the right answers for all the wrongs in the world. Then, after another series of

strange insults to the natural world, you begin to realize that God in heaven may be something more complicated than just “goodness and love.”

It is apparent that most of the “bad” things happening on earth are being instigated from above—from God, or at least His domain in the heavens. The media are flooding the airwaves and the internet with blistering reports all about “The Wrath of God Has Come,” “Ancient Prophecies Fulfilled,” and “Get Out While You Can!” It would seem that your comfortable “God of love” has become a God of hate.

Then one terrible day you awake to skies filled with bizarre creatures released from the bowels of hell itself—horses that fly, or are they locusts with the faces of men? or scorpions with long, flowing hair? They cannot be defined, but fill the air like living pollution, darting here and there, anywhere they please, their long tails flashing like convulsive snakes, stinging painfully every person they touch. In fact, cities and countryside alike are littered with people writhing on the ground in agony, wishing only to die—please, *kill me*, anyone, *please* I can’t stand it!

But no one is permitted to die, and no one is permitted to kill.

No one needs to be told: these are demons, led by demons, created by the one demon worst of all, Satan.

His mask has been removed, and we now see him and his angels for what they truly are.

Destroyers.

John Walvoord: Such is the character of Satan and those who affiliate with him as wicked or fallen angels. Though in the modern world Satan often appears as an angel of light in the role of that which is good and religious, here the mask is stripped away and evil is seen in its true character. Satan and the demons are seen as the destroyers of the souls of men and as those who can only bring affliction. When divine restraint is released, as in this instance, the true character of the evil one is manifested immediately. Desperate indeed will be the situation of those who know not Christ in these tragic hours preceding His return to judge the wicked world. The tribulation period unmasks human wickedness and also demonstrates the true character of Satan [Ephesians 6:12]. In our modern day while Satan is still restricted it is easy to forget the great conflict which is raging between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. In the great tribulation, and especially in the time of the fifth trumpet, with the release of the confined demons the full character of Satan will be starkly manifested. For the first time in history all those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour will come under demonic possession and affliction. What is true in that hour is also true in some measure today, for there is no deliverance from the power of Satan nor from his affliction apart from salvation in Christ and the delivering power of God.

SESSION 24: THE TRIBULATION (PART FOURTEEN): THE SIXTH TRUMPET

Chart: The Sixth Trumpet: #13

PREFACE

We now come to the sixth trumpet, and, because by now we are well aware of how these judgments are ordered, it is, in practical terms, the *last* trumpet in the series, for the seventh will do nothing more than reveal the seven *bowl* judgments. Perhaps the most prominent question to be answered about the sixth trumpet is, *Does the narrative describe an army of supernatural demons or the machines and soldiers of modern warfare?* That may be one of the more interesting debates over this judgment, but there are clues scattered throughout the passage that will lead us, inevitably, to one conclusion. I would contend, however, that in the final analysis it makes little difference. The outcome is the same.

Read Revelation 9:13-15.

v13-14

Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,

Adam Clarke—he of our last session’s opinion regarding the locust’s “long hair,” that “No razor passes upon their flesh. Their hair long, and their beards unshaven”—states that this verse “is another...indication that the Jewish temple was yet standing.” It is pretty obvious that the locale for the scene in vv13-14 is not on earth at all, but in heaven. As vv1-2 of Chapter Eight make clear, the seven trumpet angels “stand before God” and are handed their instruments after 30 minutes of silence “in heaven.”

Further, most commentators associate the “golden altar” referenced here with the altar mentioned twice earlier—each time in the precincts of heaven. This is the heavenly original for the earthly copy, the altar of incense that was positioned just outside the partition separating the holy place, where only priests could go, from the most holy place and the ark of the covenant, where only the high priest could go, once a year on the Day of Atonement.¹ On earth this altar was where incense was burned, symbolizing the prayers of the people for mercy rising upward to God.

Its heavenly version seems, as implied here, to be associated similarly with the prayers of the saints for God to judge those inflicting them with persecution and death. This is thought to be the same altar referenced under the fifth seal.

Read Revelation 6:9-10.

¹Exodus 30:6

Walvoord: The inference is that this judgment like those preceding is partially an answer to the prayers of the persecuted saints on earth and a token of divine response and preparation for their deliverance.

and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,

We don't know the source of this voice, which, from the wording, seems to come from all four horns of the altar. It could be the voice of Christ, but we cannot be sure of that. The voice from the altar issues the command to the angel with the trumpet to

"Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

We are not told *why* these four angels have been bound at the Euphrates river,² but from this we can deduce that they are evil angels in Satan's camp, for nowhere in Scripture are *God's* (good) angels "bound." These have been bound, perhaps for some time, awaiting their release. They are Satan's angels, but they are ultimately under the authority and command of holy God. They have been waiting in readiness for the precise moment—"the hour and day and month and year"—according to the Lord's will.

It is not inconsequential that these angels are imprisoned at the "great river Euphrates." This historic river

- was one of the four rivers dividing the water flowing out of the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:14);
- so it was near the Euphrates that sin in man began, the first lie was told, the first murder committed, and the tower of Babel was erected;
- the river was the eastern boundary of the land promised to Abram (Genesis 15:18);
- in this region was located three world powers that oppressed Israel: Assyria, Babylon, and Medo-Persia;
- and over its dried riverbed will cross God's enemies to engage in the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:12). (John MacArthur)

v15

And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind.

MacArthur: Shockingly, from the altar associated with mercy [come] words of judgment. God is a merciful, gracious, compassionate God, yet His "Spirit shall not strive with man forever" (Genesis 6:3). When this trumpet judgment occurs, the time for mercy will have passed; the altar of mercy will become an altar of judgment. Sinful men will have finally and completely rejected God's gracious offer of salvation.

²The KJV has "in" the river.

One clue that these are demonic angels is that they do not receive a *command* to kill (or at least we are not so informed); all it takes is for them to be released and they immediately go forth to kill.

Read Revelation 9:16-19.

v16

The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

The first thing I find fascinating in this much debated verse is that there is no transitional text leading into it. The four angels are unbound—and suddenly, out of nowhere, there is an army of two hundred million! We may infer from this that this army, too, has been waiting in readiness for the moment to arrive. It was not required for the army to be collected and formed; it, like the angels, is already prepared and chomping at the bit.

The second fascinating aspect of this army is its sheer size. The literal Greek is *dyo myriades myriadon*. The Greek *myrias* (in English “myriad”) can be used to represent any unspecified, vast number, but typically means “ten thousand”—here, two myriads of myriads, or, in the KJV, “two hundred thousand thousand,” (twice ten-thousand times ten-thousand) or, as in many of our later versions (except ESV and NIV), “two hundred million.”

Quite a few commentators are quick to dismiss this very high specific number, claiming it is simply hyperbole because it would be impossible to support and manage an army of such vast size. In this they assume it is a *human* force. If we assume a *supernatural* force, then those misgivings are allayed. [More on this in a moment.](#)

It seems as if the apostle himself anticipates the scholars’ skepticism, for he immediately adds, “I heard the number of them,” as if to say, *Yes, that is precisely what was told me. Don’t doubt me.*

v17

And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.

A few months ago I wrote myself a note and added it to the pile of notes on my desk. I wrote it after some discussions in class and during a time when I was, to a certain extent, vacillating about when and how much to follow the literalist approach to interpreting these passages in Revelation.

At the time I was creating Chart #11, The Trumpets, and finding images to incorporate into the chart. At the same time I was reading some opinions—

even from those predominantly in the “literalist” camp—that suggested the army John presents under the sixth trumpet could very well be his attempt to describe engines of modern warfare. As I said in class at the time,

The Sixth Trumpet unleashes another group of bizarre, evil, supernatural manifestations, horses and riders who will kill one third of all mankind—or these may be just John’s way of describing modern machinery and weapons of war. Stay tuned. (from Session 18)

In other words, at the time I wasn’t sure. I was vacillating. In any case I was up against the deadline for Chart #11 and, knowing I would have no hope of finding images to support the bizarre descriptions in the text, I created a melange of war images that included marching ranks of WW1 soldiers and WW2 tanks firing.

In the reminder note to myself I wrote something along the lines of, “Don’t you think John would know what a horse looks like?” In other words, Would the apostle—even if he couldn’t identify what he was looking at—would he call a massive, lumbering, steel machine spewing flames a “horse”? He might refer to it as a “beast”—I would—but a *horse*? Of course not; *everyone* in the first century knew what a horse looked like, and could tell the difference between it and other machines of war, e.g., catapults and scorpios, siege ramps, the Roman “turtle.”

Just as with the so-called locusts under the fifth trumpet, John grabs at the first, most likely image available to him to describe what he is seeing. And just as the earlier beasts were not literally locusts, those before us now are not literally horses, but fantastical beasts conjured in the pits of hell for service to their master, Satan, and his angels. Thus they are able to appear instantly, and do not require the massive support of a human army.

the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone;

John first describes the riders, but really only by the colors in their armor: the color of fire (red), of hyacinth (dark blue or black), and brimstone (a sulfurous yellow)—in other words, the same colors of the poison that would be spewed from the mouths of the horses; “... and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.”

J. A. Seiss: They have riders, and yet the riders are parts of themselves, to whom no separate actions are ascribed. It is not the riders but the horses which do all the mischief. They are covered with coats of mail, the colors of which are the colors of fire, and hyacinthe, and sulphur, answering to the elements which they emit from their mouths.

and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions;

While in Kenya in 1982, Linda and I saw, firsthand, lions in the wild. Heretofore our experience had been with the lions at the San Diego Zoo and its Wild Animal Park. In the *true* wild, however, the cats looked rather different; having to defend one’s territory and hunt for one’s food leaves marks. The fe-

male lions, who do the hunting for the pride, were often skinnier than their captive counterparts from, first, the exertion of the chase and, second, from the low rate of success. The males, who get first crack at the captured prey, were better fed, but covered in scars because they are the ones who do battle with other cats for territory and food. Beyond that, the head of a male lion, especially with jaws and teeth agape in battle, is *huge*—and far more menacing and effective than the head of a horse. But these “lions” kill by other means.

and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.

Keying off something in the next verse, I would suggest that the lethality of these beasts is two-fold. First, there is *direct* assault: anyone in close proximity to individuals in this army would be either burned alive by the fire, or quickly asphyxiated by the smoke or brimstone fumes coming forth from the mouths of the horses. Second, however, because in vv18 & 20 John refers to this army’s effect as “plagues,” I take this to mean that there is a *lingering* assault, as well. By that I mean that the literal fumes from hell emanating from these “horse’s” mouths overwhelm earth’s immediate atmosphere to the extent that people will die simply from lingering exposure to this lethal smog. How many will be killed is stated in v18.

v18

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.

The population of the earth is presently fast approaching eight billion people (the population of the U.S. is just over 335 million). The result of the sixth trumpet will be that greater than one half of the world’s population will be dead: one fourth killed under the fourth seal; one third killed under the sixth trumpet, which equals one half of the earth’s population, not counting deaths from the other judgments. Thus, based on today’s population, at least four billion people will have been killed over the course of approximately four or five years. When one adds to the deaths the fact that society will no longer be in a good condition to *process* all those dead bodies, we can add one more reason not to be around to experience these days.

v19

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.

This verse supplies more details about the weaponry of the horses. These monsters will sport tails utterly unlike the tails of true horses. Though unlike in design, the use and effect of the tails are similar to those of the aforemen-

tioned “locusts,” whose tails could sting but not kill. Here I favor the position of Seiss over MacArthur; the latter claims that the horses’ tails kill, but the Greek is *adikousi*, “they do harm,” hurt, do wrong, damage. Seiss concurs: “As to the serpentine tails, nothing is said of power to kill, but only of power to injure, to lame, maim, sting, or hurt.” So it would seem that the tails are there to compound the misery inflicted on the populace by this army, leaving the weaponry of the mouth to inflict fatalities.

Read Revelation 9:20-21.

v20-21

The sin nature is the most tenacious characteristic of man. It has been part of every human being’s DNA since Eden. It is not just tenacious, but incredibly strong, for it is nurtured, it is sustained, it is fed and encouraged by the very enemy of God.

This sin nature in man is so strong, so pervasive, that it even overwhelms another strong characteristic of man: self-preservation. Most sane people will do just about anything to live, to survive—or their conscience will demand at least a high and righteous reason to sacrifice their own life, such as giving their life in exchange for the life of a loved one.

By the time of the Great Tribulation during the last things, at least three to four years into the period immediately after the church is removed from the earth, every person still walking this tortured earth will have had ample opportunity to know—or at least to hear—that salvation, peaceful, joyous eternal life with God is available in Christ Jesus. They also will have had ample opportunity to sample the alternative, for life on earth by this point will have been reduced to a quite literal hell on earth. They will *know* from experience what an eternity in perdition will be like.

Read Matthew 13:36-43.

We may marvel at the stubbornness of man; we may stand agog at the utter stupidity of clinging to a lifeless idol over choosing life eternal with the only true God, but the evidence is clear—not just in the final chapters of Scripture, but as we can see and experience even in the world around us—that there will be those who, to the very end, reject the grace and forgiveness proffered by God in Christ.

By the sixth trumpet the Lord God will have given everyone on earth a sample of hell, yet those not killed by this demonstration will tenaciously cling to their sin, unrepentant to the end.

We have seen that through the seven seals and the subsequent six trumpet judgments God, in a crescendo of violence, has heaped burning coals onto the inhabitants of this globe. Will He be justified? Does He have the right to do such things? Yes, He is sovereign God, but is this fair? Is this justice from a loving God?

For at least four to five thousand earth years, perhaps longer, God has

demonstrated His longsuffering, His patience, His forgiving response to repentance. Along with that, however, He has repeatedly warned about the price to be paid by man's unrepentant rebellion against Him. On top of that, knowing the nature of man since Eden, His unbounded love caused Him to offer Himself, in the person of the Son, as a final blood sacrifice for the sins of man. Man was incapable of saving himself, so God did it for Him.

So is He justified in pouring out the judgments of the seals and the trumpets, and finally, the seven bowls of wrath? Of course. For thousands of years God has warned that this was coming. Now, in this narrative, it has arrived.

The Day of the Lord.

Let me close with what Jude, the brother of Jesus, wrote.

Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah. These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever. It was also about these men that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." (Jude 1:5-15)

SESSION 25: THE TRIBULATION (PART FIFTEEN): THE SECOND PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART ONE

Charts: The Second Parenthetical Visions: #14 (with reference to Chart #11)

PREFACE

Look at Chart #11.

If we look for a moment at Chart 11 we can see that at the end of the sixth trumpet there are two parenthetical visions. Then, immediately after the seventh trumpet is sounded, there is another, larger series of parenthetical visions even before the first bowl of wrath is poured out, which is narrated in Chapter 16 of Revelation. Traditionally the events described between Revelation 11:15 and 15:8 have been placed at the mid-Tribulation point, three and one half years in, with the two we will be looking at in *this* session—the angel with the little book and the two witnesses—a parenthesis at the end of the sixth trumpet.

My intention is to place *less* emphasis on the “mid-point” time frame. In some respects this can be a bit artificial in regards to some events; in others it is of specific, even critical importance. So I will be addressing each parenthesis on its own merits, determining, for each, whether it should be seen as following the timeline or pointing to something occurring either prior to the narrative, or later in the Eschaton.

In this session we will be looking at the first of two parentheses at the end of the sixth trumpet, both of which, although including some rather mystical, even confusing elements, seem to fit neatly into the timeline. That is, the first’s purpose and events follow chronologically between the sixth and seventh trumpets,¹ and the second is grounded solidly in the Tribulation’s mid-point.

For these two studies we will be using Chart #14

THE ANGEL APPEARS

Read Revelation 10:1-2.

v1

I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire;

More than a few scholars would have us believe that this is Christ Jesus,² primarily because of the similarities—not identical, but similar—between this angel’s appearance and descriptions of Christ elsewhere.³ And we should admit that most angels in Scripture are not so gloriously or powerfully presented as

¹ see Revelation 10:7

² e.g., Seiss

³ e.g., Revelation 1:12-16

this one. But there are a number of solid reasons to understand this figure to be just as described in the text: “another angel.”

- Here once again we have John using the Greek *allon* (“another”), which means another of the *same* kind; that is, another angel like the trumpet angels, or perhaps in reference to the strong angel of 5:2. If it were Christ, he probably would have used *heteros* (another of a *different* kind).
- John also always uses a distinctive title when referring to Christ in the Revelation (e.g., “the Lamb,” “Word of God”). For him to refer to Christ here as just another angel would be extraordinary—and out of character.
- John says this is “another strong angel” (*angelon ischyron*) Nowhere in the NT is Christ Jesus called an angel. And elsewhere there are “strong” angels mentioned that are clearly not the Lord.
- Here the angel swears, “and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it.” Since Christ Jesus is God, He would not have uttered this, but would have, instead, sworn by Himself.⁴
- Finally, this angel descends and plants his feet on the earth. If this were Christ, it would not be in accord with multiple prophecies of Christ’s return. (MacArthur)

No, this is a “strong angel”—either one of high rank and power, or one with a powerful voice for making proclamations—just as the text says. John’s description emphasizes the angel’s holiness and power to execute judgment.

If one is still hung up by the grandeur of this angel, let me remind you that there is another “strong angel” described in such glowing, glorious terms:

“Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz and the diamond; The beryl, the onyx and the jasper; The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, Was in you. On the day that you were created They were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers, And I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created Until unrighteousness was found in you.’” (Ezekiel 28:12b-15)

This is, of course, a description of the “strong angel” Satan before “unrighteousness was found in” him.

I take the position that this angel is not the Christ, but there are some tantalizing similarities, found in Daniel’s visions, between this angel and the archangel Michael.

⁴ Hebrews 6:13-14

Read Daniel 12:1.
Read Daniel 12:6-7.

v2

and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land;

We will return to the “little book” shortly, but right now let’s focus on the posture and placement of this angel. His posture is one of authority, and his placement—“his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land”—implies a position of power and authority over the entire earth (Walvoord). Note that no less than three times in this scene, when the angel is referenced it includes the descriptive, “who stands on the sea and on the land.” That means it is important.

THE SEVEN PEALS OF THUNDER

Read Revelation 10:3-4.

Just about every week I give thanks to God for revealing Himself to us in His word. This is just one more confirmation that *our* God, the triune God of heaven, is unique among all the other supposed other gods of history and the only *true* God, for only He has put down in written form the facts of His character, His ways, His purpose for mankind—all for the edification of His followers, and so that others might be drawn to Him.

Yet there are things about our God that are *not* written down in His word, and even in this last book, called “The Revelation of Jesus Christ”—revelation, *apokalypsis*, the revealing, the uncovering—not *everything* is revealed. As we will see, some things are explicitly held back from us; some *mysterions* remain.

v3

and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.

Time and again in the Bible, God, or His representatives or messengers, establish their authority with loud, commanding sounds or words. We can imagine the Israelites gathered at the base of Mt. Sinai holding their ears against the sounds of thunder and trumpet coming from God.⁵ This time John describes the voice of the angel “as when a lion roars,” which, for anyone in close proximity, it would certainly set one back on his heels. Here, however, the purpose of the angel’s “roar” seems to be to call forth the “seven peals of thunder.” But again, as is so often the case, it isn’t really thunder, but thunderous voices speaking intelligible words.

⁵ Exodus 19:16

v4

When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; 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.”

I’m not sure what to make of it, but I find it interesting that all this having to do with the thunder, the voices speaking with the thunder, etc., is all in the feminine voice. If it is the voice of God, as is easy to imagine, why would it be in the feminine?

But, of course, that is not the take-away; what we are to remember from these two verses is that John, even though from the outset he was commanded, by Christ Jesus Himself, to “write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things”,⁶ here—in the first of two messages of which we will not be privy—John is told not to write down the words spoken by the “thunder,” but to “seal up” the words.

Let us be clear that we thus do not and cannot know what the thunders said. It is fruitless to offer conjecture, but there is a psalm that many commentators reference in connection with this passage. Note not just the mention of thunder, but also that seven times the psalmist David writes, “The voice of the Lord...”⁷ First he calls upon Israel to ascribe to—to regard as belonging to—the Lord, qualities of strength and majesty.

Read Psalm 29:1-2.

Then David proceeds to narrate how the Lord sounds as He uses these qualities.

Read Psalm 29:3-9.

And we might add to this Job 37:5

“God thunders with His voice wondrously,
Doing great things which we cannot comprehend.”

THE OATH

Read Revelation 10:5-7.

v5-6A

Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever,

⁶ Revelation 1:19

⁷i.e., *Yahweh*

Here we have probably the best evidence that this is not Christ Jesus; he is swearing by someone higher than himself. The Son of God would not do this.

6B

...who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it,

Again, in this description of the one in whom the angel makes his oath, he describes as much the Son as the Father.⁸ And just what is this oath so important that the angel swears to his veracity by the Godhead?

6C

...that there will be delay no longer,
KJV: ...that there should be time no longer.

Walvoord: This expression (Gr., *chronos*) has sometimes been misunderstood to mean that time will cease. The expression here, however, does not refer to time as a succession of chronological events; rather it means that time has run out, that is, that there will be no further delay.* The end is now to be consummated. Even in eternity, there will be a time relationship in that one event will follow another.

*Which is how most of our modern versions—even the NKJV—translate it.

This is a dramatic moment in the narrative, but the drama and impact of the statement is tempered by the fact that this is a slippery concept. By this I mean that, for example, at various places in Scripture “the Day of the Lord” refers to the last things as a whole, the Tribulation, the worst days of the Tribulation, the Rapture, or Christ’s second coming. In our first session I made the case for the Last Things (*eschaton*) being inaugurated by Christ’s first *parousia* (coming, presence) in Bethlehem. Some, however, say at His baptism, some say at His death or resurrection, while others say at the Rapture of the church. In various places, stated in different ways, it is implied that *OK, time’s up; this is it*—as here: “there will be delay no longer,” the “mystery of God is finished,” implying, *This is it, this is the end!* The next verse pinpoints this moment at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, yet after that we still have the seven bowl judgments, Christ’s return, Armageddon, et al. Look at what is proclaimed immediately when the seventh trumpet sounds.

Read Revelation 11:15-17.

Yet, this is pronounced well before Christ returns and takes His throne, with all the bowls of wrath yet to be poured out!

⁸Colossians 1:15-16

v7

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.

My strongest, overarching conclusion, after all just stated, and after reading the conclusions of others regarding “there will be delay no longer,” (v6) and “the mystery of God is finished,” (v7) is that the book of Revelation represents not just the *events and order* of the final days—that is, the culmination of God’s plan—but represents as well *how God perceives these final days*.

The evidence from The Revelation is not just that God is omnipotent, completely in charge of His creation, and completely able to mete out wrath and justice; not just that Christ Jesus is ultimate Lord, before Whom all knees will ultimately bow;⁹ but that God has His own unique perception of all this. He does not see as we see; He does not count time as we: for Him it is fluid, ever-changing, circling back upon itself; and, far more, to Him something can be already in a state of completion, when to us it is still in process.

So yes, we can agree that this passage means

- ““The mystery of God’ is His purposes for man and the world as revealed to both the OT and NT prophets” (Johnson). As David Guzik writes, “In this context, the mystery of God probably refers to the unfolding of His resolution of all things, the finishing of His plan of the ages.”
- Or that “the mystery of God” is “the secret of His allowing Satan to have his own way, and man too (that is to say, the wonder of evil prospering and of good being trodden underfoot)” (William Kelly).
- Or it could refer to Ephesians 1:10, “...the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth,” as MacArthur writes.

We can agree with those and perhaps other definitions for these phrases. Beyond that, however, this passage means that in the eyes and understanding of God, Jesus could declare even at the outset of His earthly ministry, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”.¹⁰

And in Psalm 2:7 we have the familiar prophecy of a Messianic King, “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.’” All the verbs are in the *perfect* tense (corresponding to our *past* tense), meaning the action is completed. So the “today” refers to a point in time prior to the psalm’s writing. Yet this was written (probably) almost one thousand years before the birth of Christ.

Prophecy, of course, but it is written not that it will occur at some point in the future, but as if it has *already* occurred—because, I would contend, that in the mind and perception of a God who dwells outside of time, it has.

⁹ Philippians 2:10

¹⁰ Mark 1:15

Thus, I conclude, we cannot, and should not try to require the text and events in the Revelation to always obey an earthly, human perception of time and sequence.

THE “LITTLE BOOK”

Read Revelation 10:8-11.

v8

Then 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.”

We now hear again from the voice that earlier forbade John to write down the words of the seven thunders. Now the apostle is told to take the book—the aforementioned “little book”—from the strong angel. And we are again reminded that he “stands on the sea and on the land.”

Here it is just “the book,” (in the better manuscripts) but all other mentions of it have “*little book*”¹¹ because the Greek is *biblaridion*, which is the diminutive form of *biblion* (book). Because of this—and because of what happens to it—most scholars, but not all, conclude that this is a different book (or scroll) from the one with the seven seals.¹²

v9

So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book...

No matter how imposing, even terrifying, the appearance of the strong angel, just as any of us would in the same situation, John—in his vision—obeys the voice from heaven.

And he said to me, “Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.”

This is not something new to God’s word. The same thing was done to the prophet Ezekiel; the same imagery of eating the words of God was mentioned by Jeremiah; and David in Psalm 19 sings that “The judgments of the Lord are...sweeter also than honey and the dripping of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Your servant is warned.” Let’s look at the Ezekiel passage.

Read Ezekiel 3:1-4.

The passage in Ezekiel is essentially parallel to our passage in Revelation, for in both a document is “eaten” and then follows a command—to Ezekiel, from Yahweh; to John, from the angel and/or the voice from heaven—to carry those words to others. The extra part in Revelation is the “bitterness.”

¹¹ vv2, 9, 10

¹² Chapters 5-6

v10

I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

Two questions remain for us, neither of which can be answered with certainty:

What is the content of the little book?

If we make the logical assumption that the content feeds the eater with that which will be required for the second command in v11: "And they said to me, 'You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings,'" then the answer is dependent on how the second command is interpreted. If that command is to "prophesy" (tell forth) for the purpose of saving as many as possible from "many peoples and nations and tongues and kings," then the eating of the scroll represents the ingestion of God's word—and specifically, in the Revelation scene, the gospel. And those words are indeed sweet; as the psalmist writes, "Your testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul observes them. The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple. I opened my mouth wide and panted, For I longed for Your commandments" (Psalm 119:129-131).

If, however, the command is a recommissioning of John for the task he is already about—the recording of the apocalypse—then the book could contain those events, or an understanding of them.

Why the bitterness?

This was not part of the Ezekiel experience; here it may add weight to the possibility that the content of the book pertains to the judgments to follow.

Anything that reveals the power and glory of our Almighty God is something sweet to those who love Him, but if that entails something like the harsh judgments of the upcoming seven bowls, in which many more will suffer and die, this would add to the sweetness a layer of bitterness, even sorrow.

Let me close with some of John MacArthur's conclusions.

[The word in v11] "again" indicates John was being commissioned a second time (cf. 1:19) to write the rest of the prophecies God was going to give him. What he was about to learn would be more devastating than anything yet revealed—and more glorious. He was to be faithful to his duty to record all the truth he had seen and would soon see... So John is to warn of all the bitter judgments coming in the seventh trumpet and the seven bowls... He was to write the prophecies and distribute them, so as to warn all people of the bitterness of judgment to come, and of death and hell... This chapter presents an interlude of hope tinged with bitterness that reminds all Christians of their evangelistic responsibilities to warn the world of that day.

SESSION 26: THE TRIBULATION (PART SIXTEEN): THE SECOND PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART TWO

Chart: The Second Parenthetical Visions: #14

PREFACE

Look at Chart #14.

Once we examined Chapter Ten and I began work in earnest on Chapter Eleven, I sensed that something had changed; something was different about the material before us. For a while I couldn't explain it, but then I realized that with Chapter Eleven, and the opening of the second parenthesis at the end of the sixth trumpet, our perspective had shifted—perhaps subtly, but sufficient for me to notice that something had changed.

So far in our march through the Tribulation, we have uncovered a systematic series of judgments: plagues and eruptions and crashing stars and fantastical beasts that would terrify Frankenstein's monster. In one sense the narrative's very ferocity has held us at arm's length; no one reading or hearing these words can claim any similar experience with such things. *So far it is as if we have been viewing this from afar through a wide-angled lens.* Now, however, things are starting to get real; with this series of parentheses, and especially with Chapter Eleven, it is as if we are now seeing these passing events up close and personal—as if we could be experiencing them ourselves, or that we are reading history, rather than future prophecy. Oh, there will be more fantastical prophecies, but now, in a sense, we are no longer just viewing prophecy from afar; now it is as if we are on the ground, experiencing very real events.

TAKING A STAND

Perhaps more than any other portion of the Revelation, Chapter Eleven requires that we take a firm stand on our interpretive position. Every commentator agrees with—and almost always cites specifically—Henry Alford's remarks at the beginning of his notes on Chapter Eleven, found in his famous *Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary* (1863-1878):

Alford: This passage may well be called, even more than that previous one, 10:1ff, the *crux* of interpreters; as it is undoubtedly one of the most difficult in the whole Apocalypse.

One of the reasons I so seldom refer to the commentary of Alan F. Johnson¹ is that he cleaves to no one interpretive method: one passage he interprets literally, the next he interprets figuratively. His position on Chapter Ten was pretty much right in line with a literalist approach, whereas his position on Chapter Eleven runs screaming *away from* the literalist approach; for example, his position is that the “temple” located in the “holy city” in vv1-2 figuratively represents the Christian (universal) church.

¹ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*; Frank E. Gaebelien, General Editor

This is why I say that Chapter Eleven (which most agree continues the narrative from Chapter Ten) forces us to choose sides—especially with our position regarding Christians and Israel during the Last Things: Do we say that the church has become the new Israel and, by extension, the new “chosen people” of God, or do we say that the two remain separate and are treated differently during the Last Things? As stated in the third session of this class, ours is a *dispensational* approach, meaning, as summarized by Michael J. Vlach,

Vlach: Dispensationalism is an evangelical theological system that addresses issues concerning the biblical covenants, Israel, the church, and end times. It also argues for a literal interpretation of Old Testament prophecies involving ethnic/national Israel, and the idea that the church is a New Testament entity that is distinct from Israel.

If that is our well-reasoned approach to the church and Israel, and the study of the Eschaton, then we cannot conveniently change sides willy-nilly whenever things become difficult. So we will bravely soldier on through these challenging passages in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, and I’ll permit Dr. Walvoord to describe our approach:

Walvoord: The guiding lines which govern the exposition to follow regard this chapter as a legitimate prophetic utterance in which the terms are taken normally. Hence, the great city of 11:8 is identified as the literal city of Jerusalem. The time periods are taken as literal time periods. The two witnesses are interpreted as two individuals. The three and a half days are taken literally. The earthquake is a literal earthquake. The seven thousand men who are slain by the earthquake are seven thousand individuals who die in the catastrophe. The death of the witnesses is literal as are their resurrection and ascension.

MEASURING THE TEMPLE

vv1-2

Read Revelation 11:1-2.

As in Amos 7, for one example, there are times when the Lord God measures things in preparation for their destruction. At other times, however, He measures them for the purpose of claiming, or authenticating them.

When we purchased our property outside Winterset thirty-one years ago, part of the process was to order a survey to determine precisely what we were paying for, and to establish, for the public record what would subsequently be called “our land.” This is what either the strong angel of Chapter Ten or God (or Christ) commands John to do with the temple in Jerusalem as Chapter Eleven opens.* Note that nowhere are the *results* of his measurements mentioned, because that’s not the point; the point is establishing ownership, not dimensions.

This then raises the obvious question: *Which temple is it?* Some say the temple in heaven—but that makes no sense whatsoever, considering the sec-

* Only the KJVs identify the voice with the angel; the better manuscripts do not include this.

ond part of v2. There are a total of five earthly temples mentioned in God's word (not counting the tabernacle tent):

1. Solomon's temple
2. Zerubbabel's (built after the exile)
3. Herod's temple (begun in 19 BC)
4. The temple built and/or used during the Tribulation
5. The Millennial temple built by the Lord Himself (Ezekiel 40-48)†

† I will conclude, in the hand-out accompanying Session 50, that the "Millennial Temple" will *not* be built.

The temple in Chapter Eleven is the fourth temple, the one built after (or just prior to) an agreement with Antichrist, where he permits them to restore temple sacrifices. The operative text is found in Daniel 9:27, at the end of his prophecy regarding the "Seventy Weeks":

And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week 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.

To paraphrase, Antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for seven years,² for them to restore the temple worship and sacrifices. But after only three and one half years,³ Antichrist will renege on his agreement and put a stop to the sacrifices and offerings.

This raises a second question, one we discussed back in Session Ten: *Why would there be blood (atoning) sacrifices during the Tribulation?* There are two reasonable possibilities: First, according to Gleason Archer, a well-respected biblical scholar, "this refers to Messianic Jews newly in Christ (since the rapture). Since these Jewish believers trust in Jesus as their Messiah, it may well be that the sacrifices will be conducted as memorial services like the Lord's Supper, rather than for atonement purposes as in OT times."

A second possibility is that, since this agreement between the Jews and Antichrist will be established during the earlier period of the Tribulation, these may just as well be Jews clinging to their ancient traditions, celebrating the reestablishment of the temple as God's sanction of a revival of the Mosaic Law and its sacrifices. This is John Walvoord's position. I lean toward the latter, but either is possible.

There is a final question: Some might wonder, *How can a new temple be built in such a short period of time?* After all, Herod's temple took eighty-three years to build. But who says that a new temple for the Tribulation must equal the size and grandeur of Herod's? The temple began as a modest tabernacle⁴ carried about in the desert; this one might resemble in appearance something like a local community center. Who can say; God's word does not.

² i.e., one week of years, the span of the Tribulation

³ i.e., "the middle of the week" of years

⁴ literally, tent

John is handed a measuring rod⁵ for the measuring. In the Jordan Valley grows a very tall reed (15-20 ft.), hollow and lightweight—yet sufficiently rigid to be used as a walking stick—which was commonly used as a measuring device.

At the end of v1 we see that God is also measuring His possession of remaining Israel: “measure...those who worship in it.”

MacArthur: 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.

v2

“Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.”

In v2 the instruction includes what John is *not* to measure. The word translated “temple” in v1 and v2 is not *hieron*, which would refer to the entire temple complex, but *naon*, which refers to the sanctuary only: the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. And here we have our first time stamp for this prophecy.

...for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.”

There is healthy debate over whether these forty-two months refer to the first or second half of the Tribulation; however, not just the placement of the vision itself but its content seems to indicate the time of the *Great* Tribulation, the *second* half.

[Turn over to Chapter Twelve.](#)

Just for the moment, for time consideration, I’m going to lift out a brief supporting reference without giving full context. We will shortly be studying this passage in-depth, so let me, for now, just point us to vv5-6. Here Israel is presented as a woman who has given birth to a son—Christ Jesus, the Messiah—whom the red dragon—Satan—is trying to destroy. At God’s direction and preparation, she flees to a place of safety for a period of time.

And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

What strikes me first about this passage is how artfully and succinctly the first sentence summarizes, in just a handful of words, the entirety of the gospel, including Christ’s ascension, and the Millennium! But that’s not what we’re here for.

⁵literally, reed

As v3 in our passage confirms, forty-two months equals “twelve hundred and sixty days,” or three and one half years. Around the middle of the Tribulation, when Antichrist removes his mask, takes over the temple sanctuary and openly turns against Israel, God will conduct Israel to a place of security in the wilderness—a “sanctuary,” as it were. There this remnant will be “nourished” (literally, made to grow) for three and one half years. [Back to Chapter Eleven.](#)

This means that Gentiles—“the nations,” anyone not Jewish—will “tread under foot” not just the outer courtyard of the temple, but the entire city of Jerusalem for forty-two months. Why that marker? Because then Christ returns, and everything will change.

THE TWO WITNESSES vv3-14

Now, just as when the sixth trumpet sounded and abruptly out of nowhere an army of two hundred million appears, in v3 the “someone” speaking declares the working orders for “my two witnesses”—as if we are supposed to already know who they are.

Read Revelation 11:3-5.‡

The first thing that catches my eye is that the text says “my witnesses.” In our previous session we did not conclusively identify “the voice which I heard from heaven” (v8), which orders John to seal up the words of the thunder and to take the book from the angel, and here (probably) dictates the first three verses. Here, however, seems to be good evidence that it is indeed either Christ or God the Father. Yet, softening that conclusion is that none of our common versions which do capitalize pronouns do so here—even the NASB, which is rather generous in its capitalization. Nonetheless, I think the voice is that of Deity.

...clothed in sackcloth.

Their apparel of sackcloth is a sign of mourning over the doom which is to come, as well as a sign of humility before God.

I will not take up time trying to identify these two mysterious figures; trust me, much ink has been spilled and many trees murdered by scholars and commentators in their vain attempt to put names to these two men. God’s word is silent on this, and there is no good reason to speculate. Absent names, we conclude that they are, like Melchizedek,⁶ mysterious yet human, two male individuals (the nouns used to speak of them are all in the masculine) who probably emerge from the general population of post-Rapture believers, empowered by God to dramatically present the gospel with not just words but signs and wonders. MacArthur adds, “The two witnesses will proclaim to the world that the disasters occurring during the last half of the Tribulation are the

⁶ Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1-4

judgments of God. They will warn that God’s final outpouring of judgment and eternal hell will follow.”

v4

God’s word does, however, identify them by a different manner.

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

This is a reference to the prophecy of Zechariah—here the “not yet” portion of a “now” closer to his own time. [Keep your finger in Revelation and turn please to the prophecy of Zechariah](#) (the next to last book before the NT). In Chapter Four of Zechariah we find the pertinent text.

Read Zechariah 4:1-3.

When the prophet asks the angel to explain these items, he is told, “This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.”

Zerubbabel was the governor, or political leader, leading some of the exiles back to Judah to rebuild the temple. Zechariah then asks the angel about the two olive trees, which, in the vision, are connected to the lamps, thus permanently supplying them with oil.

Then he said, “These are the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.”

In the “Now” of this prophecy, God is graphically demonstrating to the prophet that it would be His Spirit alone, working through the two leaders Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua. The setting is one of spiritual revival, and the restoration of the temple—i.e., worship of Yahweh—solely through the working of the Spirit of God.

In our Revelation passage, the “not yet” of this prophecy is fulfilled in the two witnesses, empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring revival and the national conversion of Israel to the Messiah, and, after the upheaval of the Tribulation, the building of the Millennial temple. As you return to Chapter Eleven, note that both visions end with the same statement, identifying these individuals as, “These are...[the two anointed ones/the two olive trees and the two lampstands] that stand before the Lord of the [whole] earth.”

DEFENSE

v5

Verse five reveals some of the supernatural powers God has given these two prophets.

And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way.

Here is a primal force that has always been in God's arsenal for dealing with enemies of His righteousness and sovereignty.

- In Genesis 19 it is fire and brimstone with which the Lord God dispatches Sodom: "Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven, and He overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground."
- In 2 Kings 1, Elijah calls down fire upon the soldiers sent by Ahaziah (ah-hah-zee-ah); "Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. And he said to him, 'O man of God, the king says, "Come down.'" Elijah replied to the captain of fifty, 'If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.' Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty." This happened twice (the captain of the third group of soldiers not surprisingly tried a different approach).
- It was fire with which the Lord dealt with Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16, and it was how He dealt with the sin of unauthorized fire and essence from the two sons of Aaron in Leviticus 10.

Here, however, the fire—just as with that launched from the "horses" under the sixth trumpet—emanates from (flows, proceeds, goes forth, pours from) the mouths of the two witnesses. This fire serves as both protection and manner of judgment upon anyone attempting to harm God's messengers.

The narrative later in this chapter that describes the celebration when these witnesses are finally killed illustrates how very much they were hated by "those who dwell on the earth" (v10)—*and* had need of this rather dramatic and lethal means of protection.

It is not at all difficult for us today to imagine the extraordinary level of animus leveled against these two. Their message will not be one that is welcomed; it will be a time very much like our own—only worse. MacArthur describes a societal environment not too different from our own when he writes,

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.

Their supernatural abilities will be intimidating and feared. Since it is hard to imagine that technology by then will have taken a *backward* turn—since even today the entire civilized world can know in seconds what is happening on the other side of the globe—no doubt a similar and even more instantaneous

means of communication will ensure that, except for those few who accept their message, everyone globally will hate them.

From time to time in this study we need to be reminded that the days described in the Eschaton are not *our* days—and these two witnesses are a good example of that. It will be a far different dispensation than our own—the Church age, the age of Grace. Let me close by reading some of what Dr. J. A. Seiss writes about this.

Seiss: “The two olive trees” appear, but the golden candlestick is gone, and in its place is nothing but two lone lamps—the two Witnesses themselves. Ministers of God are present, but their spirit and method are entirely different from what pertains to ministers of the Gospel in the present dispensation. These witnesses kill, torment, deal out fiery judgments upon their enemies, and avenge and resent the very wish to injure them, even before it is outwardly manifested in act.

This is not according to the Christian spirit, and very unlike the commands which are upon us now. We are not to avenge ourselves, not to render evil for evil, not to smite and kill our enemies, but to love them and do good to them, and to be “harmless as doves.” Even Jesus himself, who had all power, refused to exercise it after the style of these Two Witnesses, and has given us commandment to follow his steps. He tells us that he came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them; and in this spirit his servants have ever acted. Stephen is stoned, James is beheaded, Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned, Peter is crucified, Polycarp is burned, Antipas is put to death; but neither of them resists, nor attempts to defend himself by miracle, or to avenge the wrong inflicted.

But here are ministers of God of another order. “Fire issueth out of their mouth and devoureth their enemies; and if any one willeth to injure them, thus must he be killed.” The preaching of the Gospel is a thing of joy and gladness. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation!” (Is. 52:7.) But these Witnesses are arrayed in sackcloth, and their very garb betokens calamity and judgment. Nature itself is joyful over the course of the messengers of grace. The prophetic word was, “The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree.” (Is. 55:12, 13.)

But here the heavens are shut up that no rain falls, the waters are turned to blood, the earth is smitten by many a plague, and they that dwell on it are tormented. “Peace on earth and good will toward men” is the keynote of the Gospel; but the ministry of these Witnesses is one of the three great apocalyptic woes.

It is simply impossible, therefore, to find place for these Witnesses as Gospel ministers of the present dispensation. They have quite another commission, and operate for quite other ends.

They remind us rather of the old theocratic order, when Jeroboam's hand was withered by the unnamed "man of God" when put forth to lay hold on him, and fire from heaven consumed the soldiers of Ahaziah that came against Elijah on the hill.

(J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse: A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Revised Text*, Eighth Edition., vol. 2 (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1901), 211–213.)

SESSION 27: THE TRIBULATION (PART SEVENTEEN): THE SECOND PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART THREE

Charts: The Second Parenthetical Visions: #14, with reference to Chart #2

PREFACE

[Look at Chart #14.](#)

In our last session we were introduced to the “Two Witnesses,” two mysterious men, prophets of doom, evangelists with extraordinary supernatural powers. They may just be the most obscure characters in this eschatological drama; my guess is that many even in the church have never heard of them. Yet in them we see echoes of John the Baptist—fiery speech, prophet of doom, abnormal attire—and even Christ Jesus—death, resurrection, and ascension (vv11-12). These two men—whoever they are—play an important role in the progress of the Tribulation, and the Eschaton as a whole: they foretell the approaching holocaust of the Third Woe—the Seventh Trumpet with its Seven Bowls of Wrath.

Read Revelation 11:5-6.

[Look at Chart #2.](#) These are powerful prophets and evangelists—and it is clear from what we know of them that they are not from the “turn the other cheek” school of evangelism. Remember, as I discussed last week, this is a different time from ours—specifically, a different dispensation from the Church Age, or dispensation of Grace. The period of the Tribulation is not generally demarcated as a specific dispensation; in my own chart the sequence moves from Grace to Kingdom—i.e., the Millennium. But whether or not one includes the Tribulation as its own dispensation (there is no “official” list), clearly once the Tribulation is inaugurated after the Rapture, the Dispensation of the Church Age has been closed. The church is gone; for a moment at least, every Christian on planet earth has been removed. Which means the rules have changed. Yes, some can and do acknowledge Jesus as the true Messiah during the next seven years, and many of them will be killed as a result. But it is painfully obvious to anyone left behind, that God is dealing with mankind in a different manner than He did before. [Look at Chart #14 again.](#)

v6

These [i.e., the two witnesses] have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

A three-and-one-half year drought is not new in God’s word. James gives us the *Reader’s Digest* version of it occurring when Elijah was prophesying.

*Between that similarity and the same Elijah calling down fire on his enemies, some have surmised that the prophet Elijah is one of the two witnesses in Revelation. And some surmise that the other witness may be Enoch, based on their other powers listed in v6 and that they were taken up without dying. I leave that conclusion to whomever may wish to entertain it.

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 earth for three years and six months. (James 5:17)*

Let's back up a minute before we proceed. I am usually reluctant to dig too deeply into punctuation, but here perhaps it is worth a moment of our time. All of our common versions—except the KJV, which does not insert quotation marks—place quotation marks in the text beginning in the middle of v1 with, “Get up and measure...” with the closing quotation marks at the end of v3. Yet the text that follows (vv4-10) does indeed *sound* as if the narration by God or Christ Jesus is continuing. This may be why it *feels* different to us: This is not a vision being played out before John, with him dutifully describing it to us, but is something being *told to* John. Only the YLT (which I doubt anyone carries with them to church services) places the closing quotation marks at the end of v10.

Whether we call it “the gospel” or not, these two men are “witnessing” (telling of) Christ to a world that has become a swamp of evil and depravity. Because this is no longer a period of God’s forbearance of sin, the tools with which these witnesses deliver their message are instruments of wrath.

- If they stand before someone who even wishes to harm them, they roast him on the spot to a condition of well-done.
- Apparently not in reaction to attack, but just because, they command that it will not rain during their time of ministry.
- Like Moses, they can turn flowing water to blood, and call down plagues of any and all sorts at will, and as often as they like.

Not surprisingly, these two men are hated with a passion. For three and one half years they can say what they like and no one is able to get rid of them. They can’t be “canceled,” their social media accounts cannot be censored or shut down; no one can shut them up, even though every word from their mouths is as abrasive as sandpaper to everyone in this depraved society. They will be hated with a passion, so that when they *are* finally killed, the world will celebrate as the democrats would with dancing in the streets if Donald Trump were assassinated. But how will they be killed?

Read Revelation 11:7-8.

v7

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.

We had better pause for a moment and get our bearings; just who is this “beast that comes up out of the abyss” who kills the witnesses? You are not

alone if you are a little confused. As always, commentators do not agree: Walvoord says this is Satan; MacArthur says this is Antichrist; Guzik says “most likely” Satan; Robertson says Antichrist; Seiss doesn’t say. Let me show you why I say it is Antichrist—even though later (13:1) he is described as “a beast coming up out of the sea.”

First don’t confuse this with the reference from 9:11 where the king of the locusts is described as the “angel of the abyss.” That “angel” we concluded was one of Satan’s (the fallen “star” of 9:1) archons, or lieutenant angels. Here in our passage the potential confusion arises because the individual is referred to as a “beast,” and there is more than one beast in the Eschaton. The question we need to answer is, *Is the beast here, who is out of the abyss, different from or the same as the beast out of the sea in 13:1? Let’s first look at Chapter Thirteen, beginning with v1.*

And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

The dragon is clearly identified with Satan. Then John sees a beast coming out of the sea; he describes him as “having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems.” It should not be surprising to us that “the beast’s” description matches that of the dragon in 12:3, since Antichrist is the “son” of Satan, just as Christ is the Son of God.¹ Even though the physical—albeit fantastical—description is the same, we know that they are not the same individual because here it says that “the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.” Thus the beast out of the sea is not the dragon, but receives his power from him. *Now turn to Chapter Seventeen, v7.*

Here we have a different woman: not Israel, but Babylon, sitting on “a scarlet beast.” We’ll not take the time now to dissect this prophecy; we are only concerned for the time being with the identification of the beast.

And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. And the angel said to me, “Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.”

At this point we know the beast is either Satan or the beast out of the sea, but as we read on, it becomes clear that it is Antichrist, who will rule over ten

¹ John 14:9. Note: I am not at all suggesting that Antichrist is deity, as Christ is deity, but that by the Bible’s use of the word “son” as meaning one who *behaves* like his father, Antichrist behaves like Satan as Christ behaves like Father God.

kingdoms. But note the next verse.

“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.”

Here Antichrist is referred to as “the beast... about to come up out of the abyss.” Finally, in the OT a correlation is expressed, metaphorically, between the sea and the realm of satanic activity. [Look at Isaiah 27:1.](#)

In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent,
With His fierce and great and mighty sword,
Even Leviathan the twisted serpent;
And He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea.

Thus we conclude that “the beast that comes up out of the abyss” in 11:7 is Antichrist.

MacArthur: 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.

The purpose of the verse, however, is to state that, “When they have finished their testimony...the beast...will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.” Just how Antichrist kills them is not stated, but we know that he likes to behead his enemies (20:4).

Here is a picture of God’s sovereignty, and I love what David Guzik has to say about this verse.

Guzik: ...their ministry is not cut short. They fully accomplish their task (when they finish their testimony). Praise God, we cannot be taken off of this earth until we finish our testimony. The devil does not have power over our lives. We are witnesses of the Lord, and He will protect us until our testimony is finished. This passage illustrates the difference between being a *witness* and giving *testimony*. *Witness* is not something we do; it is something we are. Giving *testimony* is what a witness does.

As to the time frame for this v7 episode, even I can do the math. Verse 3 says that the two witnesses will prophesy for 1,260 days—that is, three and one half years. If, as v7 states, they have now been killed, then in the narrative timeline, the curtain is coming down on the Tribulation and the return of the Lord is imminent. But some of you may be saying, “Wait a minute; we’ve still got the seven bowls left.”

J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* was a saga masterfully told, but the author had a rather odd way of organizing and writing some parts of the story.

In some portions of his trilogy, especially in the middle third, he could follow the trek of a couple or few characters for a hundred pages or more. Then he would fall back in time, pick up a couple other characters and follow just *their* trek for another hundred pages over the same period of time. Then do it again for a *third* group.

That is what is going on here. From Revelation 11:3-12 the last half of the Tribulation *from the perspective of the two witnesses* is told to John. Then the seventh trumpet sounds (11:15) and a series of visions are given to the apostle, followed by the outpourings of the seven bowls of wrath—only then followed by the return of Christ. Obviously the text folds back upon itself, covering the same period of time more than once from multiple perspectives.

v8

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.

They would not even bury the two men. J. A. Seiss helps us grasp the immensity of this outrage.

Seiss: This is so intense an outrage upon common decency and humanity, that it is full of significance here. Even to the worst of criminals the law awarded burial on the same day of their execution (Deut. 21:22, 23); but all law and right feeling is set at defiance with regard to these prophets of God. The exposure of their dead bodies tells of a most extraordinary malignity and spite, and attests the extraordinary potency and effectiveness of the objects of it. It shows at once a devilishness of unwonted intensity in the people, and a terribleness of efficiency in the Witnesses in provoking a fiendishness and resentment so monstrous and unrelenting that it could not be placated by their death, but continued to reek and vent itself upon their lifeless remains after they were dead.

The principal territory for the testimony of these two witnesses was in and around Jerusalem (not insignificantly, at the same time the center of Antichrist's power). Yet commentators have done their best to mishandle this verse, saying, well, it could be Rome or Egypt or... The term translated "mystically" in the NASB is better rendered, as in the KJVs, "spiritually," since the Greek is *pneumatikos*. In other words this "great city" had sunk so low in its wickedness that it could be mistaken for Sodom, or the land of Egypt. The caper, of course, is that this city is identified as one "where also their Lord was crucified." End of discussion.

Read Revelation 11:9-10.

v9

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.

Someone from the first century—or even the first half of the twentieth century—might read this and wonder how “the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations” could possibly—in just three and one half days—attend this gruesome visitation. But then, this is prophecy, isn’t it. And those of us today—a time when people from all over the world can watch a nest-full of bald eagle fledglings grow up in Decorah, Iowa in real time—can well imagine how the entire world could be watching two corpses lying on a street in Jerusalem. And v10 explains why this perversity of leaving exposed the two corpses was so important.

v10

And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

John Walvoord brings out an interesting aspect to the first phrase of this verse: “those who dwell on the earth,” which is repeatedly used in the Revelation. We would read that as simply referring, literally, to all who reside on planet earth. But in the Revelation it means something more, and all we need do is revisit a verse we just looked at to see what Walvoord is referring to. [Look again at 17:8.](#)

“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.”

Repeatedly this phrase is used in Revelation—twice in this verse alone—to refer “to those who are not only dwelling on the earth in their physical bodies but whose hope is limited to the present life”—that is, the persistently unregenerate, the lost, those who worship something other than the God of heaven and His Son. And it is not hard at all for us to understand this, for we are surrounded by such a culture: those who place all their trust and hope in this present world, rather than the next, ruled by Christ Jesus.

And here in this prophecy we see such people turning the death of these two witnesses into a perverse second Christmas, with dancing in the streets and even celebrating by the exchanging of gifts!

Just as today, it would seem that what comes along with such a worldview is a healthy dollop of stupidity. People without the Spirit of God think that

killing the messenger will also destroy the truth of the message itself. *If we can just kill those spouting this gloom and doom, then the gloom and doom will not occur!* But no; killing the messengers does not kill the message. In this instance, however, it backfires on these depraved simpletons even more than that. Yes, the wrath of God will proceed; the judgment to come *will* occur; those whose names have not been recorded in the Book of Life *will* spend an eternity in the lake of fire. But God has not forgotten His faithful witnesses. Their testimony is not yet over.

Read Revelation 11:11-14.

v11

But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.

Father God knows how to do this. After roughly the same amount of time He had done it for His own Son, and now He raises back to life those who have carried and delivered His word during these final days. Before a world-wide audience, seeing it happen in real time, these two who had been slaughtered and left to rot in the streets for three and a half days will take to their feet. They will stand up and let everyone get a good look at what the Sovereign God can do for those He loves and who love Him. And the hearts of all the viewers around the world will be filled with fear.

v12

And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.

In a scene that reminds us of both the baptism and ascension of Jesus, the Lord God speaks—audibly, so that everyone in the world can hear—His affirming invitation. In point of fact, it is less an invitation than an imperative command: “Do this now!”² This moment and the Father’s sentiment is not that different from what the voice said at Christ’s baptism. Both express approval; both are in public so that others will see and hear. The difference between the two is that with Jesus it was an affirmation to send Him off for the beginning of His ministry, while in *this* scene it is the Lord declaring, “Well done, good and faithful slave[s]. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master”.³

² as reflected in the ESV

³ Matthew 25:21

v13

And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Whenever I read this verse I wonder if it reflects the warfare that overwhelms Jerusalem just before Christ's return and the geographic turmoil that occurs when He stands atop the Mount of Olives—that is, *Does this verse represent a condensed version of the events of Zechariah 14?* Since I can find no one else who even considers the point, I am, apparently, a solitary voice—and almost certainly this is *not* describing the same event.

So Father God lifts out His faithful witnesses and punctuates the moment with a powerful earthquake that levels a tenth of Jerusalem, with seven thousand fatalities. It is hard not to see retribution in this; as before, witness the godly behavior of a different dispensation. This is not a period of grace and forbearance. God retrieves His servants then punishes the city that would so hate and abuse them—even after their death.

...and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The typical scholarly response to this (MacArthur and Johnson excepted) is voiced by M. R. Vincent: “The phrase signifies not conversion, nor repentance, nor thanksgiving, but *recognition*.” But Alan F. Johnson offers a fairly convincing argument for this describing true repentance and conversion.

Johnson: The earthquake is God's further sign of the vindication of His servants. But unlike the earthquake under the sixth seal, this one produces what appears to be repentance: “The survivors...gave glory to the God of heaven..” The opposite response in 16:9, “they refused to repent and glorify Him,” seems to confirm that [this verse] speaks of genuine repentance.

So once again we can only conclude that we don't know whether the resurrection and ascension of the witnesses, followed by God's retribution, sparked true faith, or just an acknowledgment that, “By golly, there must be a real God up there after all.”

Now, if this were our only narrative thread, in our next session we would be celebrating the return of Christ. But it is not. As it says in v14, we have recounted the first two woes (trumpets five and six), and the third is “coming quickly.” And sure enough, in the next verse the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. But then, before the events of the bowls of wrath (i.e., the third woe) we have a long list of parenthetical visions—which we will begin to investigate in our next session.

SESSION 28: THE TRIBULATION (PART EIGHTEEN): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART ONE

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15, with reference to Chart #5

PREFACE

I am the *last* person to be teaching Greek grammar, and to your benefit I seldom make the attempt. But it is important, as we open up this pivotal scene revealed immediately after the seventh trumpet is sounded, that we understand the verb tense often used in this passage—and not just here, but throughout the upcoming parenthetical visions and even throughout God’s word as a whole.

The verb tense I am referring to is the *proleptic (or prophetic) aorist*. The English word “prolepsis” (“proleptic” is the adjective form) means “the treating of a future event as if it had already happened.” This is used in God’s word to express absolute certainty in the event happening. [For example, please turn to Romans 8.](#)

Read Romans 8:29-30.

Verse 30 presents a series of verbs that describes the steps in salvation. The first three—predestination, calling, and justification—have already been accomplished in the life of a believer, but the (final) glorification is yet in the future. In English we would use a verb such as “He also *will* glorify,” looking toward the day when we stand before Him in our glorified bodies. But the Greek includes the fascinating proleptic aorist verb tense which permits the writer a way to express the concrete surety of God’s salvation process—so sure that it can be expressed as if it has already occurred: “...He also glorified.” [Back to Revelation 11.](#)

In the passage before us I count at least three occurrences of this aorist verb tense being used. Let’s look at just one of them for now; [look at v15](#). “Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world **has become** the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”

We are presently at the sounding of the seventh trumpet in the Tribulation; has the kingdom of the world already become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ? No, but the certainty of Christ’s reign is so absolute, it can be expressed as if it already *has* taken place.

We can also understand this as expressing the perception of God, or all of heaven. From that vantage point, as one writer has pictured it, one does not just see the float or marching band passing directly in front of the viewing stand, but one sees the entire parade from beginning to end at one glance. One can “see” the end as if it has already passed by.

Keeping this in mind will help us to better understand the meaning and placement of upcoming events. We are now at a point in these Last Things where, from heaven's perspective, the events of the Eschaton are drawing to a close. From *our* perspective there remains much of the parade to pass before us; but the Godhead, its archangels and run-of-the-mill angels, as well as (we can assume) myriad throngs of heaven-dwelling saints like us are so eagerly anticipating the consummation of it all, with the return of Christ and His eternal reign, that *their* attention is fixed on the parade's end. We saw their perspective expressed back in Chapter Ten, in the episode with the angel with the little book:

Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there will be delay no longer, but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God *is finished* [proleptic aorist], as He preached to His servants the prophets. (Revelation 10:5-7; emphasis added)

We will soon be addressing a collection of parenthetical visions and events that are presented roughly around the midpoint of the Tribulation. As I have stated before, I do not intend to force all of these into a tight adherence to the three-and-one-half-year mark; we will see right off that they span time frames far beyond the immediate narrative, shifting back and forth, overlapping each other, and retracing steps already taken. It is clear from Scripture, however, that the midpoint does indeed mark an important pivot-point in God's economy of the final days.

- Daniel's prophecy split the seventieth week—i.e., the last seven years of his “seventy weeks” (490 years)—in two in Daniel 9:27: “And he [i.e., Antichrist] will make a firm covenant with the many [i.e., Israel] for one week, but in the middle of the week 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.”
- When John was told to measure the temple, he was informed that the nations [Gentiles], “will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months” (11:2).
- In the recent episode with the two witnesses we saw the Tribulation split in half; they would “prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth” (11:3).
- Perhaps most important, the midpoint marks the revealing of Antichrist's true character: evil incarnate. Up to that point his public career has been one of agreeableness and, for the most part, benevolent wisdom

and power. But after three and one half years into the Tribulation the beast will renege on his agreement with Israel, take over the temple, establish it as his personal throne, have his second in command (the beast from the earth) erect and “bring to life” a statue in his honor in the temple that all are to worship as god under threat of death (13:12-15). [Look at Chart #15.](#)

The seventh trumpet is the doorway opening onto the very final chapter of God’s plan for man: the end of rebellion, the end of sin, the end of evil, ultimately the end of this earth’s system and everything familiar to us. The seventh trumpet is the gateway to eternal light and righteousness, a *new* earth and *new* heavens, and an intimate, tangible relationship with God and Christ Jesus *on* that new earth unimaginable—and not possible—through the pages of history.

J. A. Seiss: We here approach the grand climacteric of this world, and of judgment-work of the Almighty One. The seventh angel, restrained so long from ushering in the final scenes which separate us from the glorious world to come, at length pours out his wondrous blast... And if there is anything in all the round of human thought to absorb, fix, and intensify interest and attention, we have it in this subject.

Read Revelation 11:15-17.

v15

Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”

Revealing its importance, there is an immediate response in heaven to the sounding of the final trumpet. A full chorus, a symphony of the angelic and redeemed voices, cries out in abandoned praise of Father God and the Son. This praise also declares the inauguration of the long-awaited answer to the prayer Jesus gave as a model prayer to His disciples:

“Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9–10)

In the better manuscripts the word “kingdom” is singular, rather than the plural of the KJVs. Some say the difference between the two is insignificant, but I do not agree. The plural “kingdoms” suggests God’s victory over the multitudinous kingships scattered around this globe. True enough, but that doesn’t quite capture the more profound depth of this thought. Whether or not it is acknowledged, there is only one king and only one kingdom of this world. Since Eden there has been only one ruler over it all: Satan. Jesus confirmed this more than once:

“Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.” (John 12:31)

“I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.” (John 14:30)

His—Satan’s—kingdom will be the one, once and for all time, defeated, expunged, and replaced by “the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.”*

*I have from time to time pointed out how especially in the Revelation God the Father and God the Son often become synonymous. Did you catch the pronoun that follows that last line? The (new) kingdom will be “of our Lord” and “of His Christ.” Yet the following pronoun is singular: “He will reign forever and ever.”

v16

And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,

Personally I look forward to the day when, free of the dark influence of evil on this earth, which clouds and diffuses our adoration, we will—like the elders and the four creatures, who are nearest to the throne—worship the Lord God unabashedly, unfiltered. These twenty-four men, so holy they occupy seats immediately surrounding the throne of God, leave those honored seats to fall down prostrate, their faces to the floor, in worship. In v17 we have the content of their worship.

Parenthetically, my impression of the twenty-four elders is that they are the “worship leaders” of heaven. They are the ones down front, closest to the throne, supplying the words of praise and worship and prompting the rest of the congregation to a higher adoration. These twenty-four are the ones showing the rest of us how to do it.

v17

...saying, “We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.”

Here in their praise and thanksgiving is expressed the ultimate goal and purpose of all things—the purpose of Creation itself. Until now, God’s power has not been fully voiced; some of it has been held in check as His forbearance and grace have been in the fore. But now nothing is held back; now is the time for His full power—first the fullness of His wrath against evil, followed by the fullness of His sovereign rule over all—to be expressed both against and in behalf of His creation. All this is detailed in vv18-19.

Here, however, is also announced—as if it has already occurred (because in the perception of God Almighty it *has*)—the fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 2:

⁴ [David speaking] He who sits in the heavens laughs,
The Lord scoffs at them [the kings of the earth].

⁵ Then He will speak to them in His anger

And terrify them in His fury, saying, [Yahweh speaking to Messiah, His Son]

⁶“But as for Me [Yahweh], I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

⁷I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:

He [Yahweh] said to Me [Messiah], ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.

⁸Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance,

And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.

⁹You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.”

¹⁰[David speaking] Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth.

¹¹Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling.

¹²Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way,

For His wrath may soon be kindled.

How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Psalm 2:4-12)

The book of Revelation forces us out of our self-centered perspective, in which it seems as if God’s very existence is for our salvation and a pleasant eternity. We wouldn’t say this out loud, and if forced would deny it, but part of the fallenness of this earth, part of living—even as a Christian—where reality is clouded by evil, is that we believe ourselves to be the center of the universe.

And, of course, we are not. We know that, but we don’t always think or live that truth. The center of this universe, the one who holds it all together,¹ is Christ Jesus. In this narrative, He is about to take His rightful place upon the throne as King of all things, not least of a new kingdom on earth (Millennium), a kingdom extended as well into a *new* earth. This is the content of the twenty-four elders’ praise.

Read Revelation 11:18-19.

v18

In v18 the twenty-four elders apparently have more to add to their thanksgiving and praise, since all our common versions but the KJV include this verse in the quotation from v17.

“And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who

¹Colossians 1:16-17

fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

First let me point out that which is not obvious in the English of our common versions. In the NASB the words translated “enraged” and “wrath” are the same; the root is *orge*, meaning anger, wrath, passion. The same word is being used to describe man’s anger and God’s righteous judgment. And John Walvoord makes an excellent point:

The wrath of men is impotent; the wrath of God is omnipotent. The wrath of men is wicked; the wrath of God is holy.

Here the prophecy of Psalm 2, as well as that anticipated in Revelation 6:15-17 is being (or about to be) fulfilled.

Read Revelation 6:15-17.

It is not by accident that the predominant culture of this earth prefers to think of a one-dimensional God and Christ (if it bothers to think of them at all); they like to say (as they convince themselves) that “God is love,” and wouldn’t dream of inflicting judgmental wrath on anyone. If, they conclude, God is *not* love, then He simply does not exist. By such means man deludes himself that “I’m OK, you’re OK—we’ve got nothing to worry about.” This culture also does not subscribe to the depravity of man; popular thought dictates that people are essentially “good,” and if they are evil, that evil has been forced upon them by external forces.

One would think that anyone still dwelling on this earth by the time of the seventh trumpet would have at last discarded these notions, but if so, why then are they “enraged”? Here on display is the truth of the depravity of man; by whatever perverse logic still remains in their brains, they believe it is still worth their time and energy to shake their fist at heaven and vent their rage against God.

By now in the flow of time that response is not just depraved, but utterly stupid and futile. Yet we see it played out even so late as the last battle thrown together by Satan when he is released after the Millennium, and the Great White Throne judgment, resulting in Satan and all unbelievers thrown into the eternal lake of fire.

If we so chose to, we could fill multiple sessions of this study just reading all the passages that speak of the future day when God will judge unbelievers; God’s word is filled to overflowing with it. His judgment and His wrath—the wrath of even the Lamb—are a surety.

...and the time came for the dead to be judged,

I agree with MacArthur that the elders here are not referring to a specific judgment. During the final days there are several resurrections,² with concomi-

²as detailed in Chart 5

tant judgments and/or rewards following; some are for the saints, some are for unbelievers; some *may* be for both, depending on one's position.

Here I think the elders are just speaking generally, in reference to any and all future (to them) judgments. Jesus did much the same thing in John 5:28-29.

“Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”

and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great,

Our various versions organize and punctuate this phrase differently; depending on where commas are placed, one could group these together under the one heading of believers, or break it down into several sub-groups:

- bond-servants the prophets—all who declared God's truth, including the last Two Witnesses;
- saints—a common term in the Bible for referring to true believers;
- those who fear Your name, the small and the great—I would say this is synonymous with saints.

For all these, judgment brings reward. If this scene post-dates the Rapture of the church, which we believe it does, then the reference here is to those who subsequently “come to faith” during the Tribulation.

and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

No doubt many *unbelievers* today—especially those who worship at the temple of Gaia, the mythical earth goddess—would say that this refers to all who do not follow their false religion. But as God's word says repeatedly, even *He* will destroy this earth and replace it with another. So that can't be what this phrase is saying.

The word twice translated “destroy” here are two forms of the same root.³ The word can mean to destroy utterly, but is also used to express corruption, spoiling, decay, depravity, to rot thoroughly—and this is how it is used here.

This earth, theoretically, could have been a paradise, in exquisite, joy-filled harmony with its Creator. But sin entered in, and that possibility was destroyed. I doubt that I need to cite examples for anyone reading or hearing these words to substantiate the position that it is those rejecting God and His Christ who are spoiling this earth with their evil corruption and rot. I will just offer the names of two cities to make the case: Portland, Oregon and San Francisco, California. Back in the seventies and eighties these were my two favorite cities to visit. Portland was a jewel, and San Francisco a unique and fascinating city to visit. Today both of these have been reduced to rotting corpses, stinking

³ (*diaphtheirai* and *diaphtheirotas*, from *diaphtheiro*)

from filth and overrun with destruction and crime by those who hate—hate just about everything, but especially God.

If God’s “bond-servants” are rewarded, these will be judged and found guilty—and “destroyed.”

v19

Supposedly v19 is in John’s voice—the observer and chronicler of the Revelation—rather than the voices of the twenty-four elders.

And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

When Jesus died upon the cross the veil of the temple—the veil that separated man from God’s mercy seat atop the ark of the covenant—was torn in two by God Himself. Now man—any person without priest or advocate save for Christ Jesus Himself—could approach God directly and receive mercy and forgiveness. And here gloriously revealed to John from the *heavenly* temple of God is “the ark of His covenant,” His promise to man, His promise of atonement in Christ.

Yet remember, as the rest of the verse reminds us, that same ark in history served as a potent weapon for harm upon the enemies of God (1 Samuel 5)—even those who loved Him but disobeyed His law (2 Samuel 6:6-7).

The ark represents God’s mercy shown to man; the “flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm” represent His power and righteous wrath (Exodus 20:18-19).

And this last, His wrath, is about to be poured out—without mercy—upon the remaining enemies of God.

SESSION 29: THE TRIBULATION (PART NINETEEN): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART TWO

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15

PREFACE

We need to begin our exploration of the remaining parenthetical visions by taking care of some housekeeping: We need to get our bearings in the text, and point out the main characters that play critical roles in this final act of the Eschaton. Most important, however, we need to reexamine our interpretive approach to these visions.

Structure

As we saw in our last session, the seventh angel sounds his trumpet in 11:15; however, the narrative events that the trumpet actually produces—the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath—are not chronicled until Chapter Fifteen, which records the *preparation* of the last seven plagues, with the seven bowls actually being poured out in Chapter Sixteen. Christ does not return, marking the official end of the Tribulation, until the middle of Chapter Nineteen.

In between, roughly in Chapters Twelve to Fourteen, we have the parenthetical visions that we will be examining in the next few sessions.*

Read Revelation 12:1-2.

v1

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;

Verse 1 begins with “A great sign appeared in heaven.” The word translated “sign,” *semeion*, means just that—not “wonder” as the KJV has it—a sign is an outward (visible) indication of secret power or truth. John MacArthur makes an excellent point regarding this that will help us properly digest the visions here and in the next few chapters.

MacArthur: [A “sign”] describes a symbol that points to a reality. The literal approach to interpreting Scripture¹ allows for normal use of symbolic language, but understands that it points to a literal reality.

Well, that’s a good start, but what about later fantastical imagery *not* labeled a “sign” that, like these signs, we literalists will not interpret absolutely literally, such as the description of “the beast from out of the sea”? What is the difference?

¹ which we are following in this study

* I included the text from our last session (11:15-19) in with these parenthetical visions for organizational purposes, even though the subject and tenor of that passage is different in nature from the rest.

Don't MacArthur's words pardon all those interpreters that see the Roman Catholic papacy at every turn in the Revelation, or those who blithely dictate that any reference to "days"—such as the two witnesses prophesying for 1,260 days—of course means years?

I think it is necessary to pause for some analysis on this before we plow into these sometimes fantastical, even bizarre, parenthetical visions. For we will indeed be concluding that they are not what they appear to John to be, and beyond that, they often mean *more* than just one thing. (For example, the beast from the sea is not *just* Antichrist, but represents, as Walvoord puts it, "a revelation of the revived Roman Empire in its period of worldwide dominion." That is, Antichrist will be the head of that confederation.)

And please understand my reason for taking time with this. Some may find this hard to believe, but I do not intentionally drag out these studies, for I have no desire to try the patience of those in attendance. However, my philosophy is this: Why bother to make the study at all if you're not going to get down to the bare metal to understand the fullness of God's word. It would have taken one, maybe two sessions to deliver to you the skeleton of the eschatological timeline, but what good would that be without understanding what lies beneath the surface, the reasons for and explanation of the events, and, not least, how they are related to each other *and* our relationship with God? So please bear with me as I make some important distinctions regarding the interpretation of these apocalyptic texts that we find in not just the Revelation, but Daniel, Ezekiel, and many of the other prophecies.

The Historical View

Many of the interpretations we take issue with, that seem almost ridiculous to those in the dispensational camp, come from those with an *historicist*, or historical, perspective on Revelation. Those in this camp see all the events and visions of the Tribulation and Millennium² being played out during what we would call history: between the first century and present day. They find *historical, past* events behind everything that *we* see in the future. They would conclude that we are already in the Millennium.†

Those in the historicist camp pepper their interpretations with ancient Roman emperors, medieval events, the Reformation, and especially the papacy of the hated (in their eyes) Roman Catholic church.

The Allure of Apocalyptic Language

Then there are those who seem to insist at every turn that since this is apocalyptic literature it *must*, by its very nature mean something other than what it says. Every object, every individual, every fantastical creature, every action represents something other than how it is described in the text. A literalist, dispensational approach to the end times rejects this.

† Those with the exhaustive ESV Study Bible will find a helpful discussion on this and other perspectives, along with simple charts, in its introductory pages to the Revelation.

² Chapters 4-19, and 20:1-6

The Critical Importance of God’s Word as Reference

All right, so I am teaching a literalist, dispensational, pretribulational, premillennial approach to the Last Things. How, then, can I look at v1 of our text and conclude that the “woman clothed with the sun” is Israel, and that in v3 “a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems” is not just Satan, but also represents a revived Roman empire? A good and fair question.

There are two answers to that question. The immediate response is that both of these scenes are introduced as “signs” (*semeion*); we are told straight away that these visions represent something else—something tangible and actual.

In this text, the second answer is most pertinent to the scene in v3. Here we are told that the dragon had “seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.” How do we know this represents a revived Roman empire? Well, God’s word tells us so. [Turn please to Daniel 7](#). The prophet Daniel is shown a vision of four terrifying beasts that come “up from the sea”; Daniel 7 is a rich treasure trove for the study of the Eschaton, and we will be returning, but for now we are going to focus our attention on the description of the fourth beast.

Read Daniel 7:7-8.

As we might imagine, Daniel required some help in translating this vision, and he got it from a (heavenly) bystander within the vision, beginning with v17. Since our purpose here is not to explain the Daniel passage but to discover our second answer for the interpretation of the *Revelation* vision, permit me to pick and choose from the bystander’s explanation.

v17: *First we learn that “These great beasts, which are four in number, are four kings who will arise from the earth.’*

vv19-21: *“Then I [Daniel] desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates. I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them.”*

Here we have, in Daniel, the introduction of Antichrist as one who devours three of the kingdoms, leaving seven, and one who overpowers “the saints,” that is, Israel.

vv23-25: *Then the bystander in the vision offers more details about the fourth beast. “Thus he said: “The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different*

from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.” *That is, three and one half years—the last half of the Tribulation.* [Now back to Revelation 13.](#)

In Chapter Thirteen we have the emergence of “a beast coming up out of the sea,” and notice his description in vv1-2:

Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

We won’t get into specifics right now (we certainly will later), but we see right off the similarity between this beast, the beast in Daniel 7, and the dragon in Chapter 12 of Revelation. Yet in Chapter Thirteen we are told that this beast’s powers were given to him by “the dragon.” So we must conclude that this beast is *not* Satan himself.

Let me cite John Walvoord’s conclusion for our passage in Chapter Twelve.

Walvoord: The second great sign appearing in heaven is described as a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon his heads. From the similar description given in 13:1 and the parallel reference in Daniel 7:7-8, 24, it is clear that the revived Roman Empire is in view.³ Satan, however, is also called the dragon later in 12:9, and it is clear that the dragon is both the empire and the representation of satanic power. The color red may indicate his murderous characteristics. The seven heads and ten horns refer to the original ten kingdoms of which three were subdued by the little horn of Daniel 7:8, who is to be identified with the world ruler of the great tribulation who reigns over the revived Roman Empire [i.e., Antichrist].

Thus we have our two answers for us literalists to have the temerity to interpret these visions as we will.

- In Chapter Twelve they are identified as “signs,” and
- God’s word itself will at times give us the interpretation we need.

The Main Characters

Most commentators like to point to the seven main characters that are introduced in Chapters Twelve to Fourteen; at first my response to this was, “So what? We’ve seen most of them already.” But then I realized that there may be some merit in establishing, or at least reminding ourselves, who these characters are, and under what names or titles we are to know them.

³i.e., a confederation of evil states bent on world domination

In Chapter Twelve:

- A woman clothed with the sun: Israel
- A great red dragon: Satan and his confederation of states
- A male child: Christ Jesus
- The angel Michael
- The remnant of Israel

In Chapter Thirteen:

- A beast coming up out of the sea: Antichrist, world dictator
- Another beast coming up out of the earth: the false prophet, religious leader

Now we are ready to return to our text at the beginning of Chapter Twelve, and the first sign, that of the woman.

... a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;

And right off the bat we are able to turn to God's word for the interpretation of this fanciful sign in heaven—back to Genesis and one of the dreams of Joseph.

Read Genesis 37:9-11.

Thus that passage not only illumines the Revelation passage for us, but whatever questions arise in v9 are answered in v10: What do the sun and moon represent in the dream? Joseph's father and mother. What do the stars represent? Joseph's brothers. [Back to Revelation 12.](#)

So we can identify the woman in this sign as Israel, since the sun is Jacob, the moon is Rachel, and the twelve stars their sons—the twelve tribes of Israel. Interestingly, the "crown" is *stephanos*, not the crown of kingship, but the crown given to victors. Ultimately Israel will be victorious through God's defeat of their enemy.

v2

and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

In John's vision this "great sign" is being seen in heaven, but the passage speaks to events on earth, and especially those during the Great Tribulation, as well as the birth of Christ. The woman is pregnant, and we learn from v5 that this is no ordinary child, but the Messiah.

And she [the woman in v1] gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

As Walvoord states it, the woman represents “Israel as the matrix from which Christ came.” And repeatedly in Scripture the travails of a rebellious nation or individuals are likened to the travails of women in childbirth.

Read Isaiah 26:16-18.

Beyond that, however, v2 probably refers more to the national distress from without—from Rome around the time of Christ’s birth—rather than any difficulty for Judah in “birthing” the Messiah.⁴

Read Revelation 12:3-4.

v3

Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.

A second principal character is introduced into the narrative, and for a second time John employs the adjective *me-gas*, translated “great,” which in this context could mean either large, or terrifying, or important—or all of the above.‡

Like his righteous counterpart God, Satan works his will through the individuals and nations of this fallen world, and here these kings and nations are represented by the appearance of this monster; we get an explanation for these seven heads with their diadems (crowns of power and authority) and the ten horns in Chapter Seventeen. [Turn there please](#). And once again, we will dig deeper into Chapter Seventeen when we reach it in our study, but for now let us use it as a reference for Chapter Twelve.

Read Revelation 17:7, 9-13.

MacArthur: The seven heads with their seven diadems represent seven consecutive world empires running their course under Satan’s dominion: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and Antichrist’s future empire. The final kingdom, ruled by Antichrist will be a ten-nation confederacy; the ten horns represent the kings who will rule under Antichrist (Daniel 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.

⁴ Micah 5:2-5a

‡ There is a lot of time-shifting going on in Chapter Twelve. I suggest that the best way to digest these passages is to not get lost in reconciling the time frame of one passage to the rest, but to just let your mind flow back and forth with the text, for it does a good job of defining the time frame for each scene. It is clear, for example, the woman and child in vv1-2 and v5 refer to the birth of Christ Jesus, approximately 4 BC. Meanwhile, though the appearance of the dragon speaks of the present Tribulation, the dragon’s actions skip around in the past, from the birth of Christ to the beginning of the Tribulation. Each time frame for each scene is not difficult to discern from the text, so just let yourself flow with it.

v4

And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

Once again God's word will explain for us the first sentence in this verse—and we don't even have to leave the neighborhood.

Read Revelation 12:7-9.

This passage explains for us that the “stars” referred to in v4 are Satan's (evil) angels; when he is thrown out of heaven they are thrown out with him, here pictured as the dragon's tail sweeping to earth with him one third of the angels in heaven—which is a rather sobering number. Just think: at one time one third of the angels in heaven were in opposition to God!

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

When we put the pieces together, when we add to the present text the references later in Revelation and the Daniel passages, we can see that at the moment of the Messiah's birth—this One who would eventually return home to His Father in heaven (v5), only to one day return to do battle with Satan's evil, (and win), eventually casting the dragon into a thousand-year dungeon only to release him so that he can be thrown into the eternal lake of fire—as the time drew near for Messiah to be born, Satan would work through the leading power of the day, Rome, to do away with Jesus the Christ before He can grow into manhood, and take His throne to rule all the world (v5).

Satan earlier, in a similar fashion, worked through the king of Egypt to “devour” the child Moses, a Levite, through whom God would one day deliver His laws for Israel.⁵ Ultimately all that Satan has devised against the Lord God and His Christ has failed.

The other day, in a phone conversation with a young woman from the Des Moines company that installed our satellite internet, she pointed out that they were last out to our place for a service call in 2019. My response was, “Oh, only three years. That recent?” She took the opposite tack; seeing it as a longer period, she said, “Well, a lot can happen in three years.” From the perspective of 71 years, 3 are a trifle; to a woman of perhaps 30 years, 3 are more significant.

⁵ Exodus 1:8-2:10

When we back away and squint, looking at the long picture of all that Satan has devised against God, from Eden to the birth of Christ, to the Tribulation and the investiture of his evil powers in his servant Antichrist—after all that was set in place leading up to it, three and one half years of power over the world seems so trivial, so futile and meaningless compared to the one-thousand years plus an eternity during which Messiah, the Son of God will reign.

All that effort, all that time, for what? For Satan, his angels, and his human servants, an eternity of being burned alive in the lake of fire.

SESSION 30: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWENTY): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART THREE

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15

PREFACE

In our previous session we looked at the first four verses of Chapter Twelve, which introduced two “signs”:

- the woman “clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars,” a sign representing the restored nation of undivided Israel, and
- the red dragon “having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems,” a second sign representing both Satan and the confederation of states organized under the leadership of Antichrist.

In this session we will look at the continuation of the sign of the woman, and her “birth” of the Messiah, and her need to flee into the wilderness for safety. Then we will begin the continuation of the dragon sign: the war in heaven between Satan and the archangel Michael.

The time frame in Chapter Twelve is quite fluid, not just pointing forward or backward in time but doing so with abandon from one verse to the next—and especially in the first six verses. Verses 1-6 seem to serve as an overview of the entire chapter, with vv7-17 backing up and expanding the narrative with more details.

Chapter Twelve as a whole, but especially vv1-6, is an enactment of the prophecy set down by God Himself back in Genesis 3.

The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, Cursed are you more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat All the days of your life; And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.”
(Genesis 3:14–15)

The serpent, representing Satan, would indeed bruise the seed of the woman (Messiah)—i.e., an *injurious* blow; but Messiah would ultimately “crush” the head of Satan—i.e., a *fatal* blow. As it was and will be played out, Christ Jesus (“the seed” of the woman) was indeed killed, but was raised to life, and ultimately will reign over all things in an eternal kingdom, while Christ’s adversary will go down to defeat, and an eternal life in fire.

Read Revelation 12:5-6.

v5

As I mentioned in passing last week, v5 is a remarkable condensation, in just one sentence, of the redemptive life of Christ Jesus, beginning with His birth on earth and ending with His glorification in heaven.

And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

One would imagine (as I am sure Satan did) that a huge, fierce dragon crouched in waiting would hold the advantage over a woman in the travails of childbirth—not to mention the advantage over a newborn. Alas, Satan’s best is for naught when matched against the Son of God.

That the Messiah would be born of Israel, a descendant of David, was foretold by various OT prophets,¹ and His Jewish lineage is emphasized in both OT and NT.² Plus, for dispensationalists especially, it is poetically appropriate that this picture of Israel giving birth to the Messiah would be included here; the Tribulation is the time of “*Jacob’s trouble*”:

'Alas! for that day is great,
There is none like it;
And it is the time of Jacob's distress,
But he will be saved from it.
It shall come about on that day,' declares the LORD of hosts,
'that I will break his yoke from off their neck and will tear off
their bonds; and strangers will no longer make them their
slaves. But they shall serve the LORD their God and David
their king, whom I will raise up for them.' (Jeremiah 30:7-9)

who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron

Here the vision quotes Psalm 2.

Read Psalm 2:7-9.

A rod of iron is hard, solid, unyielding. And that fact draws us into a deeper consideration of the word translated “rule” in some passages and versions, and “break” in others. By so doing we get a clearer picture of the sort of millennial rule conducted by Christ Jesus. The word in the Greek is *poimaino*, (peh-men-oh) which, on the surface, has a pastoral meaning: to act as a shepherd. But it also carries with it the connotation of “destroy,” or shatter, as we see in Psalm 2:9 (Hebrew, *raa*) and in Revelation 2:27 (same Greek as in 12:5, *poimaino*).

...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; (Revelation 2:27).

¹ cf. Micah 5:2

² cf. Matthew 1

Here Messiah's millennial rule is described: He will rule the earth, the nations, with justice and mercy, but will suffer no fools; those who rebel against the King will be broken, they will be shattered as a cheap clay pot is shattered by one stroke—not to be repaired, but to be thrown onto the ash heap. As MacArthur puts it, "The phrase 'rod of iron' speaks of the resoluteness of Christ's rule; He will swiftly and immediately judge all sin and put down any rebellion."

And, even though I have repeatedly pointed it out, is there *really* that much difference between Jesus in His first *parousia* and Christ the King in His second? In His first time on earth Jesus was gracious, patient, and forgiving to the humble and truly repentant, but at the same time He could quickly and publicly condemn and rebuke the religious hypocrites.³ Even as "the Lamb," Christ did not suffer fools.

As we leave v5, note that in this one sentence time moves from the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, forward to Christ's millennial reign, then back again to His ascension to the Father.

v6

On a same note, Henry Alford points out that the whole of v6 does the same thing as regards time sequence.

Alford: "may nourish her there for a thousand two hundred and sixty days" (the whole of this verse is anticipatory: the same incident being repeated with its details and in its own place in the order of the narrative below, Revelation 12:13 ff. The fact of its being here inserted by anticipation is very instructive as to that which now next follows, as not being consecutive in time after the flight of the woman, but occurring before it, and in fact referred to now in the prophecy as leading to that pursuit of the woman by the dragon, which, as matter of sequence, led to it).*

Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

As Alford points out, this episode is fleshed out in v13 and following. Jesus also spoke of this very moment to His disciples in His Olivet Discourse, found in Matthew 24. [Let's begin with v15, where Jesus quotes Daniel.](#)

Read Matthew 24:15-21.

In that gospel passage we have several mile-markers in what Jesus said that tie it not just to the Eschaton, but to our passage in 12:6 and 12:13ff specifically.

³Matthew 23

* In the general milieu of Bible study, there seems to be something different—something extremely different—where it comes to the study of The Revelation. I have never before experienced—in studies of Hebrews, the Thessalonian letters, Colossians, Philippians, Galatians, and First Corinthians, for example—such an alienation from, or abandonment by, so many heretofore useful scholars. There is something peculiar about Revelation, sufficiently singular that many reliable sources for *other* studies leave one standing alone in the dust.

In a moment I will be directing us to the Olivet Discourse, found in Matthew 24; in preparation for that I turned to D. A. Carson's massive commentary on the first gospel—and was immediately reminded that this highly regarded (and rightly so) scholar does not even see the end times in what Jesus says—only what happened to Jerusalem in AD 70, even though Jesus' discourse to his disciples is in answer to their question, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, *and of the end of the age?*" (Matthew 24:3; emphasis added).

Now, I have sat spellbound while listening to some of Carson's discourses on Scripture; he can make this book *glow* with wonder and amazement. One comes away amazed, and supremely edified by the way he can weave together passages in God's word and bring it to life. He deserves the respect he receives. Yet, listening to what he had to say in a lengthy series of lectures on The Revelation, I finally had to turn him off. I just couldn't take any more.

(continued on next page)

All this to say, if you think what we have been studying so far has been confusing, and a challenge to apprehend, it is *nothing* compared to your confusion and frustration if you mixed in all the other theories and positions out there. The solution, in my modest opinion, is to decide where you stand on the Eschaton, and then stick with it.

- “abomination of desolation”... “standing in the holy place”; i.e., Antichrist, the servant of Satan, taking his seat of power in the Jerusalem temple, as well as the installment of his statue as the object of worship
- “flee to the mountains”; i.e., “the woman [Israel] fled into the wilderness”
- “there will be a great tribulation”; i.e., the last three and one half years of the Tribulation

Beyond these, the entire discourse is wrapped in a warning to beware of false messiahs:

- vv4-5: “See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will mislead many”;
- v24: “For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect”—a clear reference to the time of Antichrist, considering the context.

God’s word does not tell us where God will hide and/or protect Israel, and I see little point in trying to guess. The important take-away is what God is doing for His chosen people—not its location.

A study of the Last Things serves to reinforce two truths of Scripture, but truths that are often forgotten or set aside—even, in some cases, actively denied—by the Christian church. To wit,

God loves Israel

No matter how much He has chastised them, and will pour out His wrath on their rebellion against Him, the Lord God loves Israel—as a father loves his children. He always has and always will. The church does not replace Israel in the Lord’s affections; Israel remains His chosen people, but those of Israel that steadfastly refuse to accept Jesus as the promised Messiah will join Gentiles in perdition. The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 11:25-27,

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; *and so all Israel will be saved*; just as it is written, “THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB.” “THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.” (emphasis added)

God will make a *new* covenant with Israel, and unlike the first, this covenant will be unconditional. We may not understand all the details of this (and we will not delve deeper for the moment), but there will come a point in time—and I see no reason to doubt it will be during this time of protection during the last half of the Tribulation—when God will Himself change the heart of Israel as a nation regarding Christ Jesus. The prophet Jeremiah prophesied,

“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the LORD, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:33–34).

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse: The second covenant is to make new men of Israel. A nation will be born in a day. God will put His law into their inward parts and write it in their hearts. He will be their God and they shall be His people. God will manifest His sovereign electing grace on a national scale in behalf of Israel, even as He showed His sovereign elective grace on a personal scale to those who believed in Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Somewhere around the middle of the Tribulation God will remove Israel from the direct danger from Antichrist in Jerusalem. He will protect “her,” and twice we are told, in vv6 and v14, that she would be not just protected but “nourished” (*trophosin*, to feed, cause to grow, to bring up, to rear) until the climactic return of the Messiah. In light of that tender mercy shown to His chosen, it is not stretching the imagination at all that this three-and-one-half-year period will also be when God will, as Ezekiel prophesied, “give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God” (Ezekiel 11:19-20)—this in preparation for the return of their new Lord, Jesus, their true and only Christ.

Jerusalem is the Center of it All

The second truth reinforced is that Jerusalem is truly the navel of the world; in God’s eyes, it is the most important city on earth. Remember how Christ Jesus lamented the city’s rejection of Him: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling”.⁴ And what city will be the focal point of the new earth, where God the Father and Son will one day take up residence? New York? Paris? London? No, Jerusalem.

The passage before us—vv7-17—is profound, disturbing, and challenges many of our predisposed thoughts on heaven and hell, God and Satan, their respective angels, and their respective domains. For just one example, ask the average person on the street, “Where is Satan right now?” He will surely answer

⁴Matthew 23:37

that Satan is the one in charge of hell, but that is not true. Satan has not yet even visited hell, much less been the resident master of it. The first and only time he will be in hell, is when it becomes his fiery residence for all eternity.

At the other end of the spectrum, even believers can have a rather sterilized perception of heaven, but especially those unfamiliar with God's word can imagine that heaven is simply unending sweetness and light, interrupted only by sunshine baths in fields of daisies or dreamy walks along the seashore. Even for those who regularly study the Bible it can be shocking to read of "war in heaven" where these two cosmic extremes collide.

Thus it would be unwise to plow ahead into this passage as an abbreviated coda to this session. Instead I would like to use our remaining time to outline the coming passage, approaching the forest from the long view, before we begin examining the bark on each tree in our next session. So please follow along with me.

John MacArthur claims that Chapters 12-14 of The Revelation (the parenthetical visions) recapitulate the events of Chapters 6-11 (the Seals and the Trumpets) viewing them this time from Satan's perspective. I am not yet convinced that's the best way to look at this section, but we'll see. He also organizes vv7-12 into three sections: the battle, the victory, and the celebration. Yet in the following vv13-17 Satan is enraged and still hard at work trying to do his worst to Israel.

Celebration indeed.

In vv1-6 we were introduced to The woman (Israel), the red dragon (Satan), and the issue from the woman, the male child (Messiah). Now in v7 is introduced the fourth principal character in this drama: Michael the archangel, who leads the holy angels against the rebellion of Satan's evil angels. Verses 7-9 comprise the first unit: the war is fought, Satan's forces lose, and are "thrown down to the earth."

Read vv7-9.

Verses 10-12a narrate the victory celebration in and for heaven—but do not read more into this than is there. Heaven has at last been rid of the pollution from Satan and His angelic followers; the rejoicing is meant for those environs.

Read vv10-12a.

There is no similar rejoicing on the earth, for that is where all that evil now calls home.

Read vv12b.

There is a line in the final Harry Potter movie that perfectly describes the

situation in v12. Harry—who has a supernatural connection to the mind of the bad guy, Lord Voldemort—is explaining to Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger how Voldemort is presently “feeling” to him.

“He’s angry, and scared too. He knows if we find and destroy all the horcruxes we’ll be able to kill him. I reckon he’ll stop at nothing to make sure that we don’t find the rest... There’s something wrong with him. In the past I’ve always been able to follow his thoughts, and now everything just feels disconnected.”

[Ron suggests,] “Maybe he’s very weak and maybe he’s dying.”

[Harry replies,] “No. No, it’s more like he’s wounded. If anything he feels more dangerous.”

That is where we are at in v12. Satan is not crippled; he is not discouraged, ready to give up. If anything he is now dramatically more dangerous than ever before. He is now *enraged*, “knowing he has only a short time.” In v13 he renews his attack on Israel.

Read v13.

And here we are given more details on what we read in v6. But note that Satan is still not giving up.

Read vv14-16.

At last he must give up his onslaught on this protected remnant of Israel, but, enraged all the more, he storms off to inflict his worst on “the rest of her children.”

Read v17.

This section reveals a period of three and one half years in which Satan is markedly more dangerous to man than he has ever been before. He truly is a fire-breathing dragon—or, as the apostle Peter put it, “Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8b).

SESSION 31: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWENTY-ONE): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART FOUR

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15, and Tracking Satan: Chart #16

PREFACE

Read Revelation 12:7-9.

I would be doing this class a great disservice if, at this point in our study, I simply began an examination of v7 and the “war in heaven” without first offering some clarifying background. In the text just read we learn that the victor of this war in heaven will eject the loser and his army—Satan, and his angels—from heaven: “...there was no longer a place found for them in heaven” (v8).

Perhaps you, like me, read this and think, *Wait a minute, hasn't Satan been kicked out of heaven (“fallen”) before—even in this study alone? Didn't I, in Session 21, identify him as the likeliest candidate for the “star from heaven which had fallen to the earth” in 9:1? Now he is falling again?*

The fast answer to that is, yes, he is indeed falling again. But that answer is, of course, insufficient. We need to back up and make a thumbnail sketch of the career of “the great dragon,” “the serpent of old,” AKA, “the devil and Satan” (v9). [Turn please to Job 38.](#)

At the beginning of His energetic response to Job and his self-serving friends, Yahweh describes the scene in heaven at Creation.

Read Job 38:4-7.

We glean two pieces of information from this passage:

- Here and throughout the OT a common way to refer to angels is “the sons of God.”
- Though they are created beings, angels were apparently created prior to the creation of the earth and universe, for they witnessed it and “sang together” and “shouted for joy.”

Now let's get a little closer to that Creation account.

Read Genesis 1:31-2:1.

At this point everything has been created: angels, the universe, and the earth, including man. And God declares it all “very good.” This would, of course, include the angel Satan and any of his fellow angels that will later side with him. But are we assuming too much? [Turn please to Ezekiel 28.](#)

There are two passages in the OT that give us details on the pre-fall Satan, as well as his subsequent descent. This in Ezekiel is an example of a “now—now yet” prophecy, speaking on the one hand of the king of Tyre—as does Isaiah of

the king of Babylon—but including descriptions that could not possibly refer to a human being on earth. After declaring his physical beauty, v14 offers more pertinent information.

“You were the anointed cherub who covers,
And I placed you there.
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked in the midst of the stones of fire.
You were blameless in your ways
From the day you were created
Until unrighteousness was found in you.” (Ezekiel 28:14–15)

Here we learn that

- Satan was not just “good,” he was special—probably an archangel, for he “covered” (i.e., guarded, protected) the throne of God.
- He was created “blameless”—until, one day, he wasn’t.

“By the abundance of your trade
You were internally filled with violence,
And you sinned;
Therefore I have cast you as profane
From the mountain of God.
And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the stones of fire.” (Ezekiel 28:16)

Satan is cast from “the mountain of God,” but *to where*? The answer to that is a little involved. On the one hand, he was sent to earth:

“...I cast you to the ground;
I put you before kings,
That they may see you.” (v17b)

In a moment we will see that he was also sent somewhere else, but before we leave this passage, note that it includes a description of his final demise in v19:

“All who know you among the peoples
Are appalled at you;
You have become terrified
And you will cease to be forever.”

Ezekiel speaks of Satan being sent to the earth. Isaiah offers another detail. [Please turn to Isaiah 14.](#)

Here is another “now—not yet” prophecy, pertaining first to the king of Babylon, but also to Satan. And Isaiah reiterates that when he fell he was sent to earth.

Read Isaiah 14:12-15.

Here we see that this “shining one, son of the dawn” is “cut down to the earth” and “will be thrust down to Sheol,” which is essentially a subterranean holding place.

The first question to answer is, *When did this occur? When did Satan first “fall”?* The evidence clearly shows, in Genesis, that it had to occur somewhere between Genesis 1:31, when everything in Creation was declared by God to be “very good,” and Genesis 3:1, when the serpent (Satan’s representative in the garden) is actively working to corrupt God’s “very good” Creation. Ever since that initial fall, Satan has been busy on earth doing his worst against God and His people. Yet, at the same time, even though he “fell,” Satan has retained access to heaven—even the courts of the throne of God! How do we know this? [Let’s return to the book of Job, this time Chapter One.](#)

Read Job 1:6-7.

Let’s stop there for now. What do we learn from these verses?

- There again is that phrase “sons of God,” (angels) and “Satan also came among them.” So though he was demoted and cast down to the earth, and even Sheol, Satan has retained access to the third heaven and even the throne room of God.
- Yahweh as much says, Hey, Satan, what have you been up to? To which Satan replies that he has been roaming about the earth. Thus, even though he was sent to Sheol, he has access to the earth, and even though he was sent to the earth, he has access to the third heaven.

Yahweh then, in v12, grants permission for Satan to confound the life of Job—with restrictions: “Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.’ So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD.”

This sets forth an important precept. Just as He does with humans, the Lord God grants a measure of free will to the adversary—yet He, the Lord God, retains ultimate control.

This remains the status of Satan to this day; it will remain his status until somewhere around the beginning or middle of the Tribulation. So far Satan has “fallen” only once. If we are correct that the “star” of Revelation 9:1 is Satan, it clearly states that it “had fallen to earth” (past tense). When Jesus said that He “was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning” (Luke 10:18), it again was stated in the past tense (yet could also be *proleptic (or prophetic) aorist*, referring to this second fall). And since that fall, Satan has been prowling “around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

One more thing before we examine our passage in Chapter Twelve: *Who is this angel Michael, who goes to war against Satan?*

Michael is an archangel of God, one of the “chief princes,” whose assignment seems to be one of protecting, even going to battle for Israel. He is invariably por-

trayed in Scripture “as the defender of God’s people against satanic destruction” (MacArthur). In Daniel 10 the prophet records a visitation from an encouraging angel in answer to Daniel’s prayers, who states in v13 that “the prince of the kingdom of Persia¹ was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.” Later in the chapter the critical help from Michael is again emphasized.

Then he said, “Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come. However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth. Yet there is no one who stands firmly with me against these forces except Michael your prince.” (Daniel 10:20–21)

Recorded in Jude is another instance of Michael being sent to do battle with Satan—this time for the body of Moses.

But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 9)

Thus it follows that in our text in Chapter Twelve, [which we will turn to now](#), Michael is the one leading the army of holy angels against Satan and his evil angels.

v7

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,

MacArthur points out that the grammatical structure of this verse in the Greek indicates that Satan will initiate this supernatural, heavenly war. There has been a measure of conflict in heaven (just as on earth) between good and evil since the archangel Satan fell in the first place. But he knows that his time is running out; there are just so many opportunities left for him to do battle with God before his time is up.

It was shown to the prophet Daniel that Michael would engage in this war at this time.

Read Daniel 12:1.

So we can look at this as the first of his final three battles waged against God and His armies.²

¹ i.e., a demonic angel

² The last two are recorded in Revelation 16:13 to 19:21, and 20:7-10.

Little can be said about the nature or duration of this war, its weaponry, or its tactics. All we can do is shudder at the thought of such a cosmic collision between vast armies of *holy* angels meeting in combat vast armies of *evil* angels. All the clues to this³ point to it occurring around (perhaps shortly before) the mid-point of the Tribulation, for its conclusion and consequences supply a perfect explanation for the level of evil and depravity and misery that will attend the Great Tribulation.

This is where MacArthur places this war and Satan's subsequent fall to earth; that is, he sees this occurring roughly at the point where it is being described; Walvoord, however, places it considerably earlier:

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.

Personally I straddle the fence on this; I lean toward a later placement, but can imagine it either way. If Satan is cast out of heaven earlier in the Tribulation, then his initial activities are to establish the career of his primary servant, Antichrist, organizing his campaign for world domination in the name of his master. If, however, Satan is cast out closer to the mid-Tribulation, then his rage after defeat and banishment go a long way to explaining the demonic virulence of the last three and one half years of the period.

One difference between these two positions does raise an interesting thought: MacArthur claims that Satan and his excommunicated angels will join the innumerable demons already roaming the earth, the lately arrived demons belched forth from the abyss (9:1-3), and two hundred million other formerly bound demons (9:13-16) to create an unimaginable holocaust of evil.

But if Walvoord is correct with an earlier placement of the war and fall, then the released demons described in Chapter Nine may very well *be* the ones previously fallen with Satan.

Aside from Satan's evilness and opposition to the holy things of God and His Christ in general, could there be a specific reason for this war? What does he hope to gain? Does he have an immediate goal? He certainly has a history of doing whatever he can to stymie the advance of Christianity, as well as the safe return of Israel to their homeland. In the prophecy of Zechariah, written around the time of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem by the returning remnant—that is, the reestablishment of Jerusalem as a place of worship of Yahweh—he is shown a vision of the high priest standing before “the angel of the Lord.”

³ such as Daniel 12:1

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. (Zechariah 3:1)

Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor are working to re-settle Jerusalem, while Satan, stands before the pre-incarnate Christ to speak against Joshua.

In the context of Revelation 12, what big event is fast approaching? The establishment of the world-wide kingdom of Christ for one thousand years. From Satan's perspective, it would be quite a coup to start a war in heaven that just might prevent that kingdom.

v8

and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.

Verse 8 continues and completes the last sentence in v7. It doesn't just say that Satan and his army lost the war; no, the report speaks to the inherent failings of these sad combatants—the ones who initiated the conflict in the first place! “They”—the dragon and his angels—“were not strong enough.” Of course not; if this dragon cannot win out over a woman in the throes of childbirth and a newborn child,⁴ what made him think he could be victorious over the armies of righteousness led by archangel Michael?

...and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.

If this were not speaking of Satan and his minions it would be a more melancholic statement. It leaves one wondering how God will be feeling at this moment; after all, Satan was once one of the “sons of God,” an archangel, the cherub who covered the very throne of God. Even after he was demoted, when he fell the first time, there remained a place for him in heaven. He could come and go at will, had speaking rights to Father God. But now he and his angels will be forever banned from the third heaven. One wonders if there just might be a tinge of sadness in God over this.

v9

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

This verse not only describes what happened to the great dragon and his angels after they lost the war, but it condenses a veritable catalog of the character and practices of this once great angel.

⁴ vv4-6

- **“the great dragon”** The dragon with his “seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads...seven diadems” represents the satanic power structure that is in place during the Tribulation.
- **“the serpent of old”** points back to the Garden of Eden, emphasizing his treachery and subtlety, and the tragic event that triggered the fall of man and has culminated in the necessary tragedy of the Tribulation, the wrath of God against sin, and the resulting judgments.
- **“the devil”** The Greek *diabolos* (devil) means “slanderer, defamer, false accuser,” which is how he is described in the next verse: “Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, *for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night*’” (v10; emphasis added).
- **Satan** is a Hebrew word meaning “adversary.”

And the great dragon was thrown down,

The word translated “thrown down” in the NASB is the Greek *eblethe*, which means to throw (as in throwing a spear or missile), hurl, or thrust. The tense of the verb means to cast down for good and all.

David Guzik points out that this is actually the second of *four* “falls” of Satan:

1. From glorified to profane (Ezekiel 28:14-16)
2. From having access to heaven (Job 1:12, 1Kings 22:21, Zechariah 3:1) to restriction to the earth (Revelation 12)
3. From the earth to bondage in the bottomless pit for 1,000 years (Revelation 20)
4. From the pit to the lake of fire (Revelation 20)

he was thrown down to the earth,

Though this second “fall”—this expulsion from heaven—is clearly, from his perspective, a humiliating defeat for Satan, note that there is no mention of any loss of his supernatural powers.

Thus Satan brings with him to this earth every bit of his demonic capabilities. This victory, this cleansing that occurs in heaven means just the opposite for the earth. Imagine, for the first time in all history, Satan’s full measure of evil—exacerbated by his rage from being so soundly defeated by the holy angels—will be poured out onto this globe. There will be nothing to bridle it, nothing to counteract it.

...and his angels were thrown down with him.

Humanly speaking it will be his team running the show; Antichrist, the world dictator, will be in charge, with his evil genius, his P.R. man, the false

prophet, using supernatural means to make his boss appear even greater, more super-human, even god-like, than ever before. In addition, all—millions—of Satan’s demonic angels will be spewed out onto the earth, unrestricted, unrestrained, in the form of ravenous locusts, demonic horses from hell, and who knows what else.

There will be no universal presence of the Holy Spirit, as before the Rapture, to temper the evil effects of Satan, no world-wide church empowered by that same Spirit to stand in opposition to him.

Satan will be in charge.

AN AFTERTHOUGHT

In closing I would like to leave you with some food for thought. In this and earlier sessions we have learned of Satan’s almost constant presence before the throne of God, slandering, falsely accusing the righteous. There are too many references to this to slough off as mere opinion. And it would seem that his many evil angels are with him there as well.

Yet this teacher—in this and other classes, especially during our study of the Thessalonian letters—has often expressed the point that the resurrection of believers is necessary to give us glorified bodies suitable for the presence of God, *for He cannot abide sinful flesh in His presence.*

Well, which is it?

One cannot get more sinful than Satan—yet there he is standing before God and His Christ in heaven. We haven’t the time to work this out now, but I will be working on this to bring my own answer. Perhaps you might join me in pondering this on your own, searching through God’s word to glean an answer—or the critical difference between the two which may have escaped us.

The question for which we need an answer: *If God cannot permit sinful, unglorified believers in His presence, how then can He abide Satan and his angels? What are we missing?*

* Permit me to add at this point a note about that perennial question which has been raised both in this class and beyond, almost certainly since time immemorial. To wit, Why does Satan do it? He knows He must lose—he’s read Scripture; why does he attempt something so futile as to attack the holy angels of God?

In a comment I found enlightening, Joseph Seiss, responding to the phrase in v8: “they prevailed not” (NASB: “they were not strong enough”), wrote, “[Satan] might have known that this would be the result. But pride, depravity, and malice have wonderful power to blind the mind to reason and truth, and to give brazen hope even where there is not the slightest ground for hope. Satan has ever been so successful in the past, both in heaven among the angels, and on earth with the human race, and his proud daring is so unbounded, that he does not hesitate to believe that he can break even the decrees of Almightyness. So he attempts it.” (emphasis added)

That is a possible explanation that we can hang our hat on. Don’t we see it every day in, for example, politicians? Without naming names, the party will issue a statement that is empirically a lie; their people then repeat the lie ad nauseam until even they begin to believe it. By the middle of the Tribulation, after thousands upon thousands of years of hate and intrigue and duplicity, the mind of Satan may be so twisted and perverted that He may actually believe he can win against God. That is, after an entire career of lying to man about God, that venom has successfully corrupted his mind even more than man’s.

SESSION 32: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWENTY-TWO): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART FIVE

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15 (with reference to Chart #16)

PREFACE

Our last session concluded with Satan and his angels being “thrown down to the earth” after losing the war initiated by Satan against the holy angels of heaven (Revelation 12:7-9). This will be the second and last time Satan and his angelic minions will be punished and demoted by God: the first time resulting in Satan losing heaven as his official residence, but not losing his access to it; this second time resulting in Satan losing all connection with the precincts of God. His next place of residence will be the abyss for one thousand years; after that, his eternal residence will be the lake of fire.

I have posited that vv7-17 of Chapter Twelve comprise an amplification, a fleshing out, as it were, of vv1-6. In v4, for example, we are told that “[the dragon’s] tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.” With the additional details of vv7-9 we learn that this is because of the war in heaven, and that the “stars” swept by the dragon’s tail are in actuality the demonic angels being collected up for accompanying their master to their new home on earth.*

Now, to our text. At this point a victory celebration of sorts rises in heaven.

Read Revelation 12:10-12a.

v10

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.”

We cannot identify with certainty the owner, or owners, of this “voice”—note the plural “our God”—except to conclude that it is essentially a *human* voice. For later in this verse is the phrase “the accuser of our brethren,” and angels do not refer to humans as their “brethren”—fellow *servants*, yes, but not brethren. Thus we conclude that this “loud voice in heaven” is the voice of praise coming from the redeemed saints in heaven, and quite possibly the voices of those previously martyred in His name, individuals who have vocally cried out for retribution and vengeance.

Read Revelation 6:9-10.

Note in that passage that these were slain, “for the word of God and for the

testimony which they held.” We will see this again in v11 of our text. But at this point I need to confess that for me this extended passage—vv7-12a—is *very* confusing. Let me put it this way: If I were an editor and a writer submitted this paragraph to me, it would be handed back covered with blue pencil marks, and I would tell him to rewrite the whole thing, making it more coherent. The problem here is not just the standard obstacle in The Revelation of prophetic language and fantastical imagery; in this passage—and especially vv10-12a—the use of vague pronouns leaves the reader at a loss to know who is doing what, and where—and when.

Verses 7-9 make it crystal clear that this war during the Tribulation but taking place in heaven, is an *angelic* war, and has just been won by the good guys: “And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war... And the great dragon was thrown down...” (vv7, 9a). There is no mention of any participation in this war by human beings.

Verse 10, not unexpectedly, then follows immediately with a song of praise for the victory. But then the text gets very confusing, because, for one thing, it is predominantly by and about humans—*not* the angels who have just won the victory against Satan. [Let’s work our way through it.](#)

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven,

The apostle John hears a loud voice, and we gather from the plural pronouns that follow that this is probably an instance of myriad voices praising in unison. But who do the voices belong to?

saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come,

So far so good; our question is not yet answered (from this the voices could be either angelic or human, or both) but we can take this to be a standard *proleptic* (or *prophetic*) *aorist* reference to the kingdom to be established after the Tribulation, yet so certain that it is spoken of as having already occurred.

for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.”

Here we learn that the “our” refers to humans: only humans, not angels, would speak of “our brethren,” and it is, and always has been, humans accused “before our God day and night” by the great “accuser”.¹

Up to this point we have human beings—i.e., redeemed, glorified saints in heaven—rejoicing that Satan (“the accuser of our brethren”) has been thrown down. Within this verse the angels did the work, and the humans are rejoicing that the work was done. But things go sideways in v11.

¹ Job 1:11; 2:5; Zechariah 3:1

“And they overcame him...”

All our common versions place all three verses (except for the setup in v10) within quotation marks; that is, all three verses are stated by the same voice—i.e., humans in heaven. There are no close-quotes at the end of v10. That being the case, who are “they” who “overcame him” (i.e., conquered)?

- It is a pretty safe assumption that the “him” would be Satan (the accuser), and if we stopped here we might sensibly assume that “they” refers back to the angels that defeated Satan in the recent war.
- A second assumption might be that “they” refers to “the brethren” (“them” in the previous verse). But the brethren received the benefits of the war (retribution, vengeance), not the victory itself; they were not the victorious warriors in the battle.

Further leading us toward a human “they,” however, is the rest of the verse.

because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

This is clearly speaking of those for whom “the blood of the Lamb” would mean their “salvation” (v10) and atonement—i.e., humans, not angels. Verse 11 seems to paint a picture of earth-based followers of Christ. But who? and when?

It becomes necessary at this point to determine a time frame so as to correctly identify these who have (or will) overcome the adversary. To be precise, knowing the time frame will make it possible to determine **who** these faithful martyrs are that are spoken of in v11, **when** did they, or will they, “overc[o]me” Satan, and **how** they gained the victory.

Historical

A remark made by the *least* of my handful of commentators for this study seems at first to be easily dismissed—yet, it also opens up a can of worms that just may challenge some of our preconceptions. Alan F. Johnson writes, “At the time of Christ’s death on earth, Satan was being defeated in heaven by Michael.” By this (and subsequent text), Johnson is saying that this war between good and evil, between Michael and Satan, was concluded at the cross, when Christ died as the atonement Lamb, in approximately AD 26. Johnson continues,

In times past, Satan's chief role as adversary was directed toward accusing God's people of disobedience to God. The justice of these accusations was recognized by God, and therefore Satan's presence in heaven was tolerated. But now the presence of the crucified Savior in God's presence provides the required satisfaction of God's justice with reference to our sins (1 John 2:1-2; 4:10). Therefore, Satan's accusations are no longer valid and he is cast out.

Based on the position that this war and Satan's ejection from heaven takes place during the Tribulation, my immediate response to this was that Christ has remained our Advocate against the accusations of Satan even till now. How, then, can Johnson's position be valid?

Then I realized that if one takes the position that this passage in Revelation narrates the fall of Satan at the cross, *all of our references for Satan being there before God in heaven, accusing the saints, are from the OT.*² This reference in Revelation 12 would not count, since it is describing something that happened at the outset, prior to the NT being written.

Now, it is always possible that I simply could not find what I was looking for, but after considerable searching and cross-referencing I came up empty in my effort to find NT—i.e., post-Ascension—evidence for Satan accusing the saints in heaven. So maybe we should not quickly dismiss Johnson's position—which is that all the references to Satan's defeat at the cross are literal, rather than positional or prophetic, that our Savior's advocacy before the Father is accomplished by His presence alone—not that He is literally, today, arguing against the accusations of Satan before the throne.

The standard dispensational, pre-trib, pre-mil position would be that our passage in Chapter Twelve speaks of Satan losing a war and being ejected from heaven some time during the Tribulation, which would disengage the literal act from Satan's *positional* status since His defeat at the cross. These are heady, profound considerations, but we must move on to consider two other possible interpretations of this passage—actually just one, but one which can be assigned to either of two different time frames.

Tribulation/Millennium

It helps us understand this passage if we separate the practical *physicality* of this angelic war and its immediate result (Satan banished from heaven), from its more cosmic, salvation- and kingdom-oriented ramifications. Doing so frees us from the seeming confusion introduced by vague pronouns and discovering humans where we might expect angels. For example, if we consider this passage from that perspective, we see that it is *all* about humans—i.e., mankind—and *for* them. Stripped down to the essentials, why do Michael and his angels engage in this war with Satan and his angels? Is it for *their* ultimate benefit? Or is it for man's, and the purity and sanctification of the eternal kingdom? I contend that, as is usual with angels, Michael and his angels fight the war on behalf of humans, mankind.

There is a poetic symmetry to this as well: at the same time that the earth is being purified of all sin and rebellion by those in opposition to God and His Christ, heaven itself is being purified of the very same thing—all opposition to God.

With this in mind, we should not be surprised that the joyful hymn of praise is offered by a chorus of redeemed men and women in heaven. It is *their* victory!

²e.g., Job, Zechariah

Taken as a whole (vv7-12), this passage demands that we set it in the environment and time frame of the Eschaton. That being the case, we can take v10 as speaking in the practical present tense; that is, “the accuser of our brethren has been cast down” *right now*—not two thousand years ago, and “he who accuses them before our God day and night” has been stopped *right now*—not two thousand years ago.

because of the blood of the Lamb...

In v11 we get hung up on the vague pronoun “they” in “And they overcame him...” ; if angels, the rest of the verse makes no sense; if humans, how could they overcome Satan? But Henry Alford points us in the right direction with his thoughts on this verse.

Alford: And they conquered him on account of the blood of the Lamb (i. e. *by virtue of that blood having been shed*: not as in E. V., “by the blood.” The meaning is far more significant; their victory over Satan was grounded in, was a consequence of, His having shed his precious blood: without that, the adversary’s charges against them would have been unanswerable.

It is Christ in His sacrifice that has brought the victory—for angels? No, for us. Wars and battles, winners and losers, victory and defeat—all pale when set against that which has come: “the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ.”†

and because of the word of their testimony...

Let us get some help again from Henry Alford.

Alford: and “on account of the word of their testimony.” It is because they have given a faithful testimony, even unto death, that they are victorious: this is their part, their appropriation of and standing in the virtue of that blood of the Lamb. Without both these, victory would not have been theirs: both, together, form its ground.

We need to expand on this for a moment, lest we begin to think Alford is suggesting that our *performance* is somehow part of our victory over Satan. Not fearing to give testimony for Christ in the face of persecution and death is really all about our *perseverance*.

Read Matthew 10:22.

We know that that verse means that if one *is* saved, one *will* endure to the end. That verse is small consolation, however, without knowing where that endurance, or the ability to “stand firm,” comes from. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans,

† And even though our time frames do not agree, Johnson is right about at least one thing: Do we really believe that with Satan accusing believers to Father God, he requires Christ, at His right hand, to literally argue the point, as two attorneys might in court? No, the very presence of the Lamb that was slain is sufficient, and far more eloquent than any spoken words.

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, *so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,* (Romans 15:4-5; emphasis added)

It is all of God; our ability to overcome Satan begins with the atoning blood of Christ, and is played out, through faith, through the perseverance God grants His children to stand firm—even against the horrific trials and persecution of the Tribulation—and give testimony for the gospel.

and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

Even unto death, for we know that whatever life we would be trying to save by denying Christ is utterly worthless compared to the life we have—and *will have—in Him.*

The setting for this hymn of joyful victory is expansive. Let us not be so self-indulgent to imagine that its opening words speak of our own personal “salvation,” and the “power” we each have in Christ. This is a joyful hymn of praise to the Creator-God for His ingenious idea that all things—from the creation of the first atom to the creation of the last thing to be created—all things culminate in the glorious kingdom of Christ. For,

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him *all things* were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—*all things* have been created through Him and *for Him*. He is before *all things*, and in Him *all things* hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have *first place* in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for *all the fullness* to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile *all things* to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Colossians 1:15-20; emphasis added)

Verse 11 speaks of those who have persevered through the trials of the Tribulation. They have been equipped to “conquer” Satan because of the atoning blood of Christ, and their steadfast testimony for Him. Verse 10, using standard *proleptic aorist* imagery, announces that because of that victory, the kingdom has arrived.

We typically—and accurately—assign that kingdom to the Millennium, because it is then that Christ Jesus will reign, on earth, upon His throne. True. Quite true. But those thousand years are not the end of all things. Though Sa-

tan will have been locked up in the abyss, and Christ will be reigning as King over the entirety of the earth, sin and rebellion will not have been expunged. This will *not* be the pristine “eternal state.” During the Millennium there will be one last army organized from those who still hate God; when Satan is released, they will be ready and eager to join him in this final battle against righteousness.

So while it is true that Christ’s kingdom (or, “the kingdom of our God”), spoken of in v10 and myriad passages elsewhere, will be inaugurated when Christ returns in judgment to end the Tribulation, the full and glorious realization of that kingdom must wait a thousand years for that perfect, eternal state in a new Jerusalem on a new earth.

All this joy and praise in vv10-11 are based on the defeat of Satan. So v12 begins with a call to rejoice over this defeat of the adversary.

“For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them.”

Please note the limitations of this: “...rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them.” That limitation is there because this is certainly *not* an occasion for rejoicing on earth, which has just received, as new residents, Satan and his cohort who are, because of their recent defeat, madder than wet hens. No, the rest of v12 (which we will examine in our next session) makes clear that instead of rejoicing, this will mean “Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.” The second part of v12 is, as it were, the gateway opening onto the very worst of the Tribulation period.

CONCLUSION

It would seem that at the very least this passage is guilty of an inartful and confusing transition from heaven to earth. But it also may employ an inartful transition from the narrative timeline to either a point in the past, or one of two possible points in the future—that is, future to the narrative timeline, roughly the middle of the Tribulation.

Or we can look at this in a different way, that the Spirit of God has written these verses intentionally vague so as to leave it for us—with His help, of course—to make the connections and suitable application on our own.

It is no bad thing to be forced to dig in and dig deeply in Scripture to ferret out what the Lord God is telling us. I know *I* won’t be soon forgetting the truth we have discovered buried here.

SESSION 33: AN INTERLUDE: GOD AND THE PRESENCE OF EVIL

PREFACE

This study has opened our eyes to many new concepts, new interpretations, new facts and revelations. It has certainly broadened our perspective and understanding of the Last Things, as well as challenged a number of our preconceived notions.

I believe that now is an opportune time to interrupt our examination of the third parenthetical visions, found in Revelation 11:15 to 15:8, with a deeper examination of a topic that has arisen over the last few sessions: to wit, *God and the Presence of Evil*.

At the end of Session 31, I challenged us with the following:

In this and earlier sessions we have learned of Satan's almost constant presence before the throne of God, slandering, falsely accusing the righteous.

Yet this teacher—in this and other classes, especially during our study of the Thessalonian letters—has often expressed the point that the resurrection of believers is necessary to give us glorified bodies suitable for the presence of God, for He cannot abide sinful flesh in His presence. Well, which is it?

One cannot get more sinful than Satan—yet there he is standing before God and His Christ in heaven.

The question for which we need an answer [I posed at the time]: *If God cannot permit sinful, unglorified believers in His presence, how then can He abide Satan and his angels? What are we missing?*

Over the last few months a new understanding has been percolating in my mind, growing bit by bit, pieces added here and there during this study—an understanding that I believe central to this study of the Eschaton, bringing me to the following conclusion: I believe that most of us, perhaps especially those of us born and raised in the church, have been left with a rather narrow perception of God the Father and His heaven. There are subtleties and nuances to Him and His heaven that were not taught us in Sunday School, nor have they been taught much from the pulpit. (I do not mean this as a criticism; it is simply a subject that does not come up that often in the evangelical community.)

The spark that ignited this session's topic was the contemplation of Satan, along with his cohort of evil angels, retaining access to God's heaven even after inciting Adam's fall in the Garden. This means that even now—since some point prior to man's fall in Eden until roughly the middle of the Tribulation (still future to us)—even now Satan, the very essence of evil, retains access to the dwelling of a holy God.

My guess is that most of us have made our peace with a holy God using or working through pagan, even evil men to accomplish His will. All we need do is return to the Exodus narrative to see this in practice.

Read Exodus 7:2-5.

In other words it was God Himself who caused the king of Egypt to reject the signs as insufficient proof to permit Israel to leave Egypt. God's purpose was to *compound* the evidence, increasing the suffering so as to make a more dramatic statement of His power. We might expect a God who so loves Israel¹ to do everything in His power—which is, of course, limitless—to smooth the way for Israel; we might expect Him to control the Pharaoh's heart in the *other* direction, for him to immediately release them at his first opportunity. But God's agenda is not ours; He *will* be glorified, and He will do it in His own way.

Closer to home for those of us in this study, we see essentially the same thing happening during the Tribulation. God is compounding the misery, working through Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet—all three evil to the core—to, by contrast, reveal His holiness, and to make it crystal clear that He, the Lord God, will not abide the rejection of His Messiah. One dose of His wrath will not be sufficient, but He will express it again, and again, and again.

Because of these and many more instances in God's word in which He works through unbelievers to accomplish His sovereign will, we are probably at peace with God doing this on earth. But for many of us, it is difficult to swallow the idea that God is employing some of the same tactics within heaven itself. Let's organize our discussion with a series of questions.

IF HEAVEN IS CURRENTLY SUCH A PERFECT PARADISE, WITHOUT SIN, WHY WILL GOD ONE DAY REPLACE IT WITH A NEW HEAVEN?²

Let's consider a few facts about the current heaven and Father God:

- God, omnipotent and omniscient, certainly knew that one of His upper-echelon angels, His beautiful “anointed cherub who covers”,³ would eventually turn against Him, tempt Adam and Eve, and cause the downfall of all mankind in his “very good” Creation. Yet He permitted that to play out.
- Until the middle of the Tribulation, Satan and his evil angels will have access to heaven.
- Anyone who dies prior to the Rapture will be “with the Lord,” but will not yet have their glorified, resurrection body.
- In heaven there is indeed weeping and sorrow; for example, “When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their

¹ Deuteronomy 7:6-8

² Revelation 21:1-4

³ Ezekiel 28:11-15

brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.”⁴

- At the Great White Throne judgment⁵ there will be a veritable sea of sinners in the presence of God (“standing before the throne”).

My guess is that most of us today think of heaven as a place of sinless perfection and peace, a place of unending, unadulterated joy, a place of purity in which all in attendance worship a holy and righteous God. But that does not describe the current heaven; it describes the *new* heaven, not brought into existence until the very end of the Last Things. Let me read a portion of an answer offered by Dr. Roger Barrier to someone raising the same question we are addressing, who wrote,

Dear Roger,

I’m just confused on one point, where does it say that Satan has open access to Heaven? And there are scriptures that say no sin can dwell in the presence of God, so Heaven isn’t where God is right now?

Sincerely, Seth

Dear Seth,

We hear all the time from people that there is no sin in Heaven! Who says so!? Most people don’t realize that Satan has open access to Heaven even now. We think of Heaven as a place of perfection and peace where there is no more sorrow and no more sin. We are thinking of the permanent Heaven and not the present Heaven. God will one day erect a new Heaven and earth because the present Heaven is soiled with sin.

Unfortunately there is pain and suffering in the present Heaven. For example, in Revelation 6 we see in the present Heaven a group of martyrs who are weeping as they plead for God to wreak vengeance on their persecutors.

God does not remove all the tears from Heaven until Revelation 21 (when He puts the permanent Heaven into place).

We must be careful not to confuse the present Heaven with the permanent Heaven. At the “end time” God will create a new permanent Heaven and a new Earth where there are no longer any tears or sins.

Randy Alcorn, former pastor and currently founder and director of *Eternal Perspective Ministries*, writes,

People usually think of “Heaven” as the place Christians go when they die. A better definition explains that Heaven is God’s central dwelling place, the location of his throne from which he rules the universe. Many don’t realize that the present pre-resurrection Heaven and future post-resurrection Heaven are located in different places. The exact

⁴ Revelation 6:9-11

⁵ Revelation 20:11-15

location of the present Heaven is unknown, but we're told the future Heaven will be located on the New Earth. The present Heaven is a place of transition between believers' past lives on Earth and future resurrection lives on the New Earth.

Life in the present Heaven (which theologians call the "intermediate" Heaven) is "better by far" than living here on Earth under the curse (Phil. 1:23). But it's not our final destination.

Dr. Robert Jeffress, Senior Pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, and adjunct professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, writes,

Perhaps the concept of a present Heaven and a future Heaven is a bit confusing to you. Let me illustrate it this way: Let's say that you have a dream that one day when you retire you will move to the city where all of your children and grandchildren are. When the day of your retirement comes, you buy a piece of land to construct the home of your dreams. While that construction project is going on, you've got to have a place to live, so you rent an apartment. It's nice, and it's comfortable, but it is not your permanent dwelling place. The same thing is true for Christians when we die. When we die right now, we go into the presence of God. We are aware, we are with our loved ones, but it is a temporary place. God is building a permanent home for us (John 14:2-3).

DOES THIS SUGGEST A POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL ROLE FOR THE TWENTY-FOUR ELDERS, AND ESPECIALLY THE "FOUR LIVING CREATURES" AROUND THE THRONE?⁶

What I am about to suggest I do in the spirit of the apostle Paul writing to the Corinthians about marriage. Some counsel he described as coming from the Lord:

But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband... (1 Corinthians 7:10)

Other counsel he described as coming *not* from the Lord, but from him:

But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. (1 Corinthians 7:12)

Not only am I not the Lord, I am not an apostle, so what I am about to suggest I offer in the spirit of "for what it is worth," "food for thought."

The Lord God is indeed holy. In Leviticus 20:7 He told Israel, "You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the LORD your God." Moses also passed along to them that any environment in which "the Lord your God" walks must be holy: "Since the LORD your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you and to defeat your enemies before you, therefore your camp

⁶ Revelation 4:6-11

must be holy; and He must not see anything indecent among you or He will turn away from you.”⁷ Thus we can safely assume, as Psalm 68:5 states, that where He lives is also holy: “A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation.”

The prophet Habakkuk seems to echo some of our own questions about a holy God permitting sin and evil—even within His precincts.

Your eyes are too pure to approve evil,
And You can not look on wickedness with favor.
Why do You look with favor
On those who deal treacherously?
Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up
Those more righteous than they? (Habakkuk 1:13)

Yet, as we have discussed, the totality of the current heaven is far from holy and pure, sinless and perfect. How do we reconcile these two?

From a number of passages in God’s word we get a pretty solid picture of the immediate area around the throne of Father God. Let’s compare two of these to see their similarity: the visions of John and Isaiah. [Place a finger at Revelation 4 and a second at Isaiah 6, which is where I would like to begin.](#)

God’s Throne

In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. (Isaiah 6:1)

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. (Revelation 4:2)

The Lord God is *seated* on His throne—that is, the *chair*—yet all descriptions suggest that the throne itself is positioned higher than the surrounding area, which telegraphs importance, seniority, superiority—holiness.

God Himself

Isaiah does not dare to include a description of the One seated on the throne, but John does.

And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. (Revelation 4:3)

That is, so glorious and holy that all the apostle can do is grasp at similar earthly objects. He then continues with a description of the Presence of God in v5.

⁷Deuteronomy 23:14

Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; (Revelation 4:5)

No wonder Isaiah was so petrified in his vision. He does not describe God's appearance, or even His glory, but he describes the *sound* of omnipotence.

And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. (Isaiah 6:4)

The prophet Ezekiel offers us further details about “the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh.” (Note the three layers of separation required to avoid describing God Himself.)

Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. (Ezekiel 1:27–28a)

The Twenty-four Elders

The passage in Isaiah does not mention the elders, but John does.

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. (Revelation 4:4)

Thus far we have a lofty chair in the center (Ezekiel calls it, “high up”) on which Father God is seated. A “sea of glass, like crystal” one gathers is the material constituting the raised dais, or platform for the throne. The twenty-four elders are seated on their own thrones encircling God's throne; theirs are almost certainly on the glass dais, while God's throne is above theirs.

The Four Creatures

John refers to them as “living creatures” (*zoon*; KJV, “beasts”); Isaiah calls them *seraphim*, transliterated from the Hebrew, meaning fiery serpent; Ezekiel refers to them as “living beings” (Hebrew *hay-yah*), essentially the same as the Greek *zoon* in the Revelation.

All three passages mention them, but the prophet Ezekiel gives us the most detailed description of these four creatures. [Please turn to Ezekiel 1](#). (The only apparent contradictions are that Ezekiel says they had *four* wings, while John and Isaiah say six, and there is some difference in how the creatures' faces are described.)

Within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form. Each of them had four faces and four wings. (Ezekiel 1:5–6)

The discrepancy between the accounts of their wings may be solved when we compare the appearance of their faces. [Skip down to v10.](#)

As for the form of their faces, each had the face of a man; all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each had two touching another being, and two covering their bodies. (Ezekiel 1:10–11)

The predominant face for each was the “face of a man”; on either side was the face of a lion and a bull (Revelation, “calf”), with the face in the back, opposite the man’s, an eagle.

A possible explanation for the discrepancies would be that Ezekiel saw them *moving, but not turning* (vv9, 12). This might explain his fewer numbers of wings. Yet v14 says that “the living beings ran to and fro like bolts of lightning.” So even though they never turned, at any given moment one could be in front of the prophet, to either side, or in front of him, thus letting him see that each had four different faces. In contrast, *John never mentions them moving*, which would explain why he describes the faces differently:

The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. (Revelation 4:7)

If they were facing him each with a different face, and John never saw them move, he would describe them as each having a different face. If their wings were outstretched, he could more easily see them all (six). The setting is different in each of these two accounts: John in the Revelation describes a more static, formal scene of worship, whereas Ezekiel describes a more chaotic scene, with extra elements (e.g., wheels), in which everything seems to be moving and swirling about him.

[Back to Isaiah 6 one last time.](#)

Isaiah’s Iniquity and Forgiveness

One last consideration before I draw a conclusion from all this pertinent to God’s holiness set against sin in heaven. Look at Isaiah’s response to what he is seeing.

And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my

eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” Then one of the seraphim⁸ flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.” (Isaiah 6:4–7)

Immediately after this—but *only after his being cleansed of his sin*—the prophet (in his vision) has a one-on-one conversation with the Lord God. That is, *Isaiah could not approach the throne to converse with Father God until his sin had been removed by the seraph.*

Here is my proposition, posed in the form of a question:

COULD IT BE THAT THESE SURROUNDING THE THRONE OF GOD—AND ESPECIALLY THE FOUR LIVING CREATURES—ARE THERE NOT JUST TO WORSHIP GOD, BUT TO SHIELD HIM FROM THE SIN IN THE REST OF HEAVEN?

With good reason most of us have probably come to associate the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures with the perpetual worship of the Lord God and His Christ.⁹

John MacArthur reminds us, however, that the four creatures serve the Lord in ways far beyond leading in worship.

MacArthur: The four living creatures, like angels in general (Matthew 13:40-43, 49; 25:31ff.; Revelation 15:1, 7), are deeply involved with the coming judgments of the Tribulation, in which they will play an integral role. They will be there at the outset of divine judgments as one of their number calls forth the rider on the white horse (6:1-2). Another will decree economic disaster upon the earth (6:6), while another will give the seven angels involved in the bowl judgments their bowls (15:7).

Thus my proposition for your consideration is that all these “beings,” both human and non-human that surround the throne area—including the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures, and at times others—combine to encompass God’s holiness. It is *not*, as we might say in human terms, that they create a “safe zone” for God and Christ, as if they are somehow instrumental in creating the holiness and purity of the throne. No, all of that emanates from God Himself; these other figures are there to ensure that no sin or evil gets near enough to corrupt the holy throne area. I imagine the four living creatures to be especially instrumental in this.

This would go a long way toward answering many of our questions regarding the holiness of God, yet the presence of sin in heaven.

- Is God holy and pure? Absolutely.

⁸ creatures or beasts

⁹ Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8-11, 5:8-14, 15:1-4, 19:1-7

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME." (Revelation 4:8)

- **Can God dwell with sin? No.**

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit... For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8:1-4, 6-8)

- **Does this mean there is no sin, or will not be any sin, in the present heaven? No.**

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:12-15)

- **Could it be that God yearns for a new heaven and new earth as much as do His people? I believe so.**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself

will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:1-4)

The bottom line is this: If the present heaven were as perfect and pristine as the future permanent heaven just described, there would be no reason for it to be replaced. God is and has always been utterly and completely holy. It is for this reason He must eventually create a new heavens and earth, so that He can dwell in joy and peace, and perfect holiness, with His beloved people.

SESSION 34: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWENTY-THREE): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART SIX

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15, with Chart #11.

PREFACE

When last we were in Chapter Twelve of the Revelation (vv10-12a), Satan and his army of evil angels had just been defeated and forever cast out of heaven. What followed was a time of rejoicing, and an occasion to celebrate heaven as one step closer to realizing “the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ.” Though the war was won by angels, the celebration is voiced by those who benefit the most from the victory—humans—for this is a Christ-centric moment: the righteous result of this war is credited to “the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.” That is, the sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the cross is both the *reason* Michael and his angels won the victory over Satan, and from which the *resolve of the persecuted on earth* has and will come.

This passage (inartfully, in my opinion) bridges heaven and earth; the impetus for the celebration is the victory in heaven over Satan, but the celebration is voiced by humans specifically referencing how “the blood of the lamb” empowered believers on earth during the Tribulation to overcome Satan’s power. Wisely this human choir limits the rejoicing to the precincts of heaven, for there will be little reason for rejoicing on earth for the next few years. For Satan was not just thrown *out* of heaven, but thrown *down to earth*.

Read Revelation 12:12-14.

Before we dig into this passage, let’s reestablish our timeline. [Look at Chart #11.](#)

- The seventh trumpet of the trumpet judgments has already sounded. Verse 14 of Chapter Eleven announces that “The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.” The first and second “woes” were the fifth and sixth trumpets, respectively; the “third woe” is the seventh trumpet consisting of the bowl judgments.
- In v15 the trumpet sounds: “Then the seventh angel sounded...” followed immediately by a heavenly chorus announcing that this moment is a turning point; even though there still remains the second half of the Tribulation, from heaven’s perspective the sounding of this seventh trumpet marks the beginning of the end, and the coming of Christ’s reign over His kingdom.

(Parenthetically, one gets the impression that all of heaven is so eager for that kingdom that they repeatedly announce it well in advance of its literal occurrence.) [Look at Chart #15.](#)

- Verse 15 marks the beginning of what I have termed the “third parenthetical visions,” which, taking up just over four chapters in the Revelation, separate the sounding of the trumpet from the actual pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath.
- We are now poised, in this session, to conclude the third vision in this four-chapter extended passage, which began at v1 of Chapter Twelve. Verses 1-6 gave us the shorthand version of this episode; we now conclude the more detailed version of vv7-17: the miraculous saving of the Israel remnant from an enraged Satan.

wv13-14

And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.

That this will be a perilous time for Israel is apparent in that it is she whom Satan seeks out first upon being thrown out of heaven. “Having great wrath” (v12) translates not *orge*, but the Greek *thymos*. Walvoord helps us understand the difference.

The word for “wrath” means a strong passion or emotion but carries less weight than *orge*. It is an emotional rather than a rational state of mind and stems from his own awareness that his days are numbered.

We enter now what the prophet Jeremiah called, “the time of Jacob’s distress.”

Read Jeremiah 30:3-7.

So much of what is going on in this moment, this episode of the Eschaton, for Israel specifically, is centered on the Messiah. If you are a living Jew around the middle of the Tribulation on earth, your fate—your *eternal* fate—will be determined by your decision regarding Messiah. Is the historic Jesus of Nazareth the promised Messiah for Israel, or are you waiting for another? If for you Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Messiah, you will most likely take refuge in a place God has prepared for you in the wilderness, safe from Satan’s persecution. Life for you will not be easy, but you will survive.

If, on the other hand, you are a Jew who rejects Jesus as the Christ, you will be persecuted, most likely tortured, and die. Having rejected Jesus as the Messiah, you will be among those consigned to the lake of fire at the final judgment.

The prophet Zechariah informs us that this second, unbelieving group will constitute *two-thirds* of the nation of Israel, with the remaining one-third saved.

Zechariah 13:8-9: “It will come about in all the land,” Declares the LORD, “That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; But

the third will be left in it. “And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ And they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”

John MacArthur organizes Satan’s campaign against Israel into three attacks, and I think that is a helpful way to picture it, for, indeed, that is how John presents it:

- Attack One: 12:13-14
- Attack Two: 12:15-16
- Attack Three: 12:17

Attack One: Pursuit

The word translated “persecuted” in the NASB and NKJV means to put to flight, to pursue, as it is translated in the ESV and NIVs.*

Read Matthew 24:15-21.

We can well imagine the frantic chaos occurring in Judea and the Middle East. Jesus tells them, “*Just run!*”

v14: But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

The late, great professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford and author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R. R. Tolkien, portrays in his books this imagery literally, sending giant eagles to swoop in and rescue the good guys at the last minute. God’s word uses the imagery to express either rescue—“He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions” (Deuteronomy 32:11)—or protection—“Let me dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings” (Psalm 61:4)—neither of which refer to literal avian flight. And so here.

Here the imagery means that God, by whatever means, will facilitate the escape of this remnant from Israel to a safe place in the wilderness. Some have conjectured as to how and to where, but that really misses the point, which is that God Himself is determined to save a portion of Messianic Israel from the rage of Satan. In this He will be successful. How and where we are not told, but we *are* told for how long: “for a time and times and half a time.” That is, for three-and-one-half years. There this remnant will not just be held safe from Satan and his angels, but will be “nourished” (*trephe*, fed, reared, nurtured, made to grow—implied, their numbers will grow).

*Though we will not discuss it in-depth until we get to Chapter Thirteen, I just want to point out that, as Jesus describes in Matthew 24, at this point in time the “abomination of desolation” is now “standing in the holy place.” That is, the statue of Antichrist is now standing and being worshiped in the Jerusalem temple.

from the presence¹ of the serpent.

Satan will not find them. They will not see his face.

v15-16

Read Revelation 12:15-17.

Attack Two: A River

Thwarted by God in his pursuit of Messianic Israel, Satan tries a different, more long-range tactic: he sends their way what is termed “water like a river” — a different sort of pursuit.

v15: 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.

Though it is true we have striven to interpret most of the Revelation text literally, sensibly, the *sensible* interpretation of this passage in this case would be to accept much of it as being told using figurative language, for the whole thing is literally drenched in it. In this episode

- Satan is not an angel, but a dragon and serpent;
- Israel is not a nation, but a woman;
- Israel does not run into the wilderness, but flies there on “two wings of the great eagle”;
- It is hidden and protected not for three-and-one-half years, but “for a time and times and half a time”.

Rather than struggling to make literal sense of a “serpent pour[ing] water like a river out of his mouth,” we must take this to mean what it often means in the symbolic language of the OT. For example, Job describes the perils of the wicked man with, “He lies down rich, but never again; He opens his eyes, and it is no longer. Terrors overtake him like a flood; A tempest steals him away in the night.”²

Read Jeremiah 46:7-8.

The imagery is even more obvious in the next chapter of Jeremiah.

Read Jeremiah 47:1-4a.

There the armies of Egypt are pictured, in their destruction of the Philistines, as “waters rising,” “an overflowing torrent.” Thus we can easily apply a similar “reality on the ground” to this second pursuit by the armies of Satan. Perhaps he thought his initial attack would be swift and decisive with a rel-

¹literally, face

²Job 27:19-20

actively small force—a mistake many generals and political leaders continue to make. When that fails, Satan musters a larger, more comprehensive force to attack Israel with far greater numbers. But once again, God protects His children.

v16: But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.

Because He has done this before—in the Numbers narrative in which the Lord strikes the families of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram for their rebellion—we are free to interpret this more literally.

Read Numbers 16:30-33.

We can easily picture the intervention of God in his protection of Israel, commanding the earth to open and “[drink] up the river” of demonic angels flooding in to attack Israel. The Lord God may even implement this destruction by means of one of the many earthquakes inflicted on the earth during the Tribulation. He does not *need* to employ “natural” means, but He could.

Attack Three: A Seek and Destroy Mission

v17: So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Finally, Satan storms off in a huff. Like King Ramses at the shore of the Red Sea in *The Ten Commandments*, he sends his troops to their doom, but spares himself by declaring that “this is not the job for a king,” thereby saving himself from the carnage. In v17, after witnessing what happens to his troops, the frustrated and enraged Satan does an about-face and heads off in search of victims elsewhere—“to make war with the rest of [Israel’s] children.”

Opinions vary on what is meant when John expands on the words “her children” with “who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” Most of our modern versions translate this correctly as “the *rest* of her children (or seed, *spermatos*, that which is sown). The KJV “remnant” perhaps implies a protected group, which is not the case. The word is *loipon*, meaning the rest, the remaining, which could refer to just about anyone other than those that are being specifically sheltered by God.

As to the delineating phrase, “who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus,” let’s work backward. Those “who...hold to the testimony of Jesus” obviously refers to Christians, and MacArthur points out that this refers not to testimony *about* Him, “but the testimony He gave, the truths He taught that are revealed in the New Testament.” That is, people who hold to the teachings and commandments of Christ Jesus.

But to who does it refer with “who keep the commandments of God”? On the surface at least we might logically conclude this refers to Jews who keep the commands set forth by God through Moses in the Pentateuch. Thus, taken together, this verse would seem to refer to those who do both: i.e., Messianic Jews.

If that be the case, we should expect to see some etymological connection between the word used here—the Greek *entolas*—and references to the commandments in the OT. And we find that connection in the words of Jesus in the gospel accounts. In Matthew, in His conversation with a lawyer, who asks Him,

“Teacher, which is the great *commandment* in the Law?” And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost *commandment*. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two *commandments* depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40, emphasis added)

In all three instances Jesus is specifically referring to the Ten Commandments using the same word *entolas*. He used the same word again when answering the Pharisees about divorce.

They said, “Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY.” But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this *commandment*.” (Mark 10:4-5, emphasis added)

In the gospel of John, however, Jesus also uses the word to refer to *His* commandments. For example, “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)

MacArthur interprets this verse as being all-inclusive, that is, Jews and Gentile Christians. But I favor the position of John Walvoord, who writes,

Walvoord: While the program of Satan is against the Jewish race as such, anti-Semitism as a whole will reach its peak against Jewish *believers* during this period. There is a double antagonism against those in Israel who turn to Christ as their Messiah and Saviour in those critical days and maintain a faithful witness. Undoubtedly many of them will suffer a martyr’s death, but others will survive the period including the 144,000 sealed in chapter 7.

Following Boolean logic, the text does not say “or,” but “and,” which means that *both conditions* need to be true. Thus I interpret this verse, with Walvoord, as speaking specifically of *Messianic Jews* as the prey of Satan during the second

half of the Tribulation. That is not to say that other Jews and Gentiles will not suffer as well, but Satan marks out the Messianic Jews—Israelite by birth now following Jesus—as His special prey.

Not just Jewish followers of Christ, but *everyone* on earth during this horrific period would do well to recall that old hymn penned by Martin Luther in 1529.

*A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.
And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.*

The last verse closes with,

*Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!
(Martin Luther, 1529)*

Let this be *our* battle cry as well, when Satan comes on his prowl for us.

SESSION 35: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWENTY-FOUR): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART SEVEN

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15

PREFACE

Please turn to Revelation 6, and the breaking of the seven seals.

Read Revelation 6:1-2.

Here we have, in that passage, John's first rendering of the introduction of Antichrist to earth. He is the first character to emerge from the seals—the first horseman of what is commonly referred to as the “Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” In general terms it is a picture of a winner, a victor (hence the crown of victory). Here John shows him at his most benign, at the beginning of his public life, and we are not yet attuned to his motives and goal: Victory over what? Conqueror of who? Who or what will he be shooting at with his bow? As I pointed out in Session 11,

Generally speaking, for the first half of the Tribulation Antichrist is coming onto the world stage. He is clever. He is winsome. He is a strong leader who has all the answers to the world's problems. People are drawn to him like flies to honey—or should we say like a dog to its vomit. He will eventually be recognized as the savior of the world. This describes him during the roughly first half of the Tribulation. He is working, he is plotting, he is setting in place those who will assist him in his plan, but his true purpose remains secret, shielded from the rest of the world.

Now turn to our text in Revelation 13.

Read Revelation 13:1-2.

Here is John's rendering of Antichrist *later* in his career—approximately three and one half years after his emergence in Revelation 6. Now is when we—not necessarily those on earth at the time, but *we*—see him in full flower, revealing the true evil and ugliness lying beneath his heretofore benign public image. And from those first two verses it is immediately apparent: the “beast from the sea” is not a nice guy.

There is one more contrast between the two renderings: In the first we see more the *person*, while in the second we see more the *political structure* undergirding him, and over which he rules supreme. Additionally, in the second we see clearly from whence his power comes and whose servant he truly is.

v1

*And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore.**

If you had the various versions spread before you, you would see that the translators do not agree on where that first sentence belongs. Some place it at the beginning of v1 (NASB, NIVs, and KJVs); the CSB makes it an *eighteenth* verse of Chapter Twelve; the ESV—best in my estimation—tacks it onto the end of v17 of Chapter Twelve. The KJVs, working from other manuscripts, have, “Then **I** stood on the sand of the sea, which implies “I, John,...” The difference between “I” and “he” in the Greek is just one letter: *estathen* or *estathe*. The older and preferred manuscripts have “he,” referring to the dragon. In my opinion the ESV treats this the best; by placing the sentence at the end of 12:17, which is explicitly all about the dragon, so the pronoun “he” clearly points to the dragon. We don’t have to wonder.†

When one looks at vv1-2 as a unit, the “he” (or “dragon”) makes perfect sense. It is the dragon causing the beast to rise out of the sea, and it is he who gives him “his power and his throne and great authority.”

Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea,

It is easy to see this as a moment of birth, as in Botticelli’s *The Birth of Venus*, rising from the sea fully grown upon a giant scallop shell. This does not depict the beast’s birth, however, nor even his introduction to the public, but him at his zenith of power.

The context, following Chapter Twelve, is not just logical, but profound. Satan—the beast’s “father” and mentor—has just been cast out of heaven. Angry, frustrated, and, as it were, a dragon breathing fire, Satan turns to his disciple—his “son”—and elevates him into his intended global role. The dragon is the one orchestrating all of this (of course, with God’s permission).‡

Regarding the fact that the beast rises from out of the sea, coupled with, for example, the statement in 21:1 that in the new earth “there is no longer any sea,” I have included a separate handout excerpted from a dissertation by Kenneth William Lovett for his Ph.D., in which he presents his thesis that “the OT uses the sea as a negative motif and that God treats the sea as an enemy. The sea is opposed to God’s purposes in the biblical narrative and finds itself on the receiving end of God’s rebuke and restraint.” I have also included in the handout, as a preface to Lovett’s remarks, thoughts by John MacArthur on the same topic. I will reserve further discussion about this in class for when we are in Chapter Twenty-one.

having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names.

The first and best source to illuminate our understanding of this description of Antichrist is found in the prophecy of Daniel. [Turn please to Daniel 7.](#)

* Frankly I’m a little disappointed in the NASB95 update in inserting (along with the NIVs and CSB) the word “dragon.” It is not that it is inaccurate, but “dragon” is not in the text—only “he,” as it is in the original NASB.

† Remember, there are no chapter or verse breaks in the original text. These were added much later by editors. Nor are there paragraph and sentence breaks. The original Greek is just one long string of characters.

‡ The precise sequence of this portion of the Eschaton, so bizarrely portrayed, is a debatable point. Do the events of Chapter Thirteen—the presentation of the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth (Antichrist and the false prophet, respectively)—follow *after* Satan has been frustrated by his impotent pursuit of Israel subsequent to his fall? Do they perhaps represent a step Satan took between the second and third attacks in Chapter Twelve (12:15-17), when he turns away from direct pursuit of the protected Jews to aim his venom at others? Or do they represent part of Satan gathering his forces, joining human to angelic troops, in preparation for even the first attack (12:13-14)?

Daniel 7

It is easy to think of the figure called Antichrist as the *instigator* of everything around him—that he is the one who will create and organize all of his power structure. But that is not the case. Even before the beast comes onto the scene, there will be a central, extremely powerful political entity dominating the world: a revived Roman empire.

We are told in v1 of Daniel 7 that he was in bed when he “saw a dream and visions in his mind.” In this he first sees “the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea” (v2), symbolic of the polluted, turbulent Gentile humanity. Similar to Revelation 13, where two evil figures emerge from, first, the sea, and second, from the earth, here four great beasts representing four kingdoms or empires emerge from the mass of humanity.

We are told that the first beast was like a lion with the wings of an eagle, the second resembled a bear, the third was like a leopard with four wings and four heads. These first three beasts represent, respectively, Babylon, the Medo-Persian Empire, and the Greek or Alexandrian Empire.

Read Daniel 7:7-8.

Here is a beast far more powerful than the first three and the description of its teeth being of iron is a strong clue to the empire the beast represents: Rome, the colossus of the latter part of the iron age. This *new* Roman Empire will overwhelm, either destroying or apprehending all that is left over from the three previous empires. And its ten horns in the vision represent the confederation of ten states of which it is comprised; thus we might picture these horns not as separate, individual horns, but more like antlers, with five on each side of the beast’s head.

As Daniel watches, a *new* horn emerges from within the ten others; the text reads “another horn,” which I take to mean *not* one of the first ten. Though small at first, it soon destroys three adjacent horns. It is implied (and it would also be how these power struggles often worked historically) that the remaining horns then become vassals of this new “little horn.” Finally, since we are told that this new horn has “eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts,” the horn represents a specific *ruler*, rather than a nation state.

In vv21-22 Daniel appends more of what he saw this little horn doing:

“I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.”

In his vision Daniel asks someone standing nearby to explain this “alarming, distressing” vision.

Read Daniel 7:23-26.

If you have been wondering how some previously unknown figure could, in just a few years, become so powerful as to literally rule the world, these texts explain that much of the structure of his empire was already in place. Antichrist will indeed be “different from the previous ones,” but the world-wide power structure will have already been set in place by the fourth beast, the revived Roman Empire, which will “devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it” (v23).

[Back to Revelation 13.](#)

Based on the lessons of history, one might conclude that this ten-nation confederacy ruling the world will be in existence prior to the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation. It challenges the imagination that in just a few short years all this would come about *after* the inception of the Tribulation. If I am correct, this could further explain the timing of the Rapture; Christ returns to remove His church not just before the evils of the Tribulation, but to save it from any further pain from being under the thumb of an evil empire.

The picture in John’s vision is of the beast in full power—hence, the middle of the Tribulation. Opinions vary slightly, but we can take the ten horns, each with its own diadem, as representing the ten kingdoms of the original confederation, three of which were destroyed (or consumed) by the beast. Some say the seven heads represent the remaining kings that receive their power from the beast, but probably a better interpretation is that the seven heads represent successive world empires leading up to Antichrist. This harmonizes with an even more opaque prophecy in Chapter Seventeen.

Read Revelation 17:9-13.

In scripture, to be a “son” is to be *like*—to behave like, to share the same qualities of, perhaps even look like—one’s father. Thus Jesus could say to Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). As with Jesus and Father God, so with Antichrist and *his* father, Satan. The red dragon (Satan) is described with almost an identical appearance as the beast in 12:3: “Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.” Like father, like son.

As the frosting on this perverse cake, the vision includes that “on his heads were blasphemous names”—slanderous, abusive, profane names.

v2

And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion.

This is a fascinating vision of Antichrist, the beast, for he is described here as if he has incorporated in himself the traits of the first three beasts mentioned in Daniel 7. As we saw earlier, the first three beasts represented, respec-

tively, Babylon (the lion), the Medo-Persian Empire (the bear), and the Greek or Alexandrian Empire (the leopard). These world empires are now a part of the one who truly rules the world.

And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

John's vision makes crystal clear who is behind Antichrist. And again we have the profane mirror image of the relationship between Jesus and Father God: Jesus was God in flesh, yet at the same time subservient to the Father, obedient to Him, revealing His nature to man.¹ The beast is, essentially, Satan in flesh; it is from him (the dragon) that he acquires all his power and authority.

Read Revelation 13:3-4.

v3

I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast;

Here is Satan's trump card. Antichrist will already be well-known and popular after the first half of the Tribulation. During a time in which thousands upon thousands are dying, he will be—or will *appear* to be—mortally wounded, and will come back to life. Whether real or an act perpetrated by the false prophet (v14), the result will be the same: worldwide amazement and adulation of the beast.

As always, opinions vary. Here I favor MacArthur over Walvoord, who interprets this "slain head" as referencing not the individual (Antichrist), but the kingdom over which he reigns. That is he believes that that which has been slain but comes back to life speaks of the Roman Empire. But MacArthur offers far more convincing arguments for this referring to the individual.

- Here it says that one of the heads was slain, but later in this chapter John specifies the beast himself.

v12: [The beast from the earth] exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship *the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.*

v14: 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, *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.* (emphasis added)

¹Matthew 11:25-27; John 4:34, 8:29; Hebrews 10:5-9

- Even in v3 it uses the personal pronoun, saying that “his fatal wound was healed.”
- Does it track that a revival of the Roman Empire would excite such amazement, astonishment and adoration—including a worshiped statue in the Jerusalem temple—of the beast. I think that would excite, rather, dread and fear, to see the Roman Empire returning.

v4

they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?”

What a horrible time this will be on earth—we might say, a *beastly* time on earth. It is true that the pattern of history has been that societal culture rises and falls in a fairly regular pattern. Periods of licentious behavior and standards will be followed by a period of relative modesty and decorum; a period of war will be followed by a period of peace; a time of conservative morality will be followed by a time of liberal immorality.

Some say the world is getting better and better, but they are either blind or they lie. This world has been toying with evil for millennia. At times it is more prevalent, at others less so, but the overall *inertia* is toward darkness, depravity, and evil. The picture before us in v4 is the portrait of a world that has abandoned all contact with righteousness, goodness, and light. To put it in *Star Wars* terminology, it will have irretrievably gone over to the dark side. In the past this period would be followed by a reflexive return to the opposite—but no more. It will be so bad that only the bodily return of the Son of God will turn it around; absent that, there will be no change for the better. By now the society remaining on earth will be so far gone it will be unrecoverable, beyond hope. The apostle Paul describes this moment in his second letter to the Thessalonians.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12.

Earlier in this letter, just before this passage, Paul gives one reason why the world finds itself in this state. In speaking of the coming of the day of the Lord, to some in the Thessalonica church who mistakenly thought it had already come, Paul writes,

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Before Christ will return, Antichrist must “take his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.” This is what is about to happen in the narrative. §

§ Satan’s focus on Israel is apparent in the location of Antichrist’s seat of power: not New York, not Paris or London, but Jerusalem—and specifically its temple to Yahweh. There is the focus of his animus and rage.

When it has never occurred before, what explains the depth of this depravity and Satan worship? The passage continues:

Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. (2 Thessalonians 2:3–6)

In the Rapture the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit and the Church will be suddenly removed from the earth, leaving in their wake a void that will be immediately filled by Satan and his demons, as well as his earth-bound servants, Antichrist and the false prophet.

Will this worship of Satan be truly worldwide? There will surely be some followers of Christ scattered around the globe—certainly the two witnesses, described in Chapter Eleven; the 144,000 remnant of Messianic Israel, protected for the duration; and the group of Messianic Jews that has recently fled into the wilderness to the place of sanctuary prepared for them by God. So will there be righteousness on the earth? Yes, in scattered patches here and there. But the predominant culture and the only authorized religion for everyone but these righteous groups will be the worship of Satan and Antichrist.

CONCLUSION

I have often mentioned that Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet constitute an evil parody of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Verse 4 concludes with another dark parallel: crowds of worshipers crying out with great enthusiasm,

“Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?”

I am reminded of another day in Jerusalem, when instead of war the worshipers were crying out, “Peace!”

As He was going, they were spreading their coats on the road. As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, shouting: “BLESSED IS THE KING WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:36–38)

But now it will be a different song being sung—a different shout heard. These will be dark days indeed.

THE "SEA" IN GOD'S WORD

John MacArthur

The first hint of what the new heaven and new earth will be like comes in John's observation that there will no longer be any sea.

That will be a startling change from the present earth, nearly three-fourths of which is covered by water. The sea is emblematic of the present water-based environment. All life on earth is dependent on water for its survival, and the earth is the only known place in the universe where there is sufficient water to sustain life. But believers' glorified bodies will not require water, unlike present human bodies, whose blood is 90 percent water, and whose flesh is 65 percent water. Thus, the new heaven and the new earth will be based on a completely different life principle than the present universe. There will be a river in heaven, not of water, but of the "water of life" (22:1, 17). Without a sea, there can be no hydro-logical cycle, so that every feature of life and climate will be dramatically different.

From a metaphorical perspective, commentators have seen the absence of the sea as symbolic of the absence of evil. Robert L. Thomas summarizes:

Most justifiably see this void as representing an archetypical connotation in the sea (cf. 13:1; 20:13), a principle of disorder, violence, or unrest that marks the old creation (cf. Isa. 57:20; Ps. 107:25-28; Ezek. 28:8)—It is not that the sea is evil in itself, but that its aspect is one of hostility to mankind. For instance, the sea was what stood guard over John in his prison on Patmos and separated him from the churches of Asia—The sea is the first of seven evils that John says will no longer exist, the other six being death, mourning, weeping, pain (21:4), the curse (22:3), and night (21:25; 22:5).

(*Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* [Chicago: Moody 1995, p440])

Kenneth William Lovett

The sea is an inanimate part of creation and has no volition to rebel against its creator. But the OT speaks of God defeating the sea, driving it away, restraining it behind prison bars, stopping the advance of its proud waves, and splitting it as one would split a snake with an ax. At the time of creation, the sea was driven away by God so that he could create the dry land. During the flood, the sea covered the dry land, killed all the people, and destroyed their property. In Exodus, the sea killed Pharaoh's army while they pursued the Israelites. The sea also served as an apt image for prophets to warn of the imminent destruction of the Holy Land. In Jonah, it was the place of his punishment and would have been the place of his death if God had not intervened. Evil beasts and uncontrollable monsters find their home in the sea. The shadowy unknown of the dark depths of the sea also associate it with Sheol, the place of the dead. The OT is so consistently negative about the sea that one would think that the sea is an enemy of God.

The enemies of God and humanity in the OT are not difficult to catalog. Satan would top the list as the first enemy to come to mind for most people. Death is another enemy that would be on such a list. Death and Satan are not the only biblical enemies of humanity and God's good purposes in the universe. Others on the list would include Babylon; Egypt; and the Philistines, who were enemies more often than not in the biblical story. The sea is an unlikely candidate for an enemy of God and humanity in the OT. However, this dissertation will demonstrate that the OT uses the sea as a negative motif and that God treats the sea as an enemy. The sea is opposed to God's purposes in the biblical narrative and finds itself on the receiving end of God's rebuke and restraint (Ps 104:6-7; Job 38:8-11).

(from *The Negative Motif of the Sea in the Old Testament*, A Dissertation presented to the faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Copyright © 2019 Kenneth William Lovett.)

COMPARING DANIEL 7 TO DANIEL 8

(If you are left with questions when comparing Daniel 7 with Daniel 8, the following excursus may be helpful.)

Gleason L. Archer, Jr.

Excursus

At this point some observations are in order concerning the relationship between the "little horn" (qeren-'ahat misfir'd, lit., "a horn from a small one") in this passage (8:9) and the "little horn" in the previous chapter (7:8). The horn in chapter 7 emerged from the ten horns of the fourth beast, whereas this horn in 8:9 arises from the four-horned beast that represents the third kingdom, the empire of Alexander and his Epigonoi (as critics of every persuasion agree). Now since the author of Daniel lays great emphasis on numbers and invests them with high significance, there is no possibility that he could have meant to equate a ten-horned beast with one bearing only four horns. **The only really plausible explanation, therefore, is that the little horn arising from the third kingdom serves as a prototype of the little horn of the fourth kingdom.** The crisis destined to confront God's people in the time of the earlier little horn, Antiochus Epi-phanes, will bear a strong similarity to the crisis that will befall them in the eschatological or final phase of the fourth kingdom in the last days (as Christ himself foresaw in

the Olivet Discourse [Matt 24:15]). In each case a determined effort will be made by a ruthless dictator to suppress completely the biblical faith and the worship of the one true God. Rather than concluding, as the Maccabean date hypothesis insists, that the little horn of chapter 7 is also intended as a prophecy of Antiochus Epiphanes (with a resultant identification of the fourth kingdom as the Greek or Seleucid Empire), we are to understand the relationship between the little horn of the Greek Empire and that of the latter-day fourth kingdom to be that of type and antitype similar to that between Joshua and Jesus (Heb 4:8) and Melchizedek and Christ (Heb 7). In Daniel 11, as we shall see, both the typical little horn (Antiochus) and the antitypical little horn appear in succession, the transition from the one to the other taking place at 11:40, after which are predicted the circumstances of the destined death of the antitype that were not at all true of Antiochus Epiphanes himself. Therefore, the two figures cannot be identical, nor can the Greek Empire be equated with the fourth kingdom of Daniel's prophetic scheme.

(from *Daniel*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebelstein, Ed., page 99; emphasis added)

SESSION 36: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWENTY-FIVE): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART EIGHT

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15

PREFACE

Read Revelation 13:5-7.

David Guzik remarks that, “Blasphemer’ may be a more accurate title than ‘Antichrist’ for this end-times dictator. As much as anything, this beast is a man who speaks against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.” I would only add to that appraisal that it seems to me that blasphemers—be they against God, or institutions, or man—only betray their own impotence, and perhaps even cowardice. We have all run into people who talk a fierce game, only to cringe and cower away when blows begin to be thrown. The beast may have power over the suffering populace of earth, but he can do nothing but bad-mouth the King and populace of heaven.

Also revealed in this passage—vv5-10—is the lamentable fate of the short-sighted. Throughout history is documented the fate of those who took the seemingly easier path of compliance, even collaboration, rather than resistance. What happened to the women in France who slept with the Nazis? What happened to the Vichy regime that bent the knee to Hitler once the nation was liberated by the Allies?

Here in this passage—and of course throughout the narrative of the Eschaton—that dalliance and friendship with the enemy may bring ease for the moment, but it is a poor trade-off for what one will suffer for eternity.

As to the text itself, what strikes me first of all in this passage is how *passive* it is. The object is “the beast from the sea,” that is, Antichrist. And from everything we have read thus far, this person will be an extraordinarily—even uniquely—powerful individual. Yet this passage is peppered by statements about things being given to him by someone else. That’s passive.

We might expect to read, *He spoke arrogant words and had authority for forty-two months*. That would be a strong, active description of a world-wide ruler. Instead we read “There **was given to him a mouth** speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and **authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.**” In v7 we have a similar situation: “It **was also given to him to make war** with the saints and to overcome them, and **authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.**”

I believe this is saying two things—really only one thing, but considered from two directions. First, is that Satan is calling the shots, and *he* can only do what the Lord God permits. Whatever power Antichrist possesses has been given him by Satan and, ultimately, God. Second, from the opposite direction, is that Antichrist is little more than a puppet. He may even *think* he is in charge, but Satan has entered him; the beast does not *possess* anything, but, whatever

he was prior to this possession, is now himself possessed by the pure evil of Satan. Satan will indeed “enter” the beast, just as he did Judas Iscariot.

And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. (Luke 22:3)

Jesus then answered, “That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him.” So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. (John 13:26–27a)

v5

There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.

My mom’s sister—to my older brother and me growing up, Auntie Norma—liked to give things to people, to be generous toward family members. But there were invariably strings attached, a *quid pro quo*. I’ll pay for your schooling—if you’ll study this; I’ll give you the money—if you promise to...

Satan works the same way: he likes to give things to people—but there is always the *quid pro quo*. He tried it with Christ Jesus and failed; he will one day try it with Antichrist and succeed.

So Satan, as it were, “creates” the beast, and then he begins giving him things, outfitting him for his service:

- a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies
- authority to act for forty-two months
- to make war with the saints and to overcome them
- authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation

In exchange for this power and authority, of course, is required complete subservience to Satan’s program.

There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies,

From our perspective it seems odd that God would grant to Satan and his disciple permission—not to mention the skill—to blaspheme Himself, just as it seems odd to us that Father God for so long suffers the company of that fallen angel in the precincts of heaven. But God is sovereign, so we cannot question His methods; we may scratch our heads and wonder, but we must eventually bow before His superior wisdom and authority—and acknowledge that He knows what He is doing.

and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.

And apparently God, too, can demand a *quid pro quo*, for He grants to the beast the authority to do his worst—but only so long. There will be a hard-

coded cutoff point: when the Messiah returns, there will be countenanced no more of such arrogance and blasphemy. The clock is running, and the main-spring will snap after three and one half years.

v6

And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

We have just come out of (and, sadly, have just begun afresh) a political season here in the States. For months there has been a lot of hot air, a lot of nonsense—a lot of lying—flying through the air. And there will always be those who believe it. Daniel's prophecy foresaw the arrogant nature and methods of this dictator:

Daniel 7:8 While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them... and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.

Daniel 7:11 Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking...

Daniel 7:20–21 and... that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates. I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them

Daniel 7:25 He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.

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. (MacArthur)

This profane slander will be not just directed toward God in general, but toward

- His name—that is, everything that represents who He truly is, His qualities and attributes;
- His tabernacle—that is, His tent, where He dwells: heaven; and
- those who dwell with Him—the holy angels (the ones who just defeated Satan in the recent heavenly war), the redeemed from millennia before, as well as the recently arrived church from earth.

Walvoord: It is evident that blasphemy is not an incidental feature of his kingdom, but one of its main features.

v7

It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.

In our last session I noted the organized groups of saints we know will be on the earth at this time: the two witnesses, the 144,000 remnant of Messianic Israel, and the group of Messianic Jews that has recently fled into the wilderness. But there will also certainly be individuals and small groups—much like there are today in Red China—worshipping God and following Christ Jesus privately and secretly. Satan will make war against all these; we can easily imagine his storm troopers beating down doors and shattering windows, just as the SS troops and Nazi mobs destroyed property in Germany in a violent act to root out Jews and send them to concentration camps. It was called “Kristallnacht,” the night of broken glass.

...and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.

Back in the day, Satan had tried to entice Jesus with the very same carrot.

Read Matthew 4:8-11.

Back in the first century, with the Son of God, it didn’t take, but this time the devil will have a willing dupe to accept the role. And who can say when this step will actually occur; I have posited that the making of this “revived Roman Empire” would almost certainly take place gradually, over time, and probably have its beginnings in the years prior even to the Rapture and Tribulation.

There is nothing to preclude the possibility that the world—as well as the church—could have been suffering under this aggressive empire for some time. Meanwhile, perhaps there is a lowly clerk in the organization working his way up the corporate/political ladder. Perhaps the evacuation of the church at the Rapture is the spark that vaults him higher to the top; during the first half of the Tribulation he is scheming and plotting for the top spot of dictator—even as he sweet-talks Israel¹ and fools the world into thinking he is its necessary savior.

Once he takes full control at the midpoint, the beast will rule with absolute authority over “every tribe and people and tongue and nation.” That covers every last soul on the earth.

Read Revelation 13:8-10.

v8

As if to drive home the point of v7 further, v8 covers the same ground but in a different way. Verse 7 declares the scope of the beast’s *sovereign and political* rule, while v8 declares the scope of his *religious* rule.

¹ Daniel 9:27

All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

Whereas his political authority knows no bounds, encompassing “every tribe and people and tongue and nation” of the world, the beast’s *religious* authority is limited to those “who dwell on the earth.” At first glance this would seem to include every living human being, but it does not.

Verse 8 employs two means of delineating those who worship the beast from those who do not. The first is the phrase “All who dwell on the earth.” This is repeatedly used in the Revelation to denote unbelievers. Let’s look at just two examples.

Read Revelation 6:9-10.

Here the martyred saints “underneath the altar” are crying out for vengeance and justice to be poured out on “those who dwell on the earth”—meaning those who had slain them. The second example even more obviously describes unbelievers—and notice how it repeats the phrase from 13:7.

Read Revelation 11:9-10.

So in this scene it is clearly those antagonistic toward God and the Messianic message that had been delivered by the two witnesses who are “those who dwell on the earth.” But John reinforces this connection with a more explicit definition:

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.

This is a problematic portion of the verse, which we will address in a moment, but first the obvious. As David Guzik points out, “the idea is that worshipping the beast and having your name in the Book of Life are mutually exclusive.” If your name is listed in the Lamb’s book of life, you will not be worshipping the beast; if you *are* worshipping the beast, your name cannot be listed in that book. As Walvoord states it, “all who are not saved will worship the beast and those who are saved will not worship him.”

That’s the easy part, but the original text is potentially problematic—or at least confusing. The Greek is “whose names have not been written in the scroll of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” which is how KJVs and NIVs have it. That is, “from the foundation (or creation) of the world” modifies “the Lamb slain.” The NASBs and ESV reorder the text to have “from the foundation of the world” modify “everyone whose name has not been written...in the book of life...” Walvoord works it around in such a way to include both:

Walvoord: The simplest explanation here seems the best, namely, that their names were written in the book of life from eternity past. This was made possible by anticipation of the future dying of the Lamb on their behalf.

But I think I favor what Guzik comes up with by keeping the order of the original Greek:

The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world: This deeply meaningful title for Jesus reminds us that God's plan of redemption was set in place before He even created the beings who would be redeemed. God wasn't "surprised" by the fall of Adam or any other evidence of the fallen nature of man. God isn't making it up as He goes along. It is all going according to plan.

- God the Son had a relationship of love and fellowship with God the Father before the foundation of the world (John 17:24)
- The work of Jesus was ordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20)
- God chose His redeemed before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4)
- Names are written in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world (Revelation 17:8)
- The kingdom of heaven was prepared for the redeemed before the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34)

So we are left with a picture of a divided and imbalanced world. Believers, by far the minority, refuse to worship the beast and will probably lose their lives for their faith. Unbelievers, the vast majority of the populace, gladly worship the beast and his father, Satan. And is that so hard to imagine? After the events of this last week is it so hard to picture an active majority that prefers lies over truth; evil over righteousness; deceit over veracity; violence over peace; arrogance, blasphemy, and vulgarisms over civility and grace? It is not a stretch to say that we are now living through a prototype of the society in place during the Great Tribulation.

Just imagine: The world has at long last united behind one religion, a truly ecumenical faith—yet the object of worship in this one-world religion is not even a god. This faith's "god" is a man. Antichrist.

v9

If anyone has an ear, let him hear.

Everywhere this command is seen in Scripture it means that what has just been stated—or, as here, what is about to be stated—is important, and requires spiritual discernment for understanding.

v10

What we are commanded to understand by means of the Spirit is, admittedly, a bit opaque.

If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.

The primary question that needs to be answered is this: Does this proverb speak to believers or their persecutors? The answer affects how we interpret this, but since under either answer the two statements are empirically true, I will offer both. In their respective translations most of the more modern versions favor the first, while the KJVs favor the second. The NASB is the most confusing, for it seems to mix the two, although this can be resolved.*

*The NASB includes a margin note for “is destined for captivity”: or “leads into captivity.”

For Persecuted Believers

These will be terrible times for followers of Christ. For Christians (Jew or Gentile) “the testing of [one’s] faith”² will no longer be simply academic; there will be a very real cost to remaining steadfast to one’s faith: death.

Even though on the ground it may not seem so, God remains in control: if God wills for you captivity, then go into captivity; those being pursued and persecuted should not fight back, “with the sword,” for then “with the sword he must be killed” (NASB). Or as the ESV, and NIVs have it, if God wills for you “to be killed with the sword,” then it is going to happen in that way.

The last sentence of the verse seems to reinforce this interpretation: “Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.” This is what it means in these hard times to follow Christ, who “while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”³

For the Persecutors

The KJVs interpret this differently, but that interpretation is true as well.

NKJV: He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

This is clear: If you throw innocent believers in jail, you’ll end up there yourself; if you kill them by the sword, you too will be killed by the sword. There will be justice, there will be retribution. It makes no difference if ultimately God is behind all this. If you have been a willing participant, you will pay the penalty for your crimes against the faithful.

In this case the last sentence has less obvious application. It may be saying something like, *This is what it means to patiently endure for the faith.*

²James 1:3

³1 Peter 2:23

Walvoord: In this ultimate triumph and judgment upon wicked men lie the patience and faith of the saints in their hour of trial. The Scriptures frequently mention this final vindication (Gen. 9:6; Matt. 5:38; 26:52; Rom. 12:19; Gal. 6:7). The same truth which serves as an encouragement to the saints acts as a warning to their persecutors. Their ultimate doom is assured as in this case at the end of their brief period of power.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.’ “But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” (Matthew 5:38–39)

And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.” (Matthew 26:51–52)

CONCLUSION

Before we move on in our next session to the “beast from the earth” (the false prophet), let’s make sure we have a clear picture of who his boss is, the beast, Antichrist. Over the centuries many fanciful notions have been offered for his identity:

- Evil historical figures such as Nero, Caligula, Adolf Hitler, or Judas Iscariot either reincarnated or resurrected—or even kept alive all these years.
- Not an individual at all, but a system, a government, or empire.
- A literal angelic, or otherwise supernatural being, conjured by Satan.

My position is that Antichrist is none of these, but a literal human being who rises to power by Satan’s sanction. He is “supernatural”—as is the false prophet—only in that he is indwelt and given special powers by Satan. Just as in every believer it is all of Christ, so it is that the beast’s abilities are all of Satan.

But he is a man by birth.

SESSION 37: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWENTY-SIX): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART NINE

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15

PREFACE

Let's begin by reading the complete passage before us pertaining to the second beast.

Read Revelation 13:11-18.

We might break this passage down into a useful outline:

v11	Appearance and Speech
v12	Authority
vv13-15	Magician
vv16-18	Economist

There are a number of ways we might describe the false prophet's position in regards to Antichrist.

- He is his *vizier*, sharing some of his power and speaking for him (historically, the vizier would be the highest ranking non-royal, second only to the king himself (think Joseph to the pharaoh);
- he is his wing-man, his right-hand man;
- he is his PR man, Antichrist's agent and enabler;
- he represents (falsely) the more *religious* side of the team.

Note the verbs used in this passage to describe the work of the second beast:

- v12: he **exercises** all the authority of the first beast;
- v12: he **makes** [the people] worship the first beast;
- v13: he **performs** great signs, and **makes** fire come down out of heaven;
- v14: he **deceives** [the people] on the earth;
- v15: it is he who will **give breath** to the image of the beast;
- v16: he **causes**—i.e., **makes**—people be branded with the mark of the beast;
- and it is he who **ensures** that no one can buy or sell without that mark.

The second beast is, we might say, kindred to his boss. The same word for “beast” (*therion*) is used for both, and the word “another” here (*allos*) means “one like in kind.”

As Chart #15 indicates, the placement of this text would fall into place with the current narrative—that is, the blowing of the seventh trumpet. I have argued that the first beast—the person—comes onto the scene early on, perhaps before even the Tribulation, but certainly at the inception of the Tribula-

tion. We can't say for sure, but there is evidence that the second beast—like the first—is on the scene early, but then rises to prominence and power along with Antichrist. More on this in a moment.

v11: THE “BIRTH” OF THE FALSE PROPHET

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon.

Right off we see that, like his boss, this guy is a phony. The grand-dad of all liars is Satan, showing himself to be sweetness and light to mask who and what He truly is. His son, the beast, is a chip off the ol' block, as is his son's right-hand man, the counterfeit prophet.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

Paul expands on this in his counsel to *his* spiritual son, Timothy:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron. (1 Timothy 4:1-2)

We learn three important things about the false prophet in v11.¹

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth;

The first beast rose out of the sea; this second beast rises out of the earth. There are all sorts of opinions on what this might mean, that is, what is meant by “out of the sea” (v1), and what is meant by “out of the earth” (v11). One possibility is to think of it this way: In ancient times the sea was seen as more chaotic, more turbulent, more threatening than the land. So we might extrapolate that here to conclude that Antichrist (from the sea) will be more dangerous, his rule will be more world-altering and catastrophic, than that of the false prophet.

Remember, in the description of Antichrist in Daniel 7 we read that he “will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law” (Daniel 7:25a). The false prophet will be powerful, doing great evil during this time (as he, too, is indwelt by Satan); but he will not be the one in charge. This is one way to consider the contrast between sea and earth, but there are many others that could hold true, as well.

¹We get that label “false prophet” from Revelation 20:10 and 19:20: “And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

and he had two horns like a lamb

This refers to his *appearance*, so the second thing we learn is that on the outside he has the appearance of a gentle, harmless lamb. And herein lies his deceit, for he at the same time, “spoke as a dragon.”

Henry Alford: An important distinction exists between the two beasts, in that this second one has two horns like a lamb. In other words, this second beast puts on a mild and lamb-like appearance, which the other did not. But it speaks as a dragon: its words, which carry its real character, are fierce and unrelenting: while it professes that which is gentle, its behests are cruel.

At least two thousand years before these two individuals will come to power Jesus, in His sermon on the mount, warned us about falling prey to such liars.

Read Matthew 7:15-17.

We cannot know who and what they truly are by how they look, but we are to judge them by what they do and accomplish—their “fruit.” This second beast will cause great harm by encouraging people *away* from Christ, to worship instead the image of the first beast. In so doing he will lead countless millions—*like* sheep—into the torment of eternal fire. That too, Jesus spoke of: “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”.² This will be the end of the false prophet and he will drag all these idol worshipers along with him.

Finally, Jesus told His disciples that if they had seen Him, they had seen the Father;³ those alive during the Great Tribulation will probably not be aware that when they have heard the second beast, they have heard the words of *his* father—the dragon: “and he spoke as a dragon.”

v12

He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.*

The first sentence of v12 is a bit confusing on the surface. Does this mean that the second beast could only “exercise the authority of the first beast” if he was literally standing in the presence of the first beast? That doesn’t seem right. “Presence” here (*enopion*) does mean just that: to be before, in the sight of.

The NIVs translate this “on his behalf,” which is how some commentators interpret it. The margin note in the NASB says “or by his authority,” with which MacArthur agrees. Do those two mean the same thing? Not really; there is a

* John Walvoord points out that evidence exists in the Revelation to suggest that the false prophet is not just a religious figure working with Antichrist during the height of his power during the Great Tribulation, but that he will be the head of the apostate church that will almost certainly be in place at the inception of the Tribulation, or immediately thereafter, to replace the true church which has just been Raptured. We will look at this in greater detail when we get to Chapter Seventeen, but for now think of it this way: The political power structure at the time will be likened to a revived Roman Empire, while the religious power structure at work alongside it—in fact, the two are reasonably inseparable—is called in Chapter Seventeen, “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth” (17:5).

² Matthew 7:19

³ John 14:9

subtle yet critical difference. “On behalf of” suggests a looser relationship, as being simply a representative, as in “He trusts me to speak for him.”

This text and situation is similar to that of the two witnesses in Chapter Eleven.

“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands *that stand before the Lord of the earth.*
(Revelation 11:3-4; emphasis added)

Martin Kiddle in his commentary explains that in this context—so similar to that in our text about the second beast—*enopion* indicates a “prophetic readiness to do the bidding of God, and *with the authority inalienable from divine communion*” (my italics). In our text this suggests that the second beast’s authority literally emanates from the first; that he is *imbued*, as it were, with his authority in a manner similar to that that passes between God the Father and his true prophets. This continues the symmetry between the Holy Trinity and the profane trinity: The dragon (Satan) grants his power and authority to the beast (Antichrist)(13:2), who in turn grants *his* authority and power to the second beast (false prophet). Thus the false prophet is imbued with Satanic power, as evidenced by the miracles he will perform.

And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.

I won’t revisit here all the arguments and details about this aspect of the beast, who in a number of passages is described as suffering a fatal wound—i.e., death—then coming back to life. I covered that in Session 35. Here, however, I’ll just add this: Some who believe this refers to a person, not a state or empire, take the position that he literally dies and is resurrected. I question that because resurrection is a critical component of God’s economy—for example, it was not Christ’s death but His *resurrection* that validated His deity and glory. If Antichrist is physically resurrected, God would have to sanction such an action—and I do not see that happening. Thus my position is that the beast’s “fatality” and “resurrection” are just part of the public relations fakery contrived by the two beasts to sell him to the masses. After all, how better to get the world to worship the beast as god than to claim that he came back from the dead. Just like Jesus Christ!

And, speaking of the two witnesses in Chapter Eleven, they *were* resurrected from the dead—after three and one half days, no less—like Christ. But in this instance it makes perfect sense that God *would* sanction the miracle, for they were *His* witnesses—not Satan’s.

v13

He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.

Once again we have a parallel to the two witnesses, who could breathe fire to devour their enemies (11:5). The false prophet, whether by sleight of hand or a true miraculous sign affected by Satan, could call down fire “out of heaven” (*ouranou*, the sky). The present active tense of “makes” (*poieo*) suggests that the false prophet does this repeatedly.

Here is evidenced the inherent and pervasive depravity of man. It was there when God’s word was being written, it is here today, and it will still be going strong in the final days of humanity on earth. That evidence is that men will believe a lie before they will believe the truth. Present the simple, clear basics of the gospel and they will scoff; but these same people will gladly believe in the healing power of crystals, or the snake oil of religious cults, or even the lying subterfuge of the false prophet and his “god.” Paul describes well the irony of the final days.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

The fact that man *wants* to be fooled is demonstrated all around us. We *want* to believe the magicians tricks. The whole art of drama is based on its ability to make its audience members suspend their disbelief: We begin to believe the actors on stage are revealing to us a real moment out of time; the audience becomes the “fourth wall” of the room. We watch a musical and accept as normal that people break out into song to express their feelings. All of this is just part of harmless entertainment. But it is no longer harmless when one accepts as real the false magic and drama that will ultimately result not just in losing out on salvation, but in spending eternity roasting on a spit.

v14

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, 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.

he deceives those who dwell on the earth...

They have already rejected Christ, so they are primed to believe a lie.

because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast,

“Show us some signs! Show us some signs! Then we will believe!” They demanded it of Christ, and they will probably demand it of the false prophet. And the latter they will believe because of their inbred nature. And because the beast’s

magic will be empowered by Satan himself it will be strong and impressive. They will believe.

But there is a third reason they will so gladly believe. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false” (2 Thessalonians 2:11). As he has done before, God will sanction their following of the wrong thing, choosing evil over good. The Greek behind “deluding influence” (literally, “a working of error,” *energeian planes*), means *an active power of misleading*. Hidden in English, the Greek shows that the same word *energeian* lies behind the phrase just above in v9, “the activity of Satan.” They will have rejected His truth, so God will *make* them believe the lie of Satan.

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.

I find it particularly disingenuous that the false prophet makes the *hoi polloi* fashion the very idol they will be forced to worship as a god. (Talk about watching them make sausage.) This seems to indicate the level of power and influence these two men have over the people of the world. Just imagine if someone ordered you to go into your workshop and carve an idol that would then be your god; your reply might be, “Well it’s a pretty figurine, but I made every inch of that statue. I cut down the oak tree and sectioned the wood. It was my knife in my own hands that cut every feature it has. I made *it*—it didn’t make me. I am *its* god—not the other way around”.⁴ But no, this idol—this statue dedicated to Antichrist—will be what they worship.

Now, just what will this statue look like? Of what will it be an image?

- When Nebuchadnezzar erected a huge statue and demanded that everyone bow down to it, it was not of him, but probably of his patron god, Nabu (Daniel 3).
- In 167 BC, Antiochus Epiphanes (*epiphanes* = god manifest), in an effort to eradicate Jews and Judaism, outlawed all Jewish rites and worship; erected an altar to and a statue of his chief god, Zeus in the Jerusalem temple; sacrificed swine on the altar; and demanded that all worship Zeus.
- Three times in Daniel’s prophecy⁵ and in Christ’s Olivet Discourse⁶ reference is made to, in so many words, the “abomination of desolation” being set up in the Jerusalem temple.

Those who claim the passages listed above (as well as here in Revelation) refer to the acts of Antiochus Epiphanes are missing something: Jesus spoke of this occurring future to Daniel, and future even to Himself; and he said it about two hundred years *after* the time of Antiochus (167 BC). Antiochus could only be a *prototype*, a *foreshadowing* of what Antichrist will do in the Eschaton.

⁴ Isaiah 40:16

⁵ 9:27; 11:31; 12:11

⁶ Matthew 24:15

Verse 14 is vague about the actual appearance of the image:

NASB, KJVs, YLT: *to* the beast

ESV: *for* the beast

NIVs: *in honor of* the beast

CSB: *of* the beast

Verse 15, however, indicates that *this* image standing in the Jerusalem temple will be an actual image of Antichrist. All versions: the image of the beast (x3)

The standard cross reference in Daniel regarding the “abomination of desolation” is to 9:27 in his prophecy of the seventy weeks. But a parallel passage in Daniel 12 mentions this using cleaner language.

Read Daniel 12:10-11.

Just what does this mean, “set[ting] up the abomination of desolation”? From v11 we get the sequence: First Antichrist will abolish the normal Mosaic sacrifices, thereby breaking his former agreement with Israel. This will be immediately followed by his replacing the worship of Yahweh (and Christ Jesus) with the worship of himself. The false prophet will implement this by creating and “quickening” a statue of Antichrist which will be erected somewhere within the precincts of the temple. Scripture is not specific about its location; it could be in the holy place or even the holy of holies—an abomination indeed—but could also be in one of the more public areas.

The verb “set up” is the Hebrew *nathan* (*ntn*), which can be translated give, set, hand down, etc., but also means to “deliver to,” which fits the picture of the false prophet forcing the people to craft the statue (presumably off-site), then have it “delivered” to the temple for its placement. We will see in the following verses in Chapter Thirteen that the second beast will take steps to make it seem that the statue has been brought to life ([more on that in our next session](#)).

The word “abomination” means pretty much what one would expect; the Hebrew *siqqus* (*shi-coots*) means unclean, a detested thing (very often applied to pagan idols), filth (applied to food offerings), things that should not be touched.

When Linda’s brother and his fiancée were married in a Catholic church, not unexpectedly there was an image of Christ hanging on the cross suspended over the altar. As people would step out of the audience to contribute to a portion of the ceremony, they would bow or cross themselves before that image before mounting the platform. When it came time in the service for Linda and I to read a portion of Scripture, we refused to bow before that image, but just walked down the aisle, ignoring what I, frankly, considered an abomination.

The abomination Daniel prophesies will be one of “desolation,” the Hebrew verb *somem* (*smm*, shaw-mom), which means to make uninhabited, or deserted; to cause horror or consternation; the word was used of Tamar (taw-mawr') after being raped by her brother, Amnon.

What a contrast is presented here!

The temple was built for Yahweh, who brought to Israel life and strength and purpose; he offered them peace and prosperity if they would only obey His commands. In the temple's holy of holies sat the ark of the covenant, signifying the covenant the Lord God made with Israel for their good. Atop that ark was the mercy seat, where the high priest would meet with God, seeking and receiving His gracious mercy, atoning for the sins of the past year.

Now that same temple will be profaned. Now it will be dedicated to Antichrist and, by extension, his father Satan. The man-created idol installed there will represent only pain and suffering, persecution, starvation—and death, death of a most horrific kind, a death of eternal torment and damnation.

For the next three and one half years *this* will be the “god” worshiped by most of mankind on earth—to their eternal regret.

SESSION 38: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWENTY-SEVEN): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART TEN

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15

PREFACE

I have lost count of the number of times either the Scripture text or this teacher has used the phrase “the wrath of God.” The wrath of God is the bedrock lying beneath all of the Tribulation, as well as the judgments and subsequent penalties handed down immediately following.

Chapter Thirteen in the Revelation paints portraits of the first and second beasts—Antichrist and the false prophet, respectively—but it also illuminates in a unique way the righteous wrath of God poured out against an Israel that rejected His anointed: the *true* Messiah, Jesus the Christ—this time not with earthquakes and floods; not with plagues, famine, or drought; not with the extinguishing of celestial bodies. Here in the verses before us the “wrath of God” no longer masquerades behind what could be seen as natural phenomena, but takes direct aim at the heart of the matter: *Israel’s rejection of the incarnate Son of God as the Messiah*. After centuries of their scribes, lawyers, and priests poring through the Scriptures, reading the almost countless references to Messiah, to Savior, to the Redeemer, they saw *none* of them as prophesying Jesus of Nazareth. Not only that, they tortured and killed those who claimed that those Scriptures *did*. [Turn please to John 8](#).

To illustrate how much the Jews loathed and rejected Jesus as Messiah, I have lifted a portion of John 8 without including, just for the sake of time, most of Jesus’ responses (may God have mercy on my soul).

v33: They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free?’”[...]

v41: “You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.”[...]

v48: The Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”[...]

v52: The Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.’ Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?”[...]

v57: So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

As a result of this, just as God promised, there would come a day when He would pour out His wrath upon a nation—*His chosen people*—that rejected the Redeemer He sent. We must remind ourselves that it didn’t have to be this way; God gave Israel untold opportunities to repent, to obey Him and place its faith in Him, but Israel repeatedly turned its back on Him. Here in this passage, especially in vv15-17, we see that wrath inflicted—in a different way—upon the remaining unbelieving Jews.

What is the setting?

The world is in turmoil; civilization in shambles. World-wide population has been dramatically reduced by plagues, demonic invasion, sickness, and brutal homicide and genocide; parts of the world have been geographically changed—and not for the better. The remaining population cries out for a savior—someone to offer them hope.

Early on, Antichrist, in a cynical ploy, makes an agreement with the remaining Jews to permit them to practice their religion, including temple worship and sacrifices. But Judaism is divided; some have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, becoming Christians—or what we would call today, “Messianic Jews”—while the rest continue to reject Him as the promised Messiah. God has protected some of those who have become Christians: the remnant numbering 144,000 from the twelve tribes,¹ and those He has hidden and protected in the wilderness from the dragon.²

So we might deduce that the population remaining alive and free represents a mix of Jews and Gentiles who still reject Jesus as Messiah, along with Jews and Gentiles who have placed their faith in Jesus. We might also deduce that if not before, at least by the mid-Tribulation point, Jerusalem will be the center of Antichrist’s world-wide power structure. Modern technology will give them world-wide reach, but Jerusalem is where the false prophet will have established worship of Antichrist.

What form does the wrath take?

Appreciate the irony. The record shows that Israel, as a nation, rejected Jesus as the Messiah because her religious leaders were envious of Him, and unwilling to relinquish their power over the people. If they had acknowledged that Messiah had come, *He* would be Israel’s Redeemer and Lord, and thus casting them into the shadows. The truth is, they would not have welcomed *any* Messiah.

¹ Revelation 7:1-8

² 12:6, 14-17

Israel holds to this position even today; she still waits for Messiah. Yet any serious-minded Jew, studying prophecy and examining the stated qualifications—from Scripture—that Messiah must meet, can only conclude that it is now too late for anyone else to qualify. For example, the genealogical records are now gone; how can they prove today that *anyone* is of the tribe of Judah³ and of the house of David?⁴ No, it must be Jesus of Nazareth or no one.

But one day in the future there will come forth an *anti*-Messiah presenting himself as god. He will be a servant of Satan, imbued by Satan with satanic powers, desiring only to do evil, to do whatever is within his means to drag as many souls as he can along with himself to an eternal hell-fire. He will in fact be no redeemer, no savior, he will make no sacrifice of himself to atone for sin.

And now Israel will have no choice; no other option. All those left who have rejected Jesus of Nazareth will now be forced to bow, as branded slaves, before a *false* messiah. They will do this or die—not as righteous martyrs, but as helpless sheep on a fast-track to hell.

There is a believing remnant that will be saved, but Israel, as a nation, had the chance—and blew it. Now it will pay the price of its arrogance.

And *that* is the wrath of God exhibited in the verses before us.

Read Revelation 13:13-18.

v15

And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

The apostle Paul describes this moment in his second Thessalonian letter with “whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9 KJV). During His time on earth Jesus lost patience with those demanding more and more signs—and with good reason: If your “faith” is dependent on being impressed by signs and wonders, it is no faith at all.

And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast,

The original KJV has “life” instead of “breath.” But the word is not *zoe* or *bios* (life), but the familiar *pneuma* (literally wind, or breath), which more often than not is translated “spirit” in the NT. Only God can create life from lifelessness; here the second beast—either by technical trickery or by supernatural evil—makes the graven image appear to breathe, as if alive.

so that the image of the beast would even speak

We might wonder if perhaps the false prophet, in his PR and evangelist

³Genesis 49:10

⁴2 Samuel 7:12-13

roles, might reference God's word, where the psalmist points out the inadequacies of idols.

Read Psalm 115:4-7.

I can imagine the false prophet saying something like, *In the old religion it was said that there is no real life in images. But, behold, I present to you the image of your god—an image that does speak, and see, and hear, and knows all—an image that is alive, for he is god!* And it may be the graven image itself that gives voice to the decree that

as many as do not worship the image of the beast [are] to be killed.

We know from history that totalitarian regimes imperfectly execute their sweeping edicts. It was Hitler's intent to kill every Jew, and though he succeeded in his purpose beyond any rational expectation, he ultimately failed to kill all. Stalin purged even more of his own people—*far* more (tens of millions)—than his world-war enemy, yet even he failed to kill all. A dictator can say what he likes, but we know from the future history of God's prophecy that not everyone who will refuse to worship the beast (or bear the mark of the beast) will be killed. Two thirds of the remaining unprotected Jews *will* be killed, but one third will not, as the prophet Zechariah tells us.

Read Zechariah 13:8-9.

All one need do to realize the immensity of the task is lean back and consider the sheer numbers of military and informants and executioners required—even in a world of vastly reduced population—to kill everyone who refuses to bow down before Antichrist.

vv16-17

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead, and he provides that no one will 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.

Unless I'm missing something, this will be an easier edict to enforce. Whether wholesaler or retailer, vendor or customer, the door will be shut unless one bears the brand. The storekeeper won't be able to stock his shelves and the customer won't be able to purchase the product. (Can one say "black market"?)

John MacArthur points out the parallel—and contrast—to the 144,000 in Revelation 7:2-3.

MacArthur: God sealed, with a mark on the forehead, the 144,000 to preserve them from His wrath against the unbelieving world; the false prophet marks the unsaved to preserve them from Antichrist's wrath against God's people.

This will be the functional inverse of the Nazis forcing upon Jews living in the German sphere of influence a yellow badge of the star of David sewn into their garments. That yellow badge typically included the word "Jude,"⁵ which identified them as someone who could be openly ridiculed, denied basic rights, persecuted, beaten, forced into ghettos and ultimately shipped off to the camps.

During the last half of the Tribulation, the mark bearing either the name or number of the beast will *ensure* basic rights of buying and selling; it will, more importantly, identify one as *belonging to* the beast, following him, worshipping him, aligned with him. For the moment this will seem like the right move—especially considering what will be happening to those *without* the mark. You are a father with a family to support and feed during difficult times; doing something that will let you put food on the table might seem to be the right decision—even if you see through the deceit of the two beasts and do not wholeheartedly worship Antichrist.

Yet even if you *do* survive through the Tribulation by taking the mark, you will soon discover that it no longer works in your favor.

Read Revelation 14:9-11.

The word translated "mark" is the Greek *charagma* (kaw-rahg-maw), which means to sharpen, to engrave; it is a picture of etching an image into something, which could refer to a tattoo, or something impressed into the flesh (like a brand). MacArthur shares the testimony of someone who experienced this firsthand, living under Bulgaria's communist regime:

You cannot understand and you cannot know that the most terrible instrument of persecution ever devised is an innocent ration card. You cannot buy and you cannot sell except according to that little, innocent card. If they please, you can be starved to death, and if they please, you can be dispossessed of everything you have; for you cannot trade, and you cannot buy and you cannot sell, without permission.

(Cited in W. A. Criswell, *Expository Sermons on Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969], 4:120-21)

...either the name of the beast or the number of his name.

We don't know Antichrist's personal name. It certainly won't be "Beast" or even "The Antichrist." Some will call him god, but that will not be his personal name.

⁵ German for "Jew"

Whatever his name, there will probably be a numbering system in place to convert letters to numerals. In this digital age in which we live, it is easy for us to imagine some sort of scannable mark—perhaps even subcutaneous—containing not just the digital number of the beast, but personal information of the mark's bearer. The world-wide dictatorship will track every human being, not just purchases and sales, but probably location and activities as well.

Sound familiar?

v18

Here is wisdom. 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.

The last verse of Chapter Thirteen expands on the last phrase of the previous verse, but begins with a cautionary appeal for (implied) spiritual wisdom and understanding. Volumes have been filled with scholars (?) and commentators trying to work out who Antichrist is from the number 666. We have already discussed the errant theory that the first beast is an historical figure either reincarnated or resurrected. There is a technical term for that theory: Hooie.

It is true that the ancients, including the Greeks, Jews, and Rome had numerical equivalents for letters, as in A=1, B=2, C=3, etc. In this way one could add up the letters/numbers in a name to come up with a cryptic replacement—as in the oft-cited Pompeii graffiti, “I love her whose number is 545.” So many scholars down through the centuries have worn down so many pencils trying to show that the number 666 refers to the Pope or the papacy, Nero, Caligula, Domitian, John Knox, Martin Luther, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, *ad infinitum*. I'm sure there will come a day, if it is not already here, that Donald J. Trump will be added to the list.

My position (not unique) is that v18 is *not* telling us to “do the math” to identify the individual known as the beast, as Antichrist. Instead we are to use *wisdom*—i.e., spiritual wisdom from God—to have *understanding* for what that number 666 means. And the verse itself contains a vital clue: “the number is that of a man,” and on this rare occasion I believe the original NIV (*not* the more recent update) captures the correct interpretation: “for it is man's number. His number is 666.” That is, not the number of a specific individual by name, but the number of *humanity*.

We can, on occasion, declare that something in the prophecies of the Bible will not be fully understood until we are, at last, in God's presence, and that may be the case here. But, for a moment, let's run with what I believe to be the rational explanation of this verse.

It is well-accepted that in God's word the number seven represents *perfection* or *completion*. It is *God's* number, and, as J. A. Seiss notes, “Six is the bad number,” representing imperfection and incompleteness.

Seven

- In Genesis 2 we are told, “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (Genesis 2:1–3)
- In Deuteronomy 15 is established the “sabbatic year”; at the end of seven years debts would be forgiven, and bondsmen and slaves were to be freed.
- In 2 Kings 5:10, Elisha tells the leper Naaman to “Go wash in the Jordan seven times” to restore his flesh and be clean.
- Israel marched around Jericho for six days, but on the seventh day they were to blow their trumpets and the city would fall.
- Jesus told Peter to forgive someone who had sinned against him “up to seventy times seven” times.

Six

By contrast, six is *man’s* number.

- In the Jericho narrative God illustrates that man’s imperfect effort—for six days—could not accomplish what He could do on the seventh.
- Men could harvest their crops for six years, but on the seventh they were to let the land rest and be restored.
- God ordained six cities of refuge for accused murderers.

I am not suggesting some exotic numerology voodoo. Numbers in God’s word suggest helpful patterns for its understanding. For example, something being stated or performed three times illustrates strong, even supernatural emphasis, as in the seraphim around the throne calling out “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts”.⁶ Yahweh is not just holy, He is “Holy, Holy, Holy!” Absolute, unimaginable, supernatural holiness.

Repeatedly in God’s word man is told to do something either six times or for six days, but rarely does that accomplish the end goal. Man’s efforts are not sufficient because they are imperfect. Perfection or completion is not attained until God, who *is* perfect steps in to complete the task. Thus number seven represents the perfection of God, while the number six—one less than seven—represents the imperfection of man.

And no man is more *imperfect* than the man, Antichrist.

for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

Christ Jesus, the true Messiah, is as perfect and holy as Father God. He, too, is “Holy, Holy, Holy.” The Godhead is, we might say, 777, utter, complete perfection and purity. Expressing man’s imperfection is 666—here in the person of Antichrist—utter, complete imperfection and impurity.

⁶ Isaiah 6:3

God in His wisdom and perfection may be telling us something more here by this number; we may not know the full answer until The Day itself. But we can at least glean this: Man compared to God always comes out lacking. He is God and we are not. He is perfect; we are not. He is seven; we are six.

CONCLUSION

The longer I study the Last Things in God's word—especially the evil work of and subsequent end of the beast and his followers met with God's righteous wrath and certain judgment—the more I am convinced that many modern-day witnesses and evangelists are sharing an incomplete message. How many unsaved people do you know who, when told that “God loves them,” and “has a plan for their life,” would almost certainly respond, “My life is just fine, thank you very much. I am happy, have a good job, plenty of money, a loving family. Life is already good; I don't need God for that.”

God has not granted me the gift of evangelism. He has been most generous to me with other gifts, but that is not one of them. Thus I cannot speak from experience, only observation.

And my observation is that this wretched, self-satisfied, self-centered world could use more “hellfire and brimstone” preachers and evangelists, more witnesses of the ilk of the late, great Jonathan Edwards.⁷ In his famous sermon entitled, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, based on Deuteronomy 32:35, “Their foot shall slide in due time,” Edwards preached this:

Edwards: They [the unsaved] are already under a sentence of condemnation to hell. They do not only justly deserve to be cast down thither, but the sentence of the law of God, that eternal and immutable rule of righteousness that God has fixed between him and mankind, is gone out against them, and stands against them; so that they are bound over already to hell. John 3:18, “He that believeth not is condemned already.” So that every unconverted man properly belongs to hell; that is his place; from thence he is, John 8:23, “Ye are from beneath.” And thither he is bound; it is the place that justice, and God's word, and the sentence of his unchangeable law assign to him.

The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. Thus all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls; all you that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead in sin, to a state of new, and before altogether unexperienced light and life, are in the hands of an angry God. However you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have had religious affections, and may keep

⁷1703-1758

up a form of religion in your families and closets, and in the house of God, it is nothing but his mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment swallowed up in everlasting destruction. However unconvinced you may now be of the truth of what you hear, by and by you will be fully convinced of it.

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have no interest in any Mediator, and nothing to lay hold of to save yourself, nothing to keep off the flames of wrath, nothing of your own, nothing that you ever have done, nothing that you can do, to induce God to spare you one moment.

SESSION 39: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWENTY-EIGHT): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART ELEVEN

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15, with #10, and #9

PREFACE

God, in the prophecies of the Last Things in His word, demonstrates His grace by periodically offering pictures—visions—of encouragement interspersed here and there with the visions of doom and wrath. For the most part, Chapter Fourteen of the Revelation offers a breath of fresh air to believers, after the accounts of anguish, deprivation, and despair that comprised Chapter Thirteen. So if any of you have developed nightmares or chronic depression thus far from this study, be assured that at least for a while, the outlook will be a bit brighter. Here, now, we have something we can look forward to. If you like outlines, here is a quick one for Chapter Fourteen:

1. A vision of Christ's triumphant return accompanied by the 144,000 (vv1-5)
2. A vision of three angels (vv6-13)
 - a) the angel with the gospel (vv6-7)
 - b) the angel declaring Babylon has fallen (v8)
 - c) the angel declaring doom for the worshipers of the beast, but blessings upon the saints who die in the Lord (vv9-13)
3. A vision of the reaping of the earth (vv14-20)

[Look at Chart 15.](#)

Walvoord: All of this material is not chronological but prepares the way for the climax which begins in chapter 15. Chapter 14 consists of a series of pronouncements and visions assuring the reader of the ultimate triumph of Christ and the judgment of the wicked. Much of the chapter is prophetic of events that have not yet taken place, but which are now impending. The chapter begins with the assurance that the Lamb will ultimately stand in triumph on Mount Zion with his followers, and it concludes with a series of pronouncements of judgments upon the wicked.

MacArthur: Chapter Fourteen is a bright contrast to the darkness of Chapter Thirteen, which describes Satan (the dragon), Antichrist, the final false prophet, deception, the unredeemed, idolatry, and the mark of the beast. Chapter Fourteen describes the Lamb, angels, redeemed saints, genuine worship, and those sealed by God. In Chapter Thirteen there is falsehood, wickedness, corruption, and blasphemy; in Chapter Fourteen there is truth, righteousness, purity, and praise.

Read Revelation 14:1-5.

v1

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

As we have learned since beginning this study, there are some who are *determined* to complicate the interpretation of end times prophecy. And this verse includes two elements some have exerted great effort to confuse needlessly.

Mt. Zion

Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion,

There are commentators that have needlessly tried to locate this Mt. Zion in heaven by associating it with a passage in Hebrews.

Read Hebrews 12:22-24.

If this is the Mt. Zion being referenced in v1, then it destroys the whole purpose of the protected—the “sealed”—144,000 who accompany the Lamb. For in the first parenthetical vision the sixth seal, in Chapter Seven, God seals a remnant from Israel—12,000 from each tribe—against death during the Tribulation. If this Mt. Zion is in heaven, then this would mean that the 144,000 have *died* during the Tribulation. But before we get lost in such mechanics, let us exult in this vision of our triumphant Lord standing upon Mt. Zion.

For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired it for His habitation.
This is My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it. (Psalm 132:13-14)

Jesus was circumcised in Jerusalem. He wept over Jerusalem. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was slain in Jerusalem. To Jerusalem He will return, and in a *new* Jerusalem He will make His eternal abode. In cosmic, spiritual, and eternal terms, Jerusalem truly is the navel of the world. To see Him standing there in all His glory, ready for the final battle against evil will be *breathhtaking*. Will He then engage in a bloody battle against Satan? No. Jesus, the Lamb slain, will utter a word—“the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse”—and it will be over (Revelation 19:21). Once again we turn to the prophet Zechariah for different perspective on the same moment in time.

Read Zechariah 14:3-4.

The 144,000

and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.

Again, there are those who want to make this a different 144,000 for the sole reason that this verse does not include the definite article, “*the* one hundred and forty-four thousand,” as in *the same*, which is just silly. Others point out that the group mentioned in Chapter Seven are said to have on their foreheads the “seal of the living God,” while in Chapter Fourteen it is said they have “His [the Lamb’s] name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.” This reveals nothing more than that the first reference was speaking generally, and the second specifically.

Walvoord: As Seiss points out, their identification with the Father is their mark of being saved Jews; their identification with the Lamb reveals their salvation through faith in Christ; their position on Mount Zion a place of security, blessing, and glory in the earthly Jerusalem in the millennial kingdom.

These are the 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel—Messianic Jews all—who have been sealed against death—but not necessarily hardship—through the complete Tribulation. So in this vision, looking roughly three and one half years down the road, the Lord God is revealing to John that they all will indeed make it through the seven years, to stand alongside their Lord upon His return. They do not come from heaven with Him, but join Him as He arrives.

v2

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.

We need to define our pronouns here. To John, on the island of Patmos, is not just revealed a vision of images, but a heavenly soundtrack like nothing ever heard on earth. As best he can describe it, the voice (*phone*, singular feminine) has a sound like

- the sound of many waters,
- the sound of loud thunder,
- like the sound of harpists playing harps

Some of our translations interpret this third component as a separate sound instead of a voice, or even the same voice. For example, the original NIV uses “sound” throughout, with no mention of “voice,” while the NKJV uses “voice” three times, but then switches to “sound” for the harps, the KJV uses “voice” for all, and the NASB intermingles both freely. The Greek *phone* is used for all three, and can mean a voice or a sound.

This is simply the aural version of John's many visual descriptions: He is obviously privileged to hear the dramatic, yet ethereal music of heaven, and struggles to find suitable words with which to describe it.

v3

And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.

Here's where many commentators get sidetracked and end up thinking the 144,000 are in heaven; they also credit the wrong ability to them, wherever they are.

First, once again, pronouns. Who are "they"? Some have decided that it is the 144,000 who are singing—but that's not what it says. Verse 3 supplies more details to v2; hence, the "they" are the voice or voices in heaven sounding like many waters, like loud thunder, and like the sound of harps. This song is being performed "before" (*enopion*, in the presence of, in the eyes of) the exalted throne of heaven, peopled by, of course, Father and Son, but also the supporting cast of the four living creatures (seraphim), and the twenty-four elders.

The verse does not say that the 144,000 are doing the singing, nor does it even say that they can even *hear* the song; only that they are the only ones who "could learn the song" being sung. Well then, it's fair to ask, "Who is this doing the singing before the throne in heaven?" The passage does not tell us, but from the description of the scene we might make an educated guess. [Turn please to Chapter Seven.](#)

When Linda and I moved back to the Midwest from California during the winter of '91/92, for a time we stayed in an apartment in Marshalltown, our home town. The apartment was the second and third floors of an old house on State Street, and it had a large room facing the street that had windows on at least two, perhaps three sides. I drew on that room in my writing at the time to express a way to understand the holy Trinity. Imagine God, three in one, seated on a chair in the middle of that room facing forward. Now go outside and first look in at him through one window; He would look a certain way. Now switch to a window from another direction; same person, but now He looks different. Finally, switch to a window from the third direction; still the same person, but He now looks different again. The person seated in the chair never changes, but we have just looked at Him from three different aspects. God never changes, but He consists of three different aspects: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each aspect has a different role, a different job description, as it were. But they all, either individually or as One, are God.

This illustrates not just the Godhead, but how we are to make sense out of the prophecies, the sequential narratives, and various parenthetical visions scattered about in the Revelation. It is *one* narrative, but God in His wisdom

offers us various different *aspects* by which to view and understand the same narrative. In our text in Chapter Fourteen, though we have not yet arrived there in the overall narrative, we are offered an aspect onto Christ's triumphant return to earth. That same moment in time is pictured by a *different* aspect in Zechariah, as well as many other places in Scripture—including elsewhere in Revelation. [Look at Chart 10.](#)

The 144,000 are introduced in Chapter Seven, and the parenthetical vision there points us back to the *start* of the Tribulation, when God sealed these Messianic Jews against death. This remnant would survive the trials of the next seven years. In our current text in Chapter Fourteen we see them again, the parenthetical vision now pointing forward to the *end* of the Tribulation—proof before the fact that they will indeed survive and have reason to give praise to their Savior.

But there may be another connection between Chapters Seven and Fourteen—and, again, two different aspects. In the second parenthetical vision in Chapter Seven we are granted an aspect of a scene that will take place at the end of the Tribulation.

v9-10: After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Later in the passage John—and we—are told who these people are.

v14-15: ... "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them."

We first met these martyrs in Chapter Six. [Look at Chart 9.](#) Here we encounter them "underneath the altar," "the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God" and their testimony. A connecting element between those in Chapter Seven and those in Chapter six is that they are described dressed in white robes.¹ The time frame for the martyrs under the altar is somewhere *during* the Tribulation, because they are told to wait a while until *all* the martyrs have been killed. The time frame for the martyrs in Chapter Seven is the return of Christ at the *end* of the Tribulation, for it says that "These are the ones who *come out of the great tribulation*" (emphasis added). They are no longer crying out for vengeance, but now are gathered around the throne "cry[ing] out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the

¹6:11 and 7:9

throne, and to the Lamb.” [Back to Chapter Fourteen, and look at Chart 15](#)

Again, the time frame for this five-verse passage is the return of Christ marking the end of the Tribulation. So we have shown that there is pretty good evidence that these in heaven singing “a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders” are the same martyrs we saw in Chapter Six under the altar, and in Chapter Seven praising God and the Lamb before the throne.

and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand

I stated earlier that nowhere does it state that the 144,000 are actually singing; just that they alone are able to learn the song. But over against this is the common position by all my primary commentators that the 144,000 *do* take up the song learned from the voices of heaven.

Let’s back up just for a minute. We are going to see again this moment when Christ returns—predominantly, and more dramatically presented, in Chapter Nineteen—but let us not pass too quickly over what is presented in vv1-2. This will surely be the most powerful scene witnessed by anyone on earth in the history of this earth. Yet it will be, as well, in the economy of God for the redemption of man. It would be picking nits to gauge its importance in comparison to Christ’s death on the cross, His subsequent resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven. If not the most dramatic moment, however, this one holds its own against the others, and this is seen in the presumed antiphonal chorus filling the air in both heaven and earth. It begins around the throne of God in heaven, descends to earth where the 144,000 learn the song and then join in the singing. This will be a “new” song, because the occasion it serenades is brand new. It is a song of praise from those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb: The choir in heaven through martyrdom, the choir on earth through His protection through many trials. It is a song only the redeemed, the saved, can sing. And don’t miss the import of v3’s delicious closing phrase.

who had been purchased from the earth.

J. A. Seiss: [While] most people in their day “dwell upon the earth,” sit down upon it as their rest and choice, derive their chief comfort from it, these are “redeemed from the earth,”—withdrawn from it, bought away by the heavenly promises and the divine grace to live above it, independent of it, as no longer a part of it. Also is it said that they are “redeemed from men” [v4]—segregated entirely from the common course of the world, and removed from the ordinary fellowship of men. Less than this the language concerning them can scarcely mean. They are quite severed from the world in heart and life.

vv4-5

These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.

We are going to examine these last two verses as we have the previous, but if you are looking for application for us today in this passage, this is where you will find it. The last phrase of v3 tees this up, and vv4-5 expand on what it means to be purchased, or redeemed, from the earth—not just during the Tribulation, but right now. What it means to “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” It will not be necessary to drive home this application with a sledge hammer; it is lying there on the surface for all to see.

These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste.

At a cursory reading this might seem to denigrate the influence of women on men, but prepositions are important. First, this is *not* saying that all the 144,000 are virginal men. Second, it does not say that they were not defiled *by* women, but “with” women, (*meta*) which can include the idea of being in company with, among. That is, it could mean what we *think* it means at a glance—*they kept away from women*—or it could mean that *both* the men and women remained chaste. John MacArthur states it well.

MacArthur: 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 (Hebrews 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.

Those who were part of our *First Corinthians* class may recall that there were some in the Corinth church who took this to extreme. They considered themselves to be so spiritual that they were abstaining even from conjugal relations—yet some even of them were visiting temple prostitutes because they believed the flesh meant nothing; only the spirit-life was important, so what one did with the body meant nothing. Neither of those are part of God’s plan for marriage. As MacArthur points out, there is nothing “defiling” about sexual relations between husband and wife.

These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

From the insight of John Phillips we might add to this, *or go wherever He sends them.*

Phillips: They allow no rivals, no refusals, and no restraint to mar their dedication to Him. Does He need someone to stand upon the steps of the Vatican and cry out against the marriage of Christendom to the Beast? There are 144,000 ready to go! Does the Lord need someone to beard the Beast² at some high function of state and roundly denounce him, his policy, his statecraft, his religion, his economic boycott, his mark, his ministers, his alliance with Satan? There are 144,000 eager to go! Does the Lamb need evangelists to proclaim to the untold millions the gospel of the coming kingdom of God? to climb the highest Himalayas, to cross the desert sands, to blaze evangelistic trails through steaming jungles, or to mush huskies across wide arctic wastes? There are 144,000 ready to go! And though the Beasts' Gestapo dog their footsteps and wreak upon their converts his direst vengeance, yet on they go undaunted and undeterred. That was the very spirit of their consecration as they followed the Lamb whithersoever He led them on earth, and their reward is in kind.

(Exploring Revelation, 180-81)

These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

We can look at this a couple of ways, neither of which eliminates the other.

First, these 144,000, set apart and sealed by God at the beginning of the Tribulation, constitute the first and best part of the crop and always (in OT terms) offered to God for His service. These are not all that are saved during the Tribulation, but they are a special, sanctified group of Jewish evangelists, set apart to proclaim the gospel during treacherous times.

Second, we can also see them as representing the first of many others who will be saved. "The 144,000 may legitimately be viewed as the first fruits of redeemed Israel, foreshadowing the nation's salvation when Christ returns" (MacArthur).

*(v5) And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.**

The prophet Zephaniah spoke of this:

"But I will leave among you
A humble and lowly people,
And they will take refuge in the name of the LORD.
The remnant of Israel will do no wrong
And tell no lies,
Nor will a deceitful tongue
Be found in their mouths;
For they will feed and lie down
With no one to make them tremble." (Zephaniah 3:12-13)

*"...before the throne of God" (KJVs) is not found in the best manuscripts.

²To "beard" the Beast means to face or oppose courageously or brazenly, as if grasping by the beard.

The word translated “lie” or “guile” is the Greek *pseudos*, meaning there was not found in them anything false, or especially false religion. They are consecrated to God, and will have nothing to do with Antichrist’s false religion. Note how *pseudos* was used by Paul in Romans 1:25.

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 1:25)

Now, we can say that they are also “blameless” before God because of the blood of Christ. True, but I believe this verse implies *before men*, as well. These people will be the real thing; even the morally and spiritually depraved around them will attest to their honesty, forthrightness, morality, and purity.

MacArthur: The 144,000 deserve a place in the “Hall of Fame” of the Christian faith (Hebrews 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. The inspired account of their lives and ministry provides a pattern of triumphant Christian living for all believers to follow.

SESSION 40: THE TRIBULATION (PART TWENTY-NINE): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART TWELVE

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15 (with references to #1 and #2)

PREFACE

Angels play an important role in God's economy. He and the Son employ their angels to deliver messages—the literal meaning of the Greek *angelos*—to reassure and comfort humans, to fight for and protect humans, and to carry literal judgment to humans. The three angels presented in the passage before us—Revelation 14:6-12—are delivering three different messages: the first offering hope by means of the gospel; the second forecasting the approaching fall of “Babylon the great,” which, in the Revelation, represents “Antichrist’s worldwide political, economic, and religious empire” (MacArthur); the third pronouncing the doom that awaits those who worship the beast.

These three messages have a central theme—*judgment is imminent*—and constitute the offering of God’s final avenue of escape, His last offering of salvation extended before the ax falls, followed by a clear promise of that which awaits those who turn down His offer. Even as various plagues and judgments have been meted out—to those on earth they must seem by now interminable, unrelenting—God still offers unbelievers one last warning before the final, absolute, no-turning-back judgment descends.

Read Revelation 14:6-8.

The First Angel

And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;

There seems to be no significance to the adjective “another,” apparently just meaning something along the lines of, *Here is one more vision of another angel*. There is, however, significance to *where* the angel is. He is flying in “midheaven”; the ESV says the same thing using different words, while the NIVs are disappointing. The word translated “midheaven” is *mesouranemati* (mess-ur-on'-ee-matee), which means the zenith, the sun at the meridian. That is, the angel, as the ESV has it, is “directly overhead,” thus at the point in the sky most visible to the most people on earth. And remember, the common phrase in God’s word, “those who live on the earth,” always refers to unbelievers.

Because it is important, we need to split a few hairs here to understand just what message the angel is bringing. **First**, in our common versions only the NASB and ESV have it correct: *an* eternal gospel; the rest have “the,” implying *the* familiar NT gospel. But there is no definite article in the text itself.

Second, it says it is an *eternal* or everlasting gospel, so there must be *something* different about it. **Third**, the word *euangelion* (yoo-ahn-gelion), translated gospel, means “good news,” but v7, which gives us the content of the angel’s message, is not the familiar gospel of salvation in Christ through His atoning blood. So what are we to make of this? J. A. Seiss says it best.

Seiss: Paul once said, if an angel from heaven preach unto you any other Gospel than that ye have received, let him be accursed. And when he so said, he spoke the very truth of God; but it is the truth with special reference to the present dispensation, till the Church-period has come to its end...; for here, when “the judgment is come,” an angel from heaven preaches, and what he preaches is not “the everlasting Gospel” as the English version is, but “a Gospel everlasting.” It is not indeed “another Gospel,” for it is in inner substance the same old and everlasting Gospel, but now in the dress and features of a new order of things—the Gospel as its contents shape themselves in its address to the nations when “the hour of judgment is come,” and the great final administrations are in hand.

Of course, then, we have here another dispensation, a different order of things from that which now obtains. The same is also intimated in the features of the Word preached. It is no longer the meek and entreating voice, beseeching men to be reconciled to God, but a great thunder from the sky, demanding of the nations to Fear the God, as over against the false god whom they were adoring,—to Give glory to Him, instead of the infamous Beast whom they were glorifying,—to Worship the Maker of all things, as against the worship of him who can do no more than play his hellish tricks with the things that are made; and all this on the instant, for the reason that “the hour of judgment is come.”

Early on we discussed the different and progressive dispensations,¹ and here we see them coming into play. The dispensation of grace (the present church age) is now over. In our dispensation angels do not proclaim the gospel of grace; they do not preach. But during the Tribulation they will. And although his message is technically not a “different gospel”,² it is a gospel for a different time, a different situation, a different sort of people dwelling on the earth.

This is not a *graceful* gospel, but a more forceful, imperative gospel. Frankly, it is a gospel for which I lobbied at the end of Session 38: a “fire and brimstone” gospel.

v7: and [the angel] said with a loud voice, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come;

¹Chart #2

²Galatians 1:6-9

worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters.”

It is the same gospel, just presented in a different manner. This is delivered forcefully to “every nation and tribe and tongue and people” as a last-chance imperative. Let me offer a Lampel paraphrase: *Before you know it every one of you is going to be knee-deep in hell fire. This is a last call. Declare yourself for the true God; give Him glory instead of that pitiful human you have been following. Do it now—or you will burn for eternity.* Finally, John Walvoord offers an interesting take on this “good news.”

Walvoord: 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.

The next two angels punctuate that gospel message with the *bad* news for all those who will reject it.

v8

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.”

The seventh bowl of wrath, announced in Revelation 16:17-21, records the *actual* fall of Babylon, with all of Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen adding details subsequent to the fall; it is there that we will dig deeper into the details of Babylon in the Revelation. But for now, this verse contains the following description for Babylon: “she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion [or wrath, *thymos*] of her immorality.” To what does this refer? Who or what is “Babylon”?

I said earlier that in the Revelation Babylon represents “Antichrist’s world-wide political, economic, and religious empire.” Let’s add some more details to that, because this can be rather confusing to the casual reader.

We hear the name Babylon and, of course, think of the city on the Euphrates River (modern day Baghdad), the Babylonian empire founded by Nimrod,³ subsequently ruled by (among others) Sargon I, Nebuchadrezzar (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar), and Belshazzar. Our present verse echoes the prophet Isaiah:

“Now behold, here comes a troop of riders, horsemen in pairs.”
And one said, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon; And all the images of her gods are shattered on the ground.” (Isaiah 21:9)

³Genesis 10:10

That is a prophecy of the *city* of Babylon falling before the Assyrians; but that is not what is referred to in the Revelation. In the OT, Babylon was the literal city/empire, representing the very worst example of licentiousness, immorality, and corruption. In the NT—the time of the apostle John recording the visions of the Revelation—that dubious distinction was held not by Babylon, but by Rome. So we could say, as do many scholars, that the name “Babylon” simply refers to the restored “Roman” empire pasted together by Antichrist. That may be true, but it doesn’t give the full picture. There is much more behind this Babylon.

I do not do it often, but I would like to quote from Alan F. Johnson’s commentary. For the most part he has been little help in this study, but his comments here are helpful.

Johnson: It is simply not sufficient to identify Rome and Babylon. For that matter, Babylon cannot be confined to any one historical manifestation, past or future. Babylon has multiple equivalents (cf. 11:8). The details of John's description do not neatly fit any past city, whether literal Babylon, Sodom, Egypt, Rome, or even Jerusalem. Babylon is found wherever there is satanic deception. It is defined more by dominant idolatries than geographic or temporal boundaries. *The ancient Babylon is better understood here as the archetypal head of all entrenched worldly resistance to God.* Babylon is a trans-historical reality including idolatrous kingdoms as diverse as Sodom, Gomorrah, Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, Nineveh, and Rome. *Babylon is an eschatological symbol of satanic deception and power; it is a divine mystery that can never be wholly reducible to empirical earthly institutions. It may be said that Babylon represents the total culture of the world apart from God, while the divine system is depicted by the New Jerusalem.* Rome is simply one manifestation of the total system. (emphasis added)

Here the second angel prophesies—confirms—that the corrupting influence of “Babylon” is doomed. For the time being we will leave it there until we get to Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen.

So far the first angel holds out a last chance for unbelievers to repent, to follow God (and His Christ) instead of Antichrist, and thus avoid the lake of fire. The second angel has proclaimed that very soon the immoral culture of which they are a part is doomed to fall. Now the third angel puts the frosting on the cake.

Read Revelation 14:9-11.

wv9-10

We now have a third angel offering a third vision of the imminent future.

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and

receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”

The casual reader may not realize it at first, but this passage (vv9-11), in conjunction with the previous (v8), is a powerful, gut-wrenching picture of what awaits those who reject Christ. The metaphors employed—“drink of the wine of the wrath,” “mixed in full strength”—are not just florid euphemisms for the sake of color; they present a hideous turn of events from what we now experience in this dispensation.

Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2, just after Christ’s return to the Father, marked the beginning of the church age, and almost two thousand years later we remain in this dispensation of grace. Every day of our lives, as believers, we dwell in God’s grace; we are enveloped in it. It is His grace that allows the believer to find hope in a fallen world. There is so much of God’s grace that He even shares it with unbelievers—it is called God’s “common grace”—that he sends rain not just for the crops in the Christian’s field, but for those in his agnostic neighbor’s field as well.

Here in our text is a picture of a far different dispensation: a time when there is none of God’s grace on earth. None.

In v8 we are told that the licentious “Babylon the great” has “made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality”—or the wine of the wrath of her fornication (*porneias*). It is a picture of humanity being utterly enthralled, utterly consumed within “an orgy of rebellion, idolatry, and hatred of God” (MacArthur). They will be *drunk* on what Satan has to offer, embracing it to the full. And there will be no hiding who and what they are. God will not need to examine their hearts; their allegiance will be branded into them for *all* to see.

And to those already satiated with the Antichrist’s wine God will dispense a second course of His own intoxicant: “the wine of the wrath of God,” on *any* occasion a potent vintage, but now “mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger.” The Greek is literally “mixed unmixe⁴,” which refers to the common ancient practice of diluting one’s wine with water. This wine will *not* be so diluted, so weakened in strength, but dispensed “untempered by the mercy and grace of God” (Walvoord).

Let that sink in for a moment.

God’s anger, His wrath has always existed. He is the same God today as He was when He opened up the earth to swallow those who dared to rebel against Moses.⁵ The difference is that now that same wrath is tempered by His grace—even His *common* grace. But no more. In the moment described by the third angel—remember, a messenger sent directly from God with His words—that

⁴ *kekerasmenou aktratou*

⁵ Numbers 16:28-33

wrath will be poured out and these made to drink of it full strength. There will not be a particle of grace or mercy included in this judgment of pure undiluted condemnation.

Walvoord: The righteousness of God is as inexorable as the love of God is infinite. The love of God is not free to express itself to those who have spurned Jesus Christ.

And what will be the fate of these adherents to the beast?

he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

Those who aligned themselves with the lies of Antichrist will suffer unrelenting torture in the lake of fire. No longer a vision, but the actual event in the narrative occurs later.

Read Revelation 19:20.

One thousand years later, Satan himself will join them.

Read Revelation 20:10.

Verse 10 ends with an unexpected phrase: "...in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb." My guess is that most of us, when we *do* think of hell, consider it to be a place absent the presence of God—that would be one of the qualities that defines it *being* hell: the absence of God. But Scripture is clear that there is no place in all of Creation shut to its Maker.

Read Psalm 139:7-10.

What *form* this "presence" will take we cannot say, but if God is omnipresent—and He is—then that would include even the bowels of the lake of fire. Perhaps, as John MacArthur suggests, "Unrepentant sinners will be banished from God's presence relationally... They will not, however, be away from His presence in the sense of His sovereignty and omnipresence—even in hell."

For many people—even some Christians—this is a bridge too far. It is sufficiently difficult for them to believe that "a loving God" would send individuals to eternal damnation and torment; it is too much to ask for them to believe that He would superintend their stay while there. But I do not think we can read this verse any other way.

This brings up another issue that I have mentioned before. How many of us grew up thinking that heaven was the domain of God, and hell (here, the final lake of fire) the domain of Satan? But that's not true. God is Creator and Sovereign over *all*, and the devil will be an inmate—not the sovereign—of hell.

Bottom line: *Kings keep watch over their domain.*

v11

“And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

Walvoord: Their torment is not a momentary one, for it is described in verse 11 as continuing forever, literally “into the ages of ages,” the strongest expression of eternity of which the Greek is capable.

Verse 11 seems redundant at first, but does drive home the point. It stresses that this torment in the fire and sulfurous gases (brimstone) of the lake of fire will not be of brief duration, but “forever and ever.” Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise; God’s word—no less from the lips of Jesus Himself—is clear that this will be an *eternal* punishment for those who reject Christ. [Turn please to Matthew 18.](#)

Jesus, answering his disciple’s question about who is “greatest in the kingdom of heaven,” says at the end of v8, “...it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire.” He then repeats the application with another body part: “...It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.” [Turn to Chapter 25.](#)

In his discourse on the final Judgment, in which he illustrates how He, personally, “the Son of Man,” will separate the sheep from the goats, closes in v46 with this regarding the goats: “These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

In this Christ is saying that the torment of those consigned to hell will be as eternal, as everlasting, as the blessed rest of the redeemed in heaven (MacArthur).

Ending on this dour note we need to remind ourselves that indeed *all three* of these angelic messengers will bring good news for the redeemed.

This passage represents the affirmative confirmation of many, *many* prayers from the redeemed for justice—and the martyred saints under the altar will by no means be the first.⁶

[Turn please to Psalm 73](#), a psalm of Asaph, and read his expressive pleas for justice.

v3-5:
For I was envious of the arrogant
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
For there are no pains in their death,
And their body is fat.

⁶ Revelation 6:9-11

They are not in trouble as other men,
Nor are they plagued like mankind.

v8-9:

They mock and wickedly speak of oppression;
They speak from on high.
They have set their mouth against the heavens,
And their tongue parades through the earth.

v11-14:

They say, "How does God know?
And is there knowledge with the Most High?"
Behold, these are the wicked;
And always at ease, they have increased in wealth.
Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure
And washed my hands in innocence;
For I have been stricken all day long
And chastened every morning.

v15-20:

If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
Behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children.
When I pondered to understand this,
It was troublesome in my sight
Until I came into the sanctuary of God;
Then I perceived their end.
Surely You set them in slippery places;
You cast them down to destruction.
How they are destroyed in a moment!
They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!
Like a dream when one awakes,
O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form.

v25-28

Whom have I in heaven but You?
And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
For, behold, those who are far from You will perish;
You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.
But as for me, the nearness of God is my good;
I have made the Lord GOD my refuge,
That I may tell of all Your works.

SESSION 41: THE TRIBULATION (PART THIRTY): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART THIRTEEN

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15

PREFACE

The passage before us in vv14-20 of Chapter Fourteen describes two “reapings” of the earth, the second drawing upon some of the same imagery of “the wine of the wrath of God” that was found in the previous. But two verses separate those passages.

Read Revelation 14:12-13.*

vv12-13

Very often the differences in translation of a passage between our common versions leads to confusion, even frustration. I found, however, that in this instance the difference in how our versions treat this almost parenthetical passage of the two verses lying between the doom of the worshipers of the beast (vv9-11) and the reaping of the earth (vv14-20), actually *facilitated* my understanding of these enigmatic two verses. At first reading, in the NASB, v12 seemed to refer back to something just said: “Here is the perseverance of the saints...,” as in *Here we have just seen the perseverance of the saints*. Yet the previous passage is not about the saints at all, but about what will happen to those bearing the mark of the beast.

By contrast, a number of our other versions have it, “*This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints...*,” which is not a reference to something else, but is an injunction *for* the saints to actively persevere in their faith and obedience. Well, which is it? Answer: Yes.

Perseverance is guaranteed to those who are in Christ; anyone who has placed not just their belief in, but their complete trust in the risen Christ Jesus *will* endure to the end—even through the hideous trials, the worst the world has ever seen,¹ of the Great Tribulation. Yet, perseverance is a two-way street; we are indeed called to actively endure. One way to look at it is that while our faith guarantees we *will* persevere, our faith also gives us the desire to obey “the commandments of God,” and the strength and will *to* endure.

As important as it is, this is not the time or place to launch into a discourse on “the perseverance of the saints.” Hence our handout for those who wish to trace what God’s word has to say about this.

Read Revelation 14:14-16.

During His earthly ministry Jesus spoke of a ripe harvest awaiting reaping:

¹ Matthew 24:21

*The first angel in Chapter Fourteen carried an “eternal gospel to preach.” Jesus spoke of this as well in His eschatological discourse in Matthew 24: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). The third angel, in v12, echoes something else Jesus said in Matthew 24:13: “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.” Time and again God’s word confirms itself.

Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” (Matthew 9:37-38)

There the harvest was of souls ready to be “reaped into the kingdom” (Carson). Later on, however, Jesus spoke of the harvest to take place at “the end of the age.”

Read Matthew 13:47-50.

Now in our passage we have two harvests portrayed: the first using the imagery of a grain harvest, the second using the imagery of a harvest of grapes. As always, there is disagreement. Some take the position that the first (vv14-16) is of the saints, while the second (vv17-20) is of the wicked. This position is based in part on the fact that God’s wrath and punishment are mentioned only in the second. As Seiss mentions, some see the first harvest even as “the final gathering home of the people of God.” Others, probably in the majority, see both of these harvests as two *aspects* of the reaping of the wicked, the first being the imminent seven bowls of judgment, the second being the battle of Armageddon. One point that seems to substantiate this position: *Would Christ use a “sharp sickle” to bring His children home?* A case can be made for either; we will go with the latter, that this passage speaks only of the reaping of the wicked.

And in a sense we can see this of a piece with vv12-13; there we are told what will happen to those who have persevered—specifically, those who have come to Christ during the Tribulation and suffered for their faith through far more than any of us can even imagine. They will be “blessed,” they will have “rest from their labors,” welcomed into glory to dwell forever with their Lord, for whom they have suffered. Then the passage that follows portrays the flip-side, what will happen to those who rejected Christ.

v14

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand.

Among our common versions, only the KJVs (and the CSB) have “*the* Son of Man,” while the rest have “*a* son of man.” It is true that the text has “like” (*homios*; resembling, the same as), but the vast majority of commentators take the position that this is indeed Christ Jesus, the Son of Man, glorified, complete with His crown of gold.

Thus here we see, first, the Son of Man² in His glory and authority (the cloud), but also the crown of victory (*stephanos*); He is victorious over evil and unbelief, and about to exert His judgment and punishment on all the wicked on

² Daniel 7:13; Revelation 1:13; Matthew 25:31

earth. Second, we see Him in His righteous wrath—“...and a sharp sickle in His hand”—ready do justice on all who have rejected His Lordship.

v15

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, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

I must be fair and balanced here, and express my disappointment in the NASB for its inconsistency. In v13 the NASB’s first choice is to make it “a son of man” (lowercase; admittedly, to its credit, including a margin note for the alternate rendering). But here, in v15, and in v16 the NASB refers to the same individual as “Him,” “He,” and “His”—all uppercase. Well, which is it?

Some are bothered by the picture of a mere angel commanding Christ to do something. I don’t see it that way. Yes, the angel speaks “to Him who sat on the cloud,” but its not for His benefit—or at least the *tone* of the shout is not meant to be a command. The word translated “crying out” (*krazon*) is a bit of an *onomatopoeia* –a word formed by the sound it describes. This word is used for the croak of a raven, and can mean even inarticulate screaming. So this is a rather unpleasant, harsh shout from the angel whose audience is less the Son of Man than the soon recipients of the impending harvest. One also might see this shout being for the ages, a shock-wave announcement for the end of all things on earth.

It is also possible that the angel’s cry really is an official notification from God the Father to God the Son. In His eschatological discourse to His disciples, Jesus said about the timing of all this,

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” (Matthew 24:35-36)

Perhaps this is a vision of that moment when the Father will inform the Son: “Now!” In all events, I would still conclude that the *tone* of the message is for the earth and the ages.

“...the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

Our typical use of the word “ripe” is to describe something that is at its peak, as in a ripe apple that is ready to be plucked from the tree, no longer green but now delicious and sweet. But here the word “ripe” (*exeranthe*), means, instead, something that is dried up, shriveled, withering away; that is, desiccated. That delicious apple is now a withered, rotten, revolting piece of garbage. The implication of the verse is that the promised judgment is overdue. “The rotten moral condition of the world [must be] dealt with now with a sharp sickle”

(Walvoord). “The grain (the earth) pictured here has passed the point of usefulness and is fit only to be ‘gathered up and burned with fire’ (Matthew 13:40)” (MacArthur).

v16

Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth,
and the earth was reaped.

Once again God in His word is offering us a different *aspect* of a portion of the Last Things—indeed, the climax to all the Seal judgments, the Trumpet judgments, and now, here, the Bowl judgments. In Chapter Sixteen we will see John’s vision of the actual dispensing of these horrible plagues, but here we have a dark, metaphorical—almost, in a perverse way, poetical—interpretation of the events. We commonly think of a sickle, or scythe, as a tool to reap what was sown, to gather up for our consumption the life-sustaining stalks of wheat that will become bread for our table. Here and in the passage below, however, the sickle becomes an instrument of death: a horizontal guillotine lopping off the heads of the wicked left on earth.

This, of course, is a metaphor for the suffering and death poured out from the bowls of wrath: loathsome and malignant sores; all remaining water turned to blood; scorching heat from the sun; darkness, pain, and sores poured out directly upon the throne of the beast. Next we turn to a similar aspect of a second “reaping,” this time, to quote the title of a famous book, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Read Revelation 14:17-20.

Verses 14-16 paint a fantastical picture of the Bowls judgments; now vv17-20 do the same for the “battle” of Armageddon.

v17

And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven,[†]
and he also had a sharp sickle.

Here we have another angel, not the Son of Man, who will be the one wielding the sickle. Angels, especially during the Last Things, serve as more than just supernatural *Western Union* men delivering messages. They will be getting into the dirty work. Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 1, writes,

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. (2 Thessalonians 1:6–8)

[†] Frankly, I would *like* to dwell for a while on this business of “the temple which is in heaven”—the word “temple” (*naou*) just means either the whole or part of a place where God dwells—I would *like* to, but I am not yet prepared for such a discussion, for it is related (at least in my mind) to Ezekiel’s temple—the last temple, the temple of the Millennial end times (if literal) or a figurative view of God ultimately dwelling with His people. I still have on my desk my handwritten note to myself: “I have lots of questions about Ezekiel’s temple.” For that discussion I await the opportunity of a longer prep time than my normal seven days. Stay tuned.

Jesus explained to His disciples in Matthew 13 that,

“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.” (Matthew 13:37–40)

“So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 13:49–50)

v18

Then 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.”

This second angel is the one with power, authority over the fire of the altar in heaven. And shame, again, on the NASB (and CSB) for not including the definite article “*the* fire,” which is in the Greek text. This is not an angel in charge of *all* fire, but specifically the fire of the altar—probably the same altar mentioned in Revelation 6:9 (martyrs), and 8:3 (incense and prayers). This connection seems to indicate that this scene is a response to the many prayers of the saints for retribution, for God’s judgment on earthly wickedness.

This second angel “calls with a loud,” commanding voice to the angel with the sickle to start swinging it and harvesting “the clusters from the vine of the earth.” Why? Because “her grapes are ripe.”

MacArthur: The word “ripe” [*ekmasan*] is not the same Greek word used in v15. This word refers to something fully ripe and in its prime. It pictures earth’s wicked, unregenerate people as bursting with the juice of wickedness and ready for the harvest of righteousness.

v19

So 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.

Turn please to [Revelation 19](#). I have stated that I choose to place the word “battle” in scare quotes when it refers to the battle of Armageddon because there really is no combat to speak of. Armageddon is mentioned in a number of places in the Revelation—not always by that name. There are a number of pas-

sages about its preparation, but here in Chapter Nineteen is where it actually takes place, immediately after Christ returns. As to its duration, note this:

Read Revelation 19:19.

This verse states clearly that the “battle” has not yet occurred, because it speaks of the beast and his army standing in readiness. Now look at the very next verse:

Read Revelation 19:20.

So the first thing that occurs is that the commanding general and his sidekick are taken captive alive, and thrown into the lake of fire. What about their army?

Read Revelation 19:21.

Once again, Christ speaks—and an entire army is slaughtered, their flesh lying about for the carnivorous birds to have their fill. Now back up to v15, which foreshadows the action of v21 and ties into our passage in Chapter Fourteen.

Read Revelation 19:15.

[Back to Chapter Fourteen, v19.](#)

Who is it that works this “wine press of the wrath of God”? Who is it that presses it down to squeeze out the blood of the enemy? Verse 19:15: “and **He** [Christ] treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.” ‡

When does this occur? Where does it fall in the narrative sequence? Upon Christ’s return to earth. The prophet Joel speaks of this moment employing the same imagery.

Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations,
And gather yourselves there.
Bring down, O LORD, Your mighty ones.
Let the nations be aroused
And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat,
For there I will sit to judge
All the surrounding nations.
Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe.
Come, tread, for the wine press is full;
The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. (Joel 3:11-13)

‡The imagery is, of course, metaphorical. There will not be a huge wine press set up on the plain of Megiddo into which the bodies of the slain will be fed for Christ to literally stomp to extract their blood.

v20

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.

Some expositors cast a wary eye at this idea of “blood [coming] out from the wine press, up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles”—especially if they imagine this describing *flowing* blood, an ocean of blood rising to such a height. But a more sensible reading of this is that for the length and breadth of the “battle” (which, as we will see, we can easily imagine it covering such a distance) blood from the carnage is liberally *spattered* to such a height.

Most of us, probably, have imagined this “Battle” of Armageddon being staged as most wars in ancient times: two armies meeting upon a plain or wide valley—that is, fairly well contained in one spot. But the evidence from our prophets reveals that this will be a wide-spread conflict, localized in Israel but perhaps covering its length and breadth, and more.

For example, many (but not all) see the name of the battle being associated with the Plain of Esdraelon near Mount Megiddo, which is about sixty miles north of Jerusalem. Yet Isaiah prophecies seeing Messiah coming *up* from the battle, with His garments stained with blood, from Bozrah in Edom, about 70 miles south and east of Jerusalem—and not even in present-day Israel.³

Read Isaiah 63:1-6.

Again, we cannot think of this as a typical confrontation of two armies battling away at each other for days or weeks or months. There will indeed be two armies—one from the earth and one from heaven. But the righteous king astride His white horse at the head of the heavenly host will be the only one who casts a fatal blow—only one blow, that will fell every last warrior in the opposition. There will be no fighting; only the bloody carnage, the slaughter of millions, by the word spoken from the arriving Messiah: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

³presently in Jordan

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

“The phrase ‘the perseverance of the saints’ introduces one of the most important and most comforting doctrines in Scripture. It expresses the truth that all those whom God has elected, called, and justified will never lose their faith, but will persevere in it until death. Some refer to this as the doctrine of eternal security; others dub it the ‘once saved, always saved’ teaching. While those definitions are accurate, they do not express this truth as clearly as the biblical phrase ‘the perseverance of the saints.’ That statement emphasizes the reality that God keeps His own saints by sustaining their faith to the very end, no matter what occurs. True saving faith in its very nature is eternal and cannot be lost or destroyed.”

John MacArthur

Psalm 37:23-34

The steps of a man are established by the LORD,
And He delights in his way;
When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong,
Because the LORD is the One who holds his hand.
I have been young and now I am old,
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
Or his descendants begging bread.
All day long he is gracious and lends,
And his descendants are a blessing.
Depart from evil and do good,
So you will abide forever.
For the LORD loves justice
And does not forsake His godly ones;
They are preserved forever,
But the descendants of the wicked will be cut off.
The righteous will inherit the land
And dwell in it forever.
The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom,
And his tongue speaks justice.
The law of his God is in his heart;
His steps do not slip.
The wicked spies upon the righteous
And seeks to kill him.

Old Testament

The LORD will not leave him in his hand
Or let him be condemned when he is judged.
Wait for the LORD and keep His way,
And He will exalt you to inherit the land;
When the wicked are cut off, you will see it.

Isaiah 49:14-16

But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me,
And the Lord has forgotten me.”
“Can a woman forget her nursing child
And have no compassion on the son of her womb?
Even these may forget, but I will not forget you.
Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;
Your walls are continually before Me.”

Isaiah 51:6

“Lift up your eyes to the sky,
Then look to the earth beneath;
For the sky will vanish like smoke,
And the earth will wear out like a garment
And its inhabitants will die in like manner;
But My salvation will be forever,
And My righteousness will not wane.
Listen to Me, you who know righteousness,
A people in whose heart is My law;
Do not fear the reproach of man,
Nor be dismayed at their revilings.
For the moth will eat them like a garment,
And the grub will eat them like wool.
But My righteousness will be forever,
And My salvation to all generations.”

New Testament

John 5:24

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

John 6:37-40

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

Romans 8:28-30

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

John 10:27-30

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

John 8:31

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine."

"The perseverance of the Tribulation saints will be evident because they will 'keep the commandments of God.' That genuine saving faith will result in such obedience is the clear teaching of Scripture."

MacArthur

SESSION 42: THE TRIBULATION (PART THIRTY-ONE): THE THIRD PARENTHETICAL VISIONS, PART FOURTEEN

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15, with reference to #8.

PREFACE

We are now ready for the final, climactic scene of all those comprising the group I have named the third parenthetical visions—and this last vision is directly preparatory to the seven bowl judgments. As a matter of fact, God in the Revelation *remarkably* prefaces the bowl judgments. [Look at Chart #8](#)

As we saw in Chart #8—the overview of the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls—the seventh of each is—or contains—the next series. That is, the seventh Seal *is* the Trumpets, the seventh Trumpet (the Third Woe) *is* the Bowls of Wrath. But more than the previous judgments, God in His word, as it were, *teases* the final group of seven, because it is the climax, the third and final act to the entire Tribulation. It began back in Chapter Eleven.

Read Revelation 11:15.

Reading that we think, *OK, here we go; the curtain is at last rising on the third act*. But no, what follows is the group of parenthetical visions that run from 11:15 to 15:8, with this last vision described in Chapter Fifteen being yet another prefacing scene for the Seven Bowls of Wrath! The actual pouring out of the bowls does not take place until v2 of Chapter Sixteen.

All of this—the inserted parenthetical visions, the “teases”—serves to heighten expectancy in the reader—and emphasizes the cataclysmic strength and finality of the bowl judgments. The curtain is indeed now ready to rise on the final act, but first—and I can’t help but see this in theatrical terms—we are granted, in Chapter Fifteen, a glimpse of the cast getting into costume and being handed their props before entering the stage proper. This chapter as a whole can also be seen as the overture playing before the first curtain opens.

[Look at Chart #15](#)

Read Revelation 15:1-4.

John Walvoord points out that this is the third and final of three important “signs in heaven.” The first and second we saw in Chapter Twelve.

Read Revelation 12:1-2, 3.

Walvoord: The three signs taken together represent important elements in the prophetic scene: (1) Israel, that is, the woman; (2) the final world empire under the control of Satan and the beast, that is, the great red dragon; and (3) the seven angels having the seven last

plagues, that is, the divine judgment upon the satanic system and political power of the beast.

v1

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.

This final vision before the pouring out of the bowls is called “great and marvelous,” these two words (*megas* and *thaumaston*) used together only here and in v3, “express the enormous importance of this sign as it contains the final outpouring of God’s wrath on the wicked, unrepentant sinners of the earth” (MacArthur).

There appears to be nothing significant about these angels; they are just seven more holy messengers called to do the Lord’s bidding. In God’s word the number seven represents completeness, which is especially apt here, as the text tells us that this is the last of the three series of seven to be inflicted on the earth. In fact, the original Greek makes it even more emphatic: “...having seven plagues, the last ones.” This is it; no more after this.

Once again I am intrigued by something that doesn’t seem to be noticed by most of our commentators.¹ Twice in this chapter (v1 and v6) the seven angels are described as having— (“had,” *echontas*) that is, already in possession of—“seven plagues.”*

This is what intrigues me: Twice we are told the seven angels “have” the plagues to start with, but then in vv6-7 we are told that when the seven angels emerge from the temple (or, better, sanctuary), they are each handed a golden bowl “full of the wrath of God.”

Taken literally this would seem to differentiate between the “plagues” and the bowls of the wrath of God. The first is already in the possession of the angels, the second is given them at the last minute by “one of the four living creatures” from around the throne of God. Commentators, as a rule, just mush these together, but the text speaks of them as different things. Or, as MacArthur, they see the bowls as “the means by which” the plagues will be dispensed. But this misses the fact that the bowls are—as handed to the angels—already “full of the wrath of God.”

My conclusion is this: When these bowls are eventually flung out upon the earth, each blow is comprised of the combination of the two. Think of it this way: Each “plague” represents the raw material, as it were, while God’s wrath represents the *force* behind it, supplying the lethal intensity. I would reverse MacArthur; the “plagues” are the means by which the wrath of God is executed. Or, put a little differently, each angel’s plague is what God uses in His wrath against the earth.

*The word “plagues,” translating the Greek *plegas* (plee-yas’), although a faithful *transliteration*, can be misleading. The word means a blow (caused by a lash), a stripe or wound. It is translated “blows” in Acts 16:23—“When they had struck them with many **blows**, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely.” When we read “plagues” we probably have in mind a creeping sickness or disease, but these last seven judgments will be strong, abrupt and lethal blows inflicted on the earth. [More on this later.](#)

¹ I leave it to you to decide whether I have superior insight—or am certifiable.

...which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.

And don't miss that powerful closing phrase. What makes this last series of judgments so important? This will be the last—and very worst—of God's wrath. After this, the well will be dry. This doesn't mean once the seventh bowl is poured out, suddenly everything will be lovey-dovey between God and man; their will still be the individual judgments of the Great White Throne.² But the Bowls represent the last expression of God's *global* wrath upon all.

Herein lay clues to our interpretation of the Tribulation as a whole. If this be "the last," then all that came before—the seals and the trumpets—were also plagues expressing the wrath of God. This also means that there is a logical chronology built into the Tribulation: Seals, then Trumpets, then, last, Bowls.

v2

And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

Verse two calls up the imagery from Chapter Four of Revelation—

...and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. (Revelation 4:6)

—Ezekiel 1:22, and Exodus 24:9-10:

Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.

Here, however we have a new element added: fire. But John says that what he is seeing is "*something like* a sea of glass mixed with fire," which means we need not press the vision to be literal fire mixed with literal glass. In this specific moment what had once been tranquil is now "afame" from the wrath of God about to be dispensed. And John saw something else.

And I saw...those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

As with most aspects of living in Christ, we tend to have a rather sterile view of "faith." Probably our first thought is that our faith is synonymous with belief, but true faith is so much more. It is first of all *trust*, then *commitment*, then, if it necessarily comes to it, *sacrifice* and even *martyrdom*. Here the text tells us that faith is also *power*. Our text says that those believers who the beast killed during the Tribulation will—*by their faith*—be deemed "victorious over"

² Revelation 20:11-15

their persecutor and executioner; the ESV calls them “conquerors.” And part of their reward for that trust in and commitment to Christ Jesus will be to stand in a place of honor close to the throne as a privileged choir to sing their worship and praise before the throne.

vv3-4

And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED.”

Two songs are mentioned here as the source of what the martyrs will sing: “the song of Moses,” and “the song of the Lamb.” The latter song, the song of the Lamb, probably refers back to that which was sung in 5:8-14—it, too, to the accompaniment of harps. This is the song voicing the Lamb’s worthiness to open the seven seals of the scroll by means of His sacrifice for “every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”

Opinions vary regarding the source for the song of Moses. The traditional reference is to the song in Exodus 15, sung after the Lord gave them passage through the Reed Sea. An alternative could be the song Moses voiced right before his death in Deuteronomy 32. As John Walvoord points out, regardless the sources for these songs,

The former recounts the faithfulness of God to Israel as a nation in recognition that a large number of Israelites are among these martyred dead. The song of the Lamb speaks of redemption from sin made possible by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, and would include all the saints.

In either case, the text of these verses, while *thematically* similar, does not literally quote any of those sources. The situation is one of worship and praise before the throne for what is about to happen: the conclusive answer to all the prayers—no less from the Tribulation martyrs—for God to avenge the persecution and death of all those who have suffered for His name. In just moments that will occur as the seven bowls of plagues and wrath are poured out. And v4 points specifically to Christ’s Millennial reign, quoting Psalms 66 and 86, as well as other passages.

Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED."

Here the Lord is exalted for the fact that during the thousand years on earth, *all* nations will come to pay homage to the returned Messiah and King. [Now we are ready for the rest of this chapter.](#)

Read Revelation 15:5-8.

v5

After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened,

We must not pass too quickly over this. First, here in a new vision for John it is repeated that heaven has its own “tabernacle of testimony”—from which the tabernacle that Moses created for Israel was patterned. “Tabernacle” translates the Greek *skenes*, which refers to the tent, the overall structure, while “temple” translates the Greek *naos*, which here refers to the sanctuary or Holy of Holies. “Testimony” is, of course, a reference to the ark of the covenant containing the testimony—the tablets given to Moses.

Read Hebrews 8:1-2, 4-5.

What makes this worth a pause is that the angels, already in possession of the plagues, emerging from the tabernacle’s holiest place emphasizes that the root source of these plagues is God Himself.

Every day on this pitiful earth we are reminding that this present generation—youth and adults alike—is woefully ignorant of higher things. This generation is so busy tearing down statues of profound minds because those historical figures “did not share our values”—what stupefying arrogance!—that they don’t take the time to learn that all these men and women were—like us—a mixture of *many* qualities.

And they have the same level of ignorance with God and His Christ. God is not, nor has ever been the one-dimensional caricature they make Him out to be. He is indeed love, grace, mercy, forgiveness—but He is at the same time just, righteous, pure, sovereign, faithful to Himself, and, not least, holy. And at the end of all things that just and holy God will hand seven of His angels the means by which to once and for all blast this sorry earth with powerful, hideous blows that will destroy millions. Because He *is* holy, and will have lost patience with the rampant rebellion and sin on earth.

v6

and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes.

The apparel of these seven angels reveals their holiness, and purity. They are “clothed in linen, clean and bright.” Walvoord says the linen garments represent “righteousness in action.” [Turn please to Chapter Nineteen](#). This is a recurring theme in the Revelation. Every believer will be so attired at the marriage of the Lamb.

Read Revelation 19:7-8.

When Christ returns He will be accompanied by armies dressed the same.

Read Revelation 19:12-14.

...and girded around their chests with golden sashes.

Whatever the the golden sash represents, it certainly associates these holy messengers with their Lord, for Christ was wearing the same thing as He appeared to John at the outset of the Revelation:

...and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash. (Revelation 1:13)

v7

Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.

Surrounding the throne, in close proximity to the throne seat of God, are the four living creatures—awesome, terrible-looking seraphim—one of which is designated to hand out the “seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God.” The KJV’s “vials” is really incorrect. In the chart for these last seven judgments I have included a photograph of a wall carving from Seti I’s temple in Abydos, showing the king making an incense offering to the god using a small bowl similar to what our text describes. The Greek *philiās* is a shallow bowl used for pouring libations; typically a broad, flat vessel.

...full of the wrath of God

These seven bowls are literally full of the wrath of God. The Greek *gemousas* means just that; it is a nautical term to describe a heavily laden ship, even swelled out by its cargo—we might say, loaded for bear. These bowls are each filled to the brim with God’s wrath. Let me repeat what I said earlier: I conclude

that each “plague” represents the raw material, as it were, while God’s wrath represents the *force* behind it, supplying the lethal intensity. The “plagues” are the means by which the wrath of God is executed. Or, put a little differently, each angel’s plague is what God uses in His wrath against the earth.

vv7B-8

...who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

I have associated the end of v7 with v8 because I believe they, together, make a cohesive statement. In fact I would also bring in v6 as part of that statement. Taken together, these passages—presented right before the pouring out of the last seven judgments—emphasize the right, the authority, and the power of a righteous and holy God to do what He is about to do.

...who lives forever and ever.

Because the Lord God is eternal, to have ultimate communion forever with His people He must expunge sin wherever it is—on and in the earth, in those who reject Him (by consigning them to an eternity of their own away from His presence), and even in those who *are* His (by changing each of them into a glorified state).

And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power;

The final, climactic imagery right before we descend into the pain and chaos of the seven bowls is of the temple’s sanctuary filled with smoke. Repeatedly in God’s word smoke is used to demonstrate the fierce power of God. It represents, in turn, His glory (as here in v8), His majesty, and His holiness—but none of these in a gentle, comfortable manner; it is meant to drive mere humans to their knees—in fear, worship, or both.

The first occurrence is at Mount Sinai when the people were ordered to gather around the base of the mountain so Yahweh could speak to them directly.

Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. (Exodus 19:18)

The effect upon the people of Israel?

All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance.

Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.” (Exodus 20:18-19)

God employs smoke, as He does in v8, to declare, as it were, *I am God and you are not; I am holy and you are not*. Thus, as in 1 Kings 8:10-11, the Lord God uses smoke to express His glory—again, not in a gracious manner, but in a fierce, restrictive manner.

It happened that when the priests came from the holy place, the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

When the glory of God fills a space, there is no longer room for mere men.

Chapter Fifteen ends with a climactic statement about our holy, glorious God. He is just moments away from unleashing Act Three—the fiercest and concluding demonstration of His wrath upon the earth and upon those who have clung to their depravity through countless invitations and opportunities to repent.

The invitations are now at an end. The opportunities have now ceased. Now comes death and destruction, as described in Chapter Sixteen. Let us conclude with a profound statement by John MacArthur.

MacArthur: 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... Mercy refused brings judgment.

SESSION 43: THE THIRD WOE: THE BOWLS OF WRATH

Charts: The Bowls of Wrath: Chart #17

PREFACE

In our last session we saw the *equipping* of the seven angels who would pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath. The angels emerged from the sanctuary of the heavenly tabernacle already equipped with their respective "plagues."

Let us first consider the group as a whole before we examine each bowl's effect on the earth and its remaining people.

- One striking difference between these plagues and the first two groups (Seals and Trumpets) is that whereas the pain or destruction inflicted by the first two was partial—i.e., Death given authority over one fourth of the earth (6:8); damage by the first four and sixth trumpets limited to a third of the earth or a third of mankind—now, with the Bowls the devastation will be total: all who have the mark of the beast; all of the sea and every living thing in it; all the fresh water on earth; all scorched by the sun.
- These plagues are reminiscent of earlier plagues during the Tribulation, as well as the plagues of Egypt in the book of Exodus, but they are not identical. There seems to be no good reason to establish some connection, some congruity with the earlier plagues. Again, while those inflicted earlier (even in Egypt) were limited in one manner or another, these, for the most part, will be total.
- Finally, every commentator I have read declares that these seven bowl judgments, in the words of John Walvoord, "...fall in rapid succession like trip-hammer blows, and they all will be consummated within a short period of time toward the close of the great tribulation." Not one of the commentators cites, and I have been unable to find, the Scripture text that reveals this; nonetheless I will bow to their superior scholarship and let their position stand.

A passage in Hebrews serves as a suitable preamble to the Third Woe—which, in my old NASB study Bible is given the heading, "Christ or Judgment."

Read Hebrews 10:26-31.

Read Revelation 16:1-2.

v1

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

Remember what we learned from v8 in Chapter Fifteen: “And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.”

Thus we can safely deduce that the “loud voice” coming from the temple commanding the angels to pour out the bowls of wrath *must* be the voice of God, since no one else is permitted in there.

In fact, His strong voice *bookends* the seven judgments: He commands the angels to begin here in v1, and after the seventh and last bowl is poured out in v17, the same voice of God declares, “It is done.”

v2: THE FIRST BOWL

So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.

The Greek *helkos*, translated “sore,” means a festering, ulcerous wound. Interestingly, half of our common versions render this plural (sores), but the original text is singular. Perhaps the plural is used to express multiple *people* so inflicted, but one sore per person. In any case, this will be unpleasant in the extreme. The KJV is the most poetic, with “noisome and grievous,” but not much help in describing the actual wound.

“Loathsome” (noisome) translates, *kakos*, and “malignant” (grievous) translates *poneron*. Both are words for evil, but the second word *poneron* means *more* evil. MacArthur points out that “used together they stress that the sores will be festering, painful, and incurable... They will bring unrelieved physical torment to those who have rejected Jesus Christ.”

No thirds or halves with this judgment; these sores will not be inflicted upon believers—only those who bear “the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.” But *all* of them. And here is evidence that this will indeed take place during the latter half of the Tribulation—the *Great* Tribulation—since not until then will the beast’s image be in place.

Read Revelation 16:3-4.

v3: THE SECOND BOWL

The first plague was aimed directly at people; the second and third plagues will be directed toward all waters on the earth—but, of course, they will bring even more misery and death upon the populace of the earth.

The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.

Words, and their placement, are important—even the small, two-letter kind. By their placement of just the simple word “as,” or the word “like,” our mix of versions are saying, or at least implying, different things—primarily regarding the constitution of the sea after the second bowl is poured out upon it.

NASB the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man
ESV the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse,
NIV the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person,
NKJV the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man;
KJV the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man:
YLT the sea, and there came blood as of one dead,
CSB the sea. It turned to blood like that of a dead person,
TLV the sea, and it became blood like that of a corpse;

Though these versions offer a number of variants, the important difference for our purpose is this: Are the words “as” or “like” before or after the word “blood.” If before, as in the ESV and KJV, this leaves open the possibility—but doesn’t demand it—that the sea has become something other than literal blood—perhaps just red in color, or with a thick viscosity, as blood would be in a corpse. The rest of our common versions make it clear that it is real blood, with the “as” or “like” modifying the *nature* of the blood. As far as I can determine, the original Greek has “as” between blood and corpse—i.e., “blood as a dead person”—which makes the blood real (*haima*, from which we get our *hemo-*, as in hemoglobin).

This means that in a moment, all the oceans of the world are turned from sea water to blood with the consistency of molasses. And as with all of these plagues, it does not stop there. This will set loose a chain reaction of despair.

BibleRef.com: No doubt, this judgment cripples the beast's [Antichrist's] shipping and fishing industries. The effects of this judgment would be even further reaching than simple commerce. A massive change in ocean waters can have a drastic effect on weather and rain. Also, if “everything” living in the oceans were to die, it would remove a primary food source for the entire world. Even more dire, ocean plants produce most of the oxygen in the atmosphere. The death of everything in the oceans would start a countdown to the extinction of all life on earth.

I don’t think we can even imagine the stench.

V4: THE THIRD BOWL

Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood.

Now God visits upon the fresh water what He just did with the salt water. Remember that all these judgments, beginning with the Seals and continuing

on through the Trumpets and the Bowls, are cumulative. For example, the third Trumpet poisoned one third of the world's fresh water, so since then it has been in short supply. Now it will *all* be gone. John MacArthur describes the result.

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.

Again, no half measures here. The entire sea and all fresh water, rivers and springs, will be afflicted and "every living thing" in the waters will die.

We can well imagine that the remaining poor souls on the earth would be crying out to the heavens—just as people do today whenever cataclysmic events occur. We can hear them even now: "How could a loving God do such a thing? God is gracious and kind! How could He permit this to happen!?" Or perhaps the denizens of earth will take a more strident, accusatory tone: "Just who do you think you *are* God? We don't deserve to be treated this way!"

In vv5-7 we have God's answer to this cry. Here an angelic go-between—"the angel of the waters" (who is now, by the way, out of a job)—speaks in defense of God and His righteous judgments.

And I [John] heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things;

The angel declares that God, the Holy One, is innocent of the charges because He is right, He is correct. And you have to love v6; remember how the world celebrated, even exchanged gifts with each other at the murder of the two witnesses.¹ Their dead bodies were left exposed for three and a half days so that people could rejoice over their demise.

"for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it."

All right, God says, since the beginning of time these people have treated my prophets with contempt—and much worse. They have spilled the blood of my messengers, so now they deserve to drink blood. That is all they will have to drink.

Then either another angel from around the altar, or the altar itself, personified, chimes in.

And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

The time for the Lord God's longsuffering with sin has come to an end, and as to the retribution meted out, His judgments are "true and righteous." He has the right—and they "deserve" it. So, after this brief interval, the judgments continue.

¹ Revelation 11

Read Revelation 16:8-11.

vv8-9: THE FOURTH BOWL

The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. 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.

The prophet Malachi, writing around 432 BC, spoke of this day.

Read Malachi 4:1.

The first three angels poured out God's wrath on the earth; the fourth pours out His wrath on the sun—but, of course, with dire consequences for those on the earth. None of our common versions include it, but in the Greek of both v8 and v9 the word "men" (*anthropoi*) includes the definite article ("the men"), which seems to refer back to the same people spoken of in earlier verses, such as v2: "the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image." That is, it would seem that any believers still on the earth—admittedly few—will possibly be spared the intense heat of the sun. Yet there is no indication that they will be given a secret source of fresh water to drink.

God, here, is giving these people a taste of that which awaits them in the lake of fire, their eternal home after the great white throne judgment.²

There are those who have been claiming for decades that the polar ice caps are melting, though they have not. But now they really will; imagine a sea of blood being pushed and raised onto the land by all this melting ice.

Some commentators seem surprised that this powerful judgment does not result in repentance, but I am not in that camp.

I think it makes perfect sense that the judgments thus far: hideous sores, the seas and rivers turned to blood, the sun (or earth) shifted so that welcome warmth has now become unbearable scorching, all these after the previous judgments of the Seals and Trumpets—would harden even further the hearts of those who already hate God.

They of course will shake their fists at God rather than bow down before Him. They know He is the one responsible for their misery, and they resent it. "It's not fair! We don't deserve this!" It won't matter to them, in their fallen logic, that they do indeed "deserve it" (v6); just as people do today, such hardship orchestrated by God will not excite repentance, but further sharpen their anger against what they see as an "unjust" God.

And I believe that God is not doing this *expecting* a change of heart in these people; that is not why He is doing it. These judgments are poured out from bowls of His *wrath*, one after the other dispensing *His* anger and punishment

²Revelation 20:15

upon those who have persisted in rejecting Him and His Christ. If some do indeed repent, then so be it. But that is not His purpose in these final days. The late, great Charles Haddon Spurgeon had something to say about this.

Spurgeon: Judgment may produce a carnal repentance—a repentance that is of the flesh, and after the manner of the sinful nature of men. In this repentance the depravity of the heart remains the same in essence, though it takes another form of showing itself. Though the man changes, he is not savingly changed: he becomes another man, but not a new man. The same sin rules in him, but it is called by another name, and wears another dress. The stone is carved into a more sightly shape, but it is not turned into flesh. The iron is cast into another image, but it is not transformed into gold. This carnal repentance is caused by fear. Does not every thief repent of robbery when he is convicted and sent to jail? Does not every murderer repent of his crime when he stands under the fatal tree?

VV10-11: THE FIFTH BOWL

Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.*

The first account of such a plague sent by God was as the next to last plague inflicted on Egypt before the exodus.

Read Exodus 10:21-23.

Later, a number of the OT prophets would speak of God doing it again during the last days.

“For behold, darkness will cover the earth And deep darkness the peoples; But the LORD will rise upon you And His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising.” (Isaiah 60:2-3)

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. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, So there is a great and mighty people; There has never been anything like it, Nor will there be again after it To the years of many generations. (Joel 2:1b-2)

Jesus spoke of it as well:

*The accompanying graphic for the fifth bowl on Chart #17 shows fire coming down onto the Jerusalem temple—the seat of the beast’s power. The text does not mention fire, but darkness. But how does one portray darkness? A black square? So I used fire to portray God’s wrath poured out on the beast and his kingdom.

“But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory.”
(Mark 13:24-26)

J. A. Seiss can be a bit florid at times, but he paints a vivid picture of this fifth judgment upon the earth.

Seiss: This darkening of the Beast’s kingdom, added to the earlier inflictions, brings terrible distress. The description indicates the intensest writhings of anguish, the very madness of vexation and pain. The people who suffer these plagues bite their tongues, chew them, gnaw them, as their best diversion from their misery. Their tongues have spoken blasphemies, and they themselves thus punish them. Earth has become like hell for wickedness, and so it becomes like hell for darkness and torment,—nay, still further like hell, because there is no repentance in its inhabitants. Instead of cursing themselves for their impieties, they curse God as the offender, for thus interfering with their preferences and their peace. To the ulcers, the bloody waters, the sun-scorches, now comes this horrible darkness; and a God of such administrations they disdain to honor, even under all their miseries. They will gnaw their tongues with pain and rage rather than speak a prayer of penitence to Him. Nothing but cursing and horrid denunciations will they utter. When they saw the two slain Witnesses come to life again and ascend to heaven, they were willing to own that the God of heaven is God, and to give Him something of His glory. But it was only a temporary reverence, which soon faded away. Here they are again compelled to acknowledge Him as “the God of heaven,” but it is only to heap new blasphemies on His name.

A few moments ago I referred to Chart #17 and “fire coming down onto the Jerusalem temple—the seat of the beast’s power.” That is my own conclusion—but it requires some explanation. Perhaps you, like me, prefer to know *where* certain events are taking place. But the Revelation is maddeningly vague about just where “the throne of the beast” is. Let me explain my thinking on this, and why I believe it to be Jerusalem—at least for the sake of this judgment.

In a short while we will be discussing, in Chapter Seventeen and Eighteen, the destruction of “Babylon,” the “great harlot.” The identity of the harlot is given in v17:18, “The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” That is, the world-wide power structure established under the beast, Antichrist. But Babylon also represents the false religion established under the beast. Verse 17:5 says that the city is “a mystery.”

Understanding these two chapters about the fall of Babylon is (as most expositors agree) very difficult. Some say Babylon is Rome, while others say it is the corrupt papacy in Rome. Some say Babylon is a restored city along the Euphrates—and there is much that commends that position.

But now I go back to Chapter Thirteen, which was all about the establishment of the Antichrist—“the beast from the sea”—and the false prophet—“the beast from the earth.”

If we cannot say for certain where the throne of the beast is located, we can know where it *began*—especially the aspect of his rule that used a false and blasphemous religion to establish and extend his power.

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. (Revelation 13:11–12)

The supernatural idol to honor Antichrist and cause people to worship him as god was erected in the Jerusalem temple—the “abomination of desolation.” No matter where “Babylon” is—if it is a real city at all—no matter from where Antichrist rules the world, Jerusalem is the root from which such power sprouted.

SESSION 44: RUN-UP TO ARMAGEDDON

Charts: The Last Reciprocal War: #18 & #19

PREFACE

If we followed only the Revelation narrative we could be forgiven for thinking that after Antichrist establishes his hold on the entire world at the midpoint of the Tribulation, his only conflict, his only war, is the one with Christ at Armageddon. In that, we would be mistaken.

We are at an opportune juncture in this study—before we examine the last two Bowl judgments—to set aside Revelation for a while and return to the prophecies of Ezekiel, but especially Daniel, to establish more of the details of future world history. The events we will be examining do *not* fall right where we left off in Revelation 16; we will be backing up a little in the narrative, to get a proper perspective on the events; most, however, do occur during the second half of the Tribulation, when the beast—Antichrist—is in power. But let us look first at a key passage that *some* say occurs during the Tribulation, but others (including this teacher) say occurs much later. That will be in Ezekiel, but let's begin in Revelation. [Please Turn to Revelation 20.](#)

EZEKIEL'S PROPHECY

The end of Chapter Nineteen records the dramatic conclusion to Armageddon: the beast and false prophet are seized and thrown alive into the lake of fire, with the rest of their army being killed by the word spoken by Christ Jesus. Note how this chapter ends in v21: "...and all the birds were filled with their flesh." We will be referencing this again in a moment.

As I have mentioned before, it is remarkable that the seven-year Tribulation is discussed over fourteen *chapters* (6 to 19), while the thousand-year millennium is briefly mentioned in just seven *verses*. Curious, but there it is.

From Revelation we learn that it is war that bookends the Millennium. Christ's victory at Armageddon serves as the *prelude* for the Millennium, and the *postlude* is supplied by the just-released Satan and his armies surrounding "the beloved city."

Read Revelation 20:7-9.

So please note that within a span of just twelve verses in the Revelation we have Armageddon, the Millennium, and the final "war" against Messiah and the Jews before God convenes His Great White Throne of judgment. [Please Turn to Ezekiel 38.](#)

Not everyone agrees, of course, but my position—certainly not unique—is that Ezekiel 38 and 39 describe this final, post-Millennial conflict. We will look further into this when we reach the end of the Millennium in this study, but for the moment I would like to point out my reasons for placing this not

earlier in the first half of the Tribulation (Walvoord), not describing Armageddon itself, not just before the Millennium (Alexander), but later, *after* the Millennium.

- First is the “Gog (gogue) and Magog (maw-gogue)” connection, which is tossed into Revelation 20:8 almost as an afterthought: “...and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war...” The Ezekiel chapters are all about “Gog of the land of Magog”—that is, Gog, the chief prince or ruler of geographical areas Meshech (meh'-shek) and Tubal (too-ball'), in the region of Magog.
- Second, the war described by Ezekiel takes place during a time of peace and security for Israel. **Read Ezekiel 38:14-16.** Although (per Walvoord) the first half of the Tribulation will be *relatively* secure for Israel, with its covenant with the beast, the Millennium will be far more peaceful and secure for Israel.
- Third, some claim that the Ezekiel chapters speak of Armageddon because of the connection with “every kind of bird and...every beast of the field” being invited to come feast on all the dead bodies, which is indeed mentioned as part of the aftermath of Armageddon:

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, “Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.” Revelation 19:17-18

Yet note that the Revelation passage makes no mention of other beasts—only birds. I see no problem with the fact that the post-Millennial war in the Revelation makes no mention of the birds or animals, for this would be the natural conclusion to the slaughter of *any* such battle.

So I would place the Ezekiel-described conflict—the Gog and Magog narrative—immediately after the Millennium, when Satan is released from his thousand-year confinement to rally his troops for his one last shot against Israel.

Now, please turn to Daniel 11.

DANIEL’S PROPHECY: THE WAYS OF THE BEAST

Daniel 11:1-35 is all *historical* prophecy, by which I mean that it is future to Daniel—being told to him by a heavenly messenger—but past, recorded *history* to us. It is a prophecy intricately detailed and accurate with known historical accounts, but as such does not concern this present study, for, from our perspective, it has already been fulfilled in the past. Verse 35, however, segues into *eschatological* prophecy:

Read Daniel 11:34-35.

This portion of Scripture—specifically Daniel 11:1 to 12:4—beautifully illustrates why we can trust God’s word regarding the Last Things.

As the Lord God said in the negative in Deuteronomy 18, “You may say in your heart, ‘How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken.”¹ Even skeptics agree that the historical prophecy of Daniel 11—that part that was fulfilled centuries in the past—is so incredibly accurate, that many insist that it is not prophecy at all, but *had* to be written *after* the events themselves. But it was not. That is why we can treat the eschatological prophecies in God’s word as reliably true: because His prophecies of earlier events were fulfilled.

From v36 to 12:3 the time frame shifts to the second half of the Tribulation—the Great Tribulation. How do we know this? Because it depicts military movement and conflict that could only occur after the beast is at the height of his power, and, more importantly, does not occur anywhere else in recorded history—and especially not with the Antiochus Epiphanes narrative.

Verses 36-39 fill in a number of the details about Antichrist’s rule that are missing from the Revelation narrative.

Read Daniel 11:36-37.

v36

“Then the king will do as he pleases, and he will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will speak monstrous things against the God of gods; and he will prosper until the indignation is finished, for that which is decreed will be done.

We *have* read of this in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians.² But we do read something new in the next verse.

v37

“He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women, nor will he show regard for any other god; for he will magnify himself above them all.

Some conclude from the phrase “no regard...for the desire of women” that the beast will either be homosexual or asexual. But there is a better interpretation.

The Hebrew used by Daniel for “desire” (*hemdat*) is in a construct that means not a desire *for* women, but that which is desired *by* women, and probably

¹ Deuteronomy 18:21-22a

² 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10

points to the universal desire of all Jewish women of the time that they would be so privileged as to be the one to give birth to the Messiah. As Walvoord summarizes, “In other words, [the beast] would disregard the gods of the past as well as the promised Son of God who is to come from heaven.”

Read Daniel 11:38-39.

vv38-39

“But instead he will honor a god of fortresses, a god whom his fathers did not know; he will honor him with gold, silver, costly stones and treasures. He will take action against the strongest of fortresses with the help of a foreign god; he will give great honor to those who acknowledge him and will cause them to rule over the many, and will parcel out land for a price.”

“**The God of forces**” in the KJV is better translated, “**a god of fortresses.**” The Hebrew *mauzzim* means places of safety, protection, or refuge—not the troops in them. Nonetheless this paints a picture of the beast as one who places his trust not just in himself, but in military might—the power to make war. Remember how Antichrist was *first* portrayed in the Revelation? [Turn back to Chapter Six, v2](#). In the very first seal we are shown

...a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

His crown will be a crown not of royalty, but of victory (*stephanos*), and his purpose from the beginning will be to conquer the nations, to conquer religion, to conquer society itself.

Keil & Delitzsch: The “god of fortresses” is the personification of war, and the thought is this: he will regard no other god, but only war; the taking of fortresses he will make his god; and he will worship this god above all as the means of his gaining the world-power. Of this god, war as the object of deification, it might be said that his fathers knew nothing, because no other king had made war his religion, his god to whom he offered up in sacrifice all, gold, silver, precious stones, jewels.

“A god whom his fathers did not know” does not necessarily label the beast as a Jew; it just means that his god is not a traditional god worshiped by those who came before him: not Zeus, not Mars, not Jupiter, not Yahweh. Instead it will be a brand new “god” of warfare.

(v39) He will take action against the strongest of fortresses with the help of a foreign god;

In our vernacular the word “foreign” implies someone or something that lives elsewhere—i.e., foreign to *us*, but not foreign to those where it usually

dwells. But the word *nekar* (nee-car') can also mean just “strange,” as the KJV has it. The term “god” here is used loosely; it is the personification of a philosophy. Put simply, the beast will be wholly devoted to war.

And just as all kings and emperors, tyrants and dictators from the vast annals of history, Antichrist will dole out favors in the form of land grants to those who support him.

DANIEL'S PROPHECY: WORLD WAR

Everything so far has been background for what inevitably follows. If one worships war, there can be no surprise at what comes next: war—a world war.

Read Daniel 11:40-41.

v40

“At the end time the king of the South will collide with him, and the king of the North will storm against him with chariots, with horsemen and with many ships; and he will enter countries, overflow them and pass through.

These verses (vv40-45) seem to reinforce my position that the seat of the beast's power is Israel—specifically Jerusalem—for without stating it outright, this whole narrative is Israel-centric. A king from the south approaches, probably Egypt, but also including some nations of north Africa; a second king approaches from the north, quite possibly Russia with some neighboring nations. Later there will be “rumors from the East,” no doubt of impending invasion. What lies at the focal point of these threats?

Israel.

The phrase “at the end time” (or “at the time of the end”) nails the setting for this prophecy. This means, for one thing, that we need not waste time conjecturing about who this “king of the South” or “king of the North” might be. In the lifetimes of most people reading these words we have seen nations change hands or be renamed, be reshaped by war or treaty, borders shifted or wiped out. And this passage speaks of nations in place well beyond today—at a minimum, seven years beyond today, but probably more.

The word translated “collide” in the NASB (*yitnagach*) means to “but with the horns, to push against, even to gore”; it is a term of warfare drawn from the natural world—the way two bighorn sheep will slam their heads together in a dual for dominance. This is not coincidental imagery. [Please turn back to Chapter Eight.](#)

Read Daniel 8:4.

This is how the assault from the south is described, whereas the advance from the north—the word translated “storm” (*saar*) means to sweep or whirl away, as in a whirlwind.

Parenthetically, the prophetic visions of Chapter Eight are similar to Chapter Eleven, in that the first portion (vv1-22) is historical, while the second portion (vv23-26) foreshadows the beast of the end times.

When we blend into this narrative what we know from Revelation and Daniel Chapter Nine, we can easily see these two threats from north and south as signs of active rebellion against the world dictator, Antichrist. We all have a tendency to see history—and even, as here, *future* history—in simple, uncluttered terms; we see it in basic black and white, rather than the shades of gray it really is. Just because the beast has proclaimed himself ruler of the world, and even if the majority welcome him in that position, there still can be disgruntled leaders that, even if technically in the beast’s coalition, will actively rebel against him.

Once again, in v40, ambiguous pronouns cause us problems—i.e., who is the “he” in “and he will enter countries, overflow them and pass through”? Does this refer to the king of the South, the king of the North, or the world ruler? I side with Walvoord here, that the “he” throughout vv40-45 is the “king [who] will do as he pleases” from v36—that is, Antichrist, the beast. And Walvoord quotes H. C. Leupold, who agrees.

Leupold: The variety of the resources that are to be employed against the Antichrist indicate how great his power must be at the latter end—‘chariots, horsemen, and many ships.’ But the Antichrist will not be slow to repel the attack. He himself shall ‘come into these lands,’ that is, the lands of those who have assailed him, and ‘shall sweep along and pass through.’

As always there are other positions, but in this passage assigning the “he” to either of the other kings dramatically changes the interpretation of the preceding verses. I believe assigning it to Antichrist makes the most sense in the following verses. Thus we conclude that the beast will successfully repel these insurrectionists to the extent that his forces will move into their own lands.

The movement of forces in this war is represented in Chart #18—a map of the Middle East with the nations in place today; what they will be during the Tribulation is anyone’s guess. The text offers few specifics, so the flow of combat simply portrays the general movement from the various directions. What is shown is the overwhelming response from the beast: more than just defending his base of power, he energetically fights back, even moving deeper into the territory of the insurrectionists.

Chart #19 shows essentially the same information, but in a timeline format, with key succeeding events included.

vv41-42

“He 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. Then he will stretch out his hand against other countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape.

Again, there are varied interpretations of this enigmatic passage, which time does not permit us to discuss. The prominent variant interpretation is that Antichrist is the King of the North; thus his entering of “the Beautiful Land” in v41 (i.e., Israel) is one of conquest as a foe. If that were the case, however, how does one reconcile that with his coming into the temple earlier, at the midpoint of the Tribulation, to declare himself equal with God? I believe v41 describes the beast returning to his home base, as it were, or returning for the first time with all his armies in tow.

Reading these two verses it is clear that we are not being told the whole story—not surprising, since it is enigmatic prophecy, not the account of an historical conflict. But we see the beast having success—

“he will enter the Beautiful Land, and many countries will fall...
Then he will stretch out his hand against other countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape”

—as well as failure—

“but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon.”

This last group of lands, “Edom, Moab and Ammon,” is today within the precincts of the nation of Jordan, and located roughly east and southeast of today’s Israel. On our map, Ammon is shown as “Amman.”

vv43-44

“But he will gain control over the hidden treasures of gold and silver and over all the precious things of Egypt; and Libyans and Ethiopians will follow at his heels. But rumors from the East and from the North will disturb him, and he will go forth with great wrath to destroy and annihilate many.

I don’t want to read too much into this, but one gets the impression that the beast, Antichrist, may be getting desperate at this point. He takes over Egypt and takes possession of all its riches, but at the same time Egypt’s western neighbor, Libya, and Ethiopia, south east of Egypt, are surging after him. On top of this the beast hears new disturbing rumors from the East—which had thus far stayed out of the conflict—and the North, which he had supposedly neutralized earlier.

...and he will go forth with great wrath to destroy and annihilate many.

I am no military tactician, but it seems to me that this is not a good sign for the embattled Antichrist. He responds now not with calm calculation, a cool head, but a raging fury, a burning anger. That is, he is reacting *emotionally*, rather than sensibly. He may be flailing about at this stage. But then, he is near the end of his run. Remember, there is good reason to believe that concomitant with this world war are most of the Lord's bowls of wrath being poured out upon the earth.

What a mess!

v45

Verses 40-44 cannot be set with any degree of specificity in the timeline of the Great Tribulation. These events certainly fall *somewhere* during the second half of the Tribulation, and probably closer to the end than the middle, but more than that we cannot say. We also cannot speak to the *duration* of this war: three and one half years, two, one? We cannot say. But with v45 we realize we are getting very near the end.

“He will pitch the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain; yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.”

The first part of this verse points us toward Armageddon. Antichrist will set up his royal residence/military headquarters “between the seas and the beautiful mountain”—interpreted by most to mean between the Mediterranean and the Dead or Salt Sea; the reference to the “beautiful Holy Mountain” is to Jerusalem. [Look at the inset map in the upper right-hand corner of Chart #18.](#) To the left is the Mediterranean, at the bottom of the map is the Salt Sea, with Jerusalem circled next to it. Megiddo is circled above, just below the Valley of Esdraelon.

Walvoord: Geographically, [Armageddon] relates to the Mount of Megiddo located adjacent to the plain of Megiddo to the west and the large plain of Esdraelon to the northeast. Megiddo is the Hebrew word corresponding to the Greek word Armageddon. This area was the scene of many of the great battles of the Old Testament such as that of Barak and the Canaanites in Judges 4 and the victory of Gideon over the Midianites in Judges 7. Here also occurred the deaths of Saul and Josiah. The area, though it is a large one, is not sufficient for the armies of all the world, though the valley of Esdraelon is fourteen miles wide and twenty miles long. What this Scripture seems to indicate is that this area is the central point for the military conflict which ensues. Actually the armies are deployed over a 200-mile area up and down from this central location.

Daniel here does not record the battle itself, just the placement of Antichrist in the vicinity, in preparation for it.

...yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him.

The second part of this verse prophecies the fate of the beast. After a relatively brief rise to the height of worldwide power, this man imbued with satanic power will meet an abrupt end. He will not even be permitted a judicial hearing or a period of imprisonment, as will his master, but we know from the Revelation that he will be summarily executed—not into the peaceful sleep of death, but the eternal torment of a *living* death.

And the beast was seized, 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; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. (Revelation 19:20)

And there will be no one to help.

And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Revelation 19:21)

SESSION 45: THE TRIBULATION (PART THIRTY-TWO): THE FOURTH PARENTHETICAL VISIONS: BABYLON, PART ONE

Charts: Handout

PREFACE

Our last session gave us important context for what is fast approaching in the Revelation. What we will be seeing prophesied subsequently, in Session 47—both in the Revelation and in Zechariah—will be far easier to understand after our study of Daniel 11 last week.*

Last week we interrupted the narrative of the seven bowls of wrath in the Revelation—and this week and next we are going to do it again. Anywhere we stick this next parenthetical vision it will be an interruption, and I prefer to address it now, so that once we turn to Armageddon and Christ's return, we can stay on that track. And it is important that we address Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen of Revelation, which portray "Babylon the Great" and her fall, because this is a detailed portrait of the world system—both religious and political—under Antichrist and the false prophet during the Tribulation. So yes, this session and next (Sessions 45 and 46) will interrupt the flow, but we know already that the Revelation was not written—or, better, revealed to John—in chronological order. [Turn with me to Revelation Chapter Sixteen.](#)

Were we to return to this text and narrative, we would next begin with vv12, the pouring out of the sixth bowl. What follows immediately is a brief pseudo-parenthetical vision in vv13-16, that nonetheless fits into the narrative for the run-up to Armageddon. Then, in vv17-21, the seventh bowl of wrath is poured out, followed by two chapters all about "Babylon the Great"; these two chapters, along with the first six verses of Chapter Nineteen, are a true parenthetical vision, portraying the situation mostly *earlier* than the seventh bowl, some time during the Great Tribulation, and perhaps even covering the most of the seven-year Tribulation, but also right up to the last moment before Christ returns (thus there is some overlap with the last two bowls). So we will deal with this parenthetical vision *now*, rather than later.

OVERVIEW

Chapter Seventeen is predominantly about the *religious* system under the beast and the false prophet, and Chapter Eighteen is predominantly about the *political* or *commercial* system. Put another way, "Chapter Seventeen reveals the spiritual nature of Antichrist's kingdom; Chapter Eighteen follows with its material aspects" (MacArthur). Both are presented under the names "Babylon the Great," the "great harlot," even "the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth." This "Babylon" is revealed to John in the figure of a woman. Interestingly, the vision is presented to John in the beginning by no less than one of the seven angels pouring out the bowls of wrath. These chapters are all about the doom and downfall of Babylon, but in the process is included details about

* If you have not read or listened to Session 44, I implore you to obtain the notes and/or listen to the audio—including the two accompanying charts. Without that important information you will be at a real disadvantage going forward. I cannot take the time here to recapitulate all that. You will need to do that on your own—if you wish to understand the flow of the end-time narrative.

how the religious and political systems will operate during the Tribulation.

Beyond the need for us to study this because it is a component of the Last Things, one important reason for us to take the time for it is that in these chapters is revealed not just something future for this earth, but something happening *right now*. Let me be clear: I am not at all suggesting that this prophesy is being fulfilled in our midst, in our time. No, I am not suggesting that, but *declaring* that the same abominable practices, evil philosophies—the very same demonic ideas and practices of which we read here are a part of *our* system today. Whether this means that we are in the days leading to the Rapture and Tribulation, or that society will cycle through a time of righteousness after this, only God knows. That isn't my point. My point is this: These chapters offer us a picture of a system locked into the worst level of demonic depravity; as such it paints a pretty accurate picture of our world today.

Finally, in these chapters Babylon is presented as a woman, as a queen, and as a city. Scripture, as well as history, shows that Babylon—beginning with the tower of Babel in Genesis 11—has always been an important center of false religion. Satan inaugurated false religion in the first days of this earth, and here we see him doing the same in its closing days. “This 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” (MacArthur).

“Babylon” here is, at root, a metaphor for evil. The woman is described (or titled) in v5 as a “mystery” (*mysterion*). It does not refer to a geographical region, not ancient Babylon and not necessarily a rebuilt Babylon, but “a secret reality to be revealed in the end times. *This Babylon is the symbol of all worldly resistance to God*” (MacArthur).

“BABYLON” IS SHOWN TO JOHN

Happily, the Spirit of God in writing these chapters has interpreted its mysteries for us. For the most part we do not need to guess at what these visions mean.

Read Revelation 17:1-6.

What do we learn about this woman in the first six verses?

- She is portrayed as a harlot. We should not confuse this “harlotry” with the manner in which God refers to the adultery, the unfaithfulness of Israel’s idolatry in the OT. For these nations and their rulers are not Jews, neither are they the redeemed; these are never pictured as God’s or the Messiah’s “wife.”
- She “sits on many waters.” This is explained in v15. “And he said to me, “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.” In other words, her scope and influence is world-wide.

- As with human prostitutes, where the man may think he is using the woman, in truth, she is changing him. This harlot “services” the “kings of the earth,” but in turn they are corrupted—“made drunk with the wine of her immorality”—corrupted by her, and eventually *ruled* by her. *She* is the one in ultimate control. The people will be “passionately intoxicated with Antichrist’s illicit false world religion” (MacArthur).
- She sits on a scarlet beast, which by its description in v3 and later, is clearly Antichrist—or more accurately, the beast is not *just* Antichrist, but represents, as Walvoord puts it, “a revelation of the revived Roman Empire in its period of worldwide dominion.” That is, Antichrist is the head of that confederation. We can deduce from the vision that the beast supports the harlot—yet, she is the one riding (controlling) *him*. The sometimes tortured intricacies of their relationship—the political dictator with the world-wide religion—is described in v16: “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.” In this we see the apostasy and the dictator, in the beginning, working side-by-side, but later, perhaps at the midpoint of the Tribulation, Antichrist will make *himself* the object of the world’s worship, thus subsuming the two into “one in the beast’s universal and comprehensive rule” (MacArthur). The description of the beast is telling: he is vile, “full of blasphemous names,” which, at the same time, reveals the depths of depravity of the apostate church being in such intimate alliance with him. Once the true church is removed at the Rapture, this hideous abomination will be the world-wide church taking its place. The seven heads represent seven successive kingdoms or governments; the ten horns represent the coalition under the beast.
- The harlot’s apparel is telling as well. “The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls...” (v4). We might say today that these are *power* adornments; the colors speak of royalty, nobility, and wealth, as does the abundance of expensive jewelry. This false religion has immense power and wealth. In place of a royal orb, she holds in her hand (as if proud of it) “a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality.” Verse 2 told us what she does with this cup: “...those who dwell on the earth¹ were made drunk with the wine of her immorality.” The prophet Jeremiah spoke of this.

Read Jeremiah 51:6-7. †

- This woman has a rather verbose identification on her forehead: “a mystery, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” Who or whatever she is, we can take from this that she is rather proud of what she is. Some say the word “mystery” is part of the title, while others say the word is a descriptive adjective, not part of the name or title. It’s a small point. It just means that this is a secret that will be revealed.

† Permit me to insert a word here about the Catholic church. We must carefully and intelligently understand the meaning behind this vision of a woman and what she represents by her names “harlot” and “Babylon.” Many—perhaps even a majority—over the centuries have claimed flat-out that “Babylon” and this abominable harlot represent the Catholic church with its corrupt papacy. This passage is one they reference to back up their position, claiming that the garb of this woman stands for the grandiose and richly adorned robes of the papacy. As I have stated repeatedly, we do not subscribe to an historical interpretation of these visions, nor does the apostasy of the end times represent any apostasy in the Catholic church. Is there error and apostasy there? Yes—just as apostasy can be found in some protestant churches. But is this vision of an end-times false religion a picture of an end-times Catholic church? No. John Walvoord says it well: “The only form of a world church recognized in the Bible is this apostate world church destined to come into power after the true church has been raptured.” Just as I pointed out that we can see today in our culture examples of what we read here, that does not mean that we are already dwelling in the fulfillment of this prophecy. Sin and rebellion against the true God have been dwelling on this earth since Eden.

¹ i.e., unbelievers

As to the name “Babylon,”

Walvoord: ...Babylon in Scripture is the name for a great system of religious error. Babylon is actually a counterfeit or pseudo religion which plagued Israel in the Old Testament as well as the church in the New Testament, and which, subsequent to apostolic days, has had a tremendous influence in moving the church from biblical simplicity to apostate confusion. In keeping with the satanic principle of offering a poor substitute for God’s perfect plan, Babylon is the source of counterfeit religion sometimes in the form of pseudo Christianity, sometimes in the form of pagan religion. (See the handout for this session—last page of these notes—for more detailed information.)

Joseph Seiss brings out an important point about v5, which speaks to the identity of this woman in John’s vision. To those who would try to make this all about Rome or the Catholic church or the papacy itself, Seiss raises his hand in protest and says, “No, no, look again at v5!”

Note again what v5 says about the name on her forehead; her name is “a mystery, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

As Walvoord points out, it is a “mystery”—not, here, a literal, inhabited city. Seiss agrees, but comes at it by emphasizing what the text in v5 is saying, that this woman *is the mother of [all] harlots and mother of [all] the abominations of the earth!* Were we to place her on a timeline, she would predate by millennia Rome and the papacy; she predates all harlotry and all the abominations of this fallen earth. She is the one who gave birth to it all! Thus she is *all* false religion, *all* apostasy, *all* depravity and rebellion against a holy God, as exemplified by a Babylon that had its birth in the tower of Babel in Genesis 11.

Seiss: The Woman is not an empire any more than the Church of Christ is an empire. She rides upon empires, kings, and powers of the world, and inspires, leads, and controls them; but she herself is not one of them, and is above all of them, so that they court her, and are bewitched and governed by her—governed, not with the reins of empire, but with the lure of her fornication. This Woman is longer-lived than any one empire. (Again, see the handout.)

- Finally, in v2 it is the unbelievers who are “made drunk with the wine of her immorality.” Here, in v6, the *woman* is “drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.” False religion has always been a murderer. Christ Jesus, true God, offers *life*—life eternal; false religion in all forms offers only false salvation, false hope, and an eternity of misery and living *death*. Those fooled by Babylon’s apostasy are made drunk by her enticements; meanwhile she herself is made pleasantly drunk from the deaths of all those who rejected her suit in favor of the true Messiah. Remember what we read in 13:15: “And it was given to [the false prophet]

to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”

Although the text expresses great astonishment, I still read the end of v6—“When I saw her, I wondered greatly”—as profound understatement. Frankly, I believe that any one of us would faint dead-away seeing that vision before us. And the angel assures him, *Don’t worry, John, I’ll explain it all.*

THE VISION EXPLAINED

Read Revelation 17:8.

v8

“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction.

The remainder of Chapter Seventeen consists of the angel’s explanation of this bizarre sight. It is cued up by John’s wonderment in v6: “When I saw her, I wondered greatly.” Note: “When I saw *her*...” Yet the angel describes everything else *but* the woman for the next eleven verses. Only in the last verse (v18) does he get to the woman, and then in a rather off-handed manner (oh, yeah, by the way...): “The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

- *The beast that you saw*: Antichrist, the beast from the sea
- *was*: he was alive, people knew of him
- *and is not*: he faked his death so that he could be “resurrected” and be worshiped as “god”
- *and is about to come up out of the abyss*: which could be referencing his public re-emergence after his “death,” or be a reference to 13:1, where he is seen “coming up out of the sea,” or a reference to 11:7, where he is “the beast that comes up out of the abyss.”

As we discussed in Session twenty-seven,² in the OT a correlation is expressed, metaphorically, between the sea and the realm of satanic activity, as for example in Isaiah 27:1.

In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent,
With His fierce and great and mighty sword,
Even Leviathan the twisted serpent;
And He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea.

As MacArthur points out, “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.”

² the Two Witnesses

vv9-13

These verses expand on what we already know, that the seven heads represent seven earlier successive kingdoms or governments; the ten horns represent the coalition under the beast.

v14

Here is a compacted version of Armageddon. All these just described—the coalition under Antichrist—all will go to war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will win. Why? Because He is “Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.” (Sorry to spoil the ending for you, but God wins.)

v16

A study of the future history of the end times can be, and is usually, fascinating. But at times it can also be frustrating, for we wish the Spirit of God would have dispensed with all the mystic, opaque language and just given us a detailed, plain-English, minute-by-minute account that could be easily understood. Verse 16 presents just such an occasion.

“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.”

We have already seen, from other passages, how Antichrist will initially be most agreeable with religion. At the beginning of the Tribulation period he will make an agreement with the Jews to permit them to worship as they see fit in a rebuilt Jerusalem temple. But then, somewhere around the middle of the Tribulation he will renege on that agreement and begin his active persecution of Israel.

This text tells us that he will do much the same with “the harlot” called in these two chapters, “Babylon.” This is not Judaism, but a continuing—and greatly expanded—system of false religion and gross apostasy; during the first half of the Tribulation this will be “the church”—and it will be a travesty.

This verse describes, in the same obtuse prophetic imagery that opened the chapter, that the beast and his ten-nation coalition—that is, the lieutenant rulers reigning under the pleasure and rule of Antichrist—will suddenly destroy this perverse religion. It has served them well by being the carrot that attracted the masses to the beast, organizing them, subjugating them. But it is now time to dispense with it. Why? Does he want to replace it with a true religion? No, he wants to replace it with himself. From here on out he, the beast, will be the object of veneration and worship—and no one else. From here on out, *he* will be “God.”

v17

But we must never forget that there is One causing all this to happen. Satan? Yes, to a point. But over and above all else there is holy God calling the shots.

“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 will be fulfilled.

What better way to rid the earth of the hideous “great harlot” than to have Antichrist himself do all the dirty work. It is *His* purpose to have the coalition unite under what they see as *their* purpose—to wit, to unite as one under the rule of the beast without any distracting religious affections than to him alone. *The beast* will be will be their god, *he* will be their church, *he* will be their all-in-all! That is, “until the words of God [the *true* God] will be fulfilled.”

v18

Verse 18 serves as a suitable segue into *Chapter Eighteen*.

“The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

In this session, aside from a brief mention at the top, I have purposely restricted our focus to Babylon as standing for the pervasive system of immorality and apostasy that has infected mankind since the beginning of its time on earth. She is and always has been, as the words on her forehead proudly proclaim, “BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.” She is the insidious monster infecting our churches, even today, with false religion, false promises, false hope—all bringing only death to those who listen to her siren song.

I have kept us focused on that aspect of “Babylon” so as to make it easier for us to grasp what can be a mysterious, mystical, and slippery concept.

Now, in our next session, we will turn the page to Chapter Eighteen, and Babylon as something more concrete, more tangible—still immoral, still perverse, still hateful to a holy God, but now instead of religion she will represent commerce, trade, politics. As such, most scholars agree that Babylon in Chapter Eighteen *does* speak of a literal city, or, at least, location. Just where, well, on that few *do* agree.

We have placed the prophecy of Chapter Seventeen somewhere around the mid-Tribulation point; we will place Chapter Eighteen somewhere closer to the very end of the Tribulation.

THE TRIBULATION

“Babylon”

Why is the harlot in Revelation 17 referred to as “Babylon”? What is the significance of this term in God’s word?

Of primary importance in the study of Babylon is its relation to religion as unfolded in Revelation 17. In addition to materials given in the Bible itself, ancient accounts indicate that the wife of Nimrod, who founded the city of Babylon, became the head of the so-called Babylonian mysteries which consisted of secret religious rites which were developed as a part of the worship of idols in Babylon. She was known by the name of Semiramis and was a high priestess of the idol worship. According to extra-biblical records which have been preserved, Semiramis gave birth to a son who she claimed was conceived miraculously. This son, given the name of Tammuz, was considered a savior of his people and was, in effect, a false messiah, purported to be the fulfillment of the promise given to Eve. The

legend of the mother and child was incorporated into the religious rites and is repeated in various pagan religions. Idols picturing the mother as the queen of heaven with the babe in her arms are found throughout the ancient world, and countless religious rites were introduced supposedly promising cleansing from sin. Though the rites which were observed in the Babylonian false religion differed greatly in various localities, there usually was a priestly order which furthered the worship of the mother and child, practiced the sprinkling of holy water, and established an order of virgins dedicated to religious prostitution. Tammuz, the son, was said to have been killed by a wild beast and afterward brought back to life, obviously a satanic anticipation of the resurrection of Christ.

In the Scriptures themselves, though many of these facts are not mentioned, there are a number of allusions to the conflict of the true faith with this pseudo religion. Ezekiel protests against the ceremony of weeping for Tammuz in Ezekiel 8:14. Jeremiah mentions the heathen

practices of making cakes for the queen of heaven (Jer. 7:18) and offering incense to the queen of heaven (Jer. 44:17-19, 25). The worship of Baal, characteristic of pagan religion in Canaan, was another form of this same mystery religion originating in Babylon. Baal is considered identical to Tammuz. The doctrines of the mystery religions of Babylon seem to have permeated the ancient world, giving rise to countless mystery religions, each with its cult and individual beliefs offering a counterfeit religion and a counterfeit god in opposition to the true God revealed in the Scriptures. Babylon as an evil woman is portrayed in the prophecy of Zechariah 5:1-11 where the woman of verse 7 is described as personifying wickedness in verse 8.

The Babylonian cult eventually made its way to other cities including Pergamos, the site of one of the seven churches of Asia. The chief priests of the Babylonian cult wore crowns in the form of the head of a fish, in recognition of Dagon the fish god, with the title “Keeper of the Bridge,” that is, the “bridge” between man and Satan, imprinted on the crowns. The Roman equivalent of the title, Pontifex Maximus, was used by the Caesars and later Roman emperors, and was also adopted as the title for the bishop of Rome. In the early centuries of the church in Rome, incredible confusion arose; and attempts were made to combine some of the features of the mystery religion of Babylon with the Christian faith, a confusion which has continued down to the present day. In this chapter in Revelation, the last stage of counterfeit religion is revealed as it will be in existence in the period before the return of the Lord to earth.

(John Walvoord, in “The Destruction Of Ecclesiastical Babylon,” from his series, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*.)

SESSION 46: THE TRIBULATION (PART THIRTY-THREE): THE FOURTH PARENTHETICAL VISIONS: BABYLON, PART TWO

PREFACE

In our last session, looking at Revelation 17, we saw Babylon as standing for the pervasive system of immorality and apostasy that has infected mankind since the beginning of its time on earth. We understood her to be the insidious monster infecting our churches, even today, with false religion, false promises, false hope—all bringing only death to those who listen to her. Thus, in that context Babylon is a driving force behind the depraved philosophies of a fallen world. In that role she is very real, and very powerful; she is, as John MacArthur puts it, “the symbol of all worldly resistance to God”—but, especially in Chapter Seventeen, she is the driving force behind false religion, apostasy, and *all* manner of corruption of religion.*

Now in Chapter Eighteen we see a different *aspect* of Babylon. Here she is associated not with religion, but with immoral commerce, trade, politics, and city life.

David Guzik poses the rhetorical question, “Is this the same Babylon as is described in chapter 17?” and I agree with his answer to this, that the two are “intertwined, yet somehow distinct.” After all, the Babylon in Chapter Seventeen is utterly destroyed—by Antichrist’s coalition—in v16; the Babylon in Chapter Eighteen will be utterly destroyed—by the seventh bowl of God’s wrath—in vv17ff. Also, we place Chapter Seventeen during the *first* half of the Tribulation, culminating in the destruction of Babylon—the false church—at the midpoint, while in Chapter Eighteen Babylon is destroyed just moments before Christ returns at the *end* of the Tribulation.

Though separated by time and sphere of influence during the Tribulation, it is clear that both these aspects of Babylon are ancient and enduring aspects of true evil, at work on earth since the Fall. They both share a common purpose: separating man from his Maker. The most insidious of these two works in the realm of religion; the other, in the realm of commerce and society.

Even in 17:18 the woman is referred to as a “city,” and “the great city” is mentioned repeatedly in Chapter Eighteen—not just by that name, but implied in the passages. For example in v2 she is called “a dwelling place for demons,” and in vv11-17 merchants “weep and mourn” because the city will no longer be purchasing their goods.

The text seems to describe a city next to water, either the sea or a major river.¹ Contrary to many scholars, I do not see the need to pinpoint this city on a map. Walvoord, MacArthur and Seiss see this as a rebuilt Babylon on the Euphrates; Alford says it is Rome.

My position is that it doesn’t really matter *where* it is, or even the future name by which it will be called by those alive at the time. It may be “Babylon”;

¹ e.g., v11 (cargoes) and v17 (“every shipmaster, passenger and sailor... and [those who] make their living by the sea”)

* In a sense, based on her motives and behavior, one might say it is as if she is a female version of Satan.

it may be something else. *God* calls it Babylon, and that is enough for us. Wherever it is, it will be the commercial center for the beast's kingdom. Some say it will be the city from which he rules. Perhaps. Again, I don't think it matters that much.

Read Revelation 18:1-3.

v1

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.

Some like to make this angel out to be Christ Himself, but the text says that he is "another" of the same kind as the previous angel, and Christ would not be referred to in this way in the Revelation. The angel has been given "great authority," and if we remember the time frame of this event we can well understand that "the earth would be illumined by his glory." Recall that just before this event (or perhaps synchronized with it) the fifth bowl of wrath darkened the entirety of the beast's kingdom. This angel will indeed make a dramatic entrance.

v2

And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

Once again we see how prophecy in God's word repeatedly employs the "now—not yet" method, announcing something apparently a *fait accompli*, only to be actually fulfilled later. Verse 8, later, says that she *will be* destroyed, and Babylon does not literally fall until 16:19. The angel's descent and announcement marks the beginning of the end.

The second part of the verse paints an interesting, if not horrific picture of the city. It has become, "a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird." Let us first consider the words:

- it is a habitation, a dwelling place for evil angels (*daimonon*);
- for foul spirits (*akathartou pneumatos*) it is a prison, a place where they are confined and guarded (*phylake*);
- as well as "unclean and hateful birds" (*akathartou kai memisemenou or-neou*). I can find no explanation for the ESV, new NIV, and CSB adding at the end of the verse, "a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast," other than the obvious, that they are working from a different manuscript. The rest do not have this. I also could discover no satisfactory explanation for the inclusion of "birds."

Those are the details, but what do they mean? I can imagine either of two interpretations.

This could be a more florid way of expressing the fact that this city is pervaded and controlled by demonic spirits. That is, it is not speaking of literal demons and angels walking the streets, but expressing a supernaturally possessed city overwhelmed by evil. This is possible, but I favor a second, more literal interpretation. Look back with me to several passages that might illumine this statement. [Turn please to Chapter Nine](#). In vv13-19 we have a description of what happens when the sixth Trumpet is blown. Note especially vv14-16:

...one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.

Note two things here:

- from somewhere around the river Euphrates four angels, who have been waiting for this moment, are *released*;
- they call out an army of 200 million horsemen. As with the angels, this demonic army seemingly appears out of nowhere, as if it, too, is already in place and chomping at the bit. [Now look back at vv1-11](#).

Here the fifth trumpet is blown, which brings forth a plague of "locusts"; the stinging locusts are not numbered, but they are clearly in the millions, and led by "the angel of the abyss," Abaddon. Finally, [turn to Chapter Twelve](#). [Look at v9](#).

Read Revelation 12:9.

Question: Where have all these demonic beings been as the Tribulation has proceeded? Did they just disappear, or did they remain? If the latter, where have they been garrisoned? I suggest they may have been imprisoned, caged, in or in the vicinity of, Babylon.

These may very well be what are spoken of when v2 in Chapter Eighteen records that Babylon has become "a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird"—a veritable hell-hole on earth.

v3

Last week I prefaced our look at Chapter Seventeen with the following:

One important reason for us to take the time for it is that in these chapters is revealed not just something future for this earth, but something happening *right now*. Let me be clear: I am not at all sug-

gesting that this prophesy is being fulfilled in our midst, in our time. No, I am not suggesting that, but *declaring* that the same abominable practices, evil philosophies—the very same demonic ideas and practices of which we read here are a part of *our* system today.

Verse 3 makes clear that the same holds true for the description of Babylon the city.

“For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.”

Verse 3 is a snapshot of our present-day culture, media, and politics—all saturated with a level of depravity represented here by Babylon the great city.†

v4-5

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

Some claim this now is the voice of God, but, once again, the word “another” means another of the same kind.² So this is most probably the voice of another strong angel.

One might rightly ask why there would be believers (“my people”) in such a place. There can be any number of reasons: those who have been living there but recently converted; evangelists at work in the city; or perhaps even those who *will* be believers, but are not yet. The point is this: God is saying, just as he did to Lot’s family living in Sodom, *Get out, for the time has come for Me to utterly destroy this place.*

There is a second reason for the people to flee—the same reason we should take to heart today—which is voiced in v4: “... so that you will not participate in her sins.” In this is an echo of Paul’s counsel to Timothy and his congregation; remember that Babylon is, in the beast’s kingdom, the center for world-wide trade.

Read 1 Timothy 6:9-11.

Although at this time the entire world is being bombarded by the bowls of wrath (so there are few places of safety for anyone), the Lord God has reserved much of the seventh bowl specially for Babylon. [Look at 16:17.](#)

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is

† Need an illustration? After watching a *literally* satanic performance by two “transitioned” biological men during the recent Grammys, Country music singer John Rich tweeted, “The Grammys looked like hell last night. If God doesn’t bring judgment on America he’ll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.” Indeed.

² *allen* [from *allos*] meaning “one like in kind”

done.” And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty. *The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.* (Revelation 16:17–19; emphasis added)

Finally, there is a bit of a jab in “her sins have piled up as high as heaven.” The word translated “piled up” (“have reached” in KJVs), *ekolletesan*, (from *kol-lao*) means to glue or cement together, as bricks are laid to form a building. Add to that “as high as heaven” and we have a clear reference to the building of the tower of Babel, where this all began: “They said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name...’”³

wv6-8

The same voice then goes into detail about *why* this destruction is merited.

“Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I SIT as A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.’ For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.”

The angel hearkens back to the logic of the Mosaic Law that one is to be repaid double, which has the sense of fullness or completeness. For example,

“For every breach of trust, whether it is for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, or for any lost thing about which one says, ‘This is it,’ the case of both parties shall come before the judges; he whom the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.” (Exodus 22:9)

And again, just as with Lot’s situation, the angel states that the destruction of Babylon will not be accomplished over time, but will be immediate—“in one day.”

wv9-19

Verses 9-19 is an extended, anguished lament—with narration by the angel—by those who made their living by dealing with the “great city,” over the

³Genesis 11:4

loss of their livelihood. It is a great read, which I commend to you, but we need not dissect it verse by verse in class.

Walvoord: The time is the second coming of Christ at the end of the great tribulation. The very kings who participated in the wickedness and wealth of Babylon now mourn her passing, symbolized in the burning of the capital city. The lament of the kings over Babylon is most emphatic in the Greek by the repetition of the article: literally “the city the great, Babylon the city the mighty.” It was great in its extent of power and accomplishment and mighty in the strength of its rule. In spite of its greatness and strength...it nevertheless falls in one hour.

Let’s read just the first and last verses to catch the flavor of it:

v9-10: “And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.’”

v19: “And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!’”

The angel-narrator then turns away from the earthly carnage of the destruction of Babylon and turns toward heaven—I can well imagine with a big grin on his face.

v20: “Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.”

The text doesn’t say it explicitly, but one gets the impression—not least from the timing of this, almost on top of the return of Christ—that the destruction of Babylon represents the final, conclusive, grand finale—the dramatic *denouement* of all God’s acts of retribution and vengeance during the last seven years. It is the scene in all the older James Bond movies where the villain’s cavernous headquarters are dramatically blown to smithereens.

But then, even as we are reveling with the angel in this wrath poured out against evil, the last paragraph of this chapter—vv21-24—reminds us that all of this is *prophecy*; even in the timeline of the seven-year Tribulation, this has not yet occurred. The verb tenses in this last passage slap us back to reality, and the tale is picked up by a new character: a third strong angel.

v21

Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.

So right away we are reminded that these angels have just been painting us a vivid picture of what will be—so vivid that we got carried away thinking that, in the Tribulation timeline, Babylon has already been wiped off the map. But no. The angel demonstrates what is yet to happen in the timeline: the great city’s demise will be as if it has been thrown into the sea, never to be seen again.

vv22-23

Then in vv22-23a the angel describes all that will never again be seen or heard in that once-great city.

“And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; 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; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer...

When Jerusalem had been plundered and destroyed, such as when Judah was removed to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, who then returned to break down the walls and burn the city—even then a remnant remained, and under Ezra and Nehemiah the people returned, and the temple and city were rebuilt. When Jerusalem was razed to the ground by Rome in AD 70, a remnant remained and the city was eventually rebuilt. But the destruction of Babylon will not be conducted by mere men; this city will be destroyed by the almighty wrath of a holy God—and it will be no more.

Chapter Eighteen closes, in vv23b-24, by listing just three reasons—among far many more, of course—why the Lord God has done this.

One

These three justifications for Babylon the city being “thrown down with violence” and “not be found any longer” come after a litany of her many sins, followed by a list of all that will no longer exist within her, once the city is destroyed. Considering the context, the inference in this first is that these merchants are guilty of offenses against God.

for your merchants were the great men of the earth,

Although kings are mentioned, most of Chapter Eighteen is about the merchants; not your average shopkeepers, we would call these today titans of industry, merchants of products in the way that Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates are merchants of products: “great men” who have an inordinate influence

on culture, commerce, and even politics. These merchants have bought into the sensuality, immorality of Babylon, dallying with her for their own profit.‡

Two

Still speaking to the merchants, the angel states a second justification: They not only did these things, they did them well. It was effective—implied, disastrously so. The nations were successfully deceived by these merchants.

because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.

The word translated “sorcery” is *pharmakeia* (far-mah-kee'-ah), from which we have our words pharmacy and pharmaceuticals. Combined with *eplanethesan* (“deceived”) it means these merchants are guilty of leading people astray by their administering of drugs or spells—by intellectually, emotionally, or even physically “drugging” the populace for their (the merchant’s) greater profit. It also implies, as elsewhere in the NT, by means of magic and the occult.

Three

Taking the focus off the merchants and turning to the city itself, the angel and chapter end with v24. Babylon—in *both* of her aspects, both religious and commercial—has been responsible for the slaughter of countless millions of God’s people. This verse expresses how all that is on her. Essentially personifying the city as a murderer saturated with the blood of her victims, the angel accuses Babylon with,

And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.

Let us close by reading the first six verses of Chapter Nineteen, which give us a vision of how heaven will celebrate this horrific, yet righteous event.

Read Revelation 19:1-6.

‡ Need an example? Note today—every day—huge corporations and vast media empires are bowing to the insidious woke culture, labeling products, creating programs—even Disney, for crying out loud—that exalt prurient distortions of human sexuality. Why? Only one reason: profit.

SESSION 47: THE THIRD WOE: THE BOWLS OF WRATH, PART TWO: PRELUDE TO CHRIST'S RETURN

Charts: The Last Reciprocal War: Chart #18, The Bowls of Wrath: Chart #17,

Events Surrounding Christ's Return: Chart #20

PREFACE

We are about to embark on what is without a doubt *the*—not just *one of the*, but *the* most dramatic, literally earth shattering series of events in the history of this world since Eden. This is not hyperbole, but prophetic fact. From here—the Sixth Bowl of wrath, which triggers Armageddon—until the start of the Millennium, events are let loose which will result in a literal, geographic re-shaping of this globe.

And, of course, much more.

It all happens at lightning speed, one dramatic, convulsive event piled on top of another, often overlapping, all with ramifications that will echo into eternity. [Look at Chart #18.](#)

SETTING THE STAGE

We must begin by getting our bearings. What is the shape of things as we return to the narrative of the Bowls of Wrath, beginning with the Sixth Bowl? First, aside from Christ Jesus Himself,

Who are the key actors?

- The beast (Antichrist) and the false prophet
- The angels with the seven bowls
- Kings (armies) from the N, S, and E
- The people of Jerusalem and vicinity

Where are the key actors, and what are they doing?

- The beast is encamped in the vicinity of Megiddo in Israel. He, Antichrist, is almost certainly anticipating, and gearing up to meet, armies from the north and south and possibly east. *From the beast's perspective, he is preparing to fight men—not Christ.*
- Kings from the north and south are converging on Megiddo and what we today call Israel.
- To the beast it is but a rumor, but we know that kings from the east are advancing toward the River Euphrates—or perhaps encamped on its eastern shore, waiting to advance.
- The people in Jerusalem and the surrounding area—perhaps the entire nation of Israel and even beyond—are probably already under the gun, experiencing invasion and violence of all sorts. [Look at Chart #17.](#)

Meanwhile, let us not forget that the world as a whole remains under the assault—the bombardment of the first five bowls of wrath.

- The first bowl released loathsome sores on all followers of the beast;
- the second turned all the seas to thick blood, killing everything in them;
- the third did the same to all fresh water on earth;
- the fourth bowl turned the sun into a fierce, scorching furnace upon the surface of the earth;
- and the fifth bowl extinguished the heavenly lights, casting the earth into darkness.

And now, on top of all that—war. And if you still require convincing that this is all about Israel, and God's love for His chosen people, stay tuned. But, of course, we will see that this is not an earthly-defined love; God will ultimately save and exalt a remnant of His people—but not before putting them through even more trials. He is punishing the wicked, He is winnowing the chaff from the wheat, He is demonstrating His sovereign power—all to His glory. [We now return to Chapter Sixteen of the Revelation.](#)

v12: THE SIXTH BOWL

With the sixth angel we have the first recorded move toward the fateful “battle” of Armageddon.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.

Various opinions abound on just who these kings are that will benefit from the drying up of the Euphrates—Walvoord claims there are as many as fifty different interpretations. As is our way, we will take this to mean what it says: There will be Oriental kings from the “east”¹ who will be coming at Antichrist, either independent of, or in league with, the kings from the north and south.* Recall what we read in Daniel 11:44 :

“But rumors from the East and from the North will disturb him,² and he will go forth with great wrath to destroy and annihilate many.”

God does not stop these armies from the east, but in fact paves the way for their approach. Why?

MacArthur: God's drying up the Euphrates is not an act of kindness toward the kings of the east, but one of judgment. They and their armies will be entering a deadly trap.

* Don't get thrown off-track by the use of “kings” in this narrative. For our purposes, just think nations, or even better in this context, armies.

¹ literally, the rising of the sun

² i.e., the beast

There *may*—and I emphasize *may*—be a connection between the sixth bowl and the sixth trumpet in Chapter Nine (vv13-21).

Walvoord: The relationship between the drying up of the Euphrates and the battle that follows has sometimes been connected with the sixth trumpet in 9:13-21. In the sixth trumpet an army of 200 million men is loosed to slay a third part of men (9:15). This army is related to the Euphrates River even as the army of the kings of the East. Probably the best explanation is that the seven vials follow very rapidly after the trumpets and that the events such as a great invasion are pictured in their early stages in the sixth trumpet with a statement of their ultimate purpose that is actually realized in the sixth vial. The time sequence here may be in terms of days rather than months or years.

The reason I do not wholeheartedly endorse this is that, unless the Tribulation is scheduled for still thousands of years in the future, I question that Daniel 11:44 would say that the beast was hearing “rumors” from the East. We know from history that advances in science and technology do not always increase; at certain times in the history of man these things have been forgotten, causing the advance of society to roll backward, only to be rediscovered later. It is possible that if more thousands of years will pass before these days are played out, the technology of today will have been forgotten. If not, however, we can safely assume that Antichrist will be in possession of high definition images of those 200 million “horsemen” at the Euphrates; it won’t be just a “rumor”—at least before the darkness of the fifth bowl.

Earlier I said that, “From the beast’s perspective, he is preparing to fight men—not Christ.” After our study of Daniel 11:35-45, that seemed to be the only logical conclusion, that from an *earthly* perspective these armies were *first* gathered to fight each other, only later to turn *en masse* to fight Christ Jesus and His army of angels.³ I was encouraged to learn that John Walvoord agrees with me.

Walvoord: Some have interpreted this as a gathering of forces in anticipation of the second coming of Christ. More probably, it reflects a conflict among the nations themselves in the latter portion of the great tribulation as the world empire so hastily put together begins to disintegrate. The armies of the world contending for honors on the battlefield at the very time of the second coming of Christ do all turn, however, and combine their efforts against Christ and His army from heaven when the glory of the second coming appears in the heavens. It will be the final challenge to divine sovereignty and power as the military might of the world of that day will be engaged in fighting on the very day that Christ returns.

³Matthew 24:30-31

This would also help us understand the prophecy of Zechariah 14, something that has puzzled me for some time. Thus in advance of Christ's return we see much fighting between nations.

Huge armies are prosecuting another World War (only God knows whether this is WW3 or WW29) and the worst of it is in the Middle East, especially Israel, with a focus on Jerusalem. [Turn please to Zechariah 14](#). This important prophecy is set up in the final verses of Chapter Thirteen.†

† And if you are still looking at Chart #17, you may wish to switch to Chart #20: *Events Surrounding Christ's Return*.

Read Zechariah 13:8-9.

Whether through the beast's purges or through the systematic plagues, two-thirds of Israel will have been killed for rejecting Christ, while one-third will be saved. But the Lord of hosts declares that though he has saved a remnant, He has reserved a last-minute baptism by fire, for further refining. Then the prophet details what this will look like—a passage that now makes sense to your humble teacher with the war set forth in Daniel 11.

Read Zechariah 14:1-3.

I can't help but think that this consists not just of Jerusalem being in the path of the battle, but also a last-minute belch of antisemitism by the remaining Goyim. Nothing has changed, even at this late date: the world as a system still hates Jews.

vv13-16

Verses 13-16 of Revelation 16 further the narrative in the guise of a parenthetical vision.

Read Revelation 16:13-14.

Haven't we all had dreams in which we see someone who looks nothing like anyone we know, but in the dream we just *know* that that is our wife or husband, or mother or father? Just so, here John is shown a vision in which two of our actors, with Satan—the dragon (Satan), the beast (Antichrist), and the false prophet (Anti-spirit)—spew forth “unclean spirits” presented, in the vision, as hideous frogs (*batrachoi*).

Though this fits into the narrative, I suggest it points backward to a point earlier in the Tribulation. Earlier in the Great Tribulation these spirits of demons (*daimonon*) would have been sent out as emissaries to work wonders, impressing the kings scattered about the world, and cause them to go to war. They don't know they are marching to their doom before the Lord; they think they will be fighting men.

Then we have a *literal* parenthesis in v15, voiced probably by Christ Himself or by Father God.

“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.”)

This verse speaks of the readiness of a soldier, who must sleep fully clothed so as to be ready for instant combat—but this is not speaking of literal clothing, but being clothed in *righteousness*. The prophet Isaiah spoke of it:

I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,
My soul will exult in my God;
For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness,
As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)

Your nakedness and shame will be that you are not clothed in the righteousness of Christ—to your doom. Verse 16 snaps us back to our timeline:

And they⁴ gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.

This last word is the Hebrew word for “Mount Megiddo” “Har” can mean mountain or hill country, which fits, for the Plain of Megiddo is surrounded by hill country. This passage (vv13-16) does raise the possibility that the demonic trilogy of Satan and the two beasts does indeed know that ultimately the battle will be against the Lord Himself. Certainly Satan—who knows Scripture better than any of us—is aware that the war will turn from men fighting each other to fighting Christ. I think it is an open question whether the two beasts realize this or not.

v17: THE SEVENTH BOWL

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is done.”

The human mind struggles in vain to describe this moment. All attempts fall flat in the presence of a righteous, holy God delivering His final blow upon this fallen world. In a similar moment, when Christ Jesus was breathing His last upon the cross, He cried out, “It is finished!” That declaration announced the completion of the necessary sacrifice for sinful but repentant man to now to have a way, through Christ, to reach a holy God. It marked, at once, an end and a new beginning.

Now, in *this* moment, that same holy God declares, “It is done!” This is His final act of wrath, of vengeance against the *unrepentant*, those who refused to bow before the Lord Christ Jesus. There remains His final *judgment*, but this

⁴i.e., the spirits of demons from v14

seventh bowl with its multiple contents marks the last blow of His out-poured wrath.

Yet, just as at the cross, that which is “done” marks another new beginning; this is the pivot-point between the old and the new, for it announces the return—the long-awaited return—of the Messiah to His creation. He *left* the earth as “the Lamb slain”; He will return as “a rod of iron”.⁵

What Christ declared from the cross, using *teleo*, meant that he had completed or accomplished something. What God declares at the end of the Tribulation with, “It is done,” using just one Greek word—*Gegonen*—means “to come into being.” This marks the end of His wrath upon the earth, but it also marks the *birth* of something brand new: the reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years—or, as Alan Johnson translates it, “It has come to pass,” meaning, essentially, *What I promised, I have done*.

v18-21: THE WORST OF HIS WRATH

In His eschatological discourse, Jesus foretold this moment in Matthew 24:29.

“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.”

Here is how John describes the same moment in v18:

And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.

These are the final acts of God's reshaping of the earth in preparation for Christ's Millennial reign and, ultimately, being replaced by a *new* earth. Through the seals, the trumpets, and the first six bowls of wrath, heaven has dealt cataclysmic blows upon the earth, destroying trade, commerce, the natural world, and millions of lives. These, in the seventh bowl, are the last—and worst—of it. Part of this will be the falling of Babylon and all the cities of the world.

v19: The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

The prophet Zechariah tells the story even better—and in his text we see an example of why it can be so difficult to determine a proper sequence to these events, for in Revelation the reshaping of the earth seems to happen *prior to* Christ's return, while in Zechariah, it seems to be His return that *triggers most of* the geological shifts.

⁵ Psalm 2:9, Revelation 12:5; 19:15

Read Zechariah 14:4-8, 10.

The city of Jerusalem, rather than being destroyed with the rest, will be elevated, and all the surrounding land reduced to a plain. The geological changes extend around the globe: [Back to Revelation 16](#).

v20: And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.‡

‡MacArthur, citing Henry Morris, ascribes the disappearing of islands and mountains to God returning the earth to its antediluvian (pre-Flood) state, that is, “a gentle rolling topography of the world as originally created,” without “inaccessible, uninhabitable mountain ranges or deserts or ice caps.” While I do not dispute his description of the reshaped world in the eschaton, I am not sure I subscribe to his description of the world as originally created.

If we required further evidence of the finality and thoroughness of God’s wrath, here it is. It is not enough that humanity has been made to suffer every plague and onslaught of the seals, the trumpets, the bowls; it is not enough that the water has been poisoned, then turned to blood, and that the whole world lies in thick darkness; it is not enough that millions upon millions have been killed. No, the vengeful God of heaven is not yet finished with His retribution against stubborn, sin-possessed man.

v21a: And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men;

When we were studying the seven seals,⁶ I noted that the *sixth* seal represented a projection into the future of the Tribulation, something that would occur later. Well, here it is.

Read Revelation 6:12-14.

With icy projectiles weighing anywhere from 90 to 135 pounds (*talantiaios* [talen-tee-ay’-ous]) being thrown down to earth, after all that had come before, we see a good reason for the behavior of vv15-17.

Read Revelation 6:15-17.

Walvoord: Verse 21 records a great hail[storm] with every stone about the weight of a talent. Though the talent in different periods of history varied in weight, the reference here seems to be to the talent weighing about 100 pounds and representing all that a man could normally carry. Such a hail from heaven falling upon men would have a devastating effect and would destroy much that was still left standing by the earthquake. It is a judgment compared to that of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah but here extending over the entire earth.

Contrary to many commentators who seem surprised that this devastation does not bring about universal repentance, I think it makes perfect sense that unrepentant man would still shake his fist at the heavens and be even more obdurate than before.

⁶Chart #9

v21b: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.

MacArthur: It is too late for these hardened sinners; they have sold their souls to Satan; they are totally committed to Antichrist's blasphemous, idolatrous, ant-God system. Children of wrath they are, catapulting into hell.

These "children of wrath" will probably not be aware that they themselves are a fulfillment of ancient prophecy.

Read Ezekiel 7:8-9.

While we are in the neighborhood, let's turn to the prophet Isaiah to announce the second coming of the Messiah—and note how this familiar passage (often erroneously read at Christmas) takes on a fresh reality, because of what we have learned in the Revelation and Zechariah.

Read Isaiah 40:3-5.

We will stop here for now. In our next session we will see Christ Jesus return to this earth, the Battle of Armageddon, summary judgment executed upon the two beasts, all remaining combatants killed in a moment, and—not least—Satan bound in the abyss for one thousand years.

SESSION 48: ARMAGEDDON AND CHRIST'S RETURN

Charts: Events Surrounding Christ's Return: Chart #20

PREFACE

As we did in our previous session, let us begin by taking stock of the earthly situation to which Messiah will be returning. Coming back to the narrative of the Eschaton we see the world almost certainly in the worst shape it has been since Creation itself. Geographically, culturally, morally it is an absolute wreck. Even though the population has been dramatically reduced, food and water are scarce; people are sick and dying; and the entire world has been cast into impenetrable darkness. On top of all that, the world is at war: many of those who joined the world-wide government of the beast—the ten-nation coalition—are now rebelling against him and his false-prophet sidekick. Armies have advanced on his headquarters at Megiddo in Israel from the north, the south, and the east. As a result Jerusalem has once again been attacked—our best guess, by the eastern forces whose way was paved by God Himself by drying up the Euphrates with the sixth bowl of His wrath.

THREE DEMONS

It is almost impossible to designate a beginning point to Armageddon. A pretty good place to start would be in a passage we looked at last week, which describes the unholy trinity sending out demonic emissaries to gather the nations for war.

Read Revelation 16:13-14.

Verse 16 concludes this with, “And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.” One way to read this would be that while v14 gives us the *ultimate* purpose of this gathering—“for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty”—that does not necessarily mean that Satan (the earthly orchestrator of this war) reveals this purpose to the kings. I suggest the demonic spirits being sent out are influencing these kings to invade the beast in an effort to regain their sovereign power of their individual nations. They are not being told that before the war is over, they will be aligned against very God Himself, not the beast. At the same time, perhaps Satan has lied to his two beasts with a *different* misdirection, that the armies are being called in to fight God—not telling them that they would be fighting the two beasts first. After all, Satan is the “father of lies”; he is good at it.

We have already covered the movement of these armies toward Megiddo, as well as Zechariah’s description of its impact on Jerusalem.

ARMAGEDDON

If one asks your average man or woman on the street, “What is the Battle of Armageddon?” the common answer will be probably be that it will be the final war before the end of the world. If one asks your average evangelical the same question, the answer will probably be that it is the final war between Christ and the armies of Antichrist. That latter answer is pretty close, but I believe the narrative requires the answer be this: *The Battle of Armageddon is the last and deciding battle of a broader war that began as a world war between nations, but ended with those nations joining to fight Christ and the armies of heaven.*

Preparations are made for two wars in the Eschaton—and Armageddon is not the last. The second preparation is absent a clever, well-known name, but is just as real, just as massive: an army formed during the Millennium, in waiting for their general, Satan himself.

I, of course, choose the words “preparations for” to describe these two events, because there *is* no battle, no fighting, in either one. Both “wars” consist of millions of combatants arrayed for battle, only to be extinguished in a moment by a word from the Lord in the first, and fire from heaven in the second.¹ *

Right now in the narrative, we are ready for this last battle of the world war: Armageddon.

THE WEDDING AND MARRIAGE SUPPER

Before we address Christ's return we need to step back for just a moment and revisit something we discussed way back in Session 7: The Tribulation Fork, referring to how (shown in Chart #6) immediately after the Rapture of the church there will be two tracks running simultaneously, one in heaven and one on earth, for about seven years. So we need to look back for a moment at the wedding and marriage supper of the Lamb.

The *earthly* track is the Tribulation, which we have been studying for the last thirty-nine sessions, and the *heavenly* track, I suggested, will consist of the believers' *bema* seat judgment, followed by the wedding and marriage supper of the Lamb.†

I pointed out at the time that it is very difficult to place the components of the heavenly track; on older charts of the Eschaton they are seen in a number of places. In Session 7 I submitted my rationale for placing the *bema* seat of judgment for believers shortly after the Rapture, but the placement of the wedding and wedding feast is more problematic. Most older charts show the marriage supper taking place near the end of the Tribulation period on earth, just before Christ returns in judgment—and that is roughly where I would place it. What we cannot say conclusively is the *duration* of either the judgment or the supper.

We cannot say what the heavenly wedding and marriage supper will be like; we have only the biblical picture of the earthly version to go by: “In Jewish culture, the marriage supper was the best banquet or party anyone knew; it

* In what I just said—“no battle, no fighting”—I need to differentiate between the war between the nations, the “battle” between those nations and Christ, and the aftermath of both. In the war between the nations there will indeed be fighting, bloody death and carnage, man upon man. There will be no man-to-man nor angel-to-man “combat” in the battle between the nations and Christ. But the result of Christ's word (the only weapon wielded in that battle) will be a literal bloodbath (Isaiah 34:1-8, Revelation 14:17-20).

† I likened the heavenly track to an end times reenactment of Noah's ark, and the earthly track, the Tribulation, to a reenactment of the flood.

¹ Revelation 20:7-10

always was an occasion of tremendous joy,” (David Guzik) and went on for days. Wherever the wedding and supper fall in the timeline, they are discussed right before Christ’s return in Chapter Nineteen.

Read Revelation 19:7-9.

THE RETURN OF CHRIST

In some respects it just might be worth being a relatively new Christian during the Tribulation, suffering the many plagues, persecution, and the very real potential of martyrdom—just to be there to see the Savior suddenly appear to deal out justice against those trying to kill you. The words of the old hymn by Mabel Johnston Camp seem to capture it well:

Lift up your heads, pilgrims aweary,
See day’s approach now crimson the sky;
Night shadows flee, and your Beloved,
Awaited with longing, at last draweth nigh.

Dark was the night, sin warred against us;
Heavy the load of sorrow we bore;
But now we see signs of His coming;
Our hearts glow within us, joy’s cup runneth o’er!

O blessed hope! O blissful promise!
Filling our hearts with rapture divine;
O day of days! Hail Thy appearing!
Thy transcendent glory forever shall shine!

I do not think that mere words can capture the drama, the overwhelming glory and power of His appearing. The best we have is Scripture itself, and we will be looking at a number of passages to get a full picture of this event. [Turn please to Isaiah 30](#). There are many references in God’s word to Christ’s return; I have selected a few that capture the multi-dimensional aspects of His second coming. I’ll begin with a couple of verses in Isaiah 64 that plead for the Lord to come down and show Himself—to reveal His power against the nations.

Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down,
That the mountains might quake at Your presence—
As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil—
To make Your name known to Your adversaries,
That the nations may tremble at Your presence! (Isaiah 64:1-2)

An earlier prophecy by Isaiah captures the vivid, frightening depth to Christ’s wrath at His coming. He will no longer be the submissive “Lamb slain.”

Read Isaiah 30:27-33.

But Isaiah also included the more tender aspects of the Lord's coming.

Read Isaiah 40:9-11.

Now turn to 2 Thessalonians, where we see both sides described.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.

So in these passages (and, of course, more) we see the duality of this event. Christ is returning in fierce wrath to deal out justice and punishment for all who have rejected Him at the same time that He comes as the answer to many prayers and pleadings for Him to rescue His followers. Finally Jesus Himself describes for us the sudden abruptness of His return, and that He will be, at once, seen by all.

Read Matthew 24:27-31.

In the Rapture Christ Jesus will remain "in the air," "in the clouds";² for the second coming His feet will touch down and He will remain. He will be universally seen by all at the same time, yet along with that will be a special appearance outside Jerusalem, at the Mount of Olives.

In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. (Zechariah 14:4)

We are now ready for John's revelation of this event. [Please return to Chapter Nineteen](#). John sees the Messiah in a more fantastical entrance, that, perhaps, will not be seen by those on earth at the time. But Scripture is clear: every last soul on earth will see His appearing, and they will know who He is. Don't waste your time trying to figure out how this feat is accomplished. He is God; He can do it.

Now is the point at which the armies of the nations turn from fighting each other and join to do battle with Christ. How long this will take, how it is accomplished we are not told. Since Christ appears everywhere at once, there need not be a mass movement of forces. Let's read what John saw.

Read Revelation 19:11-16.

When we add together various Scripture passages, we know that it is more than just angels accompanying the Lord. Coming with Him from heaven are

- the church, the bride of the Lamb (19:8);

²1 Thessalonians 4:17

‡This according to MacArthur, yet 20:4 indicates that these are not resurrected until after Satan is bound.

- the OT saints, resurrected at the end of the Tribulation (Daniel 12:1-2);
- perhaps the Tribulation martyrs (7:9);‡
- and, of course, the “holy angels” from heaven (Matthew 25:31).

All these accompanying the Lord will appear to those on the ground as an unbeatable army numbering millions upon millions, but they are not there to fight; not one of them will be armed. They are not coming to fight, but to reign with Christ during the Millennium.

Christ with His vast company appears, and the following things occur, we assume in close order:

- The armies are arrayed to fight Christ;
- An angel poised between earth and the sun declares in a loud voice, ...saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, “Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.” (Revelation 19:17–18)[§]
- Then the two generals in charge of this vast army are summarily removed:
And the beast was seized, 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; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. (Revelation 19:20)

[§]Note that apparently the darkness of the fifth bowl [16:10] has now been at least temporarily lifted, for this angel is seen hovering between earth and the sun.

Don’t miss that: These two alone will not be killed by the word from the Lord so that they will still be alive when Jesus casts them into the lake of fire. This is Jesus behaving in a manner different from the gospels—Jesus who said, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”.³ That dispensation is at an end; now comes the dispensation of vengeance and wrath. No mercy will be shown to the wicked. The two in charge of all the evil of the previous seven years will be thrown—alive—into the lake of fire.

- After this Christ Jesus speaks, and every combatant remaining drops dead.
And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Revelation 19:21)

We are told the *instrument* of these deaths (Christ’s “sword”) but not the *manner* of these deaths, but there are too many references to copious amounts of blood⁴ to assume that they just silently drop dead, as if being effortlessly rendered unconscious.

³Matthew 5:44

⁴e.g., Revelation 14:20

- Then the birds and beasts of the field begin feasting on the flesh of the millions of dead soldiers; this moment fulfills the vision of the reaping of the earth in Chapter Fourteen:

So 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. 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. (Revelation 14:19-20)

I appreciate what John Walvoord has to say about all this vengeance and bloodshed.

Walvoord: All of these passages point to the sad conclusion that in the day of judgment it is too late for men to expect the mercy of God.

There is nothing more inflexible than divine judgment where grace has been spurned. *The scene of awful judgment which comes from this background is in flat contradiction of the modern point of view that God is dominated entirely by His attribute of love.* (emphasis added)

Joseph Seiss, as is his way, offers a more florid, but eloquent description of this epochal moment.

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 dishonored dregs.

And what is thus foreintimated 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.

SATAN IMPRISONED

In our next session we will be looking at the Millennium, but right now we close the Tribulation—and everyone said, “Amen!”—with the fitting imprisonment of the one who orchestrated all its evil.

In a passage in the prophecy of Ezekiel, where he foretells the final, post-Millennial battle and its conclusion, we discover a clue to understand why, beyond all earthly logic, Christ Jesus would *imprison* Satan, rather than throw him into the lake of fire right now, along with his servants, the two beasts.

Read Ezekiel 39:20-22.

We may not understand all the whys and wherefores of our sovereign God, but somehow He will receive glory by permitting Satan to live for another opportunity to plan his own vengeance against the Lord. His attempt will fail, of course, and he will then find himself swimming in the lake of fire along with his buddies, the two beasts. Now lets read what I see as the last three verses of the Tribulation: as it closes we literally close and lock the lid over Satan.

Read Revelation 20:1-3.

Wouldn't you like to be there—and perhaps we *will* be privileged to witness it—when this angel grabs Satan himself, that evil dragon, by the scruff of the neck and throws him into the abyss. This is the temporary, subterranean prison for demons, and it will be his home for the next one thousand years. His incarceration, as described, is “so that he would not deceive the nations any longer.”

Many like to describe the next thousand years as paradise on earth, a return to Eden—and, in some respects, with Christ holding absolute rule during this period, that can be true. Frankly, however, my response to that is always to point out vv7-8 in this chapter, what occurs immediately *after* the Millennium.

Read Revelation 20:7-8.

The question that these verses always raise for me is, *If the previous thousand years have been a paradise on earth under the rule of Christ Jesus, where did Satan so quickly find those—numbering “like the sand of the seashore”—willing to join him in one last attempt at insurrection against God?*

Next week we will dig deeper into the Millennium, but for now I suggest we think of it this way: The Millennium will indeed, in many respects, be a return to the paradise of Eden. And, just like in Eden, where sin and rebellion against God lay dormant but eventually found its way into action, sin and rebellion will gather and grow beneath the surface like a cancerous growth that begins small, but ultimately threatens the whole body.

Initially the Millennium will be peopled by the regenerate who survive the Tribulation. And wherever there is natural flesh, there will be a proclivity toward sin. This rebellion will begin small, but steadily grow, springing from their many descendants, so that when he is released from the abyss, Satan will have a ready and willing army to join him in his last gasp of insurrection before he does indeed join his compatriots in the eternal lake of fire.

SESSION 49: ASPECTS OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM REIGN

Charts: Chart #21: Christ's Kingdom: Beginnings

PREFACE

John's account of the Millennium is a drastically abridged version. As I have said before, in John's Revelation the *seven-year* Tribulation takes up fifteen chapters, while the *thousand-year* Millennium takes up four or five *verses*. We learn precious little about the thousand-year rule of Christ on earth from the Revelation; happily, however, there is much we can learn from other portions of God's word—and especially from the OT prophets.

Walvoord: Though Revelation as a whole is not strictly in chronological order, as some chapters are parenthetical or summary in character, chapters 19 and 20 constitute a unit and form one continued prophetic strain.*

*While that is true, the “prophetic strain” of Chapter Twenty leaves out a lot of details—details we discover elsewhere. My goal in this session is to present the material in a chronological sequence—as best we can, from both OT and NT. This period in the Eschaton—the opening days of the Millennium—is best chronicled elsewhere in God's word. (Most, but not all, references are also listed on Chart #21.)

THE DAVIDIC KINGDOM

One can easily spiritualize Christ's kingdom to represent the church during this current dispensation—and there is something to be said for that. But we must wait for His return, and the subsequent Millennium to see the literal, ultimate fulfillment of that prophecy. If you ever begin to question the cohesive, narrative integrity of the Bible, here is a tip: The end-times Millennium is foreshadowed all the way back in the first book of God's word.

“The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes [or, until he comes to whom it belongs],
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”
(Genesis 49:10)

To paraphrase those last two lines, *The Seed will one day show up, and he will rule over all the peoples of earth*. When King David vowed to build a “house” for Yahweh, the Lord pulled him aside and said, no, but I'll build a “house” for you. In a prophecy that co-mingles David's son, Solomon, with David's son, Jesus—along with a description of a time of peace for Israel—he was told that this “house” would be “established forever.”

“I will also appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may live in their own place and not be disturbed again, nor will the wicked afflict them any more as formerly, even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. The LORD also declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers,

I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom." (2 Samuel 7:10-12)

Then, after a couple of verses specific to Solomon, the prophecy returns to Christ.

"Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:16)

Perhaps the most full-throated prophecy of the Millennial Kingdom is found in the astonishing second Psalm.

"But as for Me, I have installed My King
Upon Zion, My holy mountain.
I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:
He said to Me, 'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your
inheritance,
And the very ends of the earth as Your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron,
You shall shatter them like earthenware."
Now therefore, O kings, show discernment;
Take warning, O judges of the earth.
Worship the LORD with reverence
And rejoice with trembling.
Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you
perish in the way,
For His wrath may soon be kindled.
How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Psalm 2:6-12)

Like the passage in 2 Samuel, many if not most of the prophecies about the kingdom mention the return of the Jews to Israel at the beginning of the Millennium.

"Then I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and bring them back to their pasture, and they will be fruitful and multiply. I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the LORD.
"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD,
"When I will raise up for David a righteous Branch;
And He will reign as king and act wisely
And do justice and righteousness in the land.
In His days Judah will be saved,
And Israel will dwell securely;

And this is His name by which He will be called,
‘The LORD our righteousness.’” (Jeremiah 23:3-6)

Finally, let’s recall the words the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary.

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High;
and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;
and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His
kingdom will have no end.” (Luke 1:32–33)

By the way, some are of the opinion that this will literally be *David’s* eternal kingdom, when a resurrected David returns to his throne. Well, David will indeed be resurrected, along with the rest of the OT saints. And we know that the reign of Christ will indeed be shared with others—including you and me. And it does not fracture Scripture to imagine that the resurrected David may be something of a “prince” in the kingdom. But replacing Christ on the throne? No, as William R. Newell has written, “David is not the son of David. Christ, as Son of David, will be King; and David, His father after the flesh, will be¹ prince, during the Millennium.” John Walvoord adds, “In the light of many prophecies which promise saints the privilege of reigning with Christ, it would seem most logical that David the king raised from the dead should be given a place of prominence in the Davidic kingdom of the millennial reign of Christ. As indicated in Revelation 19:16, Christ is ‘King of kings and Lord of lords.’ This would certainly imply other rulers.”

THINNING THE FLOCK

The Millennium, at the start, will be peopled only by the righteous in Christ. Even though there will be millions of the unrighteous just killed at Armageddon, many still remain upon the earth. And these will need to be weeded out; the flock called humanity must be thinned; the unrighteous must be removed.

To that end, all people from all nations will be brought before Christ the Lord; a preponderance of the eschatological prophecies speak of Israel as a nation returning to its own land, and they will be first.

“As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,” declares the Lord GOD. “I will make you pass under

¹I would say, *may* be

the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I will purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD." (Ezekiel 20:33-38)

Though the remnant of Israel will pass through this time of judgment like everyone else, the apostle Paul warns Gentile Christians not to think they are the new "chosen people."

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "THE DELIVERER WILL COME FROM ZION, HE WILL REMOVE UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB. THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. (Romans 11:25-29)

The ungodliness within Israel must be "removed," but God wants us to know that they remain His Chosen People. Finally, Jesus spoke of both groups, Jews and Gentiles, when He spoke of this judgment. First the sheep:

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...'" (Matthew 25:31-34)

Then the goats:

"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels...'" "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:41, 46)

How long this judgment will take—a few seconds, a few years—no one can say; God's word is silent on that. Before we proceed into the next thousand years, let's consider some of the qualities of this kingdom of Christ on earth.

- First, it will include the entire earth—world wide. And there is a delicious

irony to this situation: For the last seven years the world was apparently “ruled” by someone exalting himself as “god”—Antichrist. But we have seen evidence that that was not literally true; many, even those in his own neighborhood, rebelled against his “kingship.” Now, however, the *true* Christ has arrived, and He will indeed be King over the entire earth.

- Second, Christ Jesus will hold and exert absolute authority and power; He will judge fairly, but destroy any and all that oppose Him:

But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth;
And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. (Isaiah 11:4)

- Third, as Isaiah voices in that passage, Christ’s rule will be marked by righteousness and justice. Just as there has never been a God like the true God, there has never been a king like the true King Jesus: no subterfuge, no conniving, no unjust laws, no kingly paranoia, no duplicity.

THE RESURRECTED POPULACE

After this judgment, conducted personally by Messiah, there will remain on earth only those righteous in Christ: Gentile believers and Messianic Jews. But who else is on earth at this time? We begin with those who just arrived with the Messiah, as we saw in our previous session:

- the church, the bride of the Lamb (19:8);
- the OT saints, resurrected at the end of the Tribulation (Daniel 12:1-2);
- and, of course, the “holy angels” from heaven (Matthew 25:31), but it’s hard to say whether these remain, or return to heaven to serve Father God.²

We can now add to these the just-resurrected martyrs from the Tribulation.

Read Revelation 20:4.

At this moment in time only the righteous populate the earth:

- those once in human flesh, but now in resurrected, glorified bodies;
- and living humans (still in flesh) followers of Christ who survived the Tribulation.

John MacArthur says that all these—including the still-living Tribulation survivors—will reign with Christ, but I question this. I think the next two verses in Chapter Twenty seem to eliminate them as co-rulers—indeed, it would seem that the still-living righteous will be those who are being *ruled over*, not the ones doing the ruling.

Read Revelation 20:5-6.

² cf. 1 Corinthians 6:3

It is the *martyred* saints from the Tribulation, those who gave their mortal lives for the testimony of Christ, who will reign with Him—not those still living. So I conclude that only those inhabiting glorified, post-resurrection bodies will be the ones who “reign with Him.”†

CHRIST'S ABSOLUTE RULE

Let's expand on this for a moment. One thing we learn from this study is that more than a few of our favorite Christmas passages of Scripture have more to do with Christ's *second* coming than His first. For example,

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Right there, after that first line, is where Christmas ends and the Eschaton begins.

And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,

Peace? Only in the Millennium and after—certainly not in *our* world, nor even in the time He was born.

On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

The government, the rule, of the Millennium will be on Christ's shoulders alone. Believers will be His representatives around the globe, but He will be calling all the shots.

The seat of Messiah's “government” will be in Jerusalem.

Now it will come about that
In the last days
The mountain of the house of the LORD
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,
And will be raised above the hills; (remember how the earth
will be reshaped...)
And all the nations will stream to it.
And many peoples will come and say,
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
That He may teach us concerning His ways
And that we may walk in His paths.”
For the law will go forth from Zion
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

† The number of resurrections, with their titles, can be confusing. It would seem there are more than one “first” resurrections. Christ, in His resurrection, is called the “first fruits” (1 Corinthians 15:23), and that is followed by the resurrection of the church at the Rapture. Yet here, in Revelation 20, the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs is called the “first resurrection.” One explanation for this could be that “first resurrection,” as implied in v6, refers to the bodily resurrection of all believers, no matter when, with the “second resurrection” being of the unrighteous dead (vv5, 12).

And He will judge between the nations,
And will render decisions for many peoples;
And they will hammer their swords into plowshares their
spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation,
And never again will they learn war. (Isaiah 2:2-4)

The prophet Zechariah says it flat-out: “And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one”.³ Kenneth Barker writes, “There will be no more idolatry, polytheism, or even henotheism,[†] but only high, ethical monotheism.” At last the apostles’ prayer will be answered and fulfilled:

[†] Henotheism is the belief in the supremacy of one god without denying the existence of others.

Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.

CO-RULERS

Here is another curious aspect of God’s economy: Christ, being God, is certainly capable of managing the affairs of this earth on His own. So why does He enlist the help of those who “reign with Him” (Revelation 20:6)? We can certainly *imagine* some answers to this; for example, could this be part of the rewards system? our “crowns”? We wear them for the duration, a thousand years, then give them back to Him as an act of devotion and praise at the beginning of the eternal state? That’s a pleasant thought, but let’s deal with what we know, beginning, again, with the Jews. Daniel 7, in v26, says that “the court will sit for judgment, and [the beast’s] dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.”

Verse 27 speaks of those that will take over in his place: “Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.” Gentile Christians will be granted the same honor; way back when the Lamb broke open the seals of the scroll, those around the throne sang,

“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10)

The apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians that they were certainly qualified to adjudicate disputes within the church, for “do you not know that the

³ Zechariah 14:9

saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?"⁴

THE IRON ROD

In our last session, discussing Christ's immediate and brutal consignment of the two beasts to the lake of fire, I said that

the dispensation of "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44) is at an end; now comes the dispensation of vengeance and wrath. No mercy will be shown to the wicked.

Whether it may be deemed another dispensation or not, once the wicked are removed from the earth and the Millennium begins, we might say that the time of vengeance and wrath is over, but now will be the time of immediate and—in comparison to the Jesus of the gospels—harsh justice. Time and again in God's word we hear the phrase, as we did in Psalm 2, "a rod of iron." This represents the manner in which Christ will rule during the Millennium; it is worth repeating Isaiah 11:4.

But with righteousness He will judge the poor,
And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth;
And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.

Even so, I believe we can assume that the details of salvation in Christ included in the NT, during the dispensation of grace, will hold true during the Millennium. That is, that true followers of Christ in earthly flesh will persevere until the end, and that Christ will not instantly reject them for every fleshly sin in their lives. So when God's word describes His rule as "slay[ing] the wicked," and "purg[ing] from you...those who transgress against Me," it presumably refers to those who have *rejected* His salvation.

IN CONCLUSION

Because the apostle John was not granted visions of the Millennium, as he was for the Tribulation, we have had to glean information from, mostly, the OT prophets. But even what they tell us has more to do with the *establishing* of the Millennium, than its progress through the thousand years. Thus we must include in our analysis some educated assumptions.

- The Lord's Davidic Kingdom on earth will open with judgments intended to remove all who are in rebellion against the Messiah. This means that in its earliest days the Millennium's general populace consists of followers of Christ alone—all still in earthly (non-glorified) flesh.
- They will be ruled over by Christ Jesus, enthroned in Jerusalem, and resurrected saints from the OT and church age, as well as the recently resurrected, martyred saints from the Tribulation—all in glorified bodies.

⁴1 Corinthians 6:2

- For the next thousand years, Satan will remain chained and powerless in the abyss.
- Along with the earth being repopulated over the next thousand years, much of it will assuredly be rebuilt after the destruction of the Tribulation with its series of “plagues.” We might also allow for Messiah to work some “miracles” to clean up some of the damage, rendering the earth more livable. He could, for example, with a word of command cleanse the oceans and fresh water of the life-killing blood from the bowls of wrath.
- Over the next thousand years, the initial believing generation will have children and grandchildren, continuing for many generations. Though this will indeed be a spiritually rich period, not all of these descendants will be believers, so that by the end of the Millennium Satan will have no problem forming a new army from the repopulated earth with which to war against Christ (Revelation 20:7-10).
- When God’s word speaks of an expanding kingdom of peace, it does not speak of the church age, *before* Christ’s return, but the Millennium, *after* His return.
- Even so, during this time of peace, with Messiah on His earthly throne, human flesh, as well as the earth itself will still be fallen, with inherent sin. It will still be necessary, after the thousand years, for the Godhead to create a new earth, new heavens, and supply them with a new earthly throne for not just the Son, but the Father as well.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them... (Revelation 21:1-3)

SESSION 50: THE END OF ALL THINGS EVIL

PREFACE

It is intriguing to me that as we approach the end of this study, I discover that the most troublesome texts—those that have been the bane of my responsibilities as a teacher—are to be found *not*, as anticipated, in The Revelation, but in the prophecies of Ezekiel, a servant of God who was granted truly *disturbed* visions.

In the handout that is part of this session you will find the first of two changes of position. First, whereas I originally subscribed to the predominate dispensational position that the fulfillment of Ezekiel's temple¹ will be in the Millennium, I have recently seen the error of my ways, and have now embraced a minority position that the temple as described has not and *will not* be built. The argument for that is found in the handout.

Second, back in Session 44 I outlined my reasons for placing the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38-39 (Gog and Magog) in Revelation 20:7-10, after Satan is released from the abyss. I have not done a *reversal* on this, but, instead, a *softening* of that position. There are indeed similarities between the two passages, as well as discrepancies. Ralph H. Alexander (*Ezekiel*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary) holds to this position with a solid, hermeneutical argument for its placement *after* the Millennium, while MacArthur and Walvoord offer less-detailed arguments for placing it *before* the Millennium, associating it with the Armageddon narrative. I still *favor* its placement at the end of the Millennium, but have a little more respect today for the arguments against it.

FINAL "BATTLE"

We closed the previous session by reading the first three verses of Chapter Twenty-one, a description of the beginning of the Eternal State in a new Jerusalem on a new earth, inaugurating an endless time of holiness and purity. Even though the Millennium has been under the rule of Christ Jesus, those thousand years in the Eschaton have *not* resulted in a time of purity and holiness. As I said at the end of our last session,

During this time of peace, with Messiah on His earthly throne, human flesh, as well as the earth itself will still be fallen, with inherent sin. It will still be necessary, after the thousand years, for the Godhead to create a new earth, new heavens, and supply them with a new earthly throne for not just the Son, but the Father as well.

When one steps back for a moment and looks at the broad view, one realizes that the whole of the Eschaton—from the Rapture, through the Tribulation and Millennium, and the Great White Throne judgment, to the consignment of even death itself to the lake of fire—all of this has been the Lord God's systematic eradication of the wicked on earth and even evil. In God's economy death itself is evil, for it was not part of His original Creation until sin elbowed

¹ Chapters 40-48

its way into Eden through the villainy of Satan. Thus death, too, as if personified, must go into the place of eternal suffering. At the same time the Lord God is using these judgments, these weapons and earthly upheavals, to demonstrate His Lordship and profound glory.

All this climaxes (but does not end) with the destruction from heaven of Satan's final army, and his being consigned to the lake of fire. The apostle Paul foretold this, as well as the Great White Throne judgment in 1 Corinthians 15:24-26.

...then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

But now let's get back to our timeline. The Millennium is drawing to a close, and as it does, things will begin happening at an accelerated pace. By the way, some have conjectured that those living and born during the Millennium will not die until the final judgment—if then. The Bible does not say that, however, only that natural life will be *extended*.

“No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,
Or an old man who does not live out his days;
For the youth will die at the age of one hundred
And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred
Will be thought accursed.” (Isaiah 65:20)

Many are surprised that after one thousand years with Christ Jesus in charge on earth, Satan will be able to form a huge army against Him.

William Hoste: The golden age of the kingdom will last a thousand years, during which righteousness will reign, and peace, prosperity, and the knowledge of God be universally enjoyed. But this will not entail universal conversion, and all profession must be tested... Will not a thousand years under the beneficent sway of Christ and the manifested glory of God suffice to render men immune to his [Satan's] temptations, will they not have radically changed for the better, and become by the altered conditions of life and the absence of Satanic temptations, children of God and lovers of His will? Alas! It will be proved once more that man whatever his advantages and environment, apart from the grace of God and the new birth, remains at heart only evil and at enmity with God.

Read Revelation 20:7-10.

It is fair to ask the question, Why does God release Satan? God Himself, through the prophet Ezekiel, gives us the answer in Ezekiel 38:14–16.

“Therefore prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “On that day when My people Israel are living securely, will you not know it? You will come from your place out of the remote parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great assembly and a mighty army; and you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. It shall come about in the last days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me when I am sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.””

In these final days, the Lord God has two priorities: to punish and eradicate evil, and to make clear to those who survive that He alone is calling all the shots so as to glorify Himself. And if there is anyone in this army who has not read Revelation 20, and so is confused by the Lord’s statement, he will be painfully surprised once the army has surrounded Jerusalem.

We are not told how long it will take Satan to gather his army, but we *are* told *how* he accomplishes it: “[he] will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war.” To the end Satan remains a gifted liar, and here, in one of his final acts, he puts that skill to good use.

The account is coldly matter-of-fact: the vast army surrounds Israel and “... fire came down from heaven and devoured them.” Just like that. Everyone in that army, but one, is killed by fire from heaven. The sole survivor, spared from the consuming flames, will be Satan—whom, I am sure, has indeed read Revelation 20. Those destroyed will have to be raised from the dead so as to stand trial before the throne. For their commander Satan no trial is necessary; he will be perp-walked right into the lake of fire. And in the narrative there he dwells, being tormented for eternity, so let us not give the enemy of everything dear to us any more of our time.

In the battle of Armageddon God permits Antichrist to harm His chosen people before coming to their rescue in the person of the Messiah. This time He permits none of that, but consumes the enveloping army before it can fire its first shot.

Read Revelation 20:11-15.

FINAL JUDGMENT

In the final-days narrative, this is a fascinating moment—not just from what we are told, but from what we are *not* told. One of the things we are not told is what happens to the still-living regenerate—and unregenerate—coming out of the Millennium.

As mentioned in our previous session, the Millennium begins with only believers populating the earth. Yet they remain in fallen flesh. As the genera-

tions of their descendants proceed, many of them will *not* be believers, which offers a rich source of rebels to join Satan in his final battle against Christ. We can probably assume safely that the living *unregenerate* will be judged before the great white throne—although they are not mentioned. At some point their bodies must be translated into bodies that will not be consumed in the eternal fire of hell. Likewise, the remaining believers in flesh must be translated into eternal, glorified bodies, much as “Enoch,² Elijah,³ and the raptured church” (MacArthur).

Nonetheless, we are not told. But the real focus of this moment is on the throne itself, the One sitting on it, and its setting. Again, we are not told precisely who is doing the judging (the NASB and NKJV at least put the “Him” in v11 in uppercase). We can readily agree with most commentators that this is God in the person of the glorified Christ Jesus, this based on such passages as John 5:21-22—

“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son...”

—and Acts 10:42, where Peter declares that Jesus is,

“...the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.”

Think of *this* moment as a logical outflow of the last thousand years. Picture it; appreciate the flow of the scenes and events: For the last one thousand years Christ Jesus has been physically ruling from a throne established in Jerusalem. He has reigned as absolute sovereign over all the nations of the world. He releases Satan from the abyss, and some time thereafter Israel, and specifically Jerusalem, is surrounded by an immense army numbering in the millions. In Luke 9 brothers James and John had volunteered to “command fire to come down from heaven and consume” the inhospitable Samaritans. Jesus rebuked them, pointing out that He had “not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them”.⁴ But, as I have said repeatedly, this is a different dispensation; this is a Messiah with a different agenda.

How does Jesus deal with this army? Does He speak a word, as He had a thousand years earlier? No, He calls down fire from heaven to consume them. And this holocaust just may be the preliminary stroke against the old earth, for almost immediately John sees Christ on his glowing, pure-white throne sitting not in Jerusalem, but somewhere in space disengaged from all temporal or heavenly foundations: a throne and a king “from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.”

² Genesis 5:24

³ 2 Kings 2:11

⁴ Luke 9:51-56

Paul in Colossians tells us that Christ Jesus was that part of God who created the universe:

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. (Colossians 1:16)

Now He is the one who has just destroyed it. J. A. Seiss argues against total destruction of the old earth (favoring a “renewal”), since Christ made it originally perfect (“good”). But this passes too lightly over the depths to which this perfect world has been corrupted by sin and depravity—to such an extent that this physical earth literally groans because of what has become of it.⁵

What we have before us in v11 is the precise moment after the universe has been destroyed—but before the new earth and new heaven* have been created. Around the throne of Christ there is nothing—*nothing*. All has “fled away.”

In this moment there is Christ upon His throne, surrounded by millions of resurrected dead—and absolutely nothing else. We have the apostle Peter’s startling description of this destruction in 2 Peter 3.

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. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which 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. (2 Peter 3:10–13)

Doesn’t sound like a “renewal” or cleansing does it. I especially like how John MacArthur describes this.

MacArthur: After describing the vision of the Judge on His throne, John noted the startling reality that from His presence earth and heaven fled away. That amazing, incredible statement describes the “uncreation” of the universe. The earth will have been reshaped by the devastating judgments of the Tribulation and [somewhat] 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).

* Remember that the word translated “heaven” (ouranos) can refer to the immediate sky overhead (in which the birds fly), space, or the place where God dwells.

⁵ Romans 8:20-23

[MacArthur continues,] 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). [Donald Grey] 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).

And now the focus in this drama is the great white throne of judgment, from which Christ will dispense His final verdict on wickedness and sin. There will be no altar call, no last-chance invitation to repent. Many interpret various Scripture passages—such as the one before us—to suggest that there will be graduated *measures* of judgment—that though all will be sent to the lake of fire, once there some will experience less torment than others. The next verse seems to bear this out.

v12: And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

The Godhead keeps meticulous records on what humanity does on earth. And these volumes are opened to inform the verdicts to be handed down. Since almost all scholars interpret this final judgment as being for the wicked alone, this verse indicates two “gates” through which each must pass. The first “gate” is found in v15:

And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

If one’s name is not recorded in the book of life—the book in which all the names of the regenerate are found—then consignment to the lake of fire is declared—i.e., the second death (v6). The second “gate,” however, is more detailed and nuanced. The books (or scrolls) are consulted as to the works of each person: “...and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.” One might rightly ask, Why bother with this if all are punished the same? So there may indeed be *graduations* of torment in hell. Verse 13 tells us from whence all these individuals came.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

This is the second resurrection, the “resurrection of judgment”.⁶ They are those who died without faith (OT), without Christ (NT) from all generations since Eden. They come from those who died (or were buried) at sea, and those who were buried in the earth (“death”), as well as those in Hades,† the temporary abode of the wicked dead. All these will be judged and delivered to hell—the lake of fire—which is the “second death.”

† The KJV “hell” is a poor translation, and should be “Hades.”

We cannot say for certain what the lake of fire will literally be like, for it exists, like God’s dwelling place, on a separate plane outside the laws of this universe. Hades (or Sheol), like the abyss, is indeed subterranean, inside the earth, but at this point that earth will have ceased to exist. But hell continues forever, as a place of unbearable heat, darkness, isolation, estrangement, and of unending sorrow. Verse 15 gives us the bottom line:

And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

We, today, still live in the church age, a dispensation in which Satan is very much alive and active here on earth. He is a very good liar, and does his best every day to delude this world into believing his lies. The mark of his expertise as a liar is his remarkable level of success—indeed so successful that most of society (sadly, even many who call themselves Christians) actually *wants* to believe Satan’s lies instead of the simple, clear truth of Scripture.

Some believe, for example, that hell is just annihilation; when one dies, after a brief period of punishment one just ceases to exist, passing into nothingness. God’s word clearly speaks against this. When Satan is cast into hell, the beast and the false prophet will have been sent there one thousand years earlier. Yet,

the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are* also; and *they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.* (v10; emphasis added)

Even the way-station, Hades, is a miserable, place of flames and intolerable heat, as we read in Jesus’ story of Lazarus and the rich man.

“In Hades [the rich man] lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’” (Luke 16:23–24)

⁶ John 5:29

Even so, our culture today is so infected by the rot of unbelief that, as Wayne Grudem writes, “Among liberal theologians who do not accept the absolute truthfulness of the Bible, there is probably no one today who believes in the doctrine of eternal conscious punishment.” Grudem also offers the text of a hymn, in which the following is the third stanza, by William B. Collyer:

*But sinners, filled with guilty fears, behold His wrath prevailing;
For they shall rise, and find their tears and sighs are unavailing:
The day of grace is past and gone; trembling they stand before the throne,
All unprepared to meet Him.*

The bottom line is this: If prior to your first death or this second resurrection you are not found in the book of life, you go to the lake of fire—the second death. You, literally, go to hell, where you will live, in torment, for all of eternity.

And any time we, as Christ’s witnesses on earth dilute or soften this truth when speaking to the unregenerate, we are serving the will not of our Lord and Savior, but Satan.

SESSION 51: THE ETERNAL STATE, PART ONE

PREFACE

Now after our hard slog through the seven-year Tribulation, the improved but decidedly not sinless Millennium, and the unpleasant but satisfying final judgment of the Great White Throne, we now come to the last two chapters of the Revelation, and certainly the most pleasant, joyful portion of the Last Things narrative.

Read Revelation 21:1-5.

SOMETHING NEW FROM NOTHING

Verses 1-5 serve as a preamble of sorts, a summary of what is to follow, about the new heaven and new earth. One of the best arguments to refute the position that this “new” earth will be just the old one cleaned up,¹ is found in Isaiah 65.

Read Isaiah 65:17-19.

The Hebrew word translated “create” is *bara* (lit., *br*), which always refers to divine creativity, and means something from nothing—*not* something from something else. As we saw in our previous session, everything that was before—*everything*—has now passed away. There is nothing from which to build something else. And that is precisely what God in the person of Christ Jesus does.*

(v1)...and there is no longer any sea.

This phrase, with its enigmatic placement, can be interpreted two different ways—neither of which cancel out the other. First, it can be taken literally: In the new world order there will be no need for the oceans. We may go about our daily lives today without giving this much thought, but life on earth now is decidedly water-based. Nearly three-fourths of this current earth is covered by water, vast seas that generate and influence the earth’s weather. Present human bodies are more water than anything else: our flesh is sixty-five percent water, and our blood is ninety percent water. Without water we die. Without water this earth would die. If we take this phrase literally—and there is no reason not to—the new earth will have a totally different hydrological and ecological system than the old (MacArthur).

Second, and I believe more important, is the metaphorical interpretation. Often gleaned only from the subtext of certain passages of Scripture is the idea of the sea representing evil, danger, and separation. We have seen it here in Revelation as the metaphorical birthplace of the beast, Antichrist,² and one of the places from which the dead come.³

¹ e.g., Seiss

² Revelation 13:1ff

³ Revelation 20:13

*There are two predominate themes throughout the Eschaton: Israel and Christ. It is not that the church is not there, but it, along with its individual members, is not the lead, but supporting character. The final days are all about reestablishing the relationship between God and His chosen people—first through punishment and cleansing, then through exaltation.

The second theme is Christ. What are the important mile-markers, the dramatic high points in the narrative? They all are centered on Christ Jesus:

- It begins with the Rapture, Christ coming for His church.
- The Tribulation comes to an abrupt end with the return of Christ to earth.
- He then rules for one thousand years.
- Immediately after that, Christ Jesus judges the wicked. And now we see Him as the One creating the new heaven and new earth, and the creation (or orchestrating the arrival) of the new Jerusalem.

But the wicked are like the tossing sea,
For it cannot be quiet,
And its waters toss up refuse and mud. (Isaiah 57:20)

It's not that the sea is portrayed as evil, but to the ancient Hebrews especially it represented the perils of the unknown, something in the depths of which one might be forever lost.

Thus with both of these we see that the new earth will be created with very different ecological laws, and that on it there will be no evil, no sin. That is, we cannot describe it further, because in both respects we are talking about something utterly foreign to our experience. We have no concept of living without water or weather, and we have no concept of living without sin—either in ourselves or in those around us.

v2

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

Opinions vary, of course, but there is much evidence to substantiate the position (held by Walvoord and MacArthur), that the “new Jerusalem” has not just been created along with the new earth and heavens, but has previously been in heaven, and now descends “out of heaven from God.” [Please turn to Hebrews 11.](#)

The writer to the Hebrews tells us that Abraham went out in obedience, looking for something that did not exist on earth at the time. Verse 10 tells us that “he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” In the next chapter he writes with greater specificity, in vv22-23,

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect

MacArthur goes so far as to say that “All of heaven is currently contained in the new Jerusalem,” but then a few paragraphs later states that “the new Jerusalem is not heaven, but heaven’s capital.” Giving Pastor MacArthur the benefit of the doubt, I think what he means by that first statement is that “all the *inhabitants* of heaven” are in the new Jerusalem. It does seem quite feasible that this “heavenly Jerusalem” descending from heaven to the new earth has indeed been the dwelling place for all those believers who have preceded us in death.

If this is true, it sheds fresh light on something Jesus told His disciples in John 14:

“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:2–3)

Heaven’s Jerusalem is the Father’s “house,” and in it are “many dwelling places” for those who are His. Every believer goes to heaven with a rental agreement in hand; passing through the Pearly Gates we hand it to the doorman and say, “Jesus made my reservation for me.”†

Later in this chapter we will have a more detailed description of this new Jerusalem.

vv3-5

If Jesus’ pronouncement in vv3-4 does not stir your soul, then I recommend you check for your pulse. Here is without a doubt one of the grandest, most exhilarating statements any believer will ever hear.

Read Revelation 21:3-4.

Literally, v3 reads, “the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them”—the same word used as a noun and a verb. Here again is dual imagery: The tabernacle was the forerunner of the temple—the place where God was worshiped; but the word also means a tent, a dwelling place—here, the place where God lives. This is one of the most profound statements I can imagine: The Lord God of the universe, the first member of the Triunity of the Godhead, when this world and this universe reaches its final, eternal state, will deign to live with His people—“God Himself will be among them.” To me, that is breathtaking. What was true for thirty-three years in Immanuel, will now be true for eternity.

As if that were not enough, this new earth and new Jerusalem will be absent five miserable experiences that have been a part of humanity since Eve plucked the first fruit from the tree: no more tears, no more death, no mourning, no crying, no pain. All those things with which we have become accustomed will “have passed away.” Gone; never to return. Jesus declares, “I am making all things new.”

David Guzik: Our instinct is to romantically consider innocence as man’s perfect state, and wish Adam would have never done what he did. But we fail to realize that redeemed man is greater than innocent man; that we gain more in Jesus than we ever lost in Adam. God’s perfect state is one of redemption, not innocence.

Because John is so enthralled by all this (as I am sure any of us would be), it is necessary for Christ Jesus, sitting on the throne, to grab his attention, “Hey! John! *Write*, for these words are faithful and true.”

† For Americans, the KJV “mansions” is misleading. To us a mansion is a huge, expensive house for one family with many bedrooms and bathrooms. The British understand it to mean an apartment house, with many “dwelling places” within for different families—which is how the Greek *monai* is used here. Jesus is not preparing a huge manor house for every believer, but an “apartment” in the city of Jerusalem.

The next few verses, spoken by Christ, identifying Himself as He did at the beginning of the Revelation, sound as if He is stating something to happen in the future, but it is actually a recapitulation of that which has already taken place.

Read Revelation 21:6-8.

We could easily spend an entire session in consideration of Jesus' profound declaration, "It is done." In lieu of that, I encourage you to do it on your own. Lean back in your prayer closet and contemplate all that Christ and His Father have done to accomplish this end—both in *your* life, and in the lives of all the redeemed.

All of these visions revealed to John are scenes from the far future—especially from the apostle's viewpoint. We today may be closer to this future than John, but who can say that it won't be *another* two thousand years before they are fulfilled.

One has the impression that these words from the Lord—perhaps more than any other uttered in the Revelation—are intended for us today. It is as if the lead character in this immense stage play suddenly turns toward the audience, breaks the imaginary fourth wall of the proscenium, and addresses the audience specifically, personally with a cautionary speech warning that for every man and woman on earth there will come in their lifetime a fork in the road.

Will he or she choose to follow Christ, to thirst for the water of life and thus accept Christ Jesus as God and to become His child, inheriting the kingdom of righteousness—or will they remain unbelieving cowards, embracing the immorality in which they were born, ending up in "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." dying twice—and the last, for all eternity.

A HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

Suddenly, in v9, the scene changes, and one of the seven angels who had had one of the bowls of wrath speaks to John: "Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." From v10 to the end of the chapter we are granted a detailed picture of the new Jerusalem. Note that in v2 the city was described with a simile: "made ready *as* a bride adorned for her husband." Here in this reprise, the city is described without the simile; now the city *is* the bride, the wife of the Lamb, which I take to be a reference to its inhabitants: the redeemed.

Before we proceed into the description, let's pause and get our bearings. Some expositors say that this scene flips back to the Millennium—that this is the Millennium temple—but we will interpret it in a sensible, literal manner, that this scene follows chronologically after the creation of the new heaven and new earth (v1). So let's set the scene:

- the second resurrection of the wicked has occurred;
- once they were emptied of the dead, death and Hades are sent to the lake of fire;

- in a fiery flash, the earth and the heavens—that is the *first* and *second* heavens, the immediate atmosphere and the universe (space)—are destroyed (“uncreated”), leaving only the Great White Throne of Christ Jesus, surrounded by the billions of the unregenerate, suspended in nothingness (“...from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them” [20:11]);
- all are judged, and consigned to the lake of fire;
- the earth is no more, the universe is no more;
- then John is shown the *new* universe and the *new* earth (21:1).

We are not told, but we can safely assume that some time just before or during all this—before the destruction of the earth—all of the redeemed who have been co-ruling on earth during the Millennium have been transferred to heaven, specifically heaven’s Jerusalem. For as heaven’s Jerusalem comes “down out of heaven from God” (v2, v10) it is called in v9 “the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

We need to remind ourselves that throughout all these dramatic universal changes, the Lord God remains constant, unchanging—*He is not new*—which is what the psalmist expresses in Psalm 102.

Read Psalm 102:25-27.

As we look at what John passes along to us we should keep in mind that mortal man, with his feet stuck in the clay of this present earth, cannot possibly imagine, much less appreciate, what this eternal city will actually be like. It will be impressive, it will be huge, it will be utterly magnificent—but beyond that, we cannot possibly know what it will be like to see it, much less live in it, for we have nothing with which to compare it. Can you describe “transparent gold”? Can you imagine pearls the size of city gates? a city fifteen hundred miles long and wide—and high? Can you describe what your apartment in it will look like? Let us not try too hard to imagine any of it, for surely all of our imaginings will fall short.

I believe some interpreters, even with righteous intentions, nonetheless read the description of this new Jerusalem through fleshly eyes. For example, Morris writes, concerning the jewel-encrusted city, “John’s use of material riches to describe the city is his way of bringing out the very great value of what God has for His people.” No, Mr. Morris, with respect that’s not it at all. It has nothing to do with us. Alan F. Johnson gets it right: “The symbolism is not meant to give the impression of wealth and luxury, but to point to the glory and holiness of God.” Everything about this city—*everything*—is meant to illustrate the majesty and holiness and righteousness of God. It is *His presence in it* with us that expresses the love of God for His people—that is what demonstrates His regard for us. But let’s look at the details given to us, beginning in v11.

- There is a wall around the city with twelve gates, each a single pearl

(v21), three on a side, each bearing the name of a tribe of Israel (vv12-13). Each gate has an angelic gatekeeper (v12). The wall is seventy-two yards (216 feet) high (or thick?) (v17) and made of jasper stone (v18)—not our modern jasper, which is opaque, but almost certainly a reference to a perfectly clear, flawless diamond. John writes that the city entire appears as brilliant as if it were one huge diamond (v11).

- The foundation of this wall consists, apparently, of twelve layers of stone, each layer bearing the name of one of Jesus' twelve apostles (v14). These stones are adorned with all sorts of precious jewels—one type of jewel per layer (vv19-20).
- The construction of the city is often imagined to be a cube, but could also be a form of a pyramid (with God enthroned at the top), or a more irregular shape. We are told that the city is approximately fifteen hundred miles square, as well as fifteen hundred miles high (v16). Verse 18 seems to suggest that the building material of the city is something like gold, yet clear like glass—a translucent material with a tinge of gold perhaps (v18).
- The street(s?) in this city are made of the same translucent, golden material as its walls (v21).
- It is revealed to John that the city does not include a temple—a dramatic omission especially for someone living in the first century. *Every* city at that time—except Jerusalem, of course—would have *multiple* temples to at least several gods. To have a city without at least one temple, as in Jerusalem, would be like saying there is a city today without a gas station. The word *naon* refers not to the temple building, but to the innermost shrine—that is, the sanctuary, the holy of holies. Thus the better version of this verse is found in *Young's Literal Translation*: “And a sanctuary I did not see in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, is its sanctuary, and the Lamb” (v22). And here again, we could spend an entire session discussing this remarkable aspect of the new Jerusalem. Put succinctly, however, Why have a shrine when you already have the literal, “bodily” God in residence—not just visiting, but permanently in residence? They *are* the temple!
- Similarly, What need have we for the sun or moon when we have the manifest glory of God and the Lamb in permanent residence, sharing their brilliant illumination (v23).

We now come, at the end of this chapter, to a challenging passage, one so troublesome that it has caused many expositors and commentators to claim this is describing not the eternal state, but the Millennium.

Read Revelation 21:24-27.

It is tempting to conclude that this passage represents a mystery that will not be explained until the day this new city is in place, and all believers are in

their glorified state. But let's see if we can't do better than that—admitting up front that there may remain at least certain aspects or details of this situation that may not be answered until that day.

I'll be honest and admit that none of the explanations I have read are without problems; not one is completely satisfying as a sensible interpretation.

V24: The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.

First, the KJVs add a phrase that is absent in all the rest. In the NKJV this verse begins, “And the nations *of those who are saved* shall walk in its light...” (emphasis added). Everyone I have read—even older commentaries—quickly dismiss the inclusion of this phrase (M. R. Vincent [1886] has just one, succinct word: “Omit.”) This bears all the marks of a marginal “gloss” has become an interpolation—which is when a subsequent copyist of a manuscript errantly inserts into the *actual* text a marginal note left behind by an earlier copyist.

On its face, these four verses seem to paint a picture of “nations” and kings of those nations (the word is *ethne*, better translated peoples, or better yet, Gentiles) dwelling outside the walls of the new Jerusalem, going in and out through its gates, being stopped and denied entrance if not redeemed (by the angelic gatekeepers?), as v27 implies: “and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Permit me to recommend a suitable and, I hope, satisfying approach to this passage.

Look back at vv7-8. These two verses, as well, seem out of place at first glance, but I suggested that they represented Christ momentarily stepping out of the narrative to speak directly to its readers. I contend that something similar—but not identical—is going on here. First some bullet points:

- The eternal state on the new earth will not include unbelievers or those not glorified—that is, still flesh.
- The different ecology of the new earth and the absence of water and weather will preclude human beings surviving outside the city.
- The eternal state on the new earth will not include sin.
- The population of the eternal state will not grow, since there is no evidence whatsoever that it will include sexual congress or babies.⁴
- There is every reason to believe that all those who begin in the new Jerusalem will *want* to remain there, close to the light of the Lord.

All these being true, we need to find a different explanation for this passage. Happily one presents itself if we use vv7-8 as a template of sorts—if we disengage it from the narrative timeline.

⁴Matthew 22:30

We have already seen elsewhere in Scripture—for example, Hebrews, where to the saints this city was a very real, tangible, yet future reality.

for [Abraham] was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Hebrews 11:10)

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. (Hebrews 11:13–16a)

Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; (Hebrews 11:35)

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind... (Hebrews 12:18)

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22–24)

Note the time-shifting that takes place in some of these passages; the saints' hope was—and is today—so real, so tangible, it is as if it has already occurred: “But you *have come* to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...” (12:22, emphasis added).

I contend that the passage at the end of Revelation 21 employs a similar time-shifting in a *backward* direction. To wit, let me offer a paraphrase of vv24-27:

The nations and kings of this present earth will walk by the light of this future city on a new earth, freely offering whatever glory they possess gladly to their Lord God and the Lamb. This is a city that will never shut its gates, for night has been banished, and besides, there is no threat from outside. All glory and honor in the nations that has ever existed down through the history of man will be gladly placed at the feet of our resident Lord and the Lamb. For this city—this glorious city—will contain

nothing defiled, no detestable abomination (as before on the old earth), no deceit. Everything in the city and all its citizens will be utterly pure, for only those whose names are found in the Lamb's book of life will be permitted inside. So make sure that you are one of them!

Alan F. Johnson: No idolatrous person may enter. Only those whose names are in “the Lamb’s book of life” and thus belong to Him through redemption. This should not be taken as implying that [on the new earth] there will still be unsaved roaming around outside [the New Jerusalem] who may now and then enter it by repenting. Instead, the exhortation warns present readers that the only way to participate in the future city is to turn one’s loyalties to the Lamb now.

SESSION 52: THE ETERNAL STATE, PART TWO

PREFACE

The first five verses of Revelation Chapter Twenty-two are a continuation from Chapter Twenty-one of the description of the eternal state in the new Jerusalem, as if what we have here is either another awkward chapter division—or, better yet, both chapters are meant to be one. For both chapters alternate between description of life on the new earth and a direct exchange with their readers, as outlined below.

Descriptive Narrative	A Plea to the Readers of this Prophecy
21:1-5	
	21:6-8
21:9-23	
	21:24-27
22:1-5	
	22:6-7
<i>an angelic rebuke (22:8-9)</i>	
	22:10-21

THE RIVER OF THE WATER AND THE TREE OF LIFE

Read Revelation 22:1-5.

Continuing from v23 in Chapter Twenty-one, an angel—presumably the angel from 21:9-10—shows the apostle John more details from that main, central street described in 21:21, “And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”

Much has been made of this river and its accompanying tree by expositors and commentators. The river *seems* to harken back to the river flowing out of Jerusalem after the world has been reshaped and Christ returns to rule in the Millennium¹—which is why not a few interpreters say this *is* the Millennium. The imagery is, of course, similar, but this is a different sort of “river.” And the tree reminds us of the “tree of life” mentioned in the Eden narrative as situated in the center of the garden in.² Some say this is the heavenly version of that same tree.

It is possible that both of these—the river and the tree—can be interpreted literally: an actual crystalline river running down the center of the street from the thrones of “God and the Lamb,” and a literal tree bearing year-round fruit. But I believe the better interpretation is that both of these—the river and

¹ Zechariah 14:8

² Genesis 2:9

the tree—are visions representing timeless truths—both of which pertain to redemption and eternal life in Christ, spoken of throughout Scripture.

The River of the Water of Life

In the prophecy of Jeremiah, Yahweh expresses anger and disbelief over Israel's rejection of Him.

“Be appalled, O heavens, at this,
And shudder, be very desolate,” declares the LORD.
“For My people have committed two evils:
They have forsaken Me,
The fountain of living waters,
To hew for themselves cisterns,
Broken cisterns
That can hold no water.” (Jeremiah 2:12–13)

Here the “living waters” represents the life Israel would enjoy if it would just obey and worship the Lord, rather than other gods; Yahweh refers to Himself as the “fountain” of those living waters. In the John 4 scene with the Samaritan woman, Jesus says to her,

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water” (John 4:10).

She thinks He is speaking of water to drink, but Jesus goes on to explain,

“Everyone who drinks of this water [the well water] will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14).

Thus the idea of “living water” moves from obedience to Yahweh to faith in Christ Jesus, both associated with a good life in the present and, in Christ, a good life for all eternity. Later in the gospel of John, Jesus cries out at the feast in Jerusalem,

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

Here again the reference is to eternal life, but in the next verse John explains that here it also refers to the receiving of the Holy Spirit:

But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37–39).

Perhaps the most clarifying statement from the Lord about this is found in Revelation 21:6:

Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost."

Those last two words set the context: this "water of life" is not obtained by obeying the Law, nor is it obtained by good works, but is given by grace, freely, to those who thirst for it—referring clearly to salvation in Christ, resulting in eternal life with Him.

The pattern set in God's word is that "water of life" or "living water" is a picture of eternal life, flowing from the throne of God, as Walvoord writes,

This future river which is in the new Jerusalem...speaks of the power, purity, and eternal life manifest in the heavenly city. This river corresponds to the present believer's experience of the outflow of the Spirit and eternal life.

And the tree has a similar lineage. The qualities of the "tree of life" in the garden are explained in Genesis 3:22.

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever."

That is, the tree of life, like the "river of the water of life," is all about *eternal* life—an immortal life with Christ and Father God. It may be that these are literal elements in the new Jerusalem, but in this vision they both serve to represent the unending life in God for those residing there.

Verse 2 states that the tree "bears...fruit every month," but in a city and land that is eternal—not to mention without a sun or moon to mark time—the word "month" is simply an anthropomorphic expression describing the qualities of eternity with familiar terms. The last portion of v2 is very important to those who claim this is describing the Millennium, for what need is there for "healing" in the eternal, perfect state? But they fail to mention that the word translated "healing" by all our version (*therapeia*) can also mean attending to good health; YLT translates it "service." But, again, either interpretation assumes the tree is literally there.

Verse 3 succinctly paraphrases 21:4, that all the evil attendant to living in fallen flesh will not exist in the eternal state. And if one lets one's mind soar, the end of v3 through v5 offers a fascinating picture of the life enjoyed in the eternal state.

...and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him;

What will we be doing for all eternity? We will be serving our God and

King; all that that will entail, we cannot say. But I can assure you of one thing that it will entail: Worship. Need a definition or picture for that word? Do you wonder what the grammar of worship will be (and *should* be even now)? See Chapters 4 and 5, 15, and the first six verses of 19. That, possibly along with other duties, is what we will be doing with our time. We will not be bored; it will not become monotonous, but we will love every minute. As John MacArthur writes, “Life in heaven will be fully energized, rich, and exciting... [His bond-servants] will spend all eternity carrying out the infinite variety of tasks that the limitless mind of God can conceive.”

they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

As the apostle Paul wrote, “...and we shall be changed”.³ Whenever I imagine an eternity with God, as it is described in His word, frankly, my first instinct is to shudder with apprehension. For in a number of ways it describes an existence the polar opposite of that with which I am comfortable now: constant, bright, piercing light, when I prefer dim light, even the shadows; living with lots of people, when I prefer solitude. I will *have* to be changed, otherwise it would mean I would be utterly *miserable* for all eternity.

Perhaps you shudder a little if you are afraid of heights. Perhaps Jesus will assign you an apartment on the 559th floor of this new Jerusalem. We will *all* have to be changed—our minds, our priorities will have to be changed.

And one of those changes will be that we will be able to survive seeing the face of God; we will glory in His glory, we will *bathe* in it, and we will glory in the privilege of being named as belonging to Him. We will not be deity, but we will be kin—not just positionally, as now, but physically.

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. (1 John 3:2)*

And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun,† because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

Verse 5 reiterates what was stated in 21:23-25. Beyond that, however, if you will permit me, I would like to suggest a possible double meaning in that phrase, “the Lord God will illumine⁴ them.” The Greek *photizo* can refer to either physical light, as from turning on the light in a room, or inner illumination or enlightenment.⁵ I would suggest that both of these meanings can be seen here. The Lord God replaces the sun and the moon with His self-generated glory, rendering artificial light unnecessary. But He also shares with the saints—now “like” Him—some of His own qualities of illumination, understanding.

³ 1 Corinthians 15:52

⁴ or “give them light,” or “enlighten”

⁵ Ephesians 1:18

* Right now we cannot see Him; we would die if we saw Him face-to-face. But we will be changed, and we will be able to see Him face-to-face—and we will *glory* in it.

† Some may point out the supposed difference between the absolute “no more night,” to the more vague “have no need of the...light of the sun,” etc. That doesn’t *necessarily* mean it doesn’t exist, you may conclude. I would posit, Why would God destroy all the earth and universe and then remake it, and include in it something for which there is no purpose? Why would He create a new sun and new moon, if they are not necessary in the eternal state?

AN EPILOGUE

John MacArthur suggests that vv6-21 form an epilogue to the book of Revelation, and that's not a bad way to think of it. By this point the narrative, the timeline of the Eschaton is finished; we have seen all the dynamic changes we are going to see, from the Rapture and the Lamb breaking open the scroll of the seven seals with the ordered destruction they release, to the perfect bliss of the eternal state in the new Jerusalem.

The narrative, from the end of the Church Age, has covered a little more than 1,007 years. We have seen that this present earth will be bruised and battered, and eventually reshaped beyond recognition, before being destroyed utterly; we have seen its people withstand relentless plagues and earthquakes and supernatural phenomena that one would think will drive a sane man to madness; we have seen evil triumph, and evil be completely eradicated; and we have seen our Savior behaving and speaking in ways we never have before.

Now, in this epilogue, Jesus speaks again—not as the reigning King over the eternal state, but once again as the resurrected, heavenly Lord at the right hand of the Father. Here is not the voice of the wrathful judge upon the Great White Throne, but the same voice heard as The Revelation opened:

“Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.” (Revelation 1:17–19)‡

In v6 John records the same angel who showed him the city saying to him, “These words are faithful and true.” That is, *Everything that has been shown to you, told you, and experienced by you has been the truth; it will happen, so put it down for all posterity.* And Jesus Himself, in v7, places the exclamation point after with, “And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.” These words “faithful and true” (elsewhere assigned to Jesus Himself), mean that “what the inspired apostle has written is not mystical; the Apocalypse is not a record of his bizarre dreams or the result of an overactive imagination. It is not an allegory from which readers can extract hidden meanings of their own concoction. It is an accurate description of events and persons yet to come” (MacArthur).

What does it mean for us today to “heed” (or “keep”) “the prophecy of this book”? Once again, we could certainly fill an entire session with the answer to that. Oddly enough, what it does *not* refer to is making a detailed study of it, complete with full-color charts! What it does, however, is that we are

- to not just be ready for the last things, but to *long* for it, to embrace its certainty and the joy that will be ours in it;
- to be inspired by its picture of our reigning King, of His taking His throne, judging and ruling over all; to love Him all the more for it;
- to be reassured by its promise that those who embrace evil will one day

‡ Three times in this epilogue Christ Jesus says, “I am coming quickly.” Each statement includes its unique context, but we should not read any of these as Christ saying, in the first century to John, that he was about, then, to return, as if just days away. The word translated “quickly” (*tachys*) is used here to express His coming swiftly, unexpectedly, not necessarily immediately.

pay for their deeds and their rejection of Christ; God is longsuffering, but He does not forget what they have done.

- Not least, the last things narrative should drive us to our knees, to fall down in worship of the majesty and power of our God and our sovereign Lord (v9).

In vv8-9 John repeats the same mistake he made in 19:10—worshiping an angel. I don't know about you, but I can't throw stones at the poor guy. I think if I had just been through what he has, I'd be half out of my mind, and bowing down to every sprouting turnip in my path. To say John is overwhelmed, even befuddled—and rightly so—is an understatement in the extreme. But the angel makes an excellent point for us today: “Worship God.” No one else. No *thing* else. Just God alone. Period.

v10: And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.”

Right after the Rapture, one of the first events of the final days is the unsealing of the scroll by the Lamb, Christ Jesus.⁶ The contents of that scroll had been sealed and hidden until the assigned day of their revelation—hence the name of this book. In v10 of this chapter the angel tells John not to do this with what he has just recorded, but to make it freely available—indeed, to *proclaim* its truth.

And regarding the reception of that truth, the angel goes on to say in v11, “Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.”

The prophecies of The Revelation are here for any and all to hear and read. They are not sealed up. We each will be held responsible for how we receive it: If we turn away from or scoff at its truths, then “there is no other message that will work. If the warnings of the book are not sufficient, there is no more that God has to say. The wicked must continue in their wicked way and be judged by the Lord when He comes. There is a sense in which present choices fix character; a time is coming when change will be impossible. Present choices will become permanent in character” (Walvoord).

Jesus Himself presses the message in vv12-13: *Please, please hear me and believe!*

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

⁶ Revelation 5:1-6:17

As we have seen in this narrative, all judgment has been handed over to the Son by the Father. When Jesus comes He will first determine whether or not one belongs to Him; if so, he or she will be rewarded; if not, there will be no second chance, but the “reward” will be eternal punishment and misery. So to the reader of these words, He still pleads, *I am the One—the first, the last, the Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. I created this world, I will uncreate when the day arrives. Listen to Me! Believe in Me!*

In vv14-15 the apostle offers a marked contrast.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.

I do not believe in my lifetime the contrast between the redeemed and the unregenerate has been so stark—and so obvious—as today. I was born smack in the middle of the previous century, and in the 1950s one could walk down the street, or attend a gathering, and there was no obvious difference between Christian and unbeliever; everyone looked pretty much the same, behaved the same, spoke the same. There was, with only the rarest exception, civility and good manners all around.

Not so today. In the 1950s, v15 would have read as some bizarre exaggeration presented for effect, to shock. Today, it is a fairly accurate description of the militant lost and what they stand for, and press upon us at every turn.

The Last Invitation

The final invitation to repentance in God’s word is prefaced by Christ Himself. We have seen verses and passages to which it can be a challenge to assign their speaker—but certainly not v16. First He addresses John, His faithful apostle, then He validates Himself for all.

“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

In other words, *I am indeed the prophesied Messiah, the God-man who will reign on the throne of David forever*, as Yahweh told David,

“Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.” (2 Samuel 7:16)

Verse 17 contains the Lamb’s final invitation, voiced by the apostle:

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

And although the warning and validation of vv18-19 are not presented as spoken by Christ, He is the one who testifies to them in v20.

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

In that last sentence the apostle John speaks for all those who long for the return of our Lord, for we—individually, and collectively, as the church—adore Him. For He is our "beloved."

Joseph A. Seiss pictures the church as a young lady waiting for her lover to return—which serves as a suitable postscript to this entire study.

Seiss: Fiction has painted the picture of a maiden whose lover left her for a voyage to the Holy Land, promising on his return to make her his beloved bride. Many told her that she would never see him again. But she believed his word, and evening by evening she went down to the lonely shore, and kindled there a beacon-light in sight of the roaring waves, to hail and welcome the returning ship which was to bring again her betrothed. And by that watch-fire she took her stand each night, praying to the winds to hasten on the sluggish sails, that he who was everything to her might come. Even so that blessed Lord, who has loved us unto death, has gone away to the mysterious Holy Land of heaven, promising on his return to make us his happy and eternal Bride. Some say that he has gone forever, and that here we shall never see him more. But his last word was, "Yea, I come quickly." And on the dark and misty beach sloping out into the eternal sea, each true believer stands by the love-lit fire, looking, and waiting, and praying and hoping for the fulfillment of his work, in nothing gladder than in his pledge and promise, and calling ever from the soul of sacred love, "EVEN SO, COME, LORD JESUS." And some of these nights, while the world is busy with its gay frivolities, and laughing at the maiden on the shore, a form shall rise over the surging waves, as once on Galilee, to vindicate forever all this watching and devotion, and bring to the faithful and constant heart a joy, and glory, and triumph which nevermore shall end.

(J. A. Seiss, *A Series of Special Lectures on the Revelation of Jesus Christ with Revised Text*, Sixth Edition., vol. III, *The Apocalypse* [New York: Charles C. Cook, 1900].)

EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE

Ezekiel 40 to 48

The prophet Ezekiel was taken to Babylonia along with the rest of the exiles from Israel in 597 BC by Nebuchadnezzar. While there the Lord God, through Ezekiel, issued prophecies of both doom and hope for the Jews—prophecies unmatched in God's word for their bizarre, even grotesque imagery, and profound difficulty of interpretation.

In Chapters 40 to 48 of Ezekiel God dictates to the prophet the details, dimensions, and use for a huge Jerusalem temple. Referred to as “Ezekiel's Temple” this temple, as described, is famously difficult to place. It is obviously not historical, as its description fits none of the earlier or later known temples. The temple would be so large, it would not fit in the Jerusalem of today, nor would there even be sufficient level space for it.

I have, earlier in this study, stated that Ezekiel's temple will be the Millennial temple—i.e., the temple in place in Jerusalem while Christ is on earth ruling the nations; this is the typical dispensational position, and is the position held by both John MacArthur and John Walvoord. I would now, however, like to officially change my position on this. Scholars and interpreters have held several predominate positions for the time of this vision's fulfillment.

One view holds that Ezekiel's Chapters 40-48 offer God's blueprint for the temple He wants them to build once Israel returns from exile—but that they simply failed to follow His plan.

Another view holds that the temple description symbolically, or figuratively, represents the Christian church.

Since the Millennial (dispensational) view is probably the most common in evangelical circles, I would like to discuss it further. Let me begin by pointing out what is probably the most objectionable aspect of Ezekiel's temple if it is to be in place during a period when Jesus the Messiah will be reigning on earth. In fact, He will be *in residence* in the very place where this temple is to be built. Look at the following passages:

Four tables were on each side next to the gate; or, eight tables on which they slaughter sacrifices. For the burnt offering there were four tables of hewn stone, a cubit and a half long, a cubit and a half wide and one cubit high, on which they lay the instruments with which they slaughter the burnt offering and the sacrifice.

Ezekiel 40:41-42

And He said to me, “Son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, ‘These are the statutes for the altar on the day it is built, to offer burnt offerings

on it and to sprinkle blood on it. You shall give to the Levitical priests who are from the offspring of Zadok, who draw near to Me to minister to Me,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘a young bull for a sin offering. You shall take some of its blood and put it on its four horns and on the four corners of the ledge and on the border round about; thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it.’”

Ezekiel 43:18-20

“On the second day you shall offer a male goat without blemish for a sin offering, and they shall cleanse the altar as they cleansed it with the bull. When you have finished cleansing it, you shall present a young bull without blemish and a ram without blemish from the flock. You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall throw salt on them, and they shall offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD. For seven days you shall prepare daily a goat for a sin offering; also a young bull and a ram from the flock, without blemish, shall be prepared. For seven days they shall make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it. When they have completed the days, it shall be that on the eighth day and onward, the priests shall offer your burnt offerings on the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you,” declares the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 43:22-27

Steve Gregg, in an article written in 2012, does an excellent job of addressing this:

Dispensationalists argue for a literal, physical building to be established in fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision. Since the temple erected after Ezekiel's time did not fit Ezekiel's description, they believe that there must be another temple in the future that will do so more admirably [i.e., during the Millennium].

It would be easier to accept this theory if we did not have the New Testament to guide our thinking. The most obvious problem presented here is that the book of Hebrews (e.g., 10:1-18) speaks of the death of Christ on the cross as a termination of the efficacy of bloody animal sacrifices, such as those Israel offered in the temple. If Ezekiel's vision applies to a future time, why do we again find the offering of animal sacrifices?

The dispensationalist answer is that the millennial sacrifices will not be intended to atone for sins. The blood of Christ precludes any need for that. Just as the Old Testament sacrifices anticipated the death of Christ as a future event, it is suggested the future millennial sacrifices will commemorate the death of Christ as a past event.

EZEKIEL'S TEMPLE

(continued)

The text of Ezekiel, however, seems to preclude this, since the various offerings in the temple are said to “make atonement for the house of Israel” (45:17). Thus, the sacrifices are presented as an atonement for sin, not as a memorial. Christ Himself recommended the use of wine and bread to commemorate His death (1 Cor. 11:24–26). Why would God replace this with animal sacrifices in which God never found any particular pleasure (Ps. 40:6; 51:16; Heb. 10:6)?

(from “Making sense of Ezekiel’s Temple Vision,” by Steve Gregg. This article first appeared in the Practical Hermeneutics column of the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 35, number 03 [2012]. For further information or to subscribe to the Christian Research Journal go to: <http://www.equip.org/christian-research-journal/>.)

In addition to the seemingly insurmountable obstacle to Ezekiel’s vision temple being in place with the crucified, risen Savior—the Lamb slain for our sins once for all—there are the closing passages that describe

- water flowing from the temple, with ever-bearing trees on either side of the resulting river (47:1-12; cf., Revelation 22:1-2);
- the city of Jerusalem with twelve gates, one for each tribe (48:31; cf., Revelation 21:10-13).

In the book of Revelation these describe the new Jerusalem in the Eternal State—*not* the Millennium.

What then are we to do with Ezekiel’s temple? The best answer to this comes from Ezekiel’s text itself.

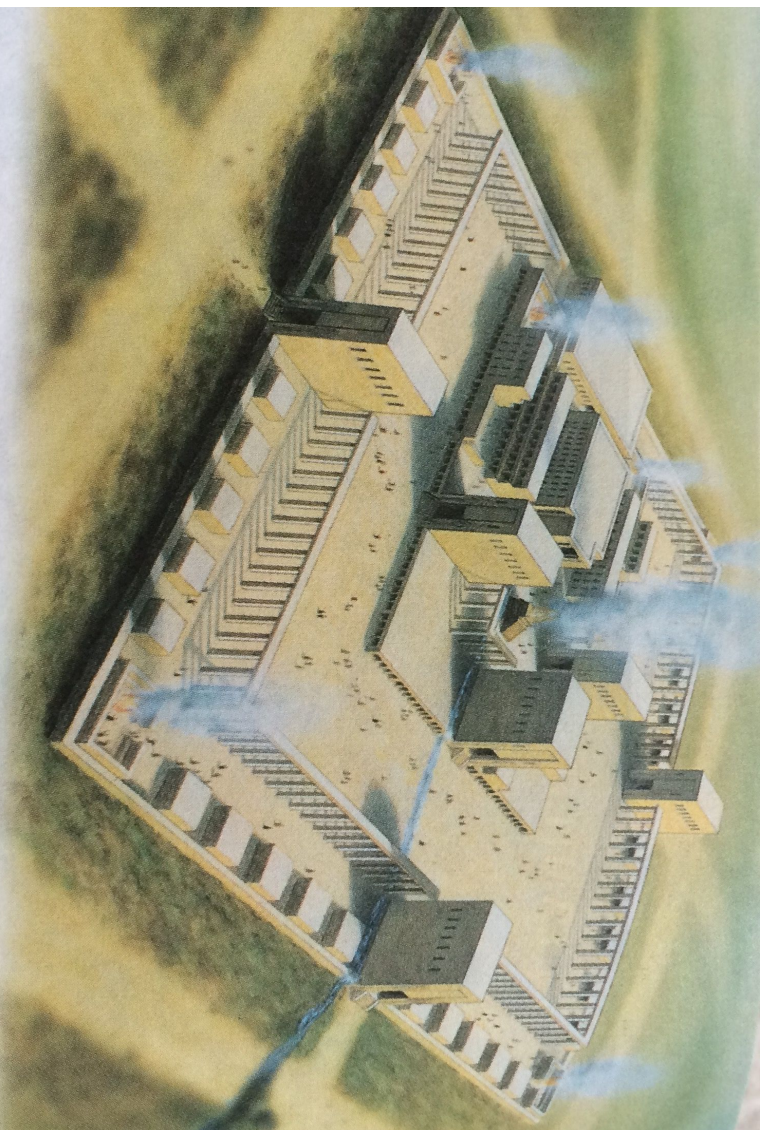
“And they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed. So I have consumed them in My anger. Now let them put away their harlotry and the corpses of their kings far from Me; and I will dwell among them forever. As for YOU, son of man, **describe the temple to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them**

measure the plan. If they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house, its structure, its exits, its entrances, all its designs, all its statutes, and all its laws. And write it in their sight, so that they may observe its whole design and all its statutes and do them.”

Ezekiel 43:8b–11 (emphasis added)

“If they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the house...” Let the record show that Israel returning from exile was, sadly, *not* ashamed of what they had done. In fact many of their number elected to remain in Babylonia, rather than return to their homeland. And their enthusiasm for rebuilding a temple was tepid at best.

They were *not* ashamed of their iniquities, so the temple as designed by God for them was never built. Not then, nor will it be during the Millennium.



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BIOGRAPHY

We are David and Linda Lampel, and we live in a large country house in the rural area outside Winterset, Iowa, in the middle of the United States. Our home is surrounded by fields of corn and soybeans, and by dense woods that are home to deer, raccoons, possums, wild turkeys, woodchucks, coyotes, and myriad birds of all shapes and colors.

The tranquility and beauty of this place contribute to what we do. In fact, we believe that the Lord brought us to this home because He knew that here we would best be equipped to serve Him and His people.

Both of us work at home—Dave with his writing and teaching, and Linda (now retired) with her baking, needlework, and crocheting projects that are given to charities. Now that she has been unshackled from the business world, Linda has expanded our gardens, and has returned to baking all our bread—and spending more time with our family of three cats.

The Lord has given us a good life, and we are most grateful to Him—especially for our 52 years together as husband and wife.