

THY KINGDOM COME

14. Revelation

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**A Teaching Commentary
of the New Testament**

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1. General Remarks

I have been dreading this day since I began writing this New Testament commentary. Revelation is an intimidating book! It is also a controversial book. There is probably no other single book in the Bible that has divided people into such ironclad factions of interpretation.

People are intrigued by Revelation. It appeals to that bit of Gnostic in all of us. Somehow we believe that if we can unravel the mysteries that have been cleverly concealed in this book, we will rise above the rest of the world on a spiritual plane. Many assume that the book clearly lays out the timeline to Armageddon, but that it does so in a secret manner. Attempts to unravel the secret have inspired everything from the well-intentioned book 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will be in 1988 to the not-so-well-intentioned teachings of David Koresh.

In fact, Revelation does outline the events that lead to Armageddon. It leads beyond Armageddon into eternity. And it does cloak these images in mysterious symbolism. The name of this book in Greek is “Αποκαλυψις Ιωαννου,” which roughly translates to “The Apocalypse of John.” “Apocalypse” comes from two Greek words which together mean “out from being hidden.” Revelation is a book that reveals the hidden secrets of God. It brings them out from being hidden. Still it communicates these secrets with a great deal of symbolism. The revelation of these mysteries is done in a mysterious way.

Simply stated, the mysteries of Revelation are difficult to understand. They were given to us for a reason, however. We are supposed to study them. We are supposed to do our best to understand them. We are supposed to let the Holy Spirit speak to us through the symbolism in the book. The study calls for a bit of moderation, however. The fact that so many intelligent and well-intentioned people have been led in so many different ways by this book is an indication that we ought not to get too dogmatic about our interpretations. As I said in the commentary on Daniel in Getting Into The Promised Land Without Falling Asleep in Leviticus, the only thing that one can know for sure is that anyone who says he has all of this figured out probably does not.

Here is my attempt to interpret the images in this book. I approach it a bit like Paul did Corinth the first time he went there (1 Corinthians 2:1-3):

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling.

The book of Revelation was written by John according to Revelation 1:4. This is generally assumed to be the apostle John, although we do not know that for certain. According to Revelation 1:9, he was in exile on the island of Patmos at the time of the writing.

2. Introduction

Revelation 1

2.1 Prologue

Revelation 1:1-3

Revelation 1:1-3 says:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

The images in this book were given by Jesus to his church. John was the messenger chosen to deliver the gift. The book describes things that will soon take place. It may seem strange to us that John wrote around 1900 years ago that these events would take place soon, since they have not yet transpired. Two points can be made. First of all, the Greek word that is translated “soon” (“ταχος”) can also mean “hastily,” “quickly,” or “abruptly.” When these events happen, they will happen quickly. The other point has to do with the timeline of God. Remember that Psalm 90:4 (and 2 Peter 3:8) says that a thousand years in our sight is like a day in the eyes of God. From his perspective, looking at eternity from end to end, whenever this happens it will be soon.

Jesus sent an angel to John to bring him this revelation. That in itself is interesting. We normally think of the Holy Spirit as being the agent of dreams and visions, but this one was brought to John by an angel.

The book promises a blessing to those who read it and who take it to heart. The nature of the blessing is not specified. Just having the hope that is contained in the book should be a source of blessing and encouragement to anyone who will receive it.

2.2 Greeting

Revelation 1:4-11

Revelation 1:4-11 says:

John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;

and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.
So shall it be! Amen.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

This letter serves as a greeting and an introduction. The letter is from John. Again, we are not sure that this is the apostle John, but the letter is generally attributed to him. It is addressed to the seven churches in Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These are in the area that is now the nation of Turkey. These were certainly not the only churches in Asia. They were not the only churches of importance. Why were these churches chosen? First of all, seven is a significant number, representing completeness. These particular seven churches were on trade routes or in major population centers. Sending the letter to these seven churches should ensure the distribution of the information. Ultimately the reason that John sent the letter to these particular churches is because Jesus told him to do so. As you will see below, John was given a specific message for each of these churches.

John wishes them grace and peace from "him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ." The passage contains a reference to Zechariah 12:10,

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.

It identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of that Old Testament prophecy. Jesus will return. He will come in the clouds, in such a manner that all mankind will see him. How that will happen we do not know. When it does, however, those who see him will mourn, because they will realize what mankind did to the one who was sent to save them.

John identifies that he was on the island of Patmos when he was visited and instructed to write down the words of this book.

2.3 Seven Golden Lampstands and the Son of Man

Revelation 1:12-20

Revelation 1:12-20 continues:

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

When the voice commanded John to write, he turned to see who was speaking. He had a vision of Jesus standing among seven golden lampstands. He was dazzling white, pure and aglow. In the Old Testament, when Moses went into the presence of God, he came out with his face glowing from the presence of God. How much more must Jesus blaze with the fire of God. Majesty sparkled around him. It says that he had seven stars in his right hand. Out of his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword. This reference is significant, because Ephesians 6:17 says that the word of God is the sword of the Spirit. Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." This sword is the word of God. It proceeds from the mouth of Jesus, because he is God.

John fell in fear before him. He stood John back up and told him not to be afraid. He said that he was the "first and the last," an image that goes back to Isaiah 44:6. In that passage, God is the first and the last. In this passage it is Jesus. That is because they are one. He told him that he holds the "keys of death and Hades."

What exactly is Hades? Hades is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew word "Sheol," which in the NIV is normally translated "grave." The Bible takes for granted the existence of this place, but never explicitly states what it is or who is there. From the way it is used, we surmise the Hades is place where the souls of dead unsaved people await their final torment. It is distinct from Gehenna, the final place of torment. In Revelation, "Hades" is mentioned in Revelation 1:18, Revelation 6:8, Revelation 20:13, and Revelation 20:14. Each time the reference is to "death and Hades." The implication in this verse is that Jesus has conquered death. He alone has achieved victory over its power. He alone was the one who was able to spare people from Hades and the final torment.

The passage closes by explaining that the seven lampstands in the vision represent the seven churches being addressed in the letter. The seven stars represent angels assigned to minister to the seven churches.

3. The Letters to the Seven Churches

Revelation 2-3

3.1 To the Church in Ephesus

Revelation 2:1-7

Revelation 2:1-7 says:

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be

apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

This begins the text of the letters to the seven churches. The first is to the church at Ephesus. The message is from Jesus (“the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands”), not John. Note also that the letter is to “the angel of the church at Ephesus.” All seven letters are addressed to the angels of the churches, not the churches themselves. What does this mean?

The word “angel” in Scripture is used consistently to refer to the heavenly beings, such as those who announced the birth of Jesus to the Bethlehem shepherds, those who defeated the Assyrian army in the time of Hezekiah, or the one who delivered Peter from prison in Acts 12. It would be very unusual to find the word used in any other context. Still, this seems to be an unusual context. How does a man write a letter to an angel? Furthermore, the information in the letter seems to be destined for the church itself. Why is it addressed to “the angel of the church?” What is “the angel of the church?”

We know from Hebrews 1:14 that angels are responsible for ministering to those who are saved. We gather that there are angels assigned to minister to particular churches. In this context, however, the recipient of the letter seems to be an individual in the church (human individual) charged with the responsibility of relaying the message of the letter to the church. Even though it is an unusual usage of the word, it makes sense when one considers the meaning of the word “angel.” The word in Greek literally means “messenger.” Angels as we normally think of them are heavenly beings who function as messengers of God. In this context, the letter is most likely addressed to an individual who would be the messenger to the church.

The letter begins by commending the church. They are commended for their hard work for the Kingdom. They have persevered for the sake of the Gospel. They have done a good job of discerning evil men and false teachers and have stood their ground against such individuals. All of this is to their credit.

He next states what he has against the church. They have forgotten their first love. It is a device of the enemy to get us to exchange godly fervor for godly business. God wants people who are passionate about him. He does not want people who are so busy serving in his name that they forget who he is. It can be a subtle and at times unnoticeable shift when we replace relationship with service. Service will flow from relationship, but relationship does not necessarily flow from service. They are warned to get their priorities back in order. If they do not, he says that he will “remove your lampstand from its place.” The passage does not state exactly what that means, but the implication is that at a minimum they would lose favor with God.

He then names one more thing that brings them favor. He already said that they do a good job of dealing with false teachers. He specifically names a group called the Nicolaitans, for whom they have no tolerance. They are commended for this.

The Nicolaitans are mentioned again in Revelation 2:15 and from that context we assume they were a group who were leading believers into immorality. We do not know for certain the origin of this group or the nature of their teachings. Whatever and whoever they were, they were an abomination to God and they were not tolerated by the Ephesian church.

The passage to the Ephesians closes with a promise, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." This is good news. The cycle is complete! Through sin we lost access to the tree of life. Those who overcome sin regain access to the tree of life.

3.2 To the Church in Smyrna

Revelation 2:8-11

The next church addressed is that in Smyrna. Revelation 2:8-11 says:

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

As was true with the letter to Ephesus, this one begins with a commendation. The church in Smyrna has been strong in the face of afflictions and poverty. They have endured slander by those who claim to be godly. Satan is attacking them vigorously, but they faithfully endure the persecution. They are warned that it will continue and that they need to continue enduring.

Unlike the letter to the Ephesians, there is no rebuke to Smyrna.

Like the letter to Ephesus, there is a promise. Those who remain faithful will receive a crown of life. They will not be hurt by "the second death," a term defined in Revelation 20:14 meaning final judgment. Final judgment holds terror for the unrighteous. Those who have endured in faith have nothing to fear.

3.3 To the Church in Pergamum

Revelation 2:12-17

The church in Pergamum is addressed in Revelation 2:12-17:

"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city – where Satan lives.

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

Like the letters to Ephesus and Smyrna, this begins with a commendation. The church resides in an area that is heavily influenced by evil (“where Satan has his throne.”) In spite of this, the church remains true. Even in the face of martyrdom they have remained steady in their faith. Apparently one of their own, a man named Antipas, had been martyred. We know nothing of this event other than what is recorded here.

The letter now states what the Lord has against this church. They have tolerated false teaching in their midst. There is a reference to the teaching of Balaam. Balaam is a key figure in a well-known story in Numbers 22-24. Balak, king of the Moabites tried to hire Balaam to pronounce curses on the Israelites, with whom he was engaged in battle. Through a series of events which included an angel and a talking donkey, God prevented him from cursing the Israelites and caused him to prophesy that they would triumph in battle, much to the disappointment of Balak.

That is not the story referenced here in Revelation.

There is another reference to Balaam in Numbers 31:16. Even though God prevented him from pronouncing curses on the Israelites, Balaam’s desire was to help Balak and the Moabites (for a price). After the event in Numbers 22-24, Balaam showed Balak another way to weaken the Israelite defense. He convinced the Moabite women to seduce the Israelite men. Once they became sexually intimate, the women would introduce the men to their religious practices. In Numbers 25, the men of Israel engaged in sexual immorality and participated in the sacrifices to Moabite idols. This was a result of a scheme of Balaam to throw them off guard and to turn them from God, the source of their protection.

In the letter to Pergamum, we do not assume that there were people literally following the teachings of Balaam. The reference to him is figurative. There are people in the church engaging in immorality and idol worship. That is what is being condemned. God wants this to stop. He also references those who follow the teachings of the Nicolaitans. In the letter to Ephesus we saw that these were people who practiced immorality as well. Their teachings were not tolerated in Ephesus. They are permitted here.

Jesus says that these people must be purged from the church or else he will deal with them personally.

The section concludes with a promise. Those who overcome will receive “hidden manna” and “a white stone with a new name on it, known only to him who receives it.” Now what in the world are these?

For around forty years, manna sustained the life of the Israelites, who were wandering in the desert. It was a source of strength and nourishment. This reference to hidden manna is an invisible source of strength, nourishment, and sustenance available to those who are faithful. It is of a spiritual nature rather than physical. As we struggle to be faithful in the face of persecution, God will sustain us. That is the promise.

The reference to the white stone is rather obscure. The meaning seems to be buried somewhere in the traditions of the time. There does seem to be evidence that stones with names written on them were used as party invitations. A white stone with a new name written on it could have been a reference to an invitation to the celebration banquet in heaven. It was an invitation to participate in the eternal reward of those who overcome. If this is a correct interpretation, then the reference to the hidden manna could also have a physical connotation, of partaking of the food of God at his great banquet.

3.4 To the Church in Thyatira

Revelation 2:18-29

He addresses the church in Thyatira in Revelation 2:18-29:

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come.

To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations –

‘He will rule them with an iron scepter;
he will dash them to pieces like pottery’ –

just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

This begins with a brief commendation. The church has good deeds, love, faith, service, and perseverance. They are stronger in these areas now than they were at the beginning.

There is a more lengthy condemnation. At the center is a prophetess in the church, referred to as Jezebel in the text. This was probably not her real name. Jezebel in the Old Testament was the evil wife of King Ahab and she was a prophetess of Baal. She led the Northern Kingdom into evil and idol worship. Among the women of the Old Testament, she was outstandingly detestable. Referring to this woman as Jezebel called attention to the degree to which she was offensive to God.

Like the Jezebel of the Old Testament, this woman was spreading false teaching which was drawing people into immorality and idol worship. The church is tolerating her rather than dealing with her. God has given her time to repent but she has hardened herself to his grace. Therefore God is going to unleash judgment and punishment upon her and those who follow her. He encourages the faithful to remain in the truth – “you who do not hold to her teaching and have

not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets." Based on that statement, there may have been a degree of Gnosticism mixed in with her teachings.

Next there is a promise. Those who overcome will be given authority to rule. He quotes Psalm 2:9, "He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery." In the Psalm this is spoken by the Father to the Messiah, granting him the authority to rule the nations that once opposed him. In Revelation, Jesus extends this authority to us. Those who overcome, who remain faithful to his teaching, will rule with him.

It also says he will give us the "morning star." The meaning of this reference is a bit uncertain. The term is used three other places in Scripture. Isaiah 14:12 says:

How you have fallen from heaven,
O morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations!

2 Peter 1:19 says:

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Finally, Revelation 22:16 says:

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

The Isaiah passage is embedded in prophecy against the king of Babylon. He was a great ruler who began to think too highly of himself. Because of his arrogance, God brought him low. The "morning star" is a reference to the splendor that he once had. In fact, "morning star" here is the word "lucifer" in Latin. Many people interpret this passage as a reference to the fall of Satan.

In the 2 Peter passage, "morning star" refers to hope where there is no hope, the first light that shines in the darkness.

In the Revelation 22 passage, Jesus is the morning star.

Thus in the Revelation 2 passage, when Jesus says that he will give us the "morning star," any of these references could make sense. Just prior to the reference, Jesus had said that he would give us authority to rule over nations that had opposed us. Therefore a reference to the rebellious king of Babylon could make sense. In that context, we would specifically have authority over rebellious kings who had tried to exalt themselves above God. If morning star is a reference to Satan, then it would mean that we have authority over him and victory over his plans and schemes. If "morning star" is a reference to hope and light, then we certainly have that as a result of overcoming. Also as a result of overcoming we have Jesus himself.

Any of these meanings of "morning star" could make sense. We are not sure which one is intended. If I had to guess, it would make the most sense to assume that John used the term consistently in the book of Revelation. Thus the interpretation of Jesus himself being the morning star would be the favored interpretation.

3.5 To the Church in Sardis

Revelation 3:1-6

The church in Sardis is addressed in Revelation 3:1-6:

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Most of the letters began with some sort of commendation. This one does not. He starts by saying that the church is dead in spite of its reputation otherwise. Their works are incomplete in the eyes of God. They are obviously a church full of compromise, with a foot in the door of the Kingdom but the face and the body turned back towards the world. God does not accept superficial commitment from us. Being his is an all-or-nothing proposition.

They are called to nurture what little life they have left in them and to let it grow to wholeness. If they do not, he will come against them “like a thief,” at a time they do not expect.

When he does come in judgment against this church, he will rescue the remnant of faithful in the church, for there are a few. God always preserves his faithful through the judgment of the wicked. He takes care of his own. Those who overcome will be “dressed in white,” which means that they will be made pure. Jesus will give them eternal life and will testify on their behalf before the Father and his angels.

3.6 To the Church in Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13

The church in Philadelphia is addressed in Revelation 3:7-13:

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Philadelphia receives commendation and promise, without any condemnation. They are commended for their faithfulness. They face opposition by hostile Jews but have remained true to Jesus.

Jesus promises to give them “an open door that no one can shut,” saying that they will have free access to him. He promises to defeat their enemies and force them to acknowledge the favor that the faithful have before Jesus. He promises to keep them from “the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” This implies that they will be spared from the Great Tribulation. He promises to make them pillars in the temple of God. This signifies that they will have an important role, lending strength to the Kingdom. He will write upon the name of God, the city of God, and his own new name, meaning that they will be “labeled” as belonging in the Kingdom.

3.7 To the Church in Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

The last church addressed is Laodicea. Revelation 3:14-22 says:

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Laodicea is offered condemnation and promise. There is no commendation. The first thing that he says is that they have bland spirituality. Like tasteless food they are neither hot nor cold. Because of this, Jesus wants to spit them out. They have an attitude of self-sufficiency, believing themselves to be rich, but in God’s eyes they are “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” He encourages them to exchange their concept of wealth for his. They need his gold that comes from the refining process. This implies that they need to let him take them through the process of being refined, cleansed, purified, and strengthened, so that they might emerge as pure gold, spiritually speaking. They need to be dressed in his white clothes, which signifies the purity that he is willing to give them. He is willing to cover up their nakedness and to restore their vision. All of this occurs by submitting to his discipline, which is something that he gives to those he loves.

This passage contains the well-known verse, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” Jesus pursues relationship with us. He waits patiently for us to respond. If we will let him in, he will have fellowship with us. He will not push his way in uninvited, however. That is an amazing proposition. Finding God, the creator of the universe, is not a mysterious journey, because he sent his son to knock on our doors and to bring us to him. All we have to do is to open the door. Still so many of us, probably operating out of fear or ignorance, bolt the door and refuse to open. The day will come when the knock will cease and the invitation will be rescinded.

The promise is that those who overcome will be given the right to sit with Jesus on his throne. They will be given power and authority, just like what has been given to Jesus himself.

3.8 The Letters to the Seven Churches Analyzed

Thus far we have seen:

Table 1 - Letters to The Seven Churches

Church	Commendation	Condemnation	Promise
Ephesus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good deeds, hard work, perseverance • endured hardships and not grown weary • have not tolerated false teachings • have not tolerated Nicolaitans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forsaken first love • fallen from heights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative: repent or have lampstand removed • Positive: overcome and receive access to tree of life in the paradise of God
Smyrna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rich in spite of afflictions and poverty • endured slander 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive: suffering and persecution will continue but they will be sustained • Positive: those who overcome receive a crown of life • Positive: those who overcome will not be hurt by the second death
Pergamum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remain true even in an evil area • held fast to faith even in the face of martyrdom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tolerate the Nicolaitans, immorality and idol worship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative: repent or God will come down in judgment against the unfaithful • Positive: those who overcome receive hidden manna and white stone with new name written on it

Church	Commendation	Condemnation	Promise
Thyatira	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good deeds, love, faith, perseverance • stronger now than in the beginning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tolerate Jezebel, immorality, idol worship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative: repent or God will come down in judgment against the unfaithful • Positive: those who overcome will be given the authority to rule • Positive: those who overcome will be given the morning star
Sardis		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • church is dead in spite of reputation for being alive • deeds are incomplete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative: repent or God will come in judgment like a thief • Positive: those who overcome will be purified, given eternal life, and Jesus will testify on their behalf before the Father and his angels
Philadelphia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • faithful, even in the face of persecution 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive: give them an open door that no one can shut • Positive: humble their enemies before them, force their enemies to confess the favor that the faithful Philadelphians have before God • Positive: spare them from the Great Tribulation • Positive: make them pillars in the temple of God • Positive: write upon them the name of God, of God's city, and of Jesus himself
Laodicea		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • neither hot nor cold, lukewarm spirituality • think themselves to be rich, but in fact are wretched, pitiful, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive: they have the option to submit to God's discipline and be refined and healed

Church	Commendation	Condemnation	Promise
		poor, blind and naked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive: Jesus pursues fellowship with them • Positive: those who overcome will be given the right to sit with Jesus on his throne

There is a hodgepodge of conditions in these churches. Some are commended for intolerance of false teachings; another is condemned for tolerating false teachers. One is commended for spiritual wealth in the face of physical poverty; another is condemned for physical wealth in the face of spiritual poverty. One is stronger now than in the beginning; others have forgotten their first love, fallen from the heights, or become lukewarm. Some are commended for good deeds, one is condemned for incomplete deeds.

There are bits and pieces of all churches and all believers represented in these seven letters¹. There are times when we are faithful, even in the face of persecution, and others when we are neither hot nor cold. There are times when we put our faith in material riches and other times when we rightfully seek spiritual treasures. There are times when we persevere and there are other times when we forget our first love. There are times when we are strong and times when we tolerate the Jezebels and the Nicolaitans.

The letters leave no doubt about which behaviors are pleasing to God and which ones he abhors. We know the rewards for the good and the penalties for the bad. Furthermore the promises of God are extended to us and to our churches and were not specific to these seven. We must strive to be overcomers, who will see our enemies humbled, who will be given authority, and who will sit with Jesus on his throne. Furthermore we must be agents telling the world around us of the one who stands at the door and knocks, so that others may have fellowship with him as well. We also want to be overcomers who are spared the events of much of the rest of this book.

Before we leave this section altogether, it is beneficial to consider the names of Jesus in these seven letters. Some of these are used again in the book. He is called:

- him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands (Revelation 2:1) (Letter to Ephesus)
- the First and the Last (Revelation 2:8) (Letter to Smyrna)
- who died and came to life again (Revelation 2:8) (Letter to Smyrna)
- him who has the sharp, double-edged sword (Revelation 2:12) (Letter to Pergamum)
- the Son of God (Revelation 2:18) (Letter to Thyatira)
- whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze (Revelation 2:18) (Letter to Thyatira)
- the one who rules with an iron scepter (Revelation 2:27) (Letter to Thyatira)
- him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars (Revelation 3:1) (Letter to Sardis)

¹ These are those who interpret these seven churches as representing seven Church ages. In the beginning, the characteristics of the Church were represented by the church at Ephesus. In time, it resembled the church in Smyrna, etc. If this viewpoint is correct, then the final Church age is represented by the church at Laodicea. Although I do not embrace this view of the seven churches per se, the conditions of Laodicea do indeed have a striking resemblance to the Church of this day and age.

- him who is holy and true (Revelation 3:7) (Letter to Philadelphia)
- who holds the key of David (Revelation 3:7) (Letter to Philadelphia)
- what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open (Revelation 3:7) (Letter to Philadelphia)
- the Amen (Revelation 3:14) (Letter to Laodicea)
- the faithful and true witness (Revelation 3:14) (Letter to Laodicea)
- the ruler of God's creation (Revelation 3:14) (Letter to Laodicea)

All of these attest to who Jesus is. He is the eternal one, with authority, who conquered death, who conquers his enemies, in whom the glory of God is manifest, who controls the universe, holy, true, the son of David. He is the only Son of God. In his first coming he won the right to come again. Let us examine the events that lead to that Second Coming.

4. The Throne Room of God

Revelation 4

Before continuing with the text, I want to insert a visual aid. Revelation is a hard book to follow. Hopefully this outline of the events of the rest of the book will serve as a useful guide to keep events in perspective as we study the rest of the book. Little explanation is given in the chart; that is what follows in the rest of the commentary.

Table 2 - Events of Revelation

Revelation 4	John is summoned to the throne room of God. The four living creatures, twenty-four elders, and seven spirits are present.
Revelation 5	The scroll with seven seals is presented. Jesus is the only one worthy to break the seals.
Revelation 6	First seal – White horse – conquest
	Second seal – Red horse – internal revolt, lawlessness, anarchy
	Third seal – Black horse – famine
	Fourth seal – Pale horse – death, 1/4 of the people on earth die
	Fifth seal – martyrs who have died during tribulation cry out for justice
	Sixth seal – Natural disasters – earthquakes and atmospheric catastrophes
Revelation 7	144,000 faithful are sealed for God's protection
	Souls of martyrs who have died during the tribulation stand before the throne and praise God. They are joined by angels, the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures.
Revelation 8	Seventh seal is broken. It starts the Seven Trumpets.
	First trumpet – hail, fire, and blood falls on the earth. 1/3 of the earth is burned.
	Second trumpet – a blazing mountain falls into the sea. 1/3 of the sea is turned to blood. 1/3 of sea life dies. 1/3 of ships are destroyed.
	Third trumpet – A blazing star fell, 1/3 of water became bitter.
	Fourth trumpet – 1/3 of the sun, moon, and stars turned dark. 1/3 of the day and night was without light.
	An eagle flies over the earth proclaiming that the worst is yet to come. The last three trumpets would be the "three woes."
Revelation 9	Fifth trumpet and first woe – A star fell from the sky and opened the Abyss. Locusts came out and tortured those who did not have the seal of God. This went on for five months.
	Sixth trumpet and second woe – Four angels led 200,000,000 troops to kill

	1/3 of mankind.
Revelation 10	Seven thunders spoke, but John was told not to record their words. An angel declares that there will be no more delay. John is given a scroll and told to eat.
Revelation 11	There is persecution against the church for 42 months (3 1/2 years) 2 Witnesses arise and prophesy for God for 1,260 days (3 1/2 years) A beast comes up out of the Abyss and kills the two witnesses. They lie dead in the streets for 3 1/2 days. The world celebrates their death. God breathes life back into them. He then calls them to heaven. People are stunned. There is a severe earthquake, instilling fear in people.
	Seventh trumpet and third woe - a proclamation is given in heaven that God's wrath is about to be unleashed. Lightning, thunder, earthquakes, and hail strike the earth.
Revelation 12	A woman (Israel) gives birth to a male child (Jesus). A dragon (Satan) tries to kill the male child, but God protects him. God took the woman to the desert to care for her 1,260 days (3 1/2 years). There is war in heaven. Satan and his angels are cast to earth. Satan tried to pursue the woman (Israel) but God protected her for 3 1/2 years. Instead, Satan pursued the rest of her offspring (the rest of the church).
Revelation 13	A beast (the antichrist) arises, drawing power and authority from Satan. The beast becomes an object of worship. The beast blasphemes, slanders, and persecutes the church for 42 months (3 1/2 years). He is allowed to conquer the saints. All who do not belong to God will worship the beast. This will be a time of tremendous destruction for the remaining people of God. It will require faithfulness and great endurance. A second beast arises. He is a false prophet, probably out of the domain of the church. The false prophet organizes worship of the first beast – the antichrist. He has a signs and wonders ministry devoted to the antichrist. The false prophet sets up images of the antichrist and causes people to worship them. The false prophet kills those who will not worship the antichrist. The false prophet forces people to receive the mark of the beast (666) in order to engage in commerce.
Revelation 14	John sees the 144,000 redeemed from earth with Jesus. An angel calls the remaining people on earth to faithfulness. A second angel declares the fall of Babylon. A third angel pronounces the wrath of God upon all who receive the mark of the beast. A voice from heaven proclaims blessings upon those who die in the Lord. Jesus leads angels with sickles to harvest the earth and to throw the clusters into the winepress of God's wrath. There is an unprecedented flow of blood that follows.
Revelation 15	The 144,000 are with God, praising him. Seven bowl judgments, or Seven Plagues follow.
Revelation 16	First plague – painful sores for those who worshipped the beast. Second plague – Sea turns to blood and all remaining sea life dies. Third plague – The rivers and springs turn to blood. Fourth plague – The sun turns scorching hot.

	Fifth plague – Total darkness
	Sixth plague – The Euphrates is dried up to make way for the armies. The beast and the false prophet gather the armies of the world at Armageddon to do battle against God.
	Seventh plague – Lightning, thunder, massive earthquake, 100 pound hailstones
Revelation 17	The Great Prostitute appears. She represents false religious systems. She is an ally of the kings of the earth. She has persecuted the righteous. She is an ally of the beast.
	The beast and his allies (the kings of the earth) turn against the prostitute and destroy her.
Revelation 18	An angel declares the fall of Babylon – the political system opposed to God.
Revelation 19	There is a Hallelujah Chorus sung in heaven.
	The Battle of Armageddon takes place. The beast and his false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire. Their kings and armies are killed. All of those who took the mark of the beast are slaughtered.
Revelation 20	Satan is confined to the Abyss for 1000 years.
	The souls of those who were martyred during the Tribulation are resurrected.
	Christ reigns with his faithful for 1000 years.
	At the end of 1000 years, Satan is released from the Abyss.
	He roams the earth and gathers followers for one final rebellion.
	Fire falls from heaven and consumes the rebels.
	The devil is thrown into the lake of fire for eternity.
	The final judgment takes place. The remaining dead are resurrected. Those whose names were not in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire for eternity. This is the second death.
Revelation 21	Earth and heaven pass away and a new heaven and earth appear.
	There is a new Jerusalem. God lives with men.
	There is no more death, mourning, crying, pain, or tears for those who dwell with God.
	There is no temple and no sun or moon in the New Jerusalem. God and Jesus dwell with men and serve as the temple. They are also a natural source of light.
Revelation 22	The river of the water of life flows from the city. Men drink of it.
	The tree of life is there. At long last, men have access to that tree restored.

The scene now shifts to the throne room of God. Revelation 4:1-11 says:

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living

creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being.”

“The voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet” is a reference to Revelation 1:10. This was the voice of Jesus. Jesus summoned John to come up to heaven and to observe what was about to take place². Whether or not John was actually transported to heaven we do not know. It is likely that all of this occurred in a vision, since John was being given a preview of events that were yet to take place. Also the next sentence indicates that he was taken to heaven “in the Spirit.” We do know that the Holy Spirit can physically transport people (Philip in Acts 8:39), but this is probably an indication that John was spiritually rather than physically taken to heaven. Either way the vision that he was given was real.

He saw God sitting on his throne. God is described as having “the appearance of jasper and carnelian” with a “rainbow, resembling an emerald” around his throne. Interpreters of Revelation have been known to do great and wondrous things with references such as this. You can find books where people begin to spin theology and doctrine based on the significance of the jasper or the emerald. I have trouble being quite so dogmatic about finding significance in every detail. If you marched into the throne room of God and saw him seated on his throne, how are you going to describe him? The glory of God dazzled and sparkled like fine gems in the sunlight. That is what John saw. He recorded it the best way that he could. The sea of glass referenced a few sentences later is the same sort of thing. John was seeing something unlike anything on earth. He was using earthly terminology the best way that he could to describe a heavenly vision.

There were twenty-four thrones with twenty-four elders seated around God. They are dressed in white, which is a symbol of purity, and have crowns of gold, symbolic of royalty. Who are these elders? Revelation does not make their identity clear. They may be human or they may be angelic. Either way, they minister before God and worship him.

We see another reference to the “seven spirits of God,” also referenced in Revelation 1:4, Revelation 3:1, and Revelation 5:6. As already indicated, we do not know for sure what these seven spirits are. Some have taken this to mean the “perfect Spirit of God,” seven being the number of completeness or perfection. This could also be taken to mean seven spirits or seven angels who minister on behalf of God. They were present before the throne, and had the appearance of a blaze.

² Some interpret the command “Come up here” to be a call to the entire church. They associate the event of the rapture with this verse.

Also before the throne were “four living creatures,” covered with eyes. One had the appearance of a lion, another an ox, another a man, and another an eagle. Each had six wings. The description of these creatures leads us to believe that they are the same “four living creatures” who visited Ezekiel, in Ezekiel 1. They were instrumental in giving Ezekiel the vision about which he wrote in his book. Now they are before the throne of God, worshipping him. They sing a song that we have come to know as “The Doxology,” declaring the glory of God. Whenever they sing the twenty-four elders fall before God and sing of his glory as well.

5. The Scroll With the Seven Seals

Revelation 5

Chapter 5 introduces the scroll with the seven seals:

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.

You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.”

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!”

The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

God held in his right hand a scroll with seven seals. We see several places in Scripture where scrolls contain the hidden mysteries of God. This one might even be the scroll of Daniel. Daniel 12:4 says:

But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.

The scroll in God's hand contained a revelation of what would take place in the end of time as we know it. It was perfectly sealed – with seven seals. An angel asked who was worthy to break the seals so that the scroll could be read. Nobody was worthy. The seals were put in place by God and nobody was worthy to touch them. John wept out of disappointment, but then Jesus himself – the only one who is worthy, stepped forward to break the seals.

Jesus is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." This language comes from Genesis 49:9, when Jacob is pronouncing his final blessing over his twelve sons. Genesis 49:9-10 says:

You are a lion's cub, O Judah;
you return from the prey, my son.
Like a lion he crouches and lies down,
Like a lioness – who dares to rouse him?
The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he comes to whom it belongs
and the obedience of the nations is his.

The lion is considered to be a powerful ruler in the animal kingdom. "The Lion King" was a story built around an already-existent idea that lions rule among the animals. Jacob knew that one would emerge from the tribe of Judah who would be a strong ruler, and the scepter would never depart from this one. Jesus was that king.

In the passage he is also called "the Root of David." This language comes from Isaiah 11:1-10:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him –
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord –

and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;

but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.

The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,
and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.

They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

David was the son of Jesse. Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would be a shoot from the root of Jesse. The Isaiah passage speaks of the day when peace would ultimately reign on the earth, not only among men but among other creatures. Wolves, lambs, leopards, goats, calves, lions, and little children could all mingle together in peace and safety. Creature would not rise up against creature. An Edenic state would be restored and nature would be in harmony. They would follow the righteous counsel and leadership of this one from the root of Jesse.

The words of the scroll describe the events that will bring about the restoration of this Edenic state. Jesus has stepped forward as the one who can break the seals so that the words of the scroll may be executed.

The Revelation passage also describes Jesus as “a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain.” Jesus came to be the lion of Judah who would rule in power, but he first came to be the sacrificial lamb that would pay for the sins of the world. It was because he was willing to be the sacrifice that he was now worthy to break the seals of the scroll. It says that “he had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” The eyes are symbolic of his omniscience and omnipresence. He is everywhere and sees everything that goes on.

The word “horn” has several connotations in Scripture. In some places, it has the meaning of the horns of an animal. At times, this connotation has an overtone of aggression or power – an animal using its horns to strike another animal.

A very frequent use of the word refers to the horns of the altar at the tabernacle or temple. The four corners of the altar had horns that pointed towards heaven. Blood was applied to the horns during a sacrifice, symbolic of lifting the blood to heaven, offering it to God. The horns were symbolic of the authority and power of God.

The word “horn” was also used to refer to a trumpet – a musical horn. This is fitting, since they were made out of animal horns. These sorts of horns were normally used to rally troops in battle and thus they, too, carried a connotation of power, aggression, or authority.

The other meaning of “horn” is reflected in the following verses:

Then Hannah prayed and said:
“My heart rejoices in the Lord;
in the Lord my horn is lifted high.
My mouth boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance.” (1 Samuel 2:1)

those who oppose the Lord will be shattered.
He will thunder against them from heaven;
the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.
“He will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.” (1 Samuel 2:10)

my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation.
He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior –
from violent men you save me. (2 Samuel 22:3)

“To the arrogant I say, ‘Boast no more,’
and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up your horns.
Do not lift your horns against heaven;
do not speak with outstretched neck.’”
No one from the east or the west
or from the desert can exalt a man.
But it is God who judges:
He brings one down, he exalts another.
In the hand of the Lord is a cup
full of foaming wine mixed with spices;
he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth
drink it down to its very dregs.
As for me, I will declare this forever;
I will sing praise to the God of Jacob.
I will cut off the horns of all the wicked,
but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up. (Psalm 75:4-10)

Here I will make a horn grow for David
and set up a lamp for my anointed one. (Psalm 132:17)

“Moab’s horn is cut off;
her arm is broken,”
declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 48:25)

In fierce anger he has cut off
every horn of Israel.
He has withdrawn his right hand
at the approach of the enemy.
He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire
that consumes everything around it. (Lamentations 2:3)

On that day I will make a horn grow for the house of Israel, and I will open your mouth
among them. Then they will know that I am the Lord. (Ezekiel 29:21)

After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast – terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns.

While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully. (Daniel 7:7-8)

Then I looked up – and there before me were four horns! I asked the angel who was speaking to me, “What are these?”

He answered me, “These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem. (Zechariah 1:18)

In each of these, “horn” is a symbolic reference of authority, power, or honor. The Lord exalts the horns of those he wishes to raise up. He breaks off the horns of those he wishes to humble. Daniel’s beast had ten horns, symbolic of multiplied power or perhaps ten rulers. Each of the meanings of “horn” had some connotation of power or authority. That is the exclusive meaning of “horn” in the passages above. This is the meaning of “horn” in Revelation 5.

Jesus had seven horns. This is symbolic of perfect authority and perfect power. Jesus ruled absolutely. He was absolutely exalted by God. The Lion of Judah and Root of David was the perfect king.

He took the scroll from God, preparing to break the seals. When he did, the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders, and a mighty chorus of angels broke out in praise and worship. They sang of the worthiness of Jesus. They praised him for purchasing the salvation of the nations with his blood.

6. The Breaking of the Six Seals

Revelation 6

Chapter 6 begins the process of the breaking of the seven seals. The first six are broken in this chapter. Each breaking is accompanied by an event in heaven or on earth, typically catastrophic in nature. There was an interlude before the seventh seal was broken.

Chapter 6 says:

I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.

When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of

wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The breaking of the first seal unleashed a rider on a white horse, bent on conquest. This represents destruction on earth, characterized by nation rising up against nation.

The breaking of the second seal unleashed a rider on a red horse. He took peace from the earth and caused men to slay one another. He brings destruction, characterized by internal revolt within nations, civil war, lawlessness, and anarchy. It is a time when men fear their neighbors and our cities are no longer safe places to live.

The breaking of the third seal unleashed a rider on a black horse, bringing destruction characterized by famine.

The breaking of the fourth seal unleashed a rider on a pale horse. He brought destruction characterized by sword, famine, plague, and attacks by the wild animals of the earth. This destruction took the lives of a quarter of the people on the earth. Note that these four forms of judgment were promised in Ezekiel 14:21. The sword and the famine also overlap with the three previous judgments. This seems to be an indication that the destruction brought about by the judgments will intensify to the point of taking the lives of a quarter of the people on the earth.

The idea of suffering destruction at the hands of wild animals may seem strange to our urbanized world, but it is not really so weird. Man has done much to kill off the food supply of wild animals. It is not totally uncommon for wolves, coyotes, or whatever to wander into urban areas in search of food. Periodically there is a news report of such an animal attacking a child who is playing in his back yard. Similarly we hear of shark attacks on swimmers increasing as the seas are overfished and their other food supplies depleted. If the world enters into an era of massive famine, animals feeding upon men will be a natural consequence.

As the fifth seal was broken, a mass of "souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained" appeared before the throne of God, crying out for

judgment to be poured out on the earth that they might be vindicated. They are given white robes, symbolic of purity, and are told to wait “until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.” Who are these people?

Revelation 7:14 explains that these are the souls of the faithful that have died during the Great Tribulation. Those of us who believe in a pretribulational rapture believe that the church will be taken out prior to the beginning of the Great Tribulation. We will have already received our glorified bodies and we will not suffer the events of the final judgment. During the Tribulation, however, people will continue to become followers of Jesus, many probably as a result of the rapture itself. (Unbelievers who are told about the rapture may scoff at the idea. When it happens, they will seriously reconsider the teachings of Jesus.) Many who become followers of Jesus during that time will suffer martyrdom for their decision. They are the ones who cry out when the fifth seal is broken.

The breaking of the sixth seal brought about many natural disasters – earthquakes and atmospheric catastrophes. They will bring terror on many, who will seek protection from the wrath of God, even in death.

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus’ disciples asked him what would be the sign that the end of the age was coming. He told them in Matthew 24:6-8:

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

Long before John’s revelation, Jesus saw these same signs. He describes them as “birth pains.” That is what they are.

The seals on the scroll are being broken for a purpose. The purpose is that the scroll may be read. The scroll contains God’s plan for restoring the universe to its created purpose. Wars, rumors of wars, civil lawlessness, earthquakes, and famine are unfortunately commonplace things. The rate at which these things are happening in the world is increasing at an alarming rate. It is the same way that the frequency and intensity of birth pains increase as the actual birth draws near. We live in an age where the seals are beginning to give way. The labor pains are increasing.

We are awaiting the birth.

7. The 144,000

Revelation 7

Six seals have been broken. There is expectation, waiting for the breaking of the seventh seal. Chapter 7 is an interlude, waiting for the breaking of that seal. The chapter says:

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed,
from the tribe of Reuben 12,000,
from the tribe of Gad 12,000,

from the tribe of Asher 12,000,
from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000,
from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,

from the tribe of Simeon 12,000,
from the tribe of Levi 12,000,
from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,

from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000,
from the tribe of Joseph 12,000,
from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

“Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!”

Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come from?”

I answered, “Sir, you know.”

And he said, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore,

“they are before the throne of God
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.

Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.
The sun will not beat upon them,
nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;
he will lead them to springs of living water.
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

The destruction is stilled for a time while the seal of God is put on 144,000 faithful. In the passage, they are enumerated as 12,000 from each of twelve tribes of Israel. Whether or not this literally refers to Jews is a matter of debate. Romans 11 tells us that there will be a massive revival among the Jews in the end time. This may well be triggered by the rapture. The Old and New Testaments both point to the rapture. When it occurs, many Jews are going to realize who Jesus really was and become his followers. Thus the 144,000 could be a literal reference to Jews.

There are a few problems with that interpretation, however. Why at this point would God treat Jewish and Gentile believers differently? Furthermore, ten of the twelve tribes basically vanished when the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom occurred. The list of names that appear in the list is also strange.. The twelve sons of Jacob were the sons of Leah (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun), the sons of Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin), the sons of Bilhah (Dan and Naphtali), and the sons of Zilpah (Gad and Asher). Before he died, Jacob adopted Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephriam as his own. They essentially supplanted their father in the inheritance giving him thirteen heirs – Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Manasseh, Ephriam, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. When the children of Israel finally entered the Promised Land, the descendants of Levi were dispersed to Levitical cities inside the other territories and did not receive a territory of their own. Thus the people became twelve tribes: Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Manasseh, Ephriam, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. The list in the passage above does not match any of these groupings. If it is a list of the sons of Jacob then Manasseh has replaced Dan. If it is a list of the tribes of Israel then Joseph and Levi had replaced Dan and Ephriam. There is no explanation given for why that is.

Most likely the number 144,000 is symbolic and the list of the twelve tribes is as well. It seems that all living believers (which would include Jewish Christians) are being sealed.

Sealed for what?

In Ezekiel 9, an angel circulated throughout the city of Jerusalem to put a seal on the forehead of the faithful of God. Everyone who did not receive the seal was killed. This is probably a precursor to that event. The seal seems to have signified that these people would receive the protection of God.

On the other hand, Revelation 6:11 indicated that there would be more people martyred for the faith.

Somehow these people are being marked for protection by God. This may mean protecting them through death rather than from death. (In fact, as we shall see in Chapters 12-13, they may indeed be sealed for martyrdom, but even then they will have God's protection.) Things are still going to be hard. This seal sets the people apart from those who take the mark of the beast in Revelation 13. They are protected from the destruction that comes as part of the fifth trumpet blast in Revelation 9. They may experience the wrath of men, but they receive divine relief from the judgment of God.

The scene now shifts back to heaven. When the fifth seal was broken, the martyrs cried out for justice and vengeance. They appear again and join the angels, twenty-four elders, and four living creatures in giving praise and worship to God. It is here that they are identified as those

who have been martyred for the faith. They are now in a place where they will never again face hunger, thirst, or pain. Jesus is their shepherd. God himself will wipe every tear from their eyes.

8. The Seventh Seal – The Six Trumpets

Revelation 8-9

In Chapter 8, the seventh seal is broken. When it is broken, it starts a series of seven trumpet blasts. Chapters 8 and 9 say:

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

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

Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water – the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.

As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a

man. During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.

The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said 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 kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.

The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood – idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

There was no specific activity associated with the breaking of the seventh seal. Instead, it instigated the blowing of the seven trumpets, each of which had an associated event in heaven or on earth. As was true with the seals, six of the trumpets are blown and then there is an interlude before the blowing of the seventh.

When the seventh seal was broken, there was silence in heaven for about half of an hour. All waited in pregnant expectation.

The passage says that incense, mixed with the prayers of the saints is offered to God. That is an interesting analogy. Our prayers go up before God like a fragrant incense. They are to him a pleasing aroma. This particular reference seems to be to the prayers of the martyrs, offered when the fifth seal was broken. They prayed for vengeance. They were told to wait "until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed" (Revelation 6:11). In Chapter 7, the remaining saints were sealed, which may indicated that they were being sealed for martyrdom. An angel takes a censer filled with fire, incense, and the prayers of the saints and casts it down to earth. It rains down in further destruction.

Seven angels prepare to blow seven trumpets.

The results of the first four trumpets were similar. When the first one blew, "hail and fire mixed with blood" fell to earth, burning up a third of the trees and grass. When the second one blew, something like a huge burning mountain fell into the sea. A third of the sea turned to blood (note

that this was one of the Egyptian plagues of Exodus). A third of the sea life died and a third of the sea vessels were destroyed. When the third trumpet blew, something like a huge burning star fell from the sky onto the rivers and water supplies. It turned a third of the water bitter and many people died from drinking it. When the fourth trumpet blew, the sun, moon, and stars were struck so that darkness was upon a third of the earth (note that this was another of the plagues of the Exodus)³.

When John saw these visions, they must have seemed really strange. How could there be huge blazing masses falling to the earth, contaminating the water, burning a fourth of the earth, destroying sea life, and darkening the atmosphere? Today we have buttons in the offices of leaders of several nations that can be pushed to bring about these exact symptoms. That same button would bring fulfillment to the words of Zechariah 14:12:

This is the plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

John and Zechariah were observing the same event from different perspectives. They may have been witnessing nuclear warfare that will be part of the final destruction of man.

These events are terrible, but the worst is yet to come. An eagle flew through heaven pronouncing woe upon those who would have to suffer the other three trumpet blasts. The fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpet blasts are called the first, second, and third woes respectively in the next several chapters.

When the fifth trumpet blew, a “star that had fallen” to earth was given the key to the Abyss. He opened it and locusts streamed out of it as thick as smoke (devastation by locusts was one of the plagues of the Exodus as well). The locusts had an appearance of evil. They tormented those who did not have the seal of God for five months. They inflicted such severe pain that people wanted to die, but somehow death eluded them.

Who is the “star” that had fallen to earth? This may be a reference to Satan. It may be an angel who is obediently bringing about the next phase of God’s judgment. The locusts are likely demons who have been unleashed to torment the unfaithful. Locusts are a common symbol of destruction in the Old Testament. At the center of Joel’s prophecy is a devastation by locusts; perhaps he was seeing this event.

This plague will be terrible and painful. The first woe has occurred. Two more are yet to come. The pain and terror are not over.

When the sixth trumpet blew, two hundred million mounted troops were released. A third of mankind would be killed by the fire, smoke, and sulfur that they “breathed.” Even though sulfur is a primary ingredient of gunpowder, this may or may not be a reference to the modern instruments of war. There is much imagery in this vision. One must be cautious about reading too much into the symbols. The real damage seems to be inflicted by the horses rather than their riders. The fact that they have tails like serpents signifies their satanic connection.

Chapter 9 concludes by noting that those who survived these plagues still refused to repent of their idolatry. This is staggering. After everything that they have endured, they cling to their idolatry, murder, magic, immorality, and other forms of godlessness. This is inconceivable and yet totally consistent with the nature of man.

³ Those who have experienced volcanic eruptions say that they black out the sky and make it dark as night in the middle of the day.

The second woe has happened. The third is yet to come. The seventh trumpet has yet to be blown.

9. The Little Scroll

Revelation 10

Chapter 10 says:

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."

Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

This scene occurs during the interlude between the blowing of the sixth and seventh trumpets. A powerful and fearful-looking angel came down from heaven with a little scroll. When he descended to earth he gave a mighty shout, and in response "the voices of the seven thunders spoke." John was going to record their words but was told not to.

Who are these seven thunders and what did they say? Thunder and lightning, though spectacular, are fearful. This could be a symbolic reference to another set of judgments to be poured down on the earth. We do not know why John was told not to record the words. Perhaps because man had refused to repent in the face of all the other judgments God felt that he did not need another warning. As for what they said, we do not know. John was obedient and did not record their words.

The angel announced that there would be no more delay, that the seventh trumpet would blow and the mysteries of God as announced through his prophets would come to pass. A voice told John to take the scroll from the angel and to eat it. It would taste sweet in his mouth but would turn sour in his stomach. This parallels instructions that were given to Ezekiel. Ezekiel 3:1-3 says:

And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

In the life of Ezekiel, this occurred as part of his call to prophetic ministry. The words of the prophecies had to become part of him, as if he had eaten and digested them. They tasted sweet in his mouth. The word of God should be sweet to us. This idea parallels passages in the Old Testament in addition to the Ezekiel passage above. Psalm 119:103 says, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" Jeremiah 15:16 says, "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty."

In contrast to the experience of Ezekiel, however, the words were bitter in the stomach of John. We have no record of what the scroll actually said, but the fact that the message was bitter indicates that it probably described the destruction yet to come. The mighty angel who descended at the beginning of the chapter indicated that the mysteries of God, revealed through the prophets, would take place without delay. More than likely the scroll contained prophetic words of destruction that were about to take place, without delay.

John was told that he must "prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings." For the majority of those left on earth, the prophecy would be a message of bitter, bloody, absolute destruction. It would make anyone's stomach turn queasy.

10. The Two Witnesses

Revelation 11:1-14

Chapter 11 also takes place in the interlude between the blowing of the sixth and seventh trumpets. The two witnesses of Revelation are introduced in this chapter. Revelation 11:1-14 says:

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven

saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

This is a very difficult chapter to interpret. Commentators differ widely on its meaning.

The chapter begins with John measuring the temple and counting the worshippers. He was to exclude the Court of the Gentiles, because they would "trample on the holy city for 42 months."

Commentators are divided as to whether or not this is a reference to an actual temple. It seems likely that "Gentiles" here refers to unbelievers and not those who are ethnically Gentile. Thus John is assessing the believers versus the unbelievers. The unbelievers were going to trample the church for 42 months, or 3 1/2 years.

We initially saw this significant timeline (of 42 months or 3 1/2 years) in Daniel 7:25. Daniel told of a ruler who would arise and oppress the saints for "a time, times and half a time," which is normally interpreted to mean 3 1/2 years. Daniel 12:7 says, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed." It seems that John and Daniel both foresaw a three and one-half year period when the church would be heavily persecuted by unbelievers.

It is interesting that the unbelievers were symbolically represented by those in the Court of the Gentiles. The Court of the Gentiles was part of the temple. It is possible that this represents a division in the church. There may be a battle between true believers in the church and apostate unbelievers who hang out in the church.

Two witnesses are going to arise. They are going to empower the testimony of the church during this 3 1/2 years, which equates to the 1,260 days mentioned in the passage. The passage says that they are "the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth." These two figures appear in Zechariah 4. Zechariah 4:14 describes them as "the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."

The identity of these two witnesses has been conjectured by many students of the Bible, but we really do not know who they are. Some have suggested that they are symbolic, representing the witness of the entire church rather than being two literal individuals. That explanation has some merit, except for the fact that they are summoned from the earth in Revelation 11:12, whereas the church is still present on the earth in Revelation 12:17. It is probably best to understand these to be two final-day prophets who embody the power of the church in the final days.

The text links them with the ministries of Elijah and Moses. The powers attributed to them parallel the miracles witnessed in the lives of Elijah and Moses. These two prophets come ministering in the power and the spirit of those powerful Old Testament prophets. For three and one-half years they give powerful testimony to the truth of God. They work signs and wonders and the church rallies behind their witness. The church suffers great persecution during this time (remember that the Gentiles are trampling the holy city during this time) but is able to endure under the leadership of these witnesses. It is God's will that they prevail.

In Revelation 11:7 things change. "The beast that comes up from the Abyss" is allowed to kill the two witnesses. This is the first mention of a "beast" in Revelation. The imagery comes from

Daniel, who had visions of various beasts wreaking havoc on the earth. There will be more beasts to come in Revelation. The identity of this particular beast is uncertain. Daniel simply says that he emerges from the “Abyss,” which is the demonic “hang out.” He kills the two witnesses. Their bodies lie exposed and unburied in the streets of Jerusalem (referred to as Sodom and Egypt) for three and one-half days, one day for each year of their testimony. To leave a body unburied was an act of great dishonor. The unrighteous who have been challenged by their testimony are ecstatic over the death of the two witnesses. They celebrate the deaths and even exchange gifts.

Then at the end of the three and one-half days, God breathes life back into their bodies. They arise in the streets of Jerusalem. People are astounded and terrified. A voice from heaven summons them to “come up” and in full view of their enemies they are taken to heaven.

That very hour an earthquake hit the city. Many people were killed. The survivors were finally terrified enough to pay homage to God.

Then John announces that the third woe, the seventh trumpet, is about to take place.

11. The Seventh Trumpet

Revelation 11:15-19

Revelation 11:15-19 says:

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,
and he will reign for ever and ever.”

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
the One who is and who was,
because you have taken your great power
and have begun to reign.

The nations were angry;
and your wrath has come.
The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets
and your saints and those who reverence your name,
both small and great –
and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

When the seventh trumpet blew, there was a proclamation that the kingdom of the world would at last be supplanted by the Kingdom of God. The prayer of Jesus, “Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven” is finally being fulfilled. He would reign here as he does there and his reign would be forever.

At the proclamation the twenty-four elders fell down and worshipped. The temple of God was opened and the Ark of the Covenant, the physical manifestation of his presence on earth, was visible. Lightning and thunder, earthquakes and hail rained down as nature itself declared the event.

It was time to put down the enemy at last.

12. War in Heaven

Revelation 12:1-13:1a

The final war begins in chapter 12. Revelation 12:1-13:1a says:

A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Christ.
For the accuser of our brothers,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.

They overcame him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony;
they did not love their lives so much
as to shrink from death.

Therefore rejoice, you heavens
and you who dwell in them!
But woe to the earth and the sea,
because the devil has gone down to you!
He is filled with fury,
because he knows that his time is short.”

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.

There is a drama being played out here. The woman represents the faithful Jews, probably specifically those within the physical borders of Israel. She gave birth to the male child who would rule with an iron scepter – Jesus. From the time that Jesus was born, the dragon, or Satan tried to destroy him. We saw this happen when Herod slaughtered the baby boys in Bethlehem. God protected him, however. Even when Satan was ultimately allowed to kill Jesus, God protected him and resurrected him, bringing about the ultimate victory against the forces of Satan. Thus the child, Jesus, was taken to be with God while the final battle prepared to take place. This part of the vision is history. The rest seems to be that which has not yet taken place. The woman – the faithful Jews in Israel – is taken to the desert to be protected by God for three and one-half years. This seems to correspond to the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:15-20:

So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.

Jesus foresaw the time when Jerusalem would come under attack and the faithful would flee the area to be protected by God.

Some mention should be made of Revelation 12:3-4. This passage introduces the presence of Satan by saying:

Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.

We know that this is a reference to Satan because Revelation 12:9 identifies the dragon to be "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan." Note that this is the only point in Scripture where the serpent of Eden is actually identified as Satan. The reference to his tail sweeping a third of the stars out of the sky is often interpreted to be a reference to a revolt among the angels. Many assume that this passage indicates that Satan once led a revolt among the angels and that a third of them joined him. As a result of their revolt, they were cast out of heaven to the earth, where they would cause their destruction until the end of time. Satan became the leader and the angels who followed him became his demons.

This interpretation may be correct, but realize that it reads a great deal into the passage. Revelation 12:9 does indicate that angels did indeed side with Satan and they, too were cast to earth with him. We do not have to conjecture to reach that conclusion. It is difficult to use Revelation 12:4 to dogmatically say that a third of the angels sided with Satan, however. Fortunately it does not really matter whether or not it was a third of the angels.

War ensued in the heavenlies. The angels of God, led by Michael, battled the angels of Satan. The army of God prevailed and Satan and his cronies were cast to earth. This may be the event that Jesus saw in Luke 10:18, "He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." A voice in heaven declared that the salvation provided by the blood of Jesus has finally triumphed over the forces of Satan. There is woe pronounced on the earth, however, because Satan's band has been cast to earth once and for all and they are mad.

The dragon sought out the woman – the faithful Jews – to wage war against her (them) but found that she (they) were under God's protection (they had been taken to the desert for three and one-half years to be guarded by God). Instead he began to wage war on the offspring of the woman, which would be the rest of the church.

13. The Beast

Revelation 13:1b-18

Chapter 13 continues the drama:

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?"

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

He who has an ear, let him hear.

If anyone is to go into captivity,
into captivity he will go.
If anyone is to be killed with the sword,
with the sword he will be killed.

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free

and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

If there was an award for "The Chapter of the Bible that has Spawned the Most Speculation About What it Means" this one would probably be the winner. People want to hang an identity on this beast. They want to know what "666" means. I've seen an assortment of conclusions, identifying the beast to be everyone from Adolph Hitler to Jimmy Carter to the American media. I've heard so many explanations of this in my life that I have learned not to speculate. God did not give us a name. He could have if he wanted to. Isaiah specifically named Cyrus. Revelation does not specifically name the beast.

There are actually two beasts in this chapter. Note that there was also a beast in Chapter 11, who killed the two witnesses. The beast in chapter 11 seems to be the first of the beasts in chapter 13.

There is a great deal of language in this chapter that may be symbolic and meaningful, but on the other hand it may simply be the color and texture of John's vision. It begins with the first verse, "And I saw a beast coming out of the sea." This may be an indication that the beast represents a leader from a nation surrounded by the ocean, such as England. Rising from the sea may represent rising out of evil, since the Jewish mindset viewed the sea as evil and dangerous. On the other hand, it may simply mean that in John's vision, he saw a creature walk out of water onto a beach. One must be careful about getting too dogmatic about the interpretation of such phrases. Understanding them properly may be vital to pinning a correct identity on "the beast," but it is not critical to understand them in order to discern correctly the overall message of Revelation.

This beast had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on the horns. Each head had a blasphemous name written on it. This description alone has generated volumes of explanations. The seven heads and ten horns link this beast with the dragon in Revelation 12:3, who was identified as Satan in Revelation 12:8. That does not mean that the beast in Revelation 13 is Satan, but it means that they are of similar nature or purpose. Horns normally represent power or authority. Ten horns may represent ten rulers – kings, Caesars, or whatever. It also links this with the beast in Daniel 7:7. This beast seems to be the same beast that Daniel saw. This beast is blasphemous, as was Daniel's. This beast has characteristics of a leopard, a bear, and a lion. In Daniel 7, he saw multiple beasts, one representing a lion, the second resembling a bear, and the third resembling a leopard. Thus the beast in Revelation 13 embodies all of the beasts in Daniel 7.

Revelation 13 says that the dragon – Satan – gives this beast his power and authority. This beast is a servant of Satan. He is Satan's end-times champion – the antichrist. This is the "man of lawlessness" in 2 Thessalonians 2.

The passage indicates that one of the seven heads seemed to have a fatal wound that had healed. The meaning of this is unclear. It may have been obvious to John's readers, but lost on us today. Remember that to John, the Roman Empire was the embodiment of this beast. He may have been referring to some Roman leader who survived a near-fatal wound. Also remember that John may have been simply writing down what he saw in his vision; we cannot assume that every detail has eschatological significance.

The beast had a great following. He allowed himself to become an object of worship. We see that this is also true of Daniel's beast. Quoting from the section entitled, "The Vision of the Ram and the Goat" in Getting Into the Promised Land Without Falling Asleep in Leviticus,

If we piece together what we know of him from Daniel 7 and 8 we see the following characteristics:

- He is an arrogant ruler.
- He will put his own government into place.
- He will attain great power and will bring about great destruction.
- At a time when people feel secure, he will destroy them.
- He will be a man of deceit.
- He will oppress the saints/the holy people. He will oppress them for three and a half years. It seems that early on in that process he will force sacrifices to God to cease. He will set himself up as an object of worship. He will desecrate the temple with unclean sacrifices and force the people into unclean and lawless living. 1,150 days later (around three years and two months) the temple will be cleansed, presumably when the Prince of princes comes to overthrow this ruler. The saints/holy people will be rescued from this evil ruler. An everlasting kingdom of righteousness will supplant the kingdom of this evil ruler.

Daniel and John are clearly referring to the same individual. This antichrist is going to arise, probably as a political leader from a nation that is a remnant of the former Roman Empire. He will be empowered by Satan and will have a tremendous following. He will transition from being a political leader to being a spiritual leader, establishing himself as an object of worship. Once he is widely accepted as an object of worship, he will begin to harass those who refuse to worship him, specifically those who continue to worship the true God. He will set up fierce persecution against them, and will continue to do so for forty-two months, or three and one-half years. It will be a time when many faithful will go into captivity or be martyred. Faithful endurance will be required.

Then another beast emerges. This one "had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon." Horns represent power or authority. The lamb is a symbol of the church. The reference to the "two horns like a lamb" seem to indicate that he will operate in the authority of "the church," but the fact that he speaks like a dragon indicates that he really speaks on behalf of Satan. This seems to be a reference to a false prophet who may arise within the structure of the church. His mission will be to try to lure the faithful into worship of the antichrist. He will have a dazzling, signs and wonders ministry. He will use it to try to win people to the antichrist, however. He will set up images of the antichrist and eventually try to enforce worship. He will kill those who do not worship the antichrist.

The false prophet also compels people to receive the mark of the beast on the right hand or forehead. People will not be able to engage in commerce without this mark. The mark of the beast is his name or "the number of his name." The number of his name is 666.

Just to save a great deal of time and speculation, I do not know what 666 means. Neither does any other human on earth except perhaps the antichrist himself, if he is alive.

Note that Satan, the Beast, and his False Prophet form an unholy trinity, in opposition to the true Trinity.

14. The Triumph of the Redeemed

Revelation 14

What John has just written could cause great concern to its readers. Thus in Chapter 14 he looks ahead to the time when the faithful will receive their reward.

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

The message of Chapter 13 was that the antichrist is going to have a time when he will inflict great persecution upon the faithful. Chapter 14 quickly points them to the day when they will be overcomers, having risen above the trouble of the tribulation.

John sees Jesus standing on Mount Zion. This seems to be a figurative reference to heaven, based on the events which follow. With him are the 144,000 faithful who were sealed in Revelation 7. It represents a massive number of faithful people. They have God's name and Jesus' name written on their foreheads⁴. This is in sharp contrast of those in the previous chapter who received the mark of the beast.

The mark of the beast may or may not be a literal thing. Whether or not there is a physical mark, there is a spiritual mark for certain. Having the mark of the beast means that we have chosen the beast over God. Having the mark of God means that we have chosen God over evil. Day by day as we live our lives we choose our mark. If the day ever comes when we are pressed to take a physical mark of the beast, it will be a simple decision because it will be a choice that we have already lived out in our lives. When the day comes that the events in Chapter 14 actually take place, we will want to have the mark of God on our foreheads.

This mass of faithful followers stood with Jesus, the four living creatures, and the elders. They sang songs of praise. The text says that the 144,000 "are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure." This is a bit of a strange verse. The Bible does not teach that sex, within the confines of marriage, defiles an individual. This seems to need a figurative interpretation. Remember that Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." The verse seems to imply "spiritual virginity" rather than sexual. Those who stand with the Lamb of God are those who have not defiled themselves by worship of other gods. The Old Testament frequently compares idolatry to fornication. John is using that same imagery. John also says that these people are pure, truthful, and blameless. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

This band of faithful includes many who were martyred during the antichrist's campaign of terror (they all may have been martyred then). By not receiving the mark of the beast they were killed. They came out on top as a result. God is about to deal with those who did receive the mark of the beast. He is about to put an end to the antichrist's reign.

Three angels fly over the earth with an ominous proclamation of judgment. In particular, the third one proclaims the demise of those who follow the beast. They are about to face a fiery torment. God's wrath and fury will be poured out upon them. There will be no rest for them from the suffering. In contrast to this, another voice calls out from heaven and proclaims blessings and rest for the faithful who die in the Lord. They will have rest from their labor, in contrast to the restless torment to be endured by the unfaithful.

Jesus then appeared with a sickle, ready to harvest the earth. He swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the unrighteous and threw them into the "great winepress of God's wrath." God was going to stomp on them and they were going to bleed. It says that "blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia," (a little less than 200 miles).

It's about over.

⁴ Remember that they received the seal of God's protection in Chapter 7, between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals.

15. The Seven Plagues

Revelation 15-16

We have had the seven seals and the seven trumpets. In chapters 15 and 16, there are the seven bowls of judgment poured out on the earth.

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues – last, because with them God’s wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.
Just and true are your ways,
King of the ages.

Who will not fear you, O Lord,
and bring glory to your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship before you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

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

The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

“You are just in these judgments,
you who are and who were, the Holy One,
because you have so judged;

for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.”

And I heard the altar respond:

“Yes, Lord God Almighty,
true and just are your judgments.”

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

“Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.”

Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!” Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

There is great excitement in heaven that God’s plan is about to be brought to completion. The redeemed sing praises of God’s glory and wonder. The angels assemble to carry out his final wrath. Seven angels are given seven bowls of God’s wrath and judgment and are told to go pour them out on the earth. They bring about plagues upon the earth.

Table 3 - The Seven Bowl Judgments

Bowl	Plague
1	This causes painful sores to break out on the people who have the mark of the beast. Note that the sixth plague that Moses brought about on the people of Egypt caused them to break out in boils.
2	The sea turned to blood, causing all life in it to die. Note that the first plague that Moses brought upon Egypt did the same thing.
3	The rivers and streams turned to blood, just as the sea had done in the previous plague. This hit a little closer to home. The sea turning to blood would be terrible, but if the rivers and streams turned to blood, there would be no drinking water. God gave the people blood as punishment for shedding the blood of the saints.
4	The sun became so hot that it scorched people. They cursed the heat and the God who sent it, but they would not repent.

Bowl	Plague
5	The earth was plunged into total darkness for an extended period of time. Note that the ninth plague that Moses brought upon Egypt had the same effect. The people hated the darkness. They cursed God because of the accumulated misery but they would not repent.
6	The Euphrates River dried up so that armies could cross it. Demons came out of the dragon and the two beasts and began to gather the armies of the world to do battle with God. They assembled in a place called Armageddon. This is probably a reference to "the mountain of Megiddo," which is a strategic defense location in Northern Israel.
7	A loud voice from heaven proclaimed the finality of the judgment. There was lightning and thunder from heaven. The earth was shaken by earthquakes. One of them ripped Jerusalem into three parts. God poured out his wrath on the earth in such quantities that it shook the earth. Giant hailstones fell on the earth. (Note that the seventh plague that Moses brought upon Egypt was hail.) Rather than repent, men cursed God because of their misery.

A progression of events made conditions on earth more and more unbearable. When people get uncomfortable, the natural thing to do is to find somebody to blame. Historically, the Jews have often been the choice. The unrighteous of the world mount a last campaign against Israel. God paved the way for their armies by drying up the Euphrates. He is ready to take them on. The stage is set for the end.

16. The Great Prostitute

Revelation 17

Chapter 17 introduces a character called the Great Prostitute. It also gives further identification concerning the beast with seven heads and ten horns. The chapter says:

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead:

MYSTERY
BABYLON THE GREAT
THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose

names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

“This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.

“The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings – and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”

Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

The woman:

- Is the great prostitute.
- Sits on many waters. The waters represent many peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages.
- Has committed adultery with the kings of the earth.
- Has intoxicated the people of the earth with the wine of her adultery.
- Sat on the scarlet beast with seven heads, ten horns, and blasphemous names.
- Was dressed in riches befitting royalty.
- Was identified as “Mystery, Babylon the Great, Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth.”
- Shed the blood of those faithful to Jesus.
- Is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.

The beast:

- Was scarlet, was covered with blasphemous names, had seven heads and ten horns.
- Once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss to go to his destruction.
- Will cause astonishment among the people of the earth because he now is not and yet will come.
- Had seven heads that represent seven hills. They also represent seven kings. John says that five of those kings have fallen, one is, and one is yet to come. The beast himself is an eighth king.
- Had ten horns that represented ten kings who had not yet come. They would cooperate with the beast, giving him power and authority. They would war against Jesus but would be defeated by him.
- Will eventually hate the prostitute. So will his ten horns, or the coalition that cooperates with him. Ultimately they will accomplish God’s purpose by being the ones to destroy her.

So what do we do with this information? Let me begin by reiterating one point. God is the only one who knows for sure what this means.

When we looked at the verse about the 144,000 who had not defiled themselves with women, I suggested that this probably implied spiritual purity rather than sexual virginity. Keeping with that analogy, the prostitution mentioned in this chapter is spiritual prostitution rather than sexual. (It may have included sexual prostitution, but the issue is broader than sexual.) The woman is the embodiment of all spiritual evil, all worship of false gods. She has involved a “sea of people” in her abominable practices. She has had allies of kings and governments. She has been adored and honored by the world’s systems. She has actively persecuted followers of Jesus and brought them to martyrdom.

In identifying her with “the great city,” John sees a close tie between Rome and the great prostitute. All that she stands for is embraced by Rome. The beast is also intertwined with Rome. John says that the seven heads are seven hills, which is a probable reference to the seven hills of Rome. Rome represented a corrupt and pagan governmental system that opposed the purposes of God. Rome is representative of pagan governmental systems in general.

The beast is the same one that we saw in Chapter 13 and most likely in Chapter 11. The beast is symbolic of governments and rulers who oppose God and his purpose. The heads and the horns represent kings who have already come or who were yet to come from John’s perspective.

The passage says that the beast “once was, now is not, and will come.” Revelation 13:3 talked about the beast having survived a fatal wound. This seems to be another attempt by the antichrist to mimic the power of Jesus. Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected from the dead – once was, now is not, and will come. Apparently the antichrist will have a similar experience – perhaps even rising from the dead. Many people will be amazed at this and will follow him because of the sign.

Initially the forces of the antichrist and the forces of the woman (the great prostitute) will work together. The antichrist will use the false religious system of the woman to accomplish his purpose. They will be allies in the struggle against the followers of Jesus.

Ultimately the antichrist will abandon his alliance with the woman – the false religious system. It will no longer suit his purposes. This will probably coincide with the time when God begins to pour out his wrath on it. Once it ceases to suit his purpose, the forces of the antichrist will turn around and destroy it. Most likely they will blame it for all of the misery in the world and will stamp it out with a vengeance. In doing so, they will actually be fulfilling God’s purpose. God will let them put an end to the false religious system and then he will put an end to them.

17. Fallen Is Babylon the Great!

Revelation 18

In chapter 18 we see the final toppling of the government which is opposed to God. John would have had Rome in mind when he wrote this since it was the unrighteous power of his day. Rome was a foreshadow of the final pagan authority that will be destroyed in the end. John referred to it as Babylon. Babylon had historically been a pagan government opposed to the people of God. The Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem and had torn down Solomon’s temple. Rome was a manifestation of that same spirit, and eventually destroyed Jerusalem and tore down Herod’s temple. We look ahead to the time when the final manifestation of that spirit will be destroyed.

Chapter 18 says:

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted:

“Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!
She has become a home for demons
and a haunt for every evil spirit,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird.

For all the nations have drunk
the maddening wine of her adulteries.
The kings of the earth committed adultery with her,
and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.”

Then I heard another voice from heaven say:

“Come out of her, my people,
so that you will not share in her sins,
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

for her sins are piled up to heaven,
and God has remembered her crimes.

Give back to her as she has given;
pay her back double for what she has done.
Mix her a double portion from her own cup.

Give her as much torture and grief
as the glory and luxury she gave herself.
In her heart she boasts,
'I sit as queen; I am not a widow,
and I will never mourn.'

Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her:
death, mourning and famine.
She will be consumed by fire,
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

“When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:

“Woe! Woe, O great city,
O Babylon, city of power!
In one hour your doom has come!’

“The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more – cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.

“They will say, ‘The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.’ The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out:

“Woe! Woe, O great city,
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,
and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!

In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!’

“Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, ‘Was there ever a city like this great city?’ They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out:

“Woe! Woe, O great city,
where all who had ships on the sea
became rich through her wealth!
In one hour she has been brought to ruin!

Rejoice over her, O heaven!
Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!
God has judged her for the way she treated you.”

Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said:

“With such violence
the great city of Babylon will be thrown down,
never to be found again.

The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters,
will never be heard in you again.
No workman of any trade
will ever be found in you again.
The sound of a millstone
will never be heard in you again.

The light of a lamp
will never shine in you again.
The voice of bridegroom and bride
will never be heard in you again.
Your merchants were the world’s great men.
By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.

In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints,
and of all who have been killed on the earth.”

A mighty angel declares that this final manifestation of Babylon is fallen. Destruction is about to fall upon that land. It will become a place fit only for evil spirits and unclean animals. Note that this prophecy against spiritual Babylon parallels Isaiah’s prophecy against literal Babylon in Isaiah 13:19-22. The days of her excesses are over. Those who have freely partaken of her immorality will have their supply cut off.

Another voice from heaven speaks to any of the faithful who may still live within her borders. They are encouraged to flee so that they might escape the wrath of what is about to take place. This is similar to the warning that Jeremiah gave to the Jews in Jeremiah 50:8, to flee Babylon

before it is destroyed. It is hard to imagine how things could get any worse than what we have already seen in Revelation, but the final judgment of this city will be devastating. God has remembered all of her sins and is about to pay them back double. Her excess of luxury is about to be replaced with an excess of torture and grief. Arrogance will be replaced by mourning and luxury by famine. Fire will fall upon her and destroy her.

The destruction is going to have a profound effect upon those who have partaken of her excesses. Kings who have enjoyed her wares will be stunned and terrorized at her destruction. Merchants who have traded with her will mourn her loss. There are several things that will run through their minds. First of all, they are being cut off from sensual pleasures that they have enjoyed. There will be a great sense of loss associated with that. They will probably be affected even greater by the stunning realization that what happened to Babylon could happen to them. In a moment it was turned from a thriving and arrogant center of immorality and excess to a desolated haunt for demons. Who is protected from having the same thing happen? Note that this lament is very similar to the lament for Tyre in Ezekiel 26-27.

An angel once again declares that this city will be violently overthrown. Never again will it be inhabited. No more will people live there or work there. No longer will it lead the world into immorality and idolatry. No longer will it shed the blood of the faithful.

18. Hallelujah!

Revelation 19:1-10

The fate of the unrighteous is sealed. The battle is about to be over. There is a great shout of joy in heaven. The "great multitude in heaven" sang the Hallelujah Chorus.

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

"Hallelujah!
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

for true and just are his judgments.
He has condemned the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.
He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

And again they shouted:

"Hallelujah!
The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:

"Amen, Hallelujah!"

Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

"Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
both small and great!"

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah!
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear.”

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ ” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

There is intense praise and worship coming from heaven. Those who are with God for ages have longed to see his Kingdom fulfilled. They have yearned to see the end of evil and the establishment of righteousness. They have watched the battle in agony – knowing how it would come out but pained by the very fact that the battle had to take place. Now the culmination of all that they had waited for was imminent.

God would put an end to false religious systems. He would avenge the martyrdom of those who had been struck down by the evil of the false prophets. Hallelujah! God will rise in triumph and will reign in righteousness and majesty unparalleled in the history of the universe. Hallelujah!

Since the ascension, the church had been preparing to become the bride of Christ. The wedding was about to take place. The faithful would be clothed in purity. They were about to take their places as joint heirs of the kingdom. All the promises that had been made were about to be fulfilled. Hallelujah!

The joy and excitement was intense. John was so overcome that he fell down in worship before the messenger who was narrating this to him. That messenger forbade John to worship him. Worship is for God alone.

19. Armageddon

Revelation 19:11-21

Then the scene shifts. At the end of chapter 16 kings and armies were gathered at a place called Armageddon to do battle against the forces of God. “Armageddon” is roughly a Hebrew word meaning “the mountain of Megiddo.” Megiddo is a strategic military location in Northern Israel. Because of the mountainous formations in northern Israel, any army that invaded from the north would normally pass through the Jezreel valley. Megiddo overlooks that valley. From Megiddo the pass could be protected. Thus controlling Megiddo meant controlling northern

access to the country. Many battles had taken place there in history. It may well be the scene of the final great battle before the Millennial Reign of Jesus.

Revelation 19:11-21 says:

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great."

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

The final battle is not really a battle at all. It is a slaughter. The army of heaven is led by Jesus. There are several not-too-subtle clues in the passage that tell us who the rider on the white horse is:

- He is called Faithful and True (Revelation 3:14).
- He judges and makes war with justice (Psalm 9:8).
- He wears many crowns.
- He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood.
- He is the Word of God (John 1:1).
- He rules with an iron scepter (Psalm 2:9, Revelation 2:27, Revelation 12:5).
- His name is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 7:14).

Jesus leads the army into battle but there is no real opposition. Unleashing the full and final wrath of God, they strike down the kings and armies gathered at Armageddon. These are slaughtered and their flesh is left for the birds to eat.

The beast – the antichrist, and his false prophet are captured. They are thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur along with all the remaining who took the mark of the beast and gave him worship.

For now, the rebellion is over.

20. The First Resurrection and the Millennial Reign

Revelation 20:1-6

Revelation 20:1-6 says:

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

After the armies are defeated at Armageddon, God confines Satan to the Abyss – the pit that is the “hang out” of demons. Note that the beast and his false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire in the previous chapter. Satan himself is confined for a time before his final judgment comes. He is confined in the Abyss for one thousand years – a millennium.

John says, “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge.” This may be a reference to Matthew 19:28. Jesus promised that his apostles would sit on thrones and would judge the tribes of Israel with him. In 1 Corinthians 6:2, Paul indicates that the saints – all faithful followers – would participate in judging the world. We are not sure whether this is a reference just to the apostles or to all followers of Jesus who died or were raptured before the events of Revelation. They are gathered to judge those who died in the Lord during the tribulation.

The souls of the faithful who were martyred during the tribulation period are brought back to life. This event is called the first resurrection. They take on glorified bodies. Those who were raptured or those who died before the rapture had already received their glorified bodies. All of these saints are now united. They join Christ and reign over the earth for a thousand years. This period is called the Millennial Reign (a millennium being a thousand years).

Those who died in rebellion remain confined in death during this period.

If the faithful have been resurrected and glorified and they reign with Christ, it poses a curious question. Over whom are they reigning?

Satan, the antichrist, his false prophet, and those who actively supported them are gone. It appears that there are others who survived the events of the Great Tribulation. They did not take the mark of the beast, or else they would have been destroyed according to Revelation 19:20⁵. This is one group who will be ruled by Jesus and the resurrected saints during the millennium.

⁵ If they had any faith in Jesus, there was no evidence of it in their lives or else they would have been martyred by the antichrist and his false prophet. These are fence-riders. They are the wishy-washy, “don’t take sides” kind of people.

There is a second group, however. Remember what happened in Revelation 12:6:

The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

Around the midpoint of the tribulation, a mass of people from Israel fled to the desert to be protected by God for the duration of the tribulation. Although there is no further reference to them after Revelation 12, we assume that they are still alive. Some or even all of these people will be faithful believers in Jesus by this point, but the assumption is that they enter the Millennial Kingdom as pre-glorified flesh and bones human beings.

There is a great promise given for those faithful martyrs who participate in this first resurrection. Their fate is sealed. There will be one final rebellion. There will be a second death. The eternal destiny of these faithful will not be in question when that happens. The second death has no power over them.

21. The Final Rebellion

Revelation 20:7-15

The events following the Millennial Reign are described in Revelation 20:7-15:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

During the millennium, life goes on. People live and die and bear children. The influence of Satan is gone. People live under the Righteous King. Still, some who survived into the millennial kingdom are not really committed to the Lord.

The day comes for the final testing. Satan is loosed from the Abyss. He picks up right where he left off. He roams the nations of the earth amassing one final rebellion. Sure enough, he finds a following. The text says that he gathers the nations of Gog and Magog. These are names found in Ezekiel 38-39, representing the nations of the earth who oppose the purposes of God.

They gather their troops and march against Jesus, his city, and the resurrected saints. When they do, fire rains down upon them and destroys them. Satan is thrown into the fiery lake once and for all, joining the beast and the false prophet, who were put there before the Millennial Kingdom began.

Then the great white throne judgment will occur. God takes his seat. The remaining dead are finally resurrected. Who are those to be judged at this point? It would include all of the unrighteous who died before the millennial kingdom began plus all who lived or died since the millennial kingdom began.

Two books are opened. One is the book of life, containing the names of all who would be spared eternal judgment. The other is a book of deeds committed by each person. People are judged according to their deeds. Furthermore if anyone's name is not in the book of life, he is cast into the lake of fire. This does not imply that salvation is granted on the basis of works. Salvation is still given solely because of faith in Jesus. It is confirmation, however, that salvation will be evidenced by deeds in a person's life.

In the process of all of this, Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire. We do not tend to think of death as a personality that can be punished, and most likely this is meant symbolically. The point is that death has been defeated once and for all. It entered the world at the rebellion of Adam and Eve. Jesus won victory over it at the cross. The effects of it have finally been done away with forever.

Hallelujah!

The final sifting has been done. Everyone who will end up in the lake of fire is there – eternally. All of those who will be eternally rewarded have received their glorified bodies and are ready to spend eternity with God.

22. The New Heaven and the New Earth

Revelation 21:1-22:5

The final glory is described in Revelation 21:1-22:5:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that

of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Most of the people who read or have read Revelation will not live through its events. Everyone who reads Revelation faces trials and tribulations of some sort, often severe. We all need a glimpse of glory. We all cry "Maranatha" from time to time.

The last two chapters of Revelation give us the best picture of eternity with God that we have in Scripture. In these chapters we learn:

- There will be a new heaven and a new earth. God will recreate our environment. There will be no sea associated with the new world.
- The new world will include a New Jerusalem. God will dwell there among his people. It will have indescribable beauty and will be adorned with jewels.
- God himself will wipe every tear from every eye. There will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain.
- We will have free access to the spring of the water of life
- Only those who overcome – who endure in Christ – will receive all of this. The unrighteous and impure will be thrown into the lake of fire.
- The New Jerusalem will have no temple. There will be no need since God and Jesus will live there.

- There will be no need for the sun, moon, and stars because the radiance of God and Jesus will provide light.
- There is a river of the water of life flowing from the city. On each side of the river the tree of life grows, bearing fruit. Men have free access to the tree of life. It will provide healing to the nations. At the fall of man, we lost access to the tree of life and came under the curse of death. The effect of all this is finally reversed.
- Men will interact with God face-to-face.

23. Final Instructions

Revelation 22:6-21

The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

At this point the vision of John comes to a close. The messenger who brought him the vision gives him instructions to record it accurately and to share it. Jesus promises to come quickly and to bring his reward. There will be blessings for those who persevere and eternal punishment for those who are unfaithful.

God promises punishment for anyone who distorts the words of the books. He promises a reward for those who take it seriously. It was important to God to give people this revelation and this hope for the future. It is important that they be forewarned of what is coming that they might conduct themselves appropriately.

Jesus promises to come soon. I believe that we are living on the edge of fulfillment of this. I also acknowledge that throughout history men have believed they were living on the edge of fulfillment of this. We all need that hope and expectancy. The promise uplifts all believers.

24. Eschatological Questions

People tend to look to the book of Revelation as the encyclopedia of end-time events. Some may be confused or even concerned to discover that it does not address many issues commonly associated with end times. There are many terms bantered about in eschatological discussions which are never mentioned in the book. Look carefully and you will not find terms such as rapture, premillennialism, pretribulation, posttribulation, etc. mentioned in the book. Furthermore, even having gone through the text of the book in some detail, the timeline of events may still be a bit unclear. This section is an attempt to address some of those issues.

Why is there no mention of the rapture in Revelation?

The word “rapture” is not used in Scripture – anywhere. The concept is there, however. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 says:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says:

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

There is an event where those who are dead in Christ will rise. The living who belong to Christ will be taken from the earth. The event is called “the rapture,” which means “the snatching away.”

Although there is a difference of opinions on why it is not mentioned, I believe that it is not mentioned in Revelation because it takes place before the events of Revelation (beginning in Chapter 4) begin. On the other hand, some view that Revelation 4:1 is a reference to the rapture. The verse says:

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

In this verse, John is summoned to heaven to observe the events of Revelation. Some view the words "come up here" as a summon to all believers, bringing about the rapture. As we shall see, some also believe that the rapture takes place at the end of the Great Tribulation.

Why is the Great Tribulation assumed to last seven years?

The idea of the seven-year tribulation originated in Daniel Chapter 9. Daniel 9:24-27 says:

Seventy "sevens" are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.

Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven "sevens," and sixty-two "sevens." It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two "sevens," the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one "seven." In the middle of the "seven" he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

In this passage, a "seven" represents seven years. There are seventy "sevens", divided into three groups.

- Seven sevens (49 years),
- Sixty-two sevens (434 years), then
- One more seven (7 years)

The timing given is:

- The issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (fulfilled when Artaxerxes told Nehemiah to return and rebuild Jerusalem in Nehemiah 2:1-9, dated March 5, 444 BC)
- Seven sevens (during which the rebuilding seems to take place) plus sixty-two sevens (This is a total of sixty-nine "sevens," or 483 years reckoned according to the Jewish calendar. Starting at March 5, 444 BC and counting forward 483 Jewish years advances to Palm Sunday, March 30, AD 33. This is the week of the crucifixion. There is a gap between the close of the sixty-ninth "seven" and the beginning of the seventieth "seven.")
- The Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. (Fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus.)
- The city and the sanctuary will be destroyed. (In AD 70, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by Rome.)
- A ruler will arise at the beginning of the last "seven". He will confirm a covenant with many. (This is the beginning of the Great Tribulation.)
- In the middle of this seven, he will put an end to sacrifices and offerings. He will set up an abomination that causes desolation in the temple.
- At the end he will have the judgment of God poured out on him.

The timing above sets the stage for a seven-year tribulation. Is this fulfilled in Revelation?

Compare the events above with the events in Revelation 11-13. We see a period of 3 1/2 years during which the church is actively persecuted, but yet thrives under the leadership of the two witnesses. At the end of the 3 1/2 years, the beast arises and kills the two witnesses. Following that, there is another 3 1/2 years during which there is massive persecution and destruction of the church. During that last 3 1/2 years, God gives special protection to a remnant of Israel, hiding in the desert. At the end of this (a total of seven years), Jesus himself comes back to lead the battle of Armageddon, handing Satan and his forces their defeat.

Putting together what we know from Daniel with what we know from Revelation, we can deduce certain things. The beast, also known as the antichrist, will be a political ruler who will be established in power before the events of the tribulation begin. During the first half of the tribulation, there will be great persecution against the church, but the antichrist will not visibly participate in that persecution. In fact, he will be seen as a peacemaker and probably have the trust and admiration of the church. In the middle of the tribulation, however, he will turn and become the leader of the opposition to the true church. He will be assisted by his false prophet, who probably arises out of the domain of the church. He will establish himself as a rival object of worship. He will champion the cause of slaughtering the saints during the last half of the tribulation.

If the pretribulation view of the rapture is correct, then nobody who belongs to Jesus now will have to experience the tribulation firsthand. All of this will happen to those who come to faith in Jesus after the rapture. It will be difficult for them, but ultimately not as difficult as for those who follow the antichrist.

The explanation above assumes that the Great Tribulation starts in Revelation 11. Note that there is great turmoil and suffering in the world prior to that, during the breaking of the seven seals and the blowing of the first six trumpets. People account for this in different ways.

Some believe that the events in chapters 4-10 have taken place steadily and with increasing frequency and intensity throughout the last two thousand years. A compressed time scale begins in chapter 11 and the interval from there through Armageddon is seven years. Thus the church has slowly endured the seal judgments and the first six trumpet judgments and will be raptured right before the events of chapter 11 take place.

Others believe that the rapture takes place before any of the events beginning in chapter 4 take place. They see a period of intense turmoil between the rapture and the beginning of the seven years of the tribulation.

Still others do not believe in a pretribulation rapture at all. They see a natural progression of history leading to the seven years which begin in chapter 11. They believe that the church will be present through the years of the tribulation, suffering great persecution and martyrdom.

There is one textual problem with confining the Great Tribulation to a seven-year period. Revelation 6 includes the breaking of the fifth seal. When that seal is broken, the souls of those martyred during the Great Tribulation cry out for justice. Revelation 6 takes place before the events of seven years, however (which begins in Chapter 11). Thus, although there seem to be seven years of intense struggle, the Tribulation may actually include the events which lead up to that seven years (the seals and the trumpets).

What are Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism?

Premillennialists, postmillennialists, and amillennialists differ on interpretation of various parts of Revelation, but particularly of Revelation 20.

Amillennialists do not believe in a literal Millennial Kingdom. They take the concept to be symbolic. (In all fairness, much of Revelation is symbolic, but a good rule of interpretation is to take things literally unless there is a clear reason to take it as symbolic.) They tend to view the millennium as symbolic of the entire period between the first coming of Jesus and the second. Jesus reigns in his Kingdom in the hearts and lives of his believers. Through the influence of the believers in the world, the world steadily becomes a better place. Ultimately Jesus will come and dwell with his people.

Postmillennialists believe in a literal Millennial Kingdom, but they believe that the return of Jesus will be after the millennium (thus the term “postmillennium”). They believe that the good in the lives of believers will ultimately triumph over evil and that the influence of the church will bind the influence of Satan for 1000 years. The Kingdom of Jesus will exist on earth because of the triumph of good over evil. At the end of this 1000 years, Jesus will come again and join his followers.

Premillennialists take the events of Revelation 20 literally. They believe that conditions on earth will get worse and worse and that persecution of the church will increase. They believe that Jesus will come to defeat the armies of evil and Satan will be bound for 1000 years. Dead believers will be resurrected. Jesus will literally dwell on earth and will reign with his believers during the 1000 years. At the end, Satan will be loosed for one final rebellion.

In the early church, premillennialism was the only orthodox view. Amillennialism arose in the 4th century, with Augustine as one of its early prominent supporters. Postmillennialism did not arise until the 17th century. Postmillennialism and amillennialism both assume that the world will steadily grow to be a better place simply because of the salt and light of believers. In earlier times these viewpoints had more adherents because it was easier to believe that the world was getting better. The vast majority of believers today hold to the premillennial viewpoint because there is so much evidence that the world is growing more and more evil in spite of the presence of believers. Note that being a premillennialist is no reason to give up and quit praying, “Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Why do some people believe in a pretribulation rapture, others a midtribulation rapture, and others a posttribulation rapture?

People differ as to when they believe the rapture will occur. This is understandable, since the event is predicted in books such as 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians, but not mentioned in Revelation.

Those who hold a pretribulationist view believe that the rapture will occur before most of the events in the book of Revelation. Some believe that the command to “come up here” in Revelation 4:1 was extended to the entire church and not just John. Others (such as me) do not necessarily believe that this verse refers to the rapture, but still hold that the rapture occurs before the tribulation. Thus references to believers during the tribulation period would refer to people who were converted after the rapture takes place.

Other people hold to a mid-tribulation viewpoint. During the first half of the tribulation, there are two witnesses ministering with some degree of power. After three and a half years they are killed. They lie dead in the streets for three and a half days. God then resuscitates them and summons them to heaven. Once again we see a command to “come up here.” Some believe that this command was to the church and not just to the two witnesses. Thus they perceive the rapture to be in the middle of the tribulation. Again, believers found in the remainder of the book would be people who were converted after the rapture.

Posttribulationists believe that the rapture occurs after the tribulation. Believers endure the entire ordeal, with many dying in the process. The rapture is concurrent with the Second Coming. When Jesus comes down at the battle of Armageddon, the remaining believers are raptured and glorified and join him in the battle.

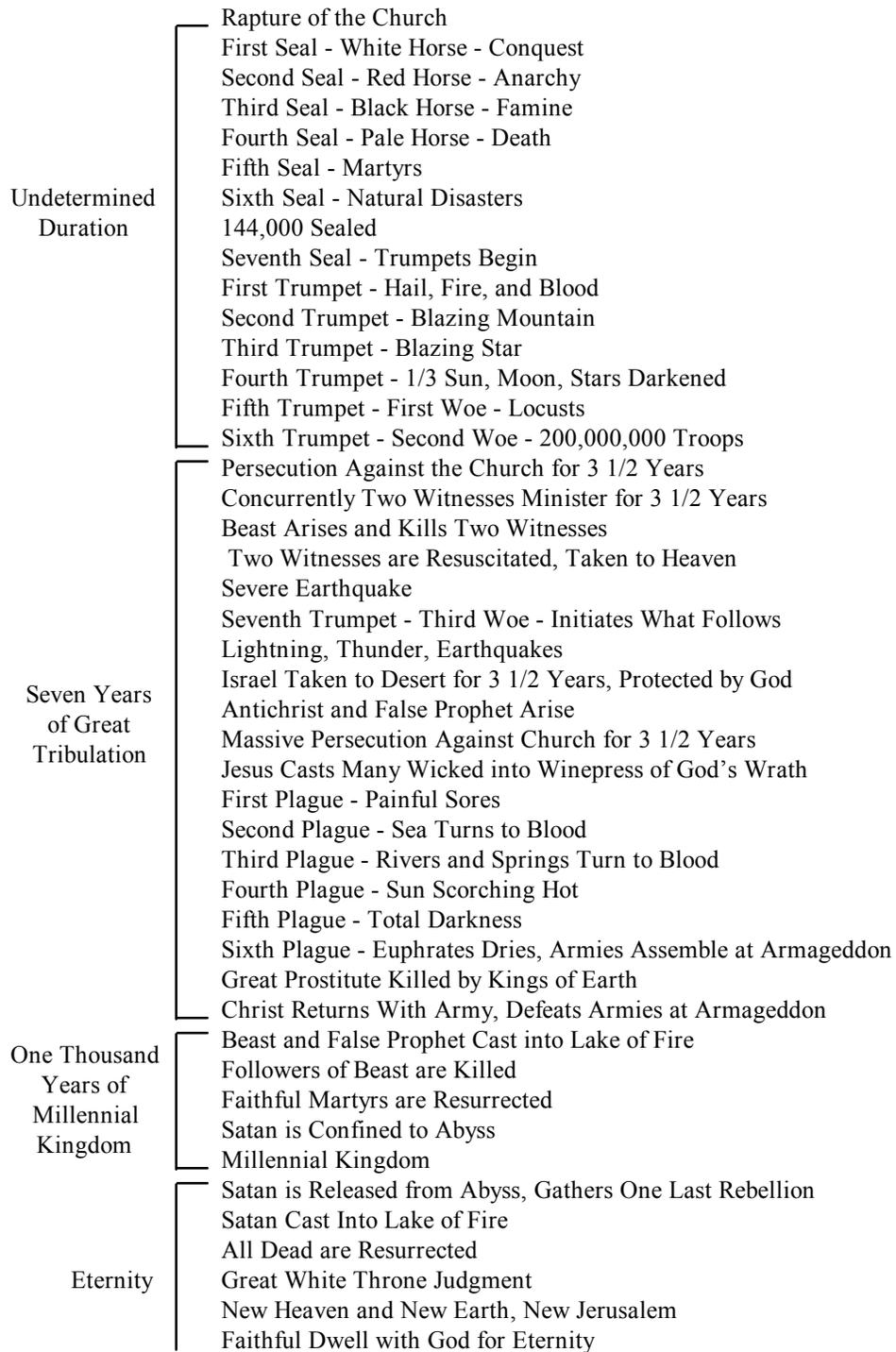
Which one is right? God only knows. My writings have been from the viewpoint of a pretribulationist. As we have gone through the text of the Bible, I have tried to point out reasons why I believe this to be the best-supported viewpoint. I will not attempt to reiterate it all here.

I will say this. I really do not want to live through the tribulation, but I can. Revelation has armed me with the knowledge that God will protect me through it, even if it means protecting me through (rather than from) death. If I must endure suffering, it will be for a short season. In the end, I will get to join the Hallelujah Chorus in heaven.

Maranatha.

25. Revelation Timeline

Thus, from a premillennialist, pretribulationist standpoint, here is the timeline of Revelation.



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