

# The Book of Revelation

## Outline of the first three chapters

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## I. The Prologue

### A. Title, John's role, Promise of blessing (1-3)

*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, <sup>2</sup> who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.*

This is a *revelation* of Jesus Christ. This letter is not meant to hide the future or make it mysterious but rather to unveil the future. Using this same noun, NT writers describe Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> coming as the "revelation" of Christ (1 Cor. 1.7; 2 Thess 1.7; 1 Pt 1.7, 13; 4.13).

- Show to his servants Clearly show them what is about to happen so they will know it and be ready for it. He is not keeping them in the dark. He knows their need (cp. Mt 6.8) and meets their need. He's not trying to confuse us with weird stuff. John "must have believed that they would be able to understand" (G.B. Caird, 1966).

As Martin Kittle (1940) writes, John's "interest was strictly pastoral, first and last...to encourage and warn them in times of extreme urgency...nothing was further from his mind than to obscure that message for the sake of intrigue or impressiveness." However foreign this genre of literature may be for us, it was not for his hearers. John hoped to fortify and guard his hearers, not to stump them with puzzles. Persecution was too serious "to justify indulgence in speculation or entertainment."

The goal of Revelation is to bring encouragement to believers of all ages that God is working out His purposes even in the midst of tragedy, suffering, and apparent Satanic domination. It is the Bible's battle cry of victory, for in it, more than anywhere else in the NT, is revealed the final victory of God over all the forces of evil. As such, it is an encouragement to God's people to persevere in the assurance that their final reward is certain and to worship and glorify God despite trials and despite temptations to march to the world's drumbeat. (G.K. Beale 2015)

He made it known He even sent an the angel who bore witness to the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ. In fact, this angel bore witness to John of everything that he saw! There is no hiding of *anything*. *All* is revealed.

Blessing John assumes this letter is so clear that in just reading and hearing it there will be blessing. The blessing is not hard to get at; it's right there for the taking.

It is not a convoluted word, some esoteric communication that can only be understood by the few, by scholars who plumb the depths of mysteries. Vern Poythress (2000) gives examples of kids and a janitor who loved the book and of a congregation that read Revelation over several months, section by section throughout the whole book, launching into prayer and praise with each reading. Poythress says "it's not a puzzle-book, it's a picture book."

- Keep "Blessed are those...who keep what is written in it." It is expected that we will understand it and that we will *obey* it. This shows that the vivid, extraordinary visions of Revelation are not just entertainment, not just predictions of future events, but are pictures (*moving* pictures!) intended for our edification and hope – to ground us in the reality of God's sovereignty. It is written for our defense against evil.

"Revelation is a book to be *seen*" (Dennis Johnson 2001). In v. 2 we read that John bore witness to all he *saw*. Later in v 11 the angel says, "Write what you *see* in a book and send it to the seven churches." The verb "see" occurs 52 times in Revelation. This is a stunning picture book, but these are action pictures. It is more like watching a movie.

William Hendriksen (1939, 1967) begins his commentary, "Beautiful beyond description is the last book of the Bible." Michael Wilcock (1975) says that God gives his people "a gorgeous picture-book to look at...this is an acted word, a word dramatized, painted, set to music – a word you can see and feel and taste...this is meant to be used and enjoyed." Johnson: "Revelation is a book of symbols in motion."

Poythress writes, "Don't become preoccupied with isolated details. Rather, become engrossed in the overall story. Praise the Lord. Cheer for the saints. Detest the Beast. Long for the final victory." Get caught up in this exciting, action-packed book!

Caird makes the point that the spectacular imagery of Revelation may be easier to get at for those who have been exposed to surrealist art. I thought about that - many times in its weird and wild depictions, surrealism speaks to the most serious philosophical and human issues.

If the whole book was read aloud at one sitting (which would take about an hour and a half), it would have made its impact on its first hearers *as a whole*, like a poetic drama or an opera; indeed one should perhaps regard it as more like music than rational discourse. (John Sweet, 1979)

"One of the key themes of the book is that things are not what they seem" (Johnson). Weak and helpless believers, attacked and killed, are in the end the true conquerors through Jesus Christ. Christ himself is a paradox in that he is the Lamb who was slain and also the Ruler of the kings on earth (1.5); the Lamb is at the same time the Lion of Judah (5.5-6).

Revelation presents history, life, conflict, suffering, good and evil from God's perspective - the perspective of heaven. Revelation challenges us with the paradox between what we see happening on earth and the real story of what God is doing and where history is going.

The word “Revelation” (Greek: *apocalypse*) is used “in the ancient sense of ‘unveiling, disclosing’ in vivid, visual form the invisible realities and forces that drive and therefore explain the course of observable historical events...On the plane of visible history things are not what they appear, so Revelation's symbols make things appear as they are. Its surprising, paradoxical imagery discloses the true identity of the church, its enemies, and its Champion. Paradox is central to the symbolism. (Johnson).

“...all the varied imagery of his (John’s) book has no other purpose than this, to disclose to the prospective martyrs the real nature of their suffering and its place in the eternal purpose of God, or, in Bunyan’s language, to take them about to the backside of the wall” (Caird).

These statements frame Revelation: The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him *to show to his servants the things that must soon take place* (1.1). And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel *to show his servants what must soon take place* (22.6)

“When we find Daniel’s ‘what will be in the latter days’ replaced by John’s ‘what must *soon* take place” it is “to bring events which were once distantly future into the immediate present” (Wilcock). “What Daniel expected to occur in the distant ‘latter days’ – the defeat of cosmic evil and the ushering in of the divine kingdom – John expects to begin ‘quickly,’ in his own generation, if it has not already begun to happen” (Beale).

This idea that the latter days had come is expressed in many ways in the NT: Acts 2.17 (latter days); Gal 4.4/Eph 1.10 (fullness of time); 1 Cor 10.11 (on whom the ends of the ages have come); 1 Tim 4.1 (in later times – which Paul viewed were already present); 2 Tim 3.1/ 2 Pt 3.3 (in the last days, already present); 1 Pt 1.20 (Christ has been revealed “in the last times”); Heb 1.2 (“in these last days” God has spoken to us in His Son); 9.26 (he [Christ] has appeared once for all “at the end of the ages”); Jam 5.3 (you have laid up treasures “in the last days”); 1 Jn 2.18 (“it is the last hour”).

So John and the other NT writers proclaim that the end times/latter days have come in Christ and they will continue until the final coming of Christ. The kingdom of Christ is now. The ascended Christ is reigning at God’s right hand (Eph 1.20-23) and will continue reigning until all his enemies are destroyed forever (1 Cor 15.20-25). Again, Daniel looked to the latter days of God’s final kingdom; John is telling us, that kingdom has begun in the reign of Jesus Christ.

This is a revelation of the glory, the sovereignty and the victory of God.

- Caird translates *tov logov tou theou* (“the word of God”) as “the purpose of God” because “God never speaks simply to convey information, but always to achieve results. ‘He spoke and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm’ (Ps 33.9). So the word of God is *the* plan of God, the purpose of God for all mankind, for all creation.”

(1.4-8) The opening greeting to the churches is brimming with the display of the sovereign rule of God and of his Christ: he is the Lord of history on a throne with the fullness of the Spirit; Jesus is ruler of kings; in him we are a kingdom – we will rule; his dominion is forever; he is coming to judge the earth; he owns the beginning and the end of history and everything in between; he is the Almighty God!

(1.9-20) Jesus is displayed in his glory and strength. *He* is the one who addresses each of the churches as each letter begins with a clip of this presentation in chapter 1. He is in the midst of churches and he holds them in his hand. Judgment comes forth from his mouth (cp 19.12), his eyes search all things, nothing is hidden from him. He is the Living One who conquered Death and now has the keys of Death. Death cannot harm his own.

- (4-5) The throne room vision in these chapters sets the course for all that follows. On his throne God rules all things. Christ alone is worthy to take the scroll of history and open its seals. Yes, there is a dragon, a beast, a false prophet and a prostitute, but this is God's history headed to God's desired purpose. All opposition will be utterly vanquished and God will usher in the New Heavens and New Earth free forever of all sin and misery.
- "...the visions of destruction (6-20) are bracketed by the overarching vision of God the Creator and Redeemer (4, 5), who makes all things new (21, 22); carnage and chaos make way for the fulfillment of all men's dreams" (Sweet).

My summary of Revelation: *Jesus Christ rules history. He will finally destroy all evil, rescue his suffering people and bring them into everlasting joy.* Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15.25, "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." Revelation is telling the story of Christ's reign in heart-rending detail! There are terrible things that will take place on this earth, but still it is the story of Christ's reign, of his living in the midst of his church (lampstand) and holding the church in his hand (stars), so that his people faithfully endure to the end and become conquerors in Christ Jesus.

Revelation tells its story multiple times. There are recapitulations of extended conflict and persecution followed by final judgment and victory. Each cycle covers the same ground from the resurrection-ascension of Christ to the final coming of Christ.

- For instance, in chapters 5 and 6 Christ takes the scroll representing the history of the earth in the latter days, and he and opens the first six seals. Already, by the end of chapter 6, the great day of God's final wrath has come (see 6.12-17). Then chapter 7 gives a vision of the final glory of God's people (see esp. 13-17 which is read at funerals). Before we get to chapter 8 we've reached final judgment and the final salvation of God's people.
- The trumpets in chapters 8 and 9 repeat the cycle of the seals, then later, about halfway through Revelation, the story starts over again with the birth of Christ in chapter 12! What? The birth of Christ in the middle of the book? That's how Revelation rolls.
- Notice, the vision of final glory in chapter 7 is a microcosm of the final glory of chapters 21-22. These are parallel passages talking about the same final blessing of God's people!
- Finally, the trumpets in 8 and 9 parallel the bowls of wrath in chapter 16. Each numbered trumpet and bowl affect the same part of the world: 1 - earth; 2 - seas; 3 rivers; 4 - sun; 5 - darkness; 6 - Euphrates river; 7 - the throne room is opened. The bowls aren't adding a new episode to the trumpets, they parallel to the trumpets. We will encounter:

The Seven Seals (5-7)  
The Seven Trumpets (8-11)  
Symbolic Figures and Harvest (12-14)  
The Seven Bowls (15-16)  
The Judgment of Babylon (17-19)  
The White Throne Judgment and New Creation 20-22.8

These cycles drive the point home again and again that God rules all things and will bring about his final and complete victory for his glory and his people's everlasting good.

conflict/suffering ⇒ victory  
conflict/suffering ⇒ victory  
conflict/suffering ⇒ victory

Further things to bear in mind (Johnson)

- Revelation only makes sense in the light of the Old Testament. Beale gives these figures: 278 out of Revelation's 404 verses have allusions to the OT. There are 500 allusions altogether. Caird quotes Austin Farrer's commentary of 1964 that Revelation "reads much more like a continuous meditation on the Old Testament."

"A quick look at just some of the OT allusions in the first chapter will illustrate our point. In 1:5 John alludes to Ps. 89:27; in 1:6 to Exod. 19:6; in 1:7 to Zech. 12:10; in 1:13-15 to Dan. 7:13-14 and 10:5-6; in 1:15 to Ezek. 1:24; and in 1:16 to Isa. 49:2." (Beale)

- Numbers count big as symbols in Revelation. 7 symbolizes completeness. The Lamb's 7 horns express his total power; his 7 eyes express his total wisdom. This isn't a physical description it is a proclamation of the glorious power and wisdom of Christ. There are not 7 Spirits. 7 expresses the fullness of the Spirit. 12 is the number of the people of God (12 tribes, 12 apostles) so the city in chapter 22, a picture of the people of God, is a cube 12,000 by 12,000 by 12,000 stadia. Even the thickness of the walls is 12 x 12, 144 cubits.
- Revelation is for the church under attack. Every one of the 7 letters ends with "to him who overcomes." There are vivid, fearsome portrayals of Satan, the Beast, the Prostitute and the false Prophet. Suffering is terrible. Believers lose their lives. But those who are faithful witnesses like Christ (1.5) will reign with him forever and ever (Rev 22.5).

Interpretations of Revelation

Preterist – the visions represent events that take place before the fall of Jerusalem or the fall of Rome, and can be tied to particulars

Futurist – the visions represent events that take place at the end of history and can be tied to particulars

Historicist – the visions represent chronological events that take place throughout history and can be tied to particulars

Idealist - the visions represent principles that always apply to God's people at all times and in all places. This will be our approach to the Book of Revelation.

## **B. The Greeting (4-8)**

John to the seven churches that are in Asia In the back of a study Bible you'll find a map of Paul's missionary journeys. In the Roman provinces of Lydia, Asia and Phrygia (present day Turkey) you'll find these seven cities. They are listed in a geographic order. Start with Ephesus and head north close to the coast to Smyrna and up to Pergamum. Then turn south to Thyatira and Sardis, over to Philadelphia and finally down to Laodicea. There are more churches that could be addressed, churches in Hierapolis, Troas and Colossae for instance. As Caird writes, "John chooses seven of the churches to indicate that his message is really addressed to the church at large. Each of the separate letters that follows contains 'what the Spirit is saying to the churches' " (italics mine). These letters are for all churches in all places at all times.

### who is and who was and who is to come

*God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I am has sent me to you.* Exodus 3.14

*Who has performed and done this, calling the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he.* Isaiah 41.4

*Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am he; I am the first, and I am the last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens when I call to them, they stand forth together.* Isaiah 48.12-13

*Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.* Isaiah 44.6-7

And see the phrase in Revelation 1.8, 17-18; 21.6; 22.13

God started everything, God brings it to its close and God rules everything in between. "First and last" is a fetching way to describe his "eternal, invincible rule" (Johnson). Who began the universe? Who will bring it to its destiny? God alone. He is our comfort and hope: "God is the sovereign Lord of all that takes place in the entire course of human history" (Mounce).

the Almighty Though this phrase occurs many times in the OT, it's found only 10 times in the NT, and 9 of those are in Revelation (1.8; 4.8; 11.17; 15.3; 17.7, 14; 19.6, 15; 21.22). It is found in 1 Corinthians 6.18 as a quote from the OT (Mounce). This is remarkable, singular use of this word is critical for the encouragement of believers in persecution, disaster, heartache and loss. Apart from his sovereignty, there is no hope whatsoever in this dark and suffering world.

seven spirits who are before the throne (see also Rev 3.1; 4.5; 5.6) The background for this description of the Spirit is from the OT: *And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it... Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.* Zechariah 4.2, 6

‘The seven spirits’ represents the Holy Spirit in “the fulness of his activity and power” (Caird), “the fulness of his operations and influences in the world and in the church” (Hendriksen).

faithful witness, *I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession* (1 Tim 6.13). As believers bear witness to Jesus and confess him in the face of persecution, they can always gain encouragement from the One who himself made the good confession as he faced eminent death.

the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth John is drawing from Psalm 89.27, and 37: *And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth... Like the moon it (his kingdom) shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies*. This is spoken to David and “extends to his descendants culminating in Jesus the Messiah... If faithful witness should result in a martyr’s death, the believer is to remember that Jesus, the ideal martyr, is also the firstborn from the dead. As the risen Christ now exercises sovereign control, so also will the faithful share in his reign (20.4-6)” (Mounce).

Christians “are called to bear the costly witness of martyrdom, trusting that in his death Christ has been a *faithful witness* to God’s way of overcoming evil: to look into the open jaws of death, remembering that he has risen as *the firstborn* of many brothers and to defy the authority of Imperial Rome in the name of a *Ruler* to whom Caesar himself must bow. (Caird)

To him who loves us Notice the present tense. He *loves* us. His is an everlasting love. He has always loved us and will always loved us, but his love was completely unveiled, bursting forth in glory through his once-for-all death on the cross which set us free from the guilt and power of sin and made us a kingdom of priests.

“freed us from our sins... kingdom of priests” From Exo 19.6. Those in Christ are the new Israel (1 Pt. 2.5-9). “Priests” indicates intimate access (Heb 10.19-22). It is because we are intimate with Him that we become his faithful witnesses in a hostile world. His people, intimate with him, reign with Him (2.26-27; 3.21; 5.10; 20.4, 6). Beale writes that we are “constituted kings together with Him.” I love Caird’s translation of “a kingdom of priests”: *a royal house of priests*. First Presbyterian Church is a royal house of priests - Christ has made us so!

You may know that *christos* (English, Christ) is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *maschiach* (English, Messiah). Jesus Christ is Jesus Messiah, and it is this Jewish Messiah who is in the midst of the *lampstands* - *the church*, not the temple, not the synagogue! As true Israel, the church is contrasted with Jews (Rev 2.9, 3.9).

glory and dominion This is the heart of the whole book and the heart of our whole lives!

coming with the clouds (From Dan 7.13-14 and Zech 12.10.) When Christ speaks of coming in his glory and kingdom or coming on the clouds he says that some aspect of that will take place for the very generation he is speaking to (Mt 16.27-28; Mt 24.29-35). Jesus said to the high priest, “from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Mt 26.64). “From now on” indicates a *continuing process* of being at the right hand of God and coming on the clouds of heaven.

So “coming with” or “on the clouds” is not a physical description. It expresses Christ’s glorious rule that governs this world and governs his church (see Eph. 1.20-23). We see Christ coming to deal with the churches in Revelation 2.5, 16; 3.11. “The clouds” indicates his active, sovereign involvement. His activity continues throughout history. The “second coming” is actually a *final* coming concluding the whole process of comings. Dan 7.13-14 describes the authority given to “one like a son of man” to exercise end-time kingship. The beginning of this fulfillment was Christ’s resurrection and ascension and this kingship continues until the last coming.

The greeting is from the *Father* “him who is and who was and who is to come,” the *Son*, “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness...” and the *Holy Spirit* “the seven spirits who are before the throne.”

all tribes of earth will wail This is not a cry of repentance. It is shock and agony as they face the mighty Lord who comes to judge the world. This anticipates a passage like Revelation 6.15-16:

*Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”*

## **II. Christ in the Midst of His Church (1.9 – 3.22)**

### **A. The Vision of the Son of Man (1.9-20)**

*1. John’s describes his and our situation: tribulation, kingdom and endurance (1.9-11)*

*through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God...and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him... For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know...* Acts 14:22; Romans 8:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:4

These three words, tribulation, kingdom and endurance, define our life on this earth. We are a kingdom, we are priests and kings, yet we face tribulation and we must endure to the end. This is how a believer reigns in the present with Jesus. This is the paradox formula for kingship.

*Overcoming* (again, each letter ends with “he who overcomes”) has nothing to do with political or social power; it has everything to do with faithful endurance in the face of tribulation.

Being identified with Christ is the basis for the trials which confront them, as well as for their ability to endure such trials and to participate in the kingdom as kings. This form of rule mirrors the manner in which Jesus exercised His authority in His earthly ministry, *even from the cross!* Christians are to follow in His path. Like Jesus’ beginning kingship, Revelation reveals that the saints’ reign consists in “overcoming” by not compromising their faithful witness in the face of trials (Beale).

See Rev 2.2-3, 9-11, 13; 3:8; 6:9 “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne”; 7:14 “these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation”; 12:11 “they have conquered him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

Patmos John was exiled because he held to the word of God and held to its testimony of Jesus.



in the Spirit See Ezekiel's similar language (2.2; 3.12, 14, 24). It indicates a trance-like state brought on by the Holy Spirit in which God gives to John this "revelation of Jesus Christ" (1.1).

Lord's Day This may indicate the first day of the week, which name Christians gave it in the wake of Jesus' resurrection on the first day. Or, it could indicate something like a "day of the Lord," that is, the great day when John received this revelation from the Lord.

trumpet This recalls God's appearance at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19.16, 19; 20.18) and the Day of Atonement (Lev 25.8-10). The trumpet accompanies this revelation of Christ to John and accompanies Christ's final revelation to the whole world (1 Cor 15.52; 1 Thess 4.16).

write Though an individual letter is written to each church (2.1, 8, 12, 18; 3.1, 7, 14), verse 11 shows that whole book of Revelation is sent to all of the 7 churches. Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah were all told to write (Exod. 17:14; Isa 30:8; Jer. 36:2). This God's prophetic word to John.

## 2. *The Description (12-16)*

seven golden lampstands These represent the seven churches (1.20). The one lampstand of the temple and of Zechariah 4 has become seven. "The purpose of the church is to bear the light of the divine presence in a darkened world (Mt 5.14-16). Failing this, its reason for existence has disappeared (cf. Rev 2.5)." (Mounce)

one like a son of man Again, this recalls Daniel 7.14. Jesus is the one who has received the kingdom from the Ancient of Days. The robe and sash indicate he is a priest, the royal priest who offered himself (1.5; 5.6, 12). The golden sash indicates purity. The risen Lord who gave himself for the church is in the midst of His church, ever protecting and blessing her.

the hairs of his head were white like wool Jesus is the son of man who receives the kingdom (Dan 7), yet he has the same glory of the Ancient of Days whose hair is also like wool.

His eyes were like a flame of fire (Dan 10.6; cp Rev 2.18; 2.23 is considered a central verse of the whole seven messages to the churches; see also Heb 4.12-13)

His feet were like burnished bronze This indicates the armor of war and judgment. His mighty feet trample down any and all wicked forces.

His voice was like the roar of many waters (Dan 10.6; Eze 1.24; Ex 19.16, 19). This expresses his absolute authority and sovereignty - the voice that brought into existence the creation. And right hand indicates his sovereign rule.

from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword This isn't his saving word. It is the word that pronounces and enacts judgment. Revelation 19.15 reads, *From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.*

His face was like the sun shining in full strength This recalls Daniel 10.6 and it reminds us of Jesus' transfiguration with the three disciples (Mt 17.2). Christ is revealed as a Warrior in the

midst of his church protecting her and defeating all his and her enemies. Think of the commander of the Lord's army who appeared to Joshua with drawn sword (Joshua 5.13-15). Jesus is risen in His might as Ruler of kings and Warrior for His people.

The symbols seen by John in the vision reveal not what Jesus looks like but what he is like - his identity as the searcher of hearts, full of consuming holiness and boundless wisdom, the perfect priest standing for his people before the Father, the perfect king defending them against the devil by his invincible Word. Revelation's visions show us how things are, not how they look to the physical eye. (Johnson)

The entire description must be taken as one whole and interpreted as such. The Son of Man is here pictured as clothed with power and majesty, with awe and terror. That long royal robe; that golden belt buckled at the chest; that hair so glistening white that like snow on which the sun is shining it hurts the eye; those eyes flashing fire, eyes which read every heart and penetrate every hidden corner; those feet flowing in order to trample down the wicked; that loud, reverberating voice, like the mighty breakers booming against the rocky shore of Patmos; that sharp, sword with two biting edges going forth in judgment, the entire appearance "as the sun shines in its power" too intense for human eyes to stare at... Christ, the majestic and powerful one coming to purge his churches, yet protect and preserve his true people against all-comers and to punish those who are persecuting his elect. (Hendricksen)

### 3. *The Words (17-20)*

the first and the last He too is the sovereign over all creation from beginning to end (v. 4). "Christ is the force behind history, causing it to fulfill his purposes..." (Beale).

#### the living one...I died, and behold I am alive forevermore...keys

Whereas once Christ Himself was held by death's grip, now not only has He been set free from it but He also has the power to determine who else will be thus liberated. This verse assures believers that, regardless of what sufferings or trials they may now endure, if they persevere they will indeed reign forever with Christ. (Beale)

Not only had he burst out of the prison, he had carried away *the keys*. His followers may pass confidently in the dungeons *of death and the grave*, knowing that he holds the authority to unlock the gates and set them free. (Caird)

write therefore the things you have seen This reiterates v. 11. The next two terms describe the mix of what is to follow: things that already are and things that are to come. John is told, basically, "Write the totality of what you see, both what is happening and what will happen in the latter days."

#### the seven stars

This is difficult. It is foreign to our thinking for sure. Some have said this is the pastor of each church. Others that each is the messenger (angel = messenger) sent to each church. However, every reference to "angel" in Revelation means angel. But how can Jesus address an angel and speak of its works, many of which are evil? How can he also say, "hear what the Spirit says to the churches" if he is addressing an angel?

One possibility offered by some commentators is that each church has a guardian angel (cp. Dan 10.12-13; Heb 1.14) and that the angel is so closely associated with the church that he bears responsibility for the church and can be addressed with the concerns and even sins of the church.

Still, it's *you... you people*. Not you angel. It's better in my opinion to follow the approach of G.K. Beale and others that this terminology reminds believers that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly and that their real home is not with the unbelieving "earth-dwellers." This keeps the sense of the church's heavenly existence and identity by modeling its worship on that of the angels' worship and the heavenly church's worship of the exalted Lamb. This is why scenes of heavenly worship are woven throughout Revelation.

Ladd writes that the term "angels" "represents the heavenly or supernatural character of the church." Kiddle, "heavenly societies in his right hand, under his guidance and protection, more than temporal organizations...he sees their divine character... addressing them as angels makes them conscious of their divine character."

Dennis Johnson adds, "...the angel of each church is not literally an angel – that is, a distinct spiritual being charged with the welfare of the church. Rather, the angel is the church, viewed from the perspective of Christ's control over his churches: the stars are in his hand...Stars and lampstands both speak of the churches as reflecting the light of their King, but the lampstands highlight his presence and the stars emphasize his protective possessiveness. The glorious Son of Man, who lives among his congregations and holds their lives in his hand, has something to say to each of them."

This initial vision has shown Christ standing in complete authority over human history, yet He does so standing amidst the churches (v. 13), which are undergoing all sorts of trials and even apparent defeats (as chs. 2 and 3 will unfold). Rev. 1:12-20 shows the "Son of man" in a present position of sovereignty among the weak and suffering churches of His kingdom, bringing into sharper focus the unexpected form in which the expected Danielic kingdom has reached its initial fulfillment. (Beale)

## **B. The Letters to the Churches (2.1 – 3.22)**

### **Structure**

The letters fall into the following pattern: abcccb'a'

a and a' (Ephesus and Laodicea) are perhaps in the worst condition.

b and b' (Smyrna and Philadelphia) are the only two that are not rebuked

ccc - the three middle churches have serious problems as well

Since the beginning and middle are the important places in Hebrew structure, it shows that as a whole, the churches are perceived as being in a poor condition. "...the churches in the worse condition form the literary boundaries of the letters and the churches with serious problems form the very core of the presentation" (Beale). This is heightened by 2.23 which is the only time "the churches" are addressed except at the end of each message, and which forms a kind of controlling atmosphere for the messages.

### **Addressees**

The starting place is obviously the 7 churches because even the historical, social, cultural and religious backgrounds of their cities is brought into play. However, the number 7 is here as

always in Revelation symbolic of completeness and fullness, indicating that these messages are to be applied to the whole church in all places and in all ages. Also, each of the seven messages has this exhortation: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” meaning that each is addressed to all. The sins and struggles that these churches faced are the potential sins and struggles that every church will face. No church is exempt from this warning.

### **Relationship to the vision of Christ in chapter 1**

Each letter includes a part of the glorious vision of Christ in chapter 1. The vision sets the stage and creates the atmosphere for each of the addresses. *Every address recalls the vision.*

So the vision of chapter 1 is not an abstract, disconnected vision. All that Christ is and all that he declares is fully brought to bear on the churches. He is the Lord with whom these churches must engage and every church is reminded of it. He is the Lord for all churches everywhere at all times, including us at First Presbyterian Church!

### **Relationship of the messages to the visions that follow**

There are many connections between the letters and the visions that follow. To mention just a few, the overcoming theme of each of the letters (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) continues in the following visions (12.11; 15.2; 17.14; 21.7). The “great tribulation” is mentioned in the letters (2.22) and in the visions (7.14). The sin of idolatry is addressed in the letters (2.14, 20) and in the visions (9.20-21).

It is important to see that Revelation is to be understood broadly as a letter (1.4 greeting; 22.21 parting grace). The “amen” in 22.20 reinforces the feel of a closing letter. Now, in the NT letters are written to address problems in the churches and to enable God’s people to live in light of the great redemption accomplished in Christ. All appeals to obedience are based upon who Christ is and what Christ has done. The visions that follow are meant to display vividly to Christ’s church the horrific nature of the evil that opposes God and the sure judgment of that evil, unmasking the temptation of persecution (personified in the beast) and the temptation of sensuality (personified in the great prostitute). And the visions vividly display the blessedness of continuing to trust and love and serve Christ in the midst of such temptation.

Every one of the 7 addresses contains this exhortation: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” One important thing this tells us is that the words of Christ come to us by means of the Spirit. Christ ministers to us through the Holy Spirit. As Jesus says of the Spirit, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (Jn 16.14).

But notice the connection of these letters to the rest of Revelation. We read in Revelation 13.9 “If anyone has an ear; let him hear.” *Christ is still addressing the churches!* This is still a part of the overall letter. So the propositional exhortations of chapters 2-3 are then portrayed in chapters 4-21 through spectacular visions, what Beale calls, “visionary parables.” It’s like the churches are being told, “OK, I *told* you (chapters 2-3), now I’m going to *show* you (chapter 4-21). You read it, now you’re going to see it.” There’s the book (2-3) then the movie (4-21); they are not disconnected. It’s the same exhortation presented in a completely different way.

### **John writes prophecy in line with OT prophecy**

the words of/thus says (Greek: *tade legei* reads literally “thus says” [*legei* is a verb], though it is translated in the ESV as “the words of.”) This phrase is “a stock formula that the OT prophets used to introduce prophetic sayings from God” (Beale). It is usually, *tade legei kurios* (thus says the Lord) at times with various additions such as *pantokratōr* “thus says the Lord almighty” or *sabaōth* “thus says the Lord of hosts.”

Also it introduces new literary units as it does here in Revelation (65 in Ezekiel, 30 in Jeremiah, 12 in Zechariah and 8 in Amos). Assuredly Revelation means to be categorized as a further prophecy of God! Of the 25 or so occurrences of *thus says* in Isaiah, this one reminds me most of these descriptions in Revelation 2-3, with their formula, “the one who..”

*Isaiah 57:15* *For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.* (see also “the Lord who...” followed by various descriptions: Isa 29.22; 43.16; 44.2; 45.18; Jer 31.35; 33.2).

Conclusions:

First, this formula (*tada legei*) “demands that chapters 2-3 be seen as a group of prophetic messages rather than as mere letters” (Beale) in line with all these OT prophetic messages.

Second, the use of this formula underscores that Christ is assuming the role of Yahweh Himself.

Third the Lord of glory (1.12-20) is in the midst of the churches (1.13) and holds them in his hand (1.20) to *spea*k to them (‘the words of him...’). He speaks as Lord and as Lord he speaks. He has absolute authority and he wields that authority by his word.

## The Relationship of Revelation to Daniel

Above on page 3 and elsewhere, we've talked about how Daniel announced a kingdom of God coming in the latter days and how John is saying that kingdom has come in Jesus Christ. Here we give some of the nitty-gritty details of those connections. This is a bit thick, so you can definitely skip this part if you want. But if you're interested this does show the intricate way John frames the whole book of Revelation using terminology he lifted out of Daniel. This is his way of saying, "See! What Daniel saw coming in the future is here, right now. The final kingdom that would be established in the latter days has finally been established in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ."

### 1. The Context for Daniel's explanation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream-vision (Dan 2.1-30)

King Nebuchadnezzar has a disturbing dream and demands that the wise men tell him both the dream and its interpretation. Of course, no one can; he orders them all killed. Before the decree is carried out, Daniel discovers it, requests an audience with the king and seeks God's mercy along with his companions. God reveals the mystery of the dream, Daniel rejoices and praises, and Daniel is brought to the king.

### 2. Terms in the introduction and conclusion of the Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation in Daniel 2.28-29 and 2.45

**Daniel 2:28-29** but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar *what will be in the latter days*. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these:<sup>29</sup> To you, O king, as you lay in bed came thoughts of *what would be after this*, and he who reveals mysteries made known to you *what is to be*.

**Daniel 2:44-45** And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,<sup>45</sup> just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king *what shall be after this*. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.

Daniel is not talking about two different things when he writes "what will be in the latter days" (v. 28) and "what would/shall be after this" (vv. 29, 45). As Daniel talks about the dream and vision, *latter days* = *after this*. They are interchangeable, synonymous terms.

(As we move forward, a little background. There are two major ancient translations of OT Hebrew into Greek. One was done in the 3rd century BC by 72 translators, six from each of the twelve Hebrew tribes. They rounded the 72 down to 70 and called the translation, *The Septuagint* (LXX). Another translation was done by a Hellenistic Jewish scholar, Theodoton, in the 2nd century AD. It is often helpful to compare the two versions so we can better see how the Jews who spoke Greek understood the Hebrew.)

So, the Hebrew, "what will be after this" (2.29, 45) is translated in LXX as "what will be in the latter days" but translated in Theodoton as "what will be after this." *It was understood that you could use either "after this" or "latter days" because they meant the same thing.*

We see this again when Peter quotes Joel in Acts 2.17.

**Joel 2:28** “It will come about *after this* That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind (NASV)

**Acts 2.17** And *in the last days* it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh

Joel’s “after this” becomes Acts’ “in the last days.” They are synonymous terms.

So, Daniel is giving a vision of the things that must happen *in the latter days* (Dan 2.28) or *after this* (2.29, 45): a kingdom will be set up by God that will ultimately destroy all other kingdoms (Daniel 2.34-35, dream; Daniel 2.44-45 interpretation).

Here are some observations we can make:

- a. In Revelation 4.1, “after this” does not mean “chronologically after chapters 1-3.” John means, “Again, in these latter days, I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven!” Therefore, all the visions that follow are in the framework of that latter day vision of Daniel 2 in which the kingdom of God will destroy the kingdoms of this world. John is saying that the “latter days” have begun and the church is in the midst of it.
- b. We read in Daniel 2.44: *And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed.* Jesus came preaching that *the kingdom of God is near* (Mark 1.15 - “at hand” in the ESV). The kingdom that Daniel’s interpretation predicted has come in the person of Jesus Christ. It’s no surprise, then, that John uses the same root word for “near” in Revelation 1.3, *the time is near*. Jesus is saying the kingdom is here; John is saying the kingdom of the latter days is here.

### **3. John uses terminology in Daniel to structure the book of Revelation**

Now look more closely at the first part of these phrases that end either *after this* or *in the latter days*. They each start in the ESV with “what will be” (Dan 2.28) or “what would be” (Dan 2.29). For both verses, the Greek in the LXX is, *ha dei genesthai*, which reads literally, “what is necessary to be,” “what must happen” or “what must take place.” ESV has “what will be” and “what would be” but as you can see, it’s a definite term declaring the certainty of a future event.

This phrase, *ha dei genesthai*, is used in Daniel 2.28 and 2.29 to introduce Daniel’s description of the dream and its interpretation. John frames and structures his vision with this same phrase:

#### **1.1-18 (Introduction)**

**Revelation 1:1** ¶ The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants *the things that must soon take place* (*ha dei genesthai en tachei*). Literally the things that will be soon.

#### **1.19 – 3.22 (The Churches)**

**Revelation 1:19** Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and *those that are to take place after this* (*ha mellei genesthai meta tauta*). John paraphrases, using *mellei* instead of *dei* just as Josephus did in quoting the same passages from Daniel [2.28-29, 45]). Both *dei* and *mellei* have the same basic meaning of “necessary” or “must.”

4.1 – 22.5 (The Visions of Destruction, bracketed by the overarching vision of God the Creator and Redeemer in chapters 4-5 and 21.1 – 22.5)

**Revelation 4:1** ¶ After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you *what must take place after this (ha dei genesthai meta tauta)*."

22.6 (The Conclusion)

**Revelation 22:6** ¶ And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants *what must soon take place (ha dei genesthai en tachei)*." John begins (1.1) and ends (22.6) with "soon" (*en tachei*).

Goppelt, in *Typos*, suggests that Daniel 2.28 is "the guiding principle" of Revelation because of its strategic occurrence at Rev 1.1, 1.19, 4.1 and 22.6. John puts his vision within the "thematic framework" (Beale) of Daniel 2). *Daniel declared that the kingdom of God was coming in the latter days, John is declaring that those latter days have come.*

#### 4. Two other other background visions from Daniel

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13-14

I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. <sup>6</sup> His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

Daniel 10:5-6

Compare Daniel 7.13-14 with "coming with the clouds" (Rev 1.7), "kingdom" (Rev 1.6, 9) and "one like a son of man" (Rev 1.13) and compare Daniel 10.5-6 to the description of the risen Christ in Revelation 1.12-16

So the "stone that was cut out" (Daniel 2.34, dream), this kingdom the God of heaven would set up (2.44, interpretation), is blended by John with the vision of the son of man receiving an everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7.13-14.

*John is saying that the kingdom predicted by Daniel is now initiated in the events of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. He is that son of man, and John saw Him in His glory. The fact that John is actually viewing these as present realities shows that the things predicted by Daniel are actually taking place in John's presence! "...John views the death and resurrection of Christ as inaugurating the long-awaited kingdom of the end times predicted in Daniel 2" (Beale, Revelation).*



## The Throne Room (Chapters 4-5)

*Two-part Vision* (This outline combines Poythress and Johnson)

### I. God and His Angelic Court (4)

- A. *How do we view these visions?*
- B. *The Summons (4.1-2)*
- C. *The One Who Sits on the Throne (4.2-6)*
- D. *The Courtiers (4.4, 6-8)*
- E. *The Praises (4.8-11)*

### II. The Triumphant Lamb (5)

- A. *The Problem: A Sealed Scroll (5.1-4)*
- B. *The Lion of Judah (5.5)*
- C. *The Lamb Slain (5.6-7)*
- D. *The New Songs of Praise (5.8-14)*

Also Caird calls the 7 letters of chapters 2-3 a cover letter to prepare the churches to hear the visions that begin in chapter 4. Also, some have called the remaining part of Revelation, “the eighth letter.” Remember, this is still the address to the seven churches, and to all the church.

### I. God and His Angelic Court (4)

A. *How do we view these visions?*

The question comes up, “Is this a real description of what God looks like or is this vision meant to communicate truth about God?” Think about this: God is infinite in his being and all his attributes. Our unimaginably vast universe is a speck of grain – it’s not even that much! God is not nor can he be isolated to one seat on a throne, so that we could say, “*There* he is; he’s right there” as though he has ceased to be the infinite God. He fills the whole universe with his presence, but that is nothing for the infinite God.

How can the infinite God be attended by 24 elders or 4 cherubim wherever he is? That is impossible. As God did with Israel, he *manifested* himself in the cloud by day and the fire by night. He gave them a picture and sign of his presence that they could see. He manifested his glory to Moses; he manifested his glory in the tabernacle and in the temple. And in the heavenly places he manifests himself to spirits, human and angelic (Rev 4-5; 7; 15; and see Heb 12.22-25; Job 1.6-12; 1 King 22.19ff).

Because God is infinite and no other being is, then God must reveal himself to angels and men. They have no capacity to see God otherwise. All revelation of God must come from him to us. We can’t explore and discover God, he must unveil himself to us.

Now some descriptions God gives are objective discourse: “God is strong.” However, since the Bible is God’s word and the Bible is God’s chosen means of revealing himself to us, objective discourse is not all there is.

God knew that poetry opens wider our vision of God. Poetry impacts our hearts and stirs our emotions. Poetry creates pictures that lodge in our souls. For “God is strong” even simple images help, “The Lord is my fortress...my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (Ps 18.1-3), but then comes the “white-knuckle” poetry of God’s rescue in verses 7-15! These are breathtaking, shattering images of God’s power and his determination to rescue his servant. How much more effective are they than, “he rescued me!”?

On Mt. Sinai God manifested himself in real physical thunder and lightning the Israelites could see and hear (Exo 19). The Psalmist describes in his poetic lines God’s rescue surrounded by thunder and lightning (Ps 18). In John’s vision thunder and lightning peal forth from the throne. We can see in Psalm 18 and Revelation 4 an intersection of poetry and vision. The visions of Revelation have much in common with poetry as they do with music and even movies.

If thunder and lightning are crashing around you, you are hitting the deck, trying to crawl into the earth, running for your life. Thunder and lightning own the situation, and the storms in which they come violent winds and water govern the earth when they strike.

So thunder and lightning represent the sheer, uncontested, unstoppable sovereignty and power of God. But think about it. What speck of God’s infinite power is the worst tornado or hurricane, the worst flood, the worst thunder and lightning? The infinite God is revealing in terms we can understand some kind of representation of his unlimited power.

In Revelation 4, the bright colors, the 24 elders, the thunder and lightning, the seven torches and the sea of glass give us pictures of the God of unlimited being, glory and power.

#### *B. The Summons (4.1-2)*

John associates himself with prophetic authority. He is summoned to the Lord’s heavenly temple just like Isaiah and Ezekiel were (Isa 6; Eze 1). John is “standing in the council of the Lord” (Jer 23.18). He is like a “privileged press-reporter...summoned to the control room at Supreme Headquarters” (Caird).

“Heaven” is likely the same as “heavenly places” of Ephesians (1.3, 20; 2.6; 3.10; 6.12) “which denote, not a place without evil, but the sphere of spiritual reality, where the masks are off and both good and evil are seen for what they really are” (Wilcock) “It is a part of the created universe, but a part which is entered by the opening of the spiritual eye rather than by any more literal form of transit” (Caird)

Remember “after this” is a synonym for “in the latter days” (above notes, pp. 14-16), meaning all of history between Christ’s first and second comings. It is *not* merely a temporal indicator.

#### *C. The One Who Sits on the Throne (4.2-6)*

“Throne” occurs 17 times in chapters 4-6. “Regardless of how rampant evil seems to run and to cause God’s people to suffer, they can know that his hand superintends everything for their good and his glory” (Beale). All judgments issue from God’s throne (6.1-8; 8.3-6; 16.17). The throne is central and everything emanates from it and is governed by it. It is all that is left in the end,

“the final reality” (Rev 20.11, Caird). Under the throne of Rome and even more ominous, the throne of Satan (2.13), this understanding is critical for their comfort and hope.

The description here has its background in the OT descriptions of God’s throne: Eze 1.26-28; 10 Exodus 24.10. The rainbow points to His glory (Eze 1.28) and to His mercy (Gen 9). The rainbow is the sign of God’s remaking the earth in the flood, and so it points to his making a new heaven and earth in the final day (21.1). The stones hint at the new creation as well as they anticipate the description of the church in the last day (Rev 21.19-21).

“...the throne room of God in Revelation 4 represents the heart of the universe, the heart of meaning, the heart of history. Revelation renews us, not so much by telling us about particular future events, as by showing us God, who will bring all events to pass in his own time and his own way (Poythress).

*the sea of crystal* (cp. Ex 24.10; Rev 15.2) Earth’s seas were a dangerous places and were readily associated with danger, death and evil. The beasts arise out of the sea in Daniel 7 and the beast arises out of the sea in Revelation 13.1. The Red Sea, occasion of God’s great defeat of Pharaoh and his army, became an an image for future victories in which it is the abode of the evil sea monster/dragon (Isa 51.9-11; Ps 74.12-15; Eze 32.2). Here in Revelation 4 (and later in chapter 15) the sea is brought to perfect calm, anticipating 21.1 where the sea is removed. This means that all evil is removed, not the oceans, from the new heaven and earth!

#### *D. The Courtiers (4.4, 6-8)*

*The 24 Elders* (OT background – 1 Ki 22.19; Dan 7.10; Ps 89.6-7; Job 1.6; 2.1). The elders speak of the church in the third person (5.10), so they don’t represent the church. They have a revelatory function (5.5; 7.13-14). They are called Elders for their wisdom, as a picture of God’s glorious counselors and advisors, after the pattern of human royalty. John spends no time explaining who they are. We see them falling down and throwing their crowns before the throne. “They are but pointers to the central majesty” (Caird).

*The four living creatures* (drawn from Isa 6.2 and Eze 1.4-21 which are based on the cherubim on the ark – Ex 25.18; 1 Ki 6.23-28; 1 Sam 4.2; 2 Sam 6.2; Ps 80.1; 99.1; also see the cherubim wind of Ps 18.10). These creatures represent the four winds and the the four corners of the earth; they are the base of God’s throne. They represent the whole creation, and perhaps more specifically, the “whole created order of animate life” (Beale). *Eyes* reflect the omniscience of God and sets the stage for their knowing administration of the judgments on mankind (6.1-8; 15.7) as servants of the Lamb.

#### Verse 8

“Lord God Almighty” equals “who was and is and is to come” in 1.4, 8, both expressing his sovereignty. Twice (vv 9, 10) we read, “who lives forever and ever.” This carries the flavor of Daniel where God’s eternity and his everlasting kingdom are emphasized (Dan 4.34; 12.7; 7.14, 18, 27) over against the temporary kingdoms of this world “that arrogate to themselves claims of deity (Dan 4.30-35; 11.36-37) and persecute God’s people (11.30-35; 12.7)” (Beale).

Also “who was and is and is to come” was used in various forms to describe the pagan gods. John’s attacks their legitimacy and authenticity with this phrase. “They aren’t sovereign, only Yahweh is!” It is a call the churches not to submit to the pressure and persecution of the pseudo-divine kings who demand they worship themselves and their pagan gods. There is one everlasting God; all other would-be gods are under the judgment of this one true God” (Beale).

Verse 11

“Will” shows that all things exist and are carried out in creation according to God’s unchanging purpose. So in the midst of maddening confusion, disruption, suffering and death, they can be confident that they are still the operating kingdom of priests to God (1.6), still conquerors by his grace (“the one who conquers”) and still destined to reign with Christ (2.26-27; 3.21).

## **II. The Triumphant Lamb (5)**

### **A. The Problem: A Sealed Scroll (5.1-4; cp Dan 12.4, 9; Eze 2.10)**

*What is the scroll and why would John weep so?*

The scroll “is God’s redemptive plan, foreshadowed in the Old Testament, by which he means to assert his sovereignty over a sinful world and so to achieve the purpose of creation. John proposes to trace the whole operation of this plan from its beginnings in the Cross to its triumphal culmination in the new Jerusalem...until the scroll is opened, God’s purposes remain not merely unknown, but unaccomplished” (Caird)

“The opening of the scroll would be not only an act of revelatory disclosure but also an act of executive authority, carrying out its edicts into action. The things written in the scroll “must take place” because they constitute God’s plan for history, culminating in the vindication of his servants and the unchallenged establishment of his dominion on earth as it is in heaven. The strong angel’s question is not merely Who is worthy to reveal God’s plan? but also Who is worthy to carry out God’s plan?” (Johnson)

“The “book” is best understood as containing God’s plan of judgment and redemption, which has been set in motion by Christ’s death and resurrection but has yet to be completed. The question asked by the angelic spokesman concerns who in the created order has sovereign authority over this plan.” (Beale)

Notice the parallelism of the hymns in 5.9-10 and 5.12.

*What do the seals and the writing mean?*

A seal is a symbol of authenticity (Jer 32.10-11; 1 Cor 9.2) and also security and privacy (Dan 12.4, 9; Rev 10.4). The seal indicates the owner’s authority and cannot legitimately be broken by another (Isa 29.11). (Because of time and money, writing was generally carried out on the inside of a scroll where the horizontal fibers ran. It was quite unusual to use both sides.)

*Why wouldn’t the One on the Throne just do it Himself? (Class question)*

## B. The Lion of Judah, the Root of David (5.5)

**Genesis 49:8-10** Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. <sup>9</sup> Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? <sup>10</sup> The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

**Psalm 89:3-4** You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: <sup>4</sup> 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.'"

**Isaiah 11:1-2** There shall come forth a *shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit*...(LXX has "root of Jesse" and a "flower from his roots") <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. <sup>6</sup> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb... <sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. <sup>10</sup> In that day *the root of Jesse*, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples--of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

**Isaiah 16:4-5** When the oppressor is no more, and destruction has ceased, and he who tramples underfoot has vanished from the land, <sup>5</sup> then a throne will be established in steadfast love, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness.

**Jeremiah 23:5** ¶ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

**Jeremiah 33:15-16** In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>16</sup> In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.

## C. The Lamb Slain (5.6-7)

One of the most dramatic moments in all of Scripture: the elder speaks of the *Lion* and I turned and saw a *Lamb*.

His humanity (though it is clear from his praises that he is also deity)  
Jesus conquered by being "slain" (vv 6, 9, 12). In Daniel 7 "the son of man" received the kingdom. Here in Revelation "Lamb" replaces "son of man." Jesus' death is kept before us throughout the rest of Revelation since "Lamb" is the predominant title from here on out (it is used 27 times in chapters 4-11).

"what he sees constitutes the most impressive rebirth of images he anywhere achieves... the Lamb is the symbol of self-sacrificing and redemptive love...it is almost as if John is saying to us, 'Wherever the OT says "Lion", read "Lamb".' Wherever the OT speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross." (Caird)

His worthiness *because he was slain and ransomed a people and made them a kingdom of priests that reign. He conquered because he ransomed his people* (v. 9 interprets v. 5).

His conquering is an example for our conquering. His people are “slain” just as he was (18.24). They conquer by the blood of the Lamb (12.11).

#### *Seven horns*

“Horns” indicates strength and rule (Ps 18.2; 89.17; Dan 7.24; Zech 1.18-21) and seven indicates again the fullness of that strength. “They are the visual equivalent of the title *Almighty*, ascribed to the Lord God” (1.8; 4.8) (Johnson). “The slain Lamb thus represents the image of a conqueror who was mortally wounded while defeating an enemy...His sacrifice “not only redeems but also conquers” (Caird).

#### *Seven eyes and seven spirits*

“Eyes” indicate wisdom, so “Christ possesses all the omnipotence and omniscience of God” (Caird). He is ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God’ (1 Cor 1.24). He knows His church and His promises will not fail for His church. The Spirit that was before the throne (4.5) now breaks loose into all the earth in all power and wisdom because of the Lamb (think of the unleashing of the Spirit at Pentecost!); this power is one of persuasion, convincing sinners of the love of God in Christ (Rom 15.18; 1 Th 1.5-6; 1 Cor. 2.10ff).

### **D. The New Songs of Praise (5.8-14)**

1. The praisers’ numbers increase with each of the five praises!
2. The Praised develop as well: 1-2 the One on the throne; 3-4 the Lamb; 5 the One on the throne and the Lamb
3. Structure: a bbb a. The middle three begin with “worthy.” The first and last do not.
4. The Content: 1 Holiness and eternity; 2 creation; 3 *Redemption this is the longest, most detailed and descriptive praise; it is the centerpiece of chapters 4-5.* Also the 4<sup>th</sup> praise directed to the Lamb has the most ‘receptions’ (7)

The association with creation and redemption show that redemption is re-creation and a reclamation of creation. Redemption is a continuation of the work of creation. The sovereign One who creates is the sovereign One who redeems and judges.

The prayers of the saints (5.8; cp 6.9-11).

Kingdom and priests (cp 1.5-6 with Ex. 19.6). In Exodus, “I have taken you as opposed to the nations.” Here “I have taken from every tribe, language, people and nation”!

For “reign” here compare Dan 7.13-14, 18, 22, 27. 5.9-10 and 12 constitute an enthronement of the Lamb (cp. 3.21; 22.1). These correspond to other NT passages that speak of this enthronement (Acts 2.29-35, with the giving of the Spirit; Eph 1.18-23 and its benefit for the church; 4.7-8, and the outpouring of gifts for the church; Phil 2.5.11; 1 Cor 15.20-28 with the defeat of all enemies including death; 1 Tim 3.16).

## Takeaways from the Throne Room Revelation 4-5

### **Position of chapters 4-5 in the Book of Revelation**

The vision of Christ in chapter 1 and the vision of the throne room form the frame/border for the message to the churches in chapters 2-3. We've seen how the address to each church has a "piece" of the description from the chapter 1 vision. The vision permeates the addresses and constantly sets their context in the majestic presence of Christ.

Then the churches who are being addressed hit more majesty as they are brought into the throne room of God in chapters 4-5. What follows in chapters 6-20 are multiple accounts of the history between Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> comings, but each one is told from "behind the scenes" revealing the spiritual powers, divine and demonic, that influence that history. *But the whole context for these accounts is the throne room of chapters 4-5.* It is the throne of God that governs the history of the world. (There's more about the throne below.)

Finally, notice that these accounts of history in chapters 6-20 are bound by the vision of Christ and the throne room of God on the one side, and the account of the final vision of the new heavens and new earth in chapters 21-22. It is the glorious risen Christ (ch. 1) who is the Lion and Lamb, controlling all the reins of history (chs. 4-5) and bringing it to its conclusion and transformation in the New Creation (chs. 21-22).

### **The Throne**

The "throne" is mentioned 17 times in chapters 4-5! "Throne" emblazons in a receptive heart a whole new environment in which to understand and interpret life – a whole new environment in which to live and love and suffer. Whatever terrible things the people of God face in this world (chapters 6ff), they are all governed by the one who sits on the throne and by the Lamb who takes the scroll. "...this vision of the universe governed by The Throne precedes the symbolic description of the trials through which the church must pass....A very beautiful arrangement!" (Hendriksen).

The throne-vision announces that even in all the suffering and loss of God's people God is working all things together for their good, always conforming them to the image of his dear son until he completes that work in the new creation (2 Cor 3.18; Rom 8.28, 32; Phil 1.6; Jude 24-25). The throne-vision guarantees the promise that the saints will reign forever and ever (22.5). Since God reigns absolutely and nothing can stop him from fulfilling all his purposes (Cp. Ps 9.7; 29.10-11; 33.13-17; 80.1; 99.1; 123.1-2; Isa 37.16).

You might spend several days reading through these two chapters, marking the 17 occurrences of "throne." You might summarize in your own words the reality of God's throne ruling all things in history including your own history. You might review that "throne-statement" for the next few weeks until you feel like you are looking at everything in your day and everything happening in the world, through a kind of "throne-lens." Rejoice in his sovereignty, take comfort in it, rest in his righteousness, justice and mercy.

### **The Scroll**

The scroll represents God's ordained plan, especially as it pertains to the space between Christ's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> comings. "To open that scroll by breaking the seals, means not merely to reveal but to carry out God's plan" (Hendriksen). Why does John weep out loud? Because

When the scroll is opened and the seals are broken, then the universe is governed in the interest of the church. Then, *God's glorious, redemptive purpose is being realized*...Hence if the scroll is not opened, then no protection for God's children in the hours of bitter trial; no judgments upon a persecuting world; no ultimate triumph for believers; no new heaven and earth; no future inheritance! (Hendriksen)

The scroll, then, contains the world's destiny, foreordained by the gracious purpose of God...Until the scroll is opened, God's purposes remain not merely unknown but unaccomplished...Especially in persecution God's people had longed for that day to bring an end to their sufferings, but also to vindicate their faith. For there is a limit to the capacity of faith to survive in the face of hostile fact; unless in the end right obviously triumphs over wrong, faith in a just God is utter illusion. God must 'vindicate his chosen who cry out to him day and night' (Lk 18.7)." (Caird)

### **The Lamb**

"Seven horns" indicate the full and unlimited power of the Lamb. It is because of the Lamb that the seven Spirits who were before the throne (4.4) are now "sent out into all the earth" (5:6). Christ taught his disciples that when he went to the Father, he would send the Spirit (Jn 15.26; 16.7). When the Spirit was poured out on Pentecost and the disciples were speaking in all the various languages of those gathered in Jerusalem for the feast, Peter declared that the exalted Christ had "poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (Acts 2.33).

While John declares that Christ is all-powerful, "he redefines omnipotence. Omnipotence is not to be understood as the power of unlimited coercion, but as the power of infinite persuasion, the invincible power of self-negating, self-sacrificing love." (Caird) This brings to mind Paul's great statement in 2 Corinthians 5.14, "For the love of Christ controls us." As Paul wrote, "I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal 2.20). It is his love that drew us to him and his love that binds us to him.

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor *because of the suffering of death*, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.  
Hebrews 2.9

Our Lamb-King rules all. He is who we worship; he is who we admire and follow. This one, the Lamb, is our Lord. His life is in us and so we live out his sacrificial life in this world as he commanded us (Jn 13.34-35) and as the apostles command us (Eph 5.1-2; 1 Jn 3.16-18). As Jesus said, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mk 10.43-45). Living out a cruciform life was the passion of Paul: *that I might know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death* (Phil 3.10). Christ's resurrection life in us means that we are empowered to give our lives away for others, as he gave his life for us.



## Revelation 6.1-11 – The First Five Seals

Revelation 5 presents the enthronement of Christ. These OT texts provide background:  
*I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*  
Daniel 7.13-14

*The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."*  
Psalm 110.1

The latter is *the* Messianic passage to which the NT refers again and again. Jesus quizzes the Pharisees about it (Mk 12.35-37), Peter refers to it in the first sermon after Pentecost (Act 2.33ff), and being seated at the right hand is a constant refrain drawn from Psalm 110

*God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins*  
Acts 5.31

*But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."*  
Acts 7.55-56

*Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*  
Romans 8.34

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*  
Colossians 3.1

*...according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet...*  
Ephesians 1.19-22

*After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*  
Hebrews 1.3b

*But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.*  
Hebrews 10.12-13

*Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*  
1 Peter 3.21-22

Remember that the scroll contains God's plan for the unfolding of his kingdom to its final consummation. As the Lamb breaks the seals, he is initiating the plan of God. The Lord Jesus is the Administrator of God's decrees, bringing about his Father's will at the right hand of power. *For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet* (1 Cor 15.25).

As he breaks a seal we do not hear anything read, we *see* it immediately unfold. The content of the scroll is enacted before John's (and our) eyes. The four horsemen represent the judgments of God that fall upon this world. One background is Ezekiel:

*"For thus says the Lord God: How much more when I send upon Jerusalem my four disastrous acts of judgment, sword, famine, wild beasts, and pestilence, to cut off from it man and beast!*

Ezekiel 14.21 (see vv. 15-21)

In the wilderness before Israel had entered the promised land, these are the very judgments with which God had threatened Israel (Lev 16.18-28; cp. Dt 32.23-25). This direct allusion shows that as God judged Israel, his covenant people, now he is judging the whole world for it has broken covenant with God. And as those tribulations upon Israel were meant to judge the wicked and apostate, they also were meant to bring repentance to His people. Here these tribulations have the same purpose.

Another background is Zechariah 1.8-15 with the different colored horses sent to patrol the earth, and especially the four chariots in Zechariah 6.1-8, one led by red horses, one by black horses, one by white horses and one by dappled horses. They were also sent to patrol the earth - sent to the "four winds" (6.5). The horses in Revelation are not simply patrolling the earth; they are bringing forth God's judgments upon the earth.

#### *Reference to the saints*

However, though these are judgments for the whole world, these seem to include at least some reference to the suffering of God's people. In the fifth seal we see the souls of those who were *slain*. This word is used four times in Revelation describing the Lamb who was slain (5.6, 9, 12; 13.8) and twice describing the saints who are slain (here and 18.24).

Therefore, "that men should slay one another" in 6.4 (same word) may carry a special emphasis of the slaying of God's people. This also helps explain why, after the four horsemen, the fifth vision abruptly moves to "the souls of those who were slain" almost as to pick up from the slaying of v. 4.

It seems that the persecution of Christians is at least understood as a vital part of what is happening in the first four seals. Some (like Beale and Hendriksen) think it's uppermost. Support for this idea comes from the synoptic gospels (Mt, Mk, Lk) where Jesus speaks of the general suffering of mankind and in the midst of it talks of the persecution of His people. (Mk 13.7-9, 24-25; Mt 24.6-8, 29; Lk 21.9-12, 25-26 with Rv 6.2-17).

One can see how comforting this would be for those who are suffering. The "slain" under the altar represent all of God's people throughout history in all that they suffer as they bear witness to the word of God.

### *Unity*

Because of the unity of the four horsemen, it is likely that the seals are not temporal indicators but that the disasters are simultaneous. The saints (6.9-11) seem to have suffered under all four trials symbolized by the seals. Yet there is a logical order, since conquest brings about famine, pestilence and the rise of wild beasts in a devastated land. We must remember again that these are pictures that don't give all the details and instances, but they are broad strokes giving overall pictures. So, this is a summary picture of humanity against humanity in all its forms and with all the suffering that attends it.

### *Is this new?*

A question arises. John weeps because there is no one to open the seals of the scroll. Then the Lamb steps forth to take the scroll. There is the greatest anticipation. What is the content of the scroll? But the four horsemen represent destructions as old as humanity. *This* is the amazing revelation? *This* comforts the church that is necessarily caught up in these destructions?

First it is the revelation that Christ is the one who rules all things including the destructions of the earth. All that we see around us is in some way fulfilling the purpose of his reign "until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (1 Cor 15.25).

Second, the fifth seal is often depicted as an interlude. Martin Kiddle (1940) urges us not to focus on the four horsemen or the final judgment at the end of chapter 6, but the fifth seal (vv. 9-11) often called just "an interlude." But "it is much too important to be thus designated as though I were of minor significance, inasmuch as it gives meaning to the vision as a whole."

This is the message to the church, that no matter what the church faces and suffers in this world, the church is safe in Christ (along with ch 7) and that their prayers play a vital role in the accomplishment of God's purposes on earth (here and in 8.1-5). "They are told in Revelation that on the stage of history, "the messianic people, the church must play the leading part." Here is not only their safety, but their significance and glory.

### *The First Seal*

The crown indicates authority, the bow, that he is a conquering warrior. The white horse indicates the victory of those who conquer. And the total focus is conquering. The purpose is to conquer. What an apt summary of the history of the world. If we began listing all the nations and tribes and peoples that have launched attacks to conquer others, it would turn into a book. Our comfort as believers is that the crown "was given to him." God is sovereign; Christ is sovereign.

This and all the judgments are precursors of final judgment. Though we will offer compassion and help in the midst of a suffering world, still we recognize that we live in a world under judgment. This is "pre-wrath" we might say, because there is yet "the wrath to come" (1 Thess 1.10). Believers are not spared as the vision of the souls slain indicates. However, believe that all things are under his sovereign hand and that while he carries out his purposes of judgment, he also sustains his people to bear witness to Christ by word and deed, bring glory to his name and by faith conquer by remaining faithful.

### *The Second Seal*

Some interpret this as the civil war, but I side with those who include every kind of violence and bloodshed, The horse is red; the rider bears a sword. Peace is removed from the earth. This is “permitted” by God. This is a terrible aspect of God’s judgment on the earth: people hurting, harming, attacking, fighting, shooting, stabbing, killing one another. The word for killing particularly means “to slaughter” or “to butcher.” Such is the world’s history, leading finally to the terrible, final, forever judgment and death (6.12-17). This is the arena in which the church lives out its faith (see again the letters to the seven churches, chapters 2-3).

### *The Third Seal*

The voice comes from the throne. This indicates its divine origin. This rider is famine, represented by the black horse and the scales for measuring food. “The balance indicates a time of scarcity when the basic commodities of life are measured out at greatly inflated prices” (Mounce). Pictured is a situation in which wheat and barley cost anywhere from 6 to 12 times the normal cost. Famine accompanies the violence depicted in the first two trumpets, even as we presently see in Gaza. At this point a limited famine is indicated. The drought that ruins the grain does not affect the deeper roots of the olives and grapes.

### *The Fourth Seal*

This horse is the yellowish-green of a dead body (Greek, *chloros*, from which we get ‘chlorine’). *Death* and *Hades* are the horrible results of sin (“in the day you eat of it, you shall surely die” Gen 2.17; “the wages of sin is death” Rm 3.23) and finally will be cast in the lake of fire to indicate the final removal of sin and all its consequences (Rev 20.14). Here it carries out its work using the same categories as we’ve already seen above from Ezekiel 14.21.

### *The Lamb is the Lord of History*

Think of the implications that it is the *Lamb* that is opening the seals! Think how he conquered all the evil done against him (Jews, Pilate, soldiers, mobs, his own followers) by enduring that evil, continuing faithfully to suffer that evil, and as a result bringing about the greatest good, the redemption and reign of His people (5.9-10). How about now *He* be given the reins of history, to bring ultimate good out of all the evil that mankind does? How about all things being subjected to Him and how about He rules until all His enemies are a footstool for His feet? How does that work for you?

But also, the stress on the slain Lamb bringing forth these judgments shows that part of his saving work involves judgment. It must be so. His death, resurrection and reign bring about the final overthrow of all his and the church’s enemies. As we have seen, that is the *goal* of his reign. That is why Kiddle wrote “by virtue of redeeming His people...a train of cosmic destruction was released, ending only when all evildoers on earth are destroyed...from the Death on the Cross flow whelming tides of divine Wrath.”

This is the flavor of Paul’s announcement to the Greeks in Athens, *The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead* (Acts 17.30-31).

Here it is the reigning Lamb who brings upon the earth the temporal judgments that plague humankind's history. And as the final judgment and closing of history is poured out with the sixth seal (6.12-17), the horsemen represent the general judgments inflicted on mankind as a result of sin. As Paul proclaimed in his gospel, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..." (Rom 1.18). These judgments are previews of final judgment - warnings of final judgment.

Christ carries out his redemptive purpose to gather all his sheep (John 10) in the midst of his judgment of the world. His people will be gathered, grown, kept and made noble in holiness and faithfulness, even as this world continues to suffer under the judgments of God.

### *The Fifth Seal*

The white robes indicate "victory, purity, and bliss" (Caird).

"...those who "overcome" in chs. 2 and 3 are all those who remain faithful to Christ in the face of various kinds of suffering and temptations to sin and compromise, not only those who die for their faith. All genuine believers will experience suffering of one sort or another as a result of their faithfulness to Christ. As Jesus put it, "Whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it" (Mark 8:35). Whether or not they are literally put to death for their faith, they have so committed themselves to the word of God and to the testimony of Christ that they have come to be identified generally with the suffering destiny of the slain Lamb, a metaphor that becomes the identity of all Christians. (Beale)

The altar is the heavenly altar and has features of both the bronze altar where animals were sacrificed and the altar of incense right before the veil which represents the prayers of the saints. This latter altar is in the forefront as we see the prayers of the saints in heaven (here and 8.3-4 e.g.). But the former altar at whose base animals' blood was poured, may be partly pictured because their souls under the altar may reference their blood being shed as a kind of sacrifice of worship and allegiance to God.

They do not cry for personal vengeance but for God's righteous justice ("holy and true").

"Those who dwell on the earth" are unbelievers throughout the earth (3.10; 8.13; 11.10; 13.8, 14; 17.8).

"until the number..."

"He has already warned the churches that they face an imminent call to become Conquerors, people in whose martyr death Christ wins again the victory of the cross. He has told them that only by the victory of the Cross has Christ won the right to open the scroll of God's purpose, both to disclose it and to put it into operation. It is not surprising then that the content of the scroll should include the story of continued martyrdom by which the final victory is to be won" (Caird)

The assurance that God will unquestionably punish the evil world becomes a motivation for Christians to persevere in their witness through suffering on earth, knowing that they are key players in helping establish the kingdom in the same ironic fashion as their Lord (e.g., see on 1:6, 9; 5:5-10). That is, through faithful endurance in trial they begin already to reign with Christ (see, e.g., 1:9). (Beale)

## Revelation 6.12 – 17 The Final Judgment

### *Review*

The Four Horsemen (6.1-8) are not released at the end of time. *All* the time between Christ's exaltation and reign (5.9-10, 12) and the final judgment (6.12-17) is one of suffering and tribulation. "...rampant evil will be abroad, bringing suffering to the world in general and to the church in particular, through the entire period from the time of John's vision to the time of Jesus's (sic) return...Seals 1 to 5 portray different aspects of the whole history; Seal 6 describes the day which will end it" (Wilcock). This is the purposeful context in which His people are called to live out their faith in Christ.

As Paul's team encouraged the churches, "it is through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14.22) and as Peter wrote, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Pt 4.12). As he wrote earlier, these trials come "so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 1.7). *Revelation 6 and 7 provides a picture of this precious faith.*

We are comforted because the Lamb Himself is in ultimate control of these forces. He releases the seals. Only He has authority to do so. Only He has authority to rule history because he is the one who died for His people and made them a kingdom and priest to God (Rev 5.9-10). When Paul described Christ's humbling of himself to die as a servant in Phil 2.5-8, he then writes, "*Therefore* God has highly exalted him..." We too can be encouraged that however terrible the woes and suffering of this world, the reins of history have been given over to the One who in humility died for His people. We can say then that the cross rules the world, for Christ reigns to bring about the full effects of the cross both in salvation and judgment (see also John 3.16-21):

**2 Corinthians 2:14-16** But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. <sup>15</sup> For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup> to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

**John 3:35-36** The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. <sup>36</sup> Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

**Hebrews 2.3a** How shall we escape if we neglect such a salvation?

**John 5:22** For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

**John 12:48** The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

**Romans 2:16** on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

**2 Corinthians 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

## THE 6<sup>th</sup> SEAL

The Symbolism – get the overall picture! “What we have here is a symbolic picture of the terror of the judgment-day...What a picture of dread and despair, of confusion and consternation for the wicked” (Hendriksen). The earthquake “indicates that God is coming, and that the very foundations of the creation respond to his presence (cf. Rev 8.5; 11.19; 16.18; Mark 13.8; Exo 19.18; Isa 29.6; Mt 27.54).” (Poythress) This language of the tearing down of creation is found in many OT texts that describe God’s judgment (Isa 13.10-13; 24:1-6, 19-23; **34.4**; Jer 4.23-28; Eze 32.6-8; Joel 2.10, 30-31; 3.15-16; Amos 8.8-9; Hab 3.6-11).

Several of these passages refer to one nation defeating another. This makes the language of de-creation clearly figurative. The sun and moon were given to rule the day and the night (2x in Gn 1.16-18), and so the destruction of earthly power is symbolized by the destruction of sun and moon. It cannot be taken literally (compare Joel 2.30-31 which is fulfilled at Pentecost according to Peter in Acts 2 and likely indicates the coming destruction of Jerusalem as does Mt 24.29 and Mk 13.25).

This is the overturning of man in his pride against God. (Notice here the mention foremost of kings, great ones, generals, the rich and powerful.) The number 6 is the sign of man. NIV probably has the right translation of Rev 13.18: “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.” So here in chapter 6 in the *sixth* seal affects *six* objects of creation and falls upon *six* categories of mankind (the last category is one group, the lower class, made up of slave and free). So this section underscores man in his self-professed power and glory. You can summarize this section as “God Meets Rebellious Man.” This is God’s holy war in which He defeats sinners.

And where is mighty man? Hiding among the rocks and caves. (Isa 2.6-22 is an amazing parallel where it is said three times that the prideful and haughty seek shelter in caves and holes from God’s glory in the day of judgment). In Hosea 10.8 we read, “...they shall say to the mountains, ‘Cover us’, and to the hills, ‘Fall on us’.” As Swete wrote, “What sinners dread most is not death, but the revealed Presence of God.” This is taken directly from Hos 10. The parallels (11.18; 16.14; 19.7-8) show that this must be regarded as the final day of judgment.

These OT passages upon which 6.12-17 is based have to do with judgment on idolatry (see Isaiah 2 for instance) and later, God’s similar judgments fall on those who are allies of the beast (19.7-8), have his mark (13.16) and worship him (13.15). The rest of Revelation uses “ones who dwell on the earth” exclusively of idol worshippers (8.13; 11.10; 13.8, 12, 14; 14.6-9; 17.2, 8). These “are at home in the present world order, men of earthbound vision, trusting in earthly security and unable to look beyond the things that are seen and temporal” (Caird). As Beale writes, “The unbelievers’ idol-refuge, the earth, must be removed because it has been made impermanent by the pollution of their sin...creation itself (sun, moon, stars, trees, animals, etc.) has become an idol that must be removed...these earthly securities will be ripped away so that they will appear spiritually naked before God’s judgment seat on the last day.”

So, how should this affect us?

## **Give thanks for your salvation!**

**Ephesians 2:3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

**Romans 9:22-24** What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, <sup>23</sup> in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory-- <sup>24</sup> even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

**1 Thessalonians 1:9-10** For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

**1 Thessalonians 5:9-10** For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

**Romans 5:9-10** Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

## **Don't avenge yourself**

**Romans 12:17-20** Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

## **Avoid a lifestyle that will bring His wrath upon you**

**Romans 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. **Romans 2:5** But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

**Galatians 5:19-21** Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**Ephesians 5:5-8** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (cp Col 3.5-7)

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-7** <sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, <sup>5</sup> not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. <sup>7</sup> For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

**Hebrews 13:4** Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.



## Revelation 7

### The Sealing and the Singing

*Titles for Chapter 7 Johnson: Vision of the Victors; Poythress: Protection for the Saints Wilcock (after “The Final Cataclysm” for 6.12-17): Yet the Church is Indestructible*

This chapter is basically an answer to the desperate question that ends chapter six, “Who can stand?” (There are some who can and do! “...standing before the throne and before the lamb” – 7.9, same word.) Chapter 7 is an aside but a vital one. It’s a kind of parenthesis as to topic, but a critical one. This parenthesis builds suspense by interrupting the seal cycle so that the 7<sup>th</sup> seal (8.1) is dramatically delayed. In a double vision (7.1-8 and 7.9-17) this interlude assures the saints that God knows them and protects them in the midst of the tribulation and judgment of chapter 6. It has a kind of, “Meanwhile back at the ranch” feel, or maybe, “You may be asking, ‘What about us saints?’ No need to worry, you will be enriched beyond imagination!”

Chapter seven is a “vision version” of Revelation 2:10, *Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.* Also 3.10, *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth* (meaning, God will keep them spiritually). Jesus’ prayer in John 17:15 is oriented in the same direction, *I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.*

#### 1. The Sealing (7.1-8)

We’ve talked about how the four riders on four horses of different colors recall the four chariots with four horses of different colors in Zechariah 6.1-3. When Zechariah asked the angel about the four chariots the angel said, *These are the four winds of heaven going out, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth* (RSV; here ESV translates badly: “These are going out to the four winds of heaven” RSV agrees with NASV, NIV and every one of the other 12 versions I checked. More importantly these all agree with the Hebrew and LXX. Go figure.) The horse-driven chariots *are* the four winds.

So here, “the four winds of the earth” is another name for the four horses that were released in chapter six. This takes us back to the beginning of chapter 6 and shows that before those terrible four seals are opened “the servants of our God” are sealed and protected (7.3). They were not sealed from bodily harm (2.10; 6.9-11) but from spiritual harm as promised in .10. The OT parallel to this sealing of their foreheads is in Ezekiel 9.1-4 where the Lord tells the man in linen to mark the foreheads of the faithful in the city before the six executioners are released.

Also see these passages if you are interested for the metaphor of God coming in the wind and storm and also of wind as a metaphor of judgment (Ps 18.10; 68.17, 33; 104.3; Isa 19.1; 66.15; Hab 3.8, Dt 33.26 – Jer 4.11-12; 23.29; Nah 1.3; Hos 13.15).

#### *Seal*

A seal authenticates and designates ownership and therefore protects: “..their profession is authenticated and they are shown truly to belong to God” (Beale). The fact that they are called

“slaves/servants” (*doulos*) of God accents this because it was common to mark slaves on the forehead to indicate who owned them. In 14.1, instead of describing it as a seal, John says the 144,000 have the Lamb’s name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads (cp 3.12) and in 22.3-4 “his (the Lamb’s) servants” (*doulos*) will have his name on their foreheads. Seal = name.

Those who have his seal/name are under the sovereign authority and protection of His name. The divine seal/name sustains and strengthens them to remain faithful to Christ in persecution and not receive the mark of the beast (20.4) as those do who do not have God’s seal (13.8; 19.20; contrast 14.1-5 with 14.9-11). *And they have conquered him (the accuser) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death* (12.11). Jesus prayed, “I have manifested your name to them..” (Jn 17.6), and “Holy Father, keep them in your name...(17.11), “I have kept them in your name...I have guarded them...”(17.12), and “keep them from the evil one...” (17.15).

### *The 144,000*

Some interpret this as a literal number of physical Jews converted to Christ after the rapture of the church and protected by God in the tribulation. This is a misunderstanding of John.

- (1) The 144,000 are “the servants of God.” “Servants” is a common description for all of God’s people in Revelation and it is never restricted to physical Jews (1.1; 2.20; 6.11; 11.18; 19.2, 5; 22.3, 6)
- (2) The description of the 144,000 in Rev 14.1-5 includes those “redeemed” from the earth, which is the same word those “ransomed” from every tribe and language and people and nation in 5.9. This is also the make-up of those described in 7.9.
- (3) As we have seen, the sealing of this 144,000 is identical to the promise of a new name in Rev 3.12, and that is clearly not restricted to physical Jews.
- (4) A further indication of this being a symbolic description is that the 144,000 in Rev 14 is “portrayed as a holy army composed exclusively of men ‘who have not been defiled with women’ (14.4). This is symbolic of the church’s spiritual purity, in no way implying that only single, celibate male servants of God receive his seal of protection” (Johnson).
- (5) The number is  $12 \times 12 \times 1000$  or perhaps  $12^2 \times 10^2 \times 10$ . These numbers heighten the figurative idea. The “twelves” may be taken from the 12 tribes and 12 apostles. Notice that in the new Jerusalem there are twelve gates with the names of the 12 tribes and 12 foundations with the names of the 12 apostles. If the name of the 12 tribes is on the gates of the city to which Gentiles belong, why can’t they be named as the 12 tribes here? Also notice that the wall is 144 cubits and the length and width are both 12,000 stadia (144,000,000 square stadia). All these numbers are figurative and all the more show that the 144,000 in Rev 7 is figurative.
- (6) The Gentiles are clearly a part of the bride and the New Jerusalem (21.9-10). Gentiles have the name of the New Jerusalem (3.12). This is like saying that we are the new Israel. Those “who say they are Jews, and are not” do not have the name of the new Jerusalem (3.9, 12). It is not surprising that here in Rev 7 God’s people as a whole would be named by the 12 tribes.
- (7) This terminology is used in other places. James addresses believers as “The twelve tribes of the Dispersion” and Peter as the “elect exiles of the dispersion” (Jam 1.1; 1 Pt 1.1). In other places in the NT the one who has the Spirit is the true Jew, not the one who has outward circumcision (Rm 2.28-29). The church is “the Israel of God” (Gal 6.16), “the circumcision” (Phil 3.2-3, where the unbelieving Jew has become the one who “mutilates the flesh”) and “Abraham’s offspring” (Gal 3.29). The description of Israel in Ex 19.6 is applied to believers in 1 Pt. 2.9 and here in Rev 1.6 and 5.10.
- (8) The list itself shows it is figurative. Normally Ephraim and Manasseh would be listed instead of their father Joseph. And if Joseph is named, his name includes both Ephraim and Manassah, but here

Joseph and Manassah are named. Also, Dan is left out of the list, probably because of idolatry associated with Dan (Judges 18; 1 Ki 12.29-30) and because Jewish literature associated Dan with the antichrist.

Also Judah is placed first to indicate that the New Israel is headed by the Lamb who is the Lion of Judah (Rev 5.5, based on Gen 49.8-10). Also, Jacob’s children of the concubines, the maids of Leah and Rachel, are moved to positions 3-6. “The elevation of these descendants of women who were outsiders to the covenant family signifies the inclusion of the Gentiles among “the bond-servants of our God” (Rev 7.3).” (Johnson). The chart on the next page shows these changes.

SONS OF JACOB (GEN 35.23-26)

SONS OF ISRAEL (REV 7.5-8)

*Sons of Wives*

*Of Leah*

Reuben  
Simeon  
Levi  
**Judah**  
Issachar  
Zebulun

**Judah (tribe of Messiah, Rev 5.5)**  
Reuben  
**Gad**  
**Asher**  
**Naphtali**  
**Manassah (replacing Dan)**

*Of Rachel*

Joseph  
Benjamin

Simeon  
Levi

*Sons of Concubines*

*Of Bilhah*

**Dan**  
**Naphtali**

Issachar  
Zebulun

*Of Zilpah*

**Gad**  
**Asher**

Joseph  
Benjamin

(In Dennis Johnson, reproduced from Christopher Smith)

“Thus the order of the tribes in Revelation 7 symbolizes the reign of Jesus, from the tribe of Judah; the incorporation of outcasts; and the exclusion of idolaters from the covenant community that God shields from his terrible wrath.” (Johnson)

*The 144,000 and the multitude in 7.9ff.*

The real difference between the 144,000 and the multitude in 7.9 is not their ethnicity but their location. “The sealed and numbered army of Israel shows the faithful church on earth, shielded from apostasy and from God’s wrath by our union with the Lamb (bearing his name, sealed by his Spirit). The innumerable assembly of nations shows the victorious church in heaven, emerging triumphant from tribulation not through a painless rapture but through a faithful death (Rev. 12.11).” (Johnson)

“Rev. 7.1-8 explains how believers are sealed so that they can persevere through the first four tribulations enumerated in ch. 6. The vision in 7.9-17 reveals the heavenly rewards for those who

do persevere...Saints who suffer in the tribulation are encouraged to persevere as they reflect on the divine protection they have through God's sealing of them and as they recall the promise of their future heavenly reward." (Beale)

"These visions picture God's protection of his people, but from two different perspectives. The numbering in 7.1-8 links God's people with their Israelite heritage, and emphasizes that God knows and cares for each one of them. The same group, though numbered by God, is so vast as to be beyond human numbering (v. 9)...they come from every nation..." (Poythress).

John *heard* the Elder describe "the Lion of Judah, the Root of David" then *saw* "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (5.5-6). Here he *hears* "the number of the sealed, 144,000" and then *saw* "a great multitude that no one could number" (7.4-8, 9). "What he *saw*, on the other hand, was that this definite total, known to God, is from the human point of view a numberless multitude. Similarly, from God's standpoint they are all 'Israel', his people; from our standpoint, they come from every nation under heaven." (Wilcock)

## **2. The Singing (7.9-17)**

"After this" doesn't mean that the events in this vision occur after what is described in 7.1-8, only that this vision came after the preceding one: "After the sealing and hearing the number of the sealed, I saw..."

This is the same group as in 5.9-10 because both are related to the Lamb (here, "standing before...the Lamb) and because the same four categories are used (tribe, people, nation, tongue). In 5.10 John sees the church's reign as fulfilling the prophesied reign of Israel in Dan 7.22, 27 and he describes them in the same way Israel is described in Ex 19.6 (kingdom of priests). So, *this* passage has the same "Israel" association, and this ties this multitude to the 144,000 "from every tribe of the sons of Israel."

"A great multitude that no one could number" recalls the promise to Abraham and Jacob that they would have descendants that could not be numbered (Gn 16.10; 32.12; and see Gn 13.16; 15.5 and Hos 1.10). The original refers not to the nations, but to *Israel* as it would be multiplied in Egypt and the promised land (Ex 1.7; Dt 1.10; 10.22; 2 Ki 3.8), but here John is saying that the gathering of *the nations* is the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise and is yet another way he refers to Christians as Israel.

"To stand before the Throne and the Lamb means to have fellowship with, to render service to, and to share in the honor of the Lamb." (Henriksen) The white robes indicate joy, blessing, purity and righteousness. "Palm branches" recall the joy of the feast of Tabernacles (Lv 23.40, 43; Neh 8.15) which recalled God's deliverance from Egypt through the Red Sea ("palm branches...are props in the ancient world's choreography of praise" Johnson). "John now applies this imagery to people from all nations, who rejoice in their latter-day exodus redemption, in their victory over their persecutors, and God's protection of them during their wilderness pilgrimage (Rev 12.6, 14) through 'the great tribulation' (7.13-14)" (Beale). Mounce writes of this whole section, "Without doubt it is one of the most exalted portrayals of the heavenly state to be found anywhere in Scripture."

This is the first praise from the church itself and it is appropriate that the first word is, “Salvation.” To say salvation belongs to the Lamb as well as to “our God” places them on the same divine level. It would be blasphemous to attribute this praise to any other than God: *there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.*<sup>22</sup> *Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other* (Isa 45.21-22). “The great multitude joyfully acknowledges that their deliverance rests on the sovereign will of God and the redemptive activity of the Lamb” (Mounce).

The angels, elders and creatures join in a 7-fold praise. This doxology repeats six of the seven attributes of the doxology 5.12. Here “thanksgiving” replaces “wealth.” The definite article is used to heighten the meaning of each term, e.g., it is not a blessing, but *the* blessing – “the blessing above all others” (Morris).

#### *The great tribulation, and the white robes (7.13-14)*

Most commentators connect “the great tribulation” with that prophesied in Daniel 12.1, and Christ’s use of this same phrase, “great tribulation” in a context using Daniel 12.1 more explicitly (Mt 24.21/Mk 13.19). *The great tribulation* emphasizes that this is the one predicted by Daniel and Christ. Though there may be an intensification of tribulation toward the end of history, the tribulation has already begun. Christ was predicting what would happen *before* the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD (see Luke’s even clearer report of Jesus’ words in Lk 21.5-33, esp. vs. 20-24).

In Rev 1.9 John says to his readers that he is their “brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus.” Christ says to Smyrna, “I know your *tribulation...*” and “do not fear what you are about to suffer..” and “for ten days (a figurative number of completeness) you will have *tribulation..*” (2.9-10). Jesus said, “In the world you will have *tribulation..* (Jn 16.33). Paul encouraged the churches he had planted saying, “through many *tribulations* we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14.22; see also Rm 5.3-5; 8.35-36; 2 Tm 3.12; 21 of Paul’s 23 uses of *thlipsis* (“tribulation”) refer to a present reality [from Beale]).

“ ‘The great tribulation’ has begun with Jesus’ own sufferings and shed blood, and all who follow him must likewise suffer through it” (Beale). This is the common view of the NT (Col 1.24; 1 Pt 4.1-7, 12-13). So right after he first talked about his own suffering Jesus told his disciples that anyone who followed him must deny himself and take up his cross, the symbol of the world’s hatred and persecution (Mt. 16.24). He said in the upper room, “A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (Jn 15.20).

Their robes washed in the blood of the lamb (“a startling juxtaposition” Poythress), then, indicate not only that the saints have been cleansed by trusting in the blood of Christ, but more specifically that they “have been cleansed from their sin by their persevering faith in Christ’s death for them, that faith having been refined by trials” (Beale). Helpless, glad, relieved, astonished dependence upon Christ demonstrates itself by enduring all loss for Christ. In Rev 12.11 it says the saints have conquered the accuser “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” The verb tenses here in Rev 7.14 indicate a process: they have *washed* their robes and *are coming* out of the tribulation.

### *The blessings (15-17)*

The theme of priesthood (1.6; 5.10) continues. In each of those two former passages Christ's blood is what makes them priests, and so here they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, "Therefore, they are before the throne..." Like Aaron who was consecrated with the sprinkled blood (Lev 8.30), the saints have been consecrated to God and serve Him continually. Compare Hebrews 9:14, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

NASV has a more literal translation of the last phrase in v. 15: *He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them* (NIV "spread his tent over them"). This anticipates 21.3 where we read, *Behold, the dwelling place (tabernacle) of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.* 21.3 more fully quotes Ezekiel 37.26-28 but both 7.15 and 21.3 are drawn from it. Ezekiel, of course, speaks of the restoration of Israel, and rabbinic tradition understood the promise of Eze 37.27 (their God/my people part) to be "the extra advantage that Israel possesses over proselytes" and to apply only "to the tribes of the Lord" and to "families of pure [ethnic] birth in Israel" (*b. Kiddushin* 70b). John takes quite a different view as here God makes his tabernacle with those from every nation, tribe, people and language and in 21.3 it applies to the whole of the New Jerusalem, both Jew and Gentile.

Verses 16 and 17 are based on Isaiah 49.10: *they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them* and they show by their content to be describing the final, consummated reward of the saints (cp. 21.3-4, 6; 22.6). These kinds of blessings were promised to the churches earlier (3.4-5; 3.13; 2.7, 17).

We already enjoy these blessings in part (Ps 23 with John 10 and 1 Pt 2.24-25; Ps 121; Jn 7.37-39; Ps 91.1, 5-6; Eph 2.19-22). Though His people suffer much harm of different kinds in this life, they are protected against ultimate harm. Wilcock quotes Spurgeon, "It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord. Ill to him is no ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Losses enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honour, death is his gain" (commenting on Ps 91.9-10). Paul's version: *If God is for us, who can be against us?* (Rm 8.31). So Toplady writes, "More happy, but not more secure, The glorified spirits in heaven" (also in Wilcock).

**Hebrews 12:22-24** *But you have come (past tense!) to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,<sup>23</sup> and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,<sup>24</sup> and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.* We are now seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2.6). In Christ God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1.3).

# The Seventh Seal and the Beginning of the Trumpet Judgments

## Revelation Chapter 8

### **The Seventh Seal – A Picture of Judgment**

“Silence” may seem anticlimactic. Some take it as “emptiness,” others as the silent calm before more tribulations, making the content of the 7<sup>th</sup> seal the terrible trumpets which follow. However, we should see the 7<sup>th</sup> seal as full of content, proclaiming the presence of climactic judgment and associating closely with 6.12-17. The OT associates silence with divine judgment. Silence can precede judgment or it can be a response to judgment.

*Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. “Be still (= silent), and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”*

Psalm 46.8-10

*But you, you are to be feared! Who can stand before you when once your anger is roused? From the heavens you uttered judgment; the earth feared and was still (silent), when God arose to establish judgment, to save all the humble of the earth.*

Psalm 76.7-9

*Sit in silence, and go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms.*

Isaiah 47.5

*And he said, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A basket of summer fruit.” Then the Lord said to me, “The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them. The songs of the temple shall become wailings in that day,” declares the Lord God. “So many dead bodies!” “They are thrown everywhere!” “Silence!”*

Amos 8.2-3

*The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth; the young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.*

Lamentation 2.10-11

*Be silent before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD is near; the LORD has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests.<sup>8</sup> And on the day of the LORD's sacrifice-- "I will punish the officials and the king's sons and all who array themselves in foreign attire.*

Zephaniah 1:7-8

*Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.* Zechariah 2.13

At the end of Habakkuk chapter 2 we read, *But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.* God's judgments follow in ch 3. Silence “in heaven” in Rev 8.1 relates to silence “in his holy temple” in Hab 2.20. Silence is commanded in the face of judgment.

“The main point is the horror of divine judgment, which has such an awesome effect that no human is able to verbalize a response” (Beale). So 8.1 continues the last judgment scene in 6.12-17, after the interlude of chapter 7 which portrays the safety and future blessing of God's people. In the Old Testament book of Isaiah three events are bound up together: final judgment on the world, Israel's final deliverance and the new creation (Isa 41.1-20; 43.2, 15-21; 51.3-16).

We see these final events bound up together in Revelation. We see judgment upon the world in the four horsemen (6.1-8) issuing in final judgment (6.12-17; 8.1, 3-5). God's people are delivered (kept faithful) in the midst of earthly judgment and suffering (6.9-11, *under the altar the souls of those slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne*; 7.1-8 sealed, thus kept and protected), and they are brought into the new creation (7.9-17 *springs of living water, God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*).

Therefore, the "silence" of 8.1 is full of meaning, pointing to judgment, deliverance and new creation. Remember the saints request in 6.10-11? *How long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?* "The sixth (6.12-17) and seventh (8.1, 3-5) seals answer this request and are thus the logical climax and main point of the entire seal series. The final judgment is therefore the main point of 6.1 – 8.1" (Beale, my underline).

### **Christ death, resurrection and ascension change the world's trajectory toward judgment**

As we have said, the cross and resurrection reorient the world toward the last judgment. Upon Christ's exaltation in 5.9-10 because he has "ransomed people for God" (cp. again Phil 2.5-11) he opens the seals and history moves forward to final judgment (6.12-17/8.1, 3-5) and the deliverance of his people (chapter 7). This reminds us of Paul's preaching in Athens:

*The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,<sup>31</sup> because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. Acts 17:30-31*

The death and resurrection of Christ means that Christ has been put into the pilot's seat, and the plane of history is now on its descent to final judgment where every person must appear before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5.10), where God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ (Rm 2.16).

The world judged and executed of God's son: *He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him* (John 1.10-11). Now the world is under judgment presently (1<sup>st</sup> four seals), even as it continues to attack Christ and his people (5<sup>th</sup> seal), only to suffer final judgment (6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seals).

Actually, this theme was introduced early in Revelation: *Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen* (Rev 1.7). This "coming" includes all of his judgments throughout history issuing in the final judgment.

Still, it is important to remind ourselves what this same John records in his gospel, that Christ was not sent to condemn the world, but to save the world; else why would he have come to die on the cross? But people love darkness and reject Christ to their own judgment and destruction.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is*



*the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.*  
*John 3.16-19*

### **Our multiple perspectives**

So we must have multiple perspectives of the suffering and judgment that has been poured out upon this world (the first four seals, 6.1-8). These judgments we see all over the world and throughout the world's entire history are announcements and anticipations of the final judgment that is coming upon the world (pictured in 6.12-17 and 8.1, 3-5; also "the wrath to come" 1 Thess 1.10; Mt 3.7; Lk 3.7; cp. Col 3.6 and Eph 5.6).

However Paul gives us another lens through which to view these judgments. In Romans 8.18-23 he speaks of the groanings of creation under God's curse and judgment. But he calls them "birth pangs" that anticipate the creation's final freedom from its bondage to decay when the children of God are revealed in glory.

It is terrible to see the suffering of this world. It is horrifying to see the evil of this world - the dreadful, hideous crimes that pour forth like a river day in and day out. We must see these as God's judgments upon the world but also we must see these as the birth pangs of the final release of this world from the presence of evil forever. We wince and are made silent at the prospect of judgment. Yet we are relieved and amazed that he has saved us, and we have hope for these present turmoils announce to us the coming day of glory, holiness, beauty and freedom.

### **The Seventh seal interlocks with the trumpets that follow**

Verse two is a purposeful interruption in anticipation of the trumpet judgments and woes. This interlocks the seals and trumpets. We see this same interlocking when final judgment comes in (14.14-20), but before the corollary appearance of God's victorious people (15.2-4), the vision is interrupted by the sign of the seven angels (15.1), which is not resumed until 15.5. These have great literary effect as one vision finishes we are already being captivated by the vision to come.

So, 8.3-5 should be attached in the closest way to 8.1. The altar recalls the altar of 6.9-11 and the prayers of the "souls of those who had been slain." "Incense" also connects to that altar and "prayers of the saints" is almost identical to 5.8 which itself is taken up and given specific content in 6.9-11. So the prayers here in 8.3-5 are the same prayers of 5.8 and 6.10.

The point here is to show that those prayers are answered. Incense accompanied sacrifice as an indication of God's acceptance of that sacrifice (Ps 141.1-2). "The fragrant odor was metaphorical of that which is acceptable" (Beale). The angel is an agent of God indicating divine approval. Also, since incense has to do with sacrifice, the saints' prayers are seen as a part of offering their lives as sacrifices to God.

God answers these prayers (5.8; 6.10; 8.3-4) with final judgment (v 5), which is a continuation of 6.12-17 ("earthquake" begins 6.12-17 and ends 8.5, e.g.). That this is final judgment is confirmed by the same language in 11.19 and 16.18, both of which pertain to final judgment.

This fourfold chain (thunder, rumblings, lightning and earthquakes) refers to divine judgment in the OT (Ps 77.18-19; Isa 29.6) and stems from God's presence at Mt. Sinai (Ex 19.16-18). The "judgment" picture of Sinai is related to God's recent judgment upon Egypt (Ps 68.8) as he now

calls his warrior people into covenant with himself. It also anticipates his future judgments for God hears his afflicted people and delivers them and judges their enemies in similar cosmic terms (Judges 5.4-5; Ps 18.6-15; Hab 2.20 – 3.1-15).

Bauckham observed that these phrases form a progressive sequence, all alluding to Exodus 19:

- 4:5               “lightnings, sounds, and thunders”
- 8.5               “thunders, sounds, lightnings and quaking”
- 11.19           “lightnings, sounds, thunders, quaking and great hail”
- 16.18-21       “lightnings, wounds, thunders, and quaking...great...and great Hail”

John gives us a familiar OT pattern: “prayer for help and then divine response to prayer, which leads to fire proceeding from the heavenly temple to consume the persecutors” (Beale). Psalm 18 gives a fantastic poetic description of God coming in response to the Psalmist’s prayer.

By interlocking the seals and the trumpets by the interruption of v. 2, 8.3-5 is a literary introduction to the trumpet judgments, showing that they too are God’s answer to the prayers of the saints. And since the trumpet judgments are a more intense recapitulation of the seal judgments, it shows that all of God’s judgments upon the wicked now and in the final day, are in part an answer to his people’s cry.

Compare Jesus words in Luke 18.1-8

And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary.’ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.’ ” And the Lord said, “Hear what the unrighteous judge says. *And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.* Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

### **The First Four of the Seven Trumpets**

The trumpets are sometimes seen as warning for the purpose of repentance (9.20-21). However their close association with the Exodus plagues and the destruction of Jericho means that more centrally they are for the demonstration of God’s incomparable sovereignty and omnipotence and a demonstration of the hardness of men’s hearts.

- |   |              |                       |
|---|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> trumpet (8.7)                         | Exo 9.22-25  | hail and fire         |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> trumpets (8.8-11) | Exo 7.20-25  | water turned to blood |
| 4 <sup>th</sup> trumpet (8.12)                        | Exo 10.21-23 | darkness              |
| 5 <sup>th</sup> trumpet (9.1-11)                      | Exo 10.12-15 | locusts               |

The ultimate purpose of the plagues was to glorify Yahweh, even through the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (Ex 9.16; 14.4, 17). The plagues were not primarily intended to bring about repentance but to show God’s “incomparability and glory” (Beal). It is assumed that Pharaoh will not let them go. These were primarily judgments, not warnings (Exo 7.14-25; 7.26 – 8.11; 8.16-28; 9.1-7, 13-25; 10.12-20).

The trumpets must be seen as judgments upon a hardened world. Though some will respond favorably to the judgments, even as some of the Egyptians did (Exo 12.38), the main function of the judgments is to reveal the hardness of man's heart and the glory of God (11.13, 15-16; cf 15.4; 19.1-7). So people persist in their idolatries in the face of God's judgments (9.20-21). John sees the plagues of Egypt as a foreshadowing of God's plagues on mankind leading up to final judgment and His deliverance and the exodus of His people to the new heavens and new earth and the new Jerusalem. This function of the trumpets as judgments also fits in well with the saints prayers in 6.9-11 and the clear answer to those prayers given in 8.3-5, an answer of final judgment.

### **Trumpets in Scripture**

In the NT, the trumpet sound indicates the coming of Christ and the transformation of his people (1 Cor 15.52; 1 Thess 4.16). These trumpet judgments must be seen as expressions of Christ's sovereignty and enthronement (5.9-10) for seals and trumpets follow from that enthronement. The Lamb is still ruling the seals (8.1) and the close relationship to seal and trumpet indicates that the Lamb is ruling the trumpets as well.

In the OT trumpets announce holy war against God's enemies (Jer 51.27; Hos 8.1; Joel 2.1; Zeph 1.16). The background to these references is the fall of Jericho, where trumpets announced the doom of the city. At Jericho (Joshua 6) seven priests blew seven trumpets. Here in Revelation the seven angels are priestly figures (15.5-6). As here the first six trumpets prepare for the seventh trumpet of final judgment (11.15-19), so in Joshua the trumpets sounded for six days announcing and preparing for the seventh day of final judgment. Jericho's collapse anticipates the collapse of the great city (11.8, 13).

And so right after God's people are constituted an army (7.3-8) and engage in victorious holy war, being faithful to death (7.14), offering up prayers for God to rescue his people (6.10), Jesus (Yeshua = Joshua) brings about his trumpet judgments. God's people engage in the critical military tactic of prayer and suffering sacrifice (the sacrifice of love to God and others). "...apparently evil occurrences of history are not a sign that events are out of God's control, but are an expression of holy war, coming as a result of the church's prayers and God's sovereign response to those prayers" (Beale). Like God's people at Jericho we wait for God to fight from heaven. After all, we pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The trumpets should be seen as occurring within the temporal framework of the first four seals. 6.12-17 brings history to final destruction and judgment, but the trumpets speak of only partial judgment (each says 'a third'). Also the trumpets have the same division as the seals of four plus three and a long interlude between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> trumpets as between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seals. The trumpets are more intense (one third instead of the one fourth in 6.8) and become more clearly demonic (9.1-11). Also, here they are seen as a result of the prayers of the saints and the focus is therefore upon the wicked who have hardened themselves against God in their idolatry and who persecute God's people (11.7). The trumpets indicate multi-faceted suffering, the overthrow of nations and authority, the turning of nature, man's idol, against him, and the bitterness and agony of sin.

## The Ruling, Conquering Lamb The First Four Trumpet Judgments - Revelation 8

### **The prayers of the saints**

Notice these further connections (from Wilcock) between the saints prayers and the trumpet judgments. *First*, in 6.10 the saints pray for the Lord to avenge their blood “on those who dwell on the earth” and so the eagle declares woes upon “those who dwell on the earth” (8.13). *Second*, the trumpets purposely recall the plagues on Egypt. Notice the preface to those plagues in Ex 3.7f: ‘The Lord said, “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and *have heard their cry*...and I have come down to deliver them. Third, “the censer from which the fire is poured out on earth is the same censer from which the prayer was sent up to heaven.”

We may shrink back from such prayers as these for vengeance, but first we must remember that these are “the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Heb 12.23). They perfectly reflect their Father’s will and their Lord’s will! Also the fact that an angel is sent by God to offer these prayers with incense indicates God’s approval and acceptance of them. And finally, the fact that the very fire from this altar representing prayer is then poured out indicates that these prayers are specifically answered with the final judgment indicated by thunder, rumblings, lightning and an earthquake (cp. earthquake, 6.12; 11.19; 16.18). “Through the sacrifice of the Lamb the prayers of the saints (5.8) have access to God’s presence (Jn 14.13; 16.23) and are poured out as coals of wrath on the earth (8.5)” (Sweet).

Isn’t it interesting that whereas the Lamb must be revealed and exalted before the seals can be opened, the prayers of the saints must come before God before the trumpets can be released. There is a correlation. Christ’s reign is carried out in keeping with the ordained prayers of his people to whom He is united. Also, though they suffer, his people reign in exercising pivotal influence on history and judgment through their prayers and through the reign of the Lamb (cp Heb 2.8-9).

What are the real master-powers behind the world and what are the deeper secrets of our destiny? Here is the astonishing answer: the prayer of the saints and the fire of God. That means that more potent, more powerful than all the dark and mighty powers let loose in the world, more powerful than anything else, is the power of prayer set ablaze by the fire of God and cast upon the earth. (Torrance)

The imagery is powerful: Christians’ prayers are integral to the downfall of the gospel’s enemies (Johnson).

### **The Trumpets**

Though they are not in the same order, the trumpets are patterned after the plagues on Egypt as we saw above. The first five trumpets image the 1<sup>st</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> plagues of Egypt and lead to the 6<sup>th</sup> trumpet of death, which in turn images the 10<sup>th</sup> and final plague of the death of the firstborn. One can see how the scene in 11.15-19 is an image of the destruction of Egypt and the deliverance of Israel. It is hard to overestimate the meaning of the deliverance from Egypt. As with Christ and the OT types, Christ is the basis for these types; they are not the basis for Him. In this way the final history of the world with its progressive judgments leading to final judgment is the basis for the deliverance from Egypt. The latter happened as a precursor and model for what God planned to do in these last days, beginning with the resurrection and reign of Christ.

The seven trumpets, as does the trumpet sound in all of Scripture, announce the coming of God in splendor, supremacy, victory and judgment. They correspond to the thunder, lightning, rumblings and earthquake which indicate the majestic presence of God (4.5; 8.5). Notice the thunder, lightning, earthquake and trumpet blast at Mt. Sinai (Ex 19.16-19).

The trumpet visions portray limited disasters and distresses in the midst of history, events that are bitter foretastes of the final, unrestrained destruction of all opposition to God’s reign at the end of the present world order. (Johnson)

Looking ahead, the first four bowls (16.1-9) correspond to these first four trumpets affecting the same four sections of the creation: land, fresh water, seas and sky. However, the trumpets affect a third of each of these, while the bowls affect the whole, indicating an increase in the intensity of judgment and increasingly focusing on the final coming of Christ which brings in the last events in history (19.11 – 20.15). The trumpets and bowls show “that God’s righteous wrath summons every aspect of our environment to indict human rebellion, both through the flow of history (trumpets) and at its climax (bowls)” (Johnson).

### **Intensification of Judgments from Trumpets to Bowls**

<b>Trumpets</b>	<b>Bowls</b>	
<i>One-third</i> of the land	<i>All</i> land	
<i>One-third</i> of the sea	<i>All</i> sea	
Bitter drinking	Drinking blood	
<i>One-third</i> of the heavenly bodies darkened	The sun scorches	(Poythress)

In the OT, the trumpets preceded the fall of Jericho which blocked Israel’s entrance into the promised land and their establishment of Jerusalem, “the holy city” (Neh 11.1; Isa 52.1). In Revelation we see the same order. The trumpets (which have their parallel in the final bowls) precede the fall of Babylon (ch 18), Satan and the beast (ch 20), and then appears “the holy city, new Jerusalem” (21.1).

### **The First Trumpet**

This does not indicate atomic fallout as some have taught. Otherwise sixty generations of the wicked have gone unscathed by this plague. Everything points to the seals being poured out directly upon the Lamb’s reign (cp. Eph 1.18ff; 1 Cor. 15.25), and the trumpets represent an intensified version of the seals. The trumpets “resemble the first five Seals in revealing not datable events, but aspects of the world situation which may be true at any time. On this view, the hail, fire, and blood symbolize any kind of destruction which at any time damages the earth on which man lives” (Wilcock).

If there is a reference to a particular kind of suffering we should start not with 20<sup>th</sup> century technology, but rather with the 7<sup>th</sup> plague of Egypt which the first trumpet images. The 7<sup>th</sup> plague consisted of thunder, hail and fire. The blood of the 1<sup>st</sup> trumpet likely has its background in Joel 2.30-32, which, in connection with the day of the Lord not only speaks of blood and fire (“fire” here in Rev 8.7, 8, 10) but also the darkening of the sun (here in 8.12). Whatever the background “blood” intensifies the sense of suffering and horrible devastation.

Whereas the hail did the damage to man, animal, plants and trees in Exodus, it is the fire that does the damage here in Revelation. And “fire” likely refers to famine. In the judgment announced in Ezekiel 5.2 we read of how one third will be *burned up with fire*, one third destroyed by the sword and one third scattered. Yet when the judgment is summarized again in 5.12, it is *famine*, sword and scattering. Also this judgment is previewed in Eze 4.9-17 as being one of famine, and it is finally described as a whole in Eze 5.16-17 as being famine. A Jewish prophetic text describes a future severe famine a “fire on the earth.” Rev 18.8 describes a judgment as “death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire.” The third seal dealt with famine (6.5-6) and it is likely that the first trumpet does as well.

That these calamities are controlled by God is indicated by being “thrown upon” the earth. All the sad tragedies and devastations on earth don’t have their ultimate source in Satan as much popular preaching puts it, but in God himself, though he does use evil forces to accomplish his purposes of judgment (as in the 5<sup>th</sup> trumpet).

### **The Second Trumpet**

In Jeremiah 51.25, 42, Babylon is called a “destroying mountain” which God will make a “burnt mountain” and submerge in the sea. Also, in Rev 18.21 the angel throws a great stone in the sea which is interpreted, “So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence.” The kings of the earth will weep over the smoke of her burning (18.9). So this speaks of a mighty kingdom falling. It likely indicates that Rome itself “was under divine sentence” (Sweet). As well, it likely indicates the suffering and economic disruption that has occurred countless times since the time of Christ as nations and rulers rise and fall. This mountain cast into the sea previews and anticipates the final overthrow of all the prideful rule of humankind. (The destruction of the ships here prepares for the mourning of the merchants and shipmasters at the fall of Babylon in 18.11-19).

The fire again may refer to the famine that occurs when nations fall. “Blood” is a clear reference to the 1<sup>st</sup> plague (Exo 7.20ff) when the Nile was turned to blood. As the fish of the Nile died, so a third of the fish of the sea die here. John is portraying the fall of this kingdom in terms of the fall of Egypt. Natural and economic resources will be diminished. Caird says that John is indicating “the self-destroying power of evil” for God uses Babylon to pollute the sea “on which Babylon itself depends for the maintenance of its commercial empire.” “The worldly powers that oppress God’s true Israel are to be shaken at the source of their confidence” (Johnson).

### **The Third Trumpet**

In speaking of this trumpet Wilcock writes, “...terrible things happen to the world in which man lives.” By going from land to sea to fresh waters and then to the sky the trumpets show that the whole of creation participates in the destructive judgments upon mankind. Beale thinks the mention of fire may again refer to famine.

The background to the star falling from heaven again points to Babylon. As part of an extended taunt against Babylon in Isa 14.3-23 we read in v. 12, “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low!”

Wormwood in the OT represents the bitterness, extreme grief and tragic results of sin and its judgment (“severe afflictions resulting from divine wrath” – Beale).

*but in the end she (the adulteress woman) is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword*  
Proverbs 5.4

(speaking of God’s judgment) *He has filled me with bitterness; he has sated me with wormwood...  
Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall!*  
Lamentations 3.15, 19

*Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will feed this people with bitter food (= wormwood), and give them poisonous water to drink.*  
Jeremiah 9.15

It also represents the corruption of justice and righteousness:

*O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth!... Do horses run on rocks? Does one plow there with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood—*  
Amos 5.7; 6.12

So Babylon’s idolatry and corruption poisons the earth and brings judgment that brings bitter suffering. “Idolatrous adulation of its rulers, who usurp God’s place is the source of the world’s torments..” (Sweet) Compare Isaiah 14:14: *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.* “Wormwood is the star of the new Babylon which has *poisoned* by its idolatry the *springs* of its own life (Caird).

At this point in his commentary Caird reminds us that Revelation “is not a manifesto hurled at a pagan civilization, but a pastoral letter designed to strengthen and comfort his fellow-Christians on the eve of martyrdom. His Egyptian typology (trumpets based on the plagues) is an emphatic way of saying that present disasters are but a prelude to God’s great deliverance.”

### **The Fourth Trumpet**

This trumpet is dependent on the 9<sup>th</sup> plague of darkness (Exo 10.21). The plagues were judgments on the Egyptian gods and darkness judged the sun god, Ra, of whom the Pharaoh was considered an incarnation.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Trumpet is parallel to the 6<sup>th</sup> seal (Rev 6.12-17, “the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth”). As we’ve said before, judgments like these have a common OT background where regularly God’s judgment of a nation is spoken of in terms of the heavenly lights being darkened (Isa 13.10-13; Jer 4.23-28; Eze 32.6-8; Joel 2.10, 30-31; 3.15-16; Amos 8.8-9). Since the heavenly lights rule the night and day as it says in Genesis 1.16, they became symbols of earthly human rule.

So darkness represents the destruction of idolatrous earthly rule. This is de-creation into darkness and chaos. *I looked on the earth, and behold, it was without form and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light* (Jer 4.23, speaking of God’s judgment). This declares the utter futility and meaninglessness of idolatry. This suffering and all the sufferings of the trumpets declare to the wicked “their separation from God and the beginning of their judgment” (Beale). Still they do not repent (9.20-21).

## The Trumpet Judgments Chapter Nine

### **The Introduction to the Last Three Trumpets (8.13)**

In chapter 8.1-12, the first four trumpets come at us one after another: The first angel (v 7) ...The second angel (vs 8-9)...The third angel (vs 10-11)...The fourth angel (v 12).

But then in verse 13 there is a pause before moving on to the fifth angel. First there is the introduction formula, “Then I looked, and I heard...” Then there is a threefold pronouncement of woe by the eagle/vulture. It’s as though he is saying, “Yes these first four trumpets are terrible, but the three remaining trumpets are far worse!”

The eagle cried with a loud voice “as it flew directly overhead.” This phrase anticipates the final judgment at Christ’s coming. In 14.6 the angel who announces that the final judgment has come was “flying directly overhead.” And in 19.17 the angel calls “to all the birds that fly directly overhead” to the judgment feast on the flesh of God’s enemies. So this description of the eagle as flying directly overhead carries ominous judgment overtones.

In addition, in chapter 11, when the seventh trumpet is finally blown, it points to final judgment:

The nations raged,  
but your wrath came  
and the time for the dead to be judged  
and for rewarding your servants (11.18)

The fifth and sixth trumpets here in chapter 9 prepare for the seventh trumpet of final judgment because they strike *all* people that are fixed in their idolatry and unbelief. Also the torment of unbelievers in these two trumpets anticipates the eternal torments that follow the final judgment.

In the OT the eagle is associated with judgment (Dt 28.49; Jer 4.13 (w/ trumpets vs 5, 21, 23); 48.40; 49.22; Lam 4.19; Hos 8.1 – trumpet and eagle). “The picture in Rev 8.13 is of an eagle hovering over its prey. Unbelieving “earth dwellers” are the prey...The eagle here announces the coming destruction of the sinful prey”(Beale). This eagle could be the fourth creature of Rev 4.7 especially since 8.13 is closely related to 14.6 where it is an angel that is “directly overhead.”

The first four trumpets struck against the environment, but these following strike the wicked directly. They are “woes” (9.12); they are announced with “woe” (8.13). The longer descriptions (1<sup>st</sup> four trumpets, 6 verses; the next two, 21 verses) indicate their greater intensity as well.

### **The Fifth Trumpet**

Jewish literature uniformly speaks of evil angels falling from heaven (cp Lk 10.17-20; Jude 13; Rev 12.9) and this angel is likely the king of the angels named “Abaddon” (Destruction”) and “Apollyon” (Destroyer) in 9.11.



The darkening of the sun points to judgment (Joel 2.10, 31; 3.15), while “smoke like a furnace” recalls Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19.28). What is so shocking here is that “the judgment formerly limited to the demonic realm (in the abyss) is being extended to the earthly realm. As a result of Christ’s death and resurrection, the devil and his legions have begun to be judged, and now the effect of their judgment is about to be unleashed on unbelieving humanity, who give their ultimate allegiance to the devil” (Beale). Ironically, when we see humanity in torment it is connected with the judgment on evil angels, mankind being engulfed in that judgment. In rejecting God they join the demons, and now are trapped in judgment along with the demons.

As seemingly *physical* as this trumpet woe appears, it is very likely that this is a striking metaphor for spiritual, emotional and psychological suffering. Of course, this will have many physical consequences, but we must not think of these creatures *physically* attacking unbelievers. This is clear from the fact that those who have the seal of God on their foreheads are protected against these creatures. This woe is being poured out over the whole earth, yet it does not touch believers. They either continue to trust in Christ and know his shalom or they are brought to Christ in the midst of this woe. Either way, the infliction of ultimate, defining spiritual harm does not affect them.

The Exodus plagues caused despair and fear among the Egyptians (Exo 10.7; 12.33-36), anxious conviction of sin not accompanied with repentance (Exo 9.27-28; 10.16-17) and a realization that their gods were vain and powerless and “they were in opposition to God through their idolatry and their persecution of God’s people” (Beale). This fifth trumpet/woe results in a similar judgment of the torment of despair and fear and hopelessness.

“Torment” (Gk – *basanismōs*) “is primarily spiritual and psychological” (Beale). Where this word is used in Revelation it is understood to either emphasize or at least certainly include spiritual and psychological torment (11.10; 14.10-11; 18.7, 10, 15; 20.10). It never means physical pain alone. Jewish works such as *Wisdom* describe this kind of torment that was inflicted on the Egyptians.

“Authority was given them” indicates that they are ultimately commissioned by God or Christ (compare a similar commissioning in 6.2-8 and 8.2). Though God uses the terrible forces of demonic power, it is his judgment. It’s as though God is saying to mankind, “You reject me in favor of your idols and thereby you embrace Satan’s agenda and are in his hand and do his will. Fine. Let him be your lord. See how that works for you.” As Paul wrote, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11.36).

#### *The description of the locusts*

The locust section (Rev 9.7-9) is based on the first two chapters of Joel, which describe a plague of locusts overtaking the land of Israel. It’s interesting that the locust plague in Joel recalls the locust plague that fell on Egypt - now because Israel has turned from God, they receive the same plague as Egypt! Further, the description of the locusts in Joel is a metaphor for an invading army. In Revelation 9, the idea of famine is still present as it was in Joel, but now it is spiritualized as a famine of soul (notice Amos 8.11-14 “*Behold, the days are coming,*” declares the Lord God, “*when I will send a famine on the land— not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord*”).

This description is meant to horrify us as we see their gruesome, monstrous, destructive power. The comparison of their faces to humans shows their demonic nature. This is aligned with the judgment pronounced in Jer 8.16-19 which has the sound of war horses and the biting of serpents, grief and being sick of heart, and all poured out because of their idolatry (same thing here, 9.4, 20). The targum (Jewish interpretive writing) of Jeremiah 8 says that in connection with this judgment, the people “will delight in death rather than life.” Same thing here.

The royal reference (9.11) anticipates the crowns of Satan (12.3-4) and the Beast (13.1) so “Abaddon/Apollyon” is either Satan or his representative. Jewish writing identified “the Destroyer” (Ex 12.23, a synonym of the word here in Rev 9.11) of the last plague as the prince of the spirits and that the “destroying angels” who brought about the hail and struck down the firstborn are evil spirits unleashed by Satan. In talking of the hail and the death of the firstborn Ps 79.46 reads, *He let loose on them his burning anger, wrath, indignation, and distress, a company of destroying angels.* Nonetheless, it was ultimately the Lord Himself who struck down the firstborn (Ex 12.12-13; 27-29). So while the plague of darkness was sent by God, *Wisdom* 17.14 (Jewish writing) says it came from “the recesses of hell.” (all this is in Beale)

John’s picture of “Abaddon” leading a hoard of evil spirits from the abyss is fully in line with Jewish descriptions of the spiritual tools used for the plagues to bring such torment upon the Egyptians (cp. “there was a great cry in Egypt” 12.29).

Verse 12 is not a temporal indicator that the first woe (fifth trumpet) will be finished on the earth and only then will the second woe (sixth trumpet) come. Rather it means the vision of the first woe is finished and now the vision of the next two woes are coming.

### **The Sixth Trumpet**

The mention of the altar (v. 13) ties this trumpet to the saints prayers in 6.10-11 and 8.3-5 and continues to show that the seven seals and seven trumpets are God’s response to the saint’s prayers. The four horns may indicate the full power of God executed on behalf of the saints (cp 14.13 where authority to judge comes from the altar).

The Euphrates (v. 14) recalls the traditional place from which armies will invade Israel to bring God’s judgment, “beyond the river,” “from the north,” “from the ends of the earth (Isa 5.26-29; 7.20; 8.7-8; 14.29-31; Jer 1.14-15; 4.6-13; 6.1, 22; 10.22; 13.20; Eze 38.6, 15; 39.2; Joel 2.1-11, 20-25). See especially Jeremiah 46 as it portrays the judgment on Egypt. There the army of horsemen from the north are like serpents, innumerable locusts, wearing breastplates (46.4, 22-23) and destruction takes place at the Euphrates (46.6, 10). John is always drawing from the OT!

This OT language is employed here to describe the evil angels bringing spiritual and physical destruction. 9.14 may be related to the four angels at the four corners of the earth holding back the four winds of the earth in 7.1. Here there are four angels and four horns. The four horns may represent the four corners of the cosmos over which God is sovereign, because in the OT and Near East in general the temple typically represented a microcosm of the world.

That these angels “had been prepared...to kill a third of mankind” recalls the Jewish writing *I Enoch 66.1*, which says that at the time of the flood there were “angels of punishment...prepared

to come and...to bring judgment and destruction.” Mounce says that the exact time is given to show that “all the forces of history are under the sovereign control of God. He is the almighty One (1.8; 4.8; 11.17; 19.15).” Things happen exactly how and when God chooses!

The ungodly spiritual forces are pictured as an innumerable army (the number is figurative). As they are described in vs 17-19 “...the piling up of monstrous metaphors underscores that the demons are ferocious and dreadful beings that afflict people in a fierce, appalling, and devastating manner.” (Beale) “Fire and smoke and sulphur” coming out of their mouths indicates fatal judgment (Gn 19.24, 28; Dt 29.23; 2 Sam 22.9; Isa 34.9-10; Eze 38.22; also see Ps 18.8, where fire comes out of God’s mouth).

This plague of death includes all the forms of death they may undergo, *but it is a physical death that ensures their final spiritual death*. It is a terrible way to describe the horrible dying of unbelieving mankind that sends them to eternal death as well. “Fire and sulphur” (3x in 19.17-18) is used exclusively in Revelation of the final and eternal judgment of ungodly idolaters (14.10; 21.8) and of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (19.20; 20.10). Notice this striking parallel in *Pss. Sol. 15.6-13* (another Jewish writing):

The flame of fire...against the unrighteous will not touch him...for the mark of God is on the righteous so that they may be saved...Famine, sword, and pestilence [will be] far from the righteous...but will pursue sinners and overtake [them]...for the mark of destruction is on their forehead. And the inheritance of sinners is destruction and darkness...Sheol beneath...sinners will perish forever in the day of the Lord’s judgment

The source of destruction is their mouths. This “indicates not only death but a judgment of deception” (Beale). The deception is a vital part of the torment. Deception is a judgment:

And Micaiah said, “Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, ‘Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, ‘I will entice him.’ And the Lord said to him, ‘By what means?’ And he said, ‘I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And he said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.’ Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has declared disaster for you.”  
1 Kings 22.19-23

Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”  
Isaiah 6.10 (quoted in Matthew 13)

Astonish yourselves and be astonished; blind yourselves and be blind! Be drunk, but not with wine; stagger, but not with strong drink! For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes (the prophets), and covered your heads (the seers). And the vision of all this has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed. When men give it to one who can read, saying, “Read this,” he says, “I cannot, for it is sealed.” And when they give the book to one who cannot read, saying, “Read this,” he says, “I cannot read.” And the Lord said: “Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden.”  
Isaiah 29.9-14 (quoted in Matthew 15)

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever!...And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.

Romans 1.21-28

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

2 Thessalonians 2.9-12

Pharaoh's hardening is a well-known example. The mouths of Satanic beings always have to do with deception (see ch 13). The tails like serpents recalls Satan who is "the Serpent" engaged in deception (12.9 "Satan, the deceiver of the whole world"; in 20.2-3 Satan the "serpent" is thrown into a pit "so that he might not deceive the nations any longer"; and 12.4 is symbolic of his deceiving angels that follow him). Again, the saints cannot be harmed by this plague; they cannot be deceived to abandon their relationship with God. Compare Jesus' words:

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Luke 10.17-20

Snakes and spiders and their venom are constantly associated in Jewish literature with deception (in Prov 23.32-33 wine brings the same delusions as those caused by a poisonous bite).

The last verses (20-21) show that those who observe these deaths do not repent. They are hardened even as Egypt was hardened. They have become like their idols (cp Ps 115.8 and 135.18 *Those who make them (idols) become like them, so do all who trust in them.*) They have become like the demons themselves in their evil and in their spiritual inability! The hardening and deceptive influence of the demons causes unbelievers "to be insensitive to divine warnings and to refuse to repent of their idolatry, even when warned by the miserable deaths of their fellow idolaters" (Beale)

"Repent" recalls the seven occurrences of this word in the letters (Chapters 2-3). This is a call to the churches to see that horrific demons stand behind idols they are tempted to follow and worship and that giving oneself to idolatry is exposing oneself to the numbing, anesthetic, hardening and deception of demons. Here is Satan afflicting his *allies*, not his enemies!

# Revelation 10

## Reminder

“Revelation is preeminently a book about God and his greatness. The secrets of history and of spiritual conflict center on God himself... When God’s people are beset by temptation or persecution, a revelation of God’s character and glory is the best remedy. His power guarantees the final victory, his justice guarantees vindication of the right, and his goodness and magnificence guarantee blessing and comfort.” (Poythress)

And the blood of the Lamb (1.5; 5.9; 7.14) is the seal that God has accomplished redemption for his people and that he will bring about all its intended result. Having given his Son, he will give them all things (Rm 8.32). “...the throne room of God in revelation 4 represents the heart of the universe, the heart of meaning, the heart of history... Revelation renews us, not so much by telling us about particular future events, as by showing us God, who will bring all events to pass in his own time and his own way.” (Poythress)

## The Interlude of Chapters 10 and 11

Just like the interlude in chapter 7 between the 6 seals in chapter 6, and the 7<sup>th</sup> seal in 8.1-5, this interlude between the 6 trumpets (chapters 8 and 9) and the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet (11.15-19) builds anticipation.

Chapter 6 (6 Seals)	<i>Seals</i> Chapter 7 (Interlude)	Chapter 8.1-5 (7 <sup>th</sup> Seal)
Chapters 8 and 9 (6 Trumpets)	<i>Trumpets</i> Chapters 10 and 11 (Interlude)	Chapters 11.15-19 (7 <sup>th</sup> Trumpet)

The parallel structure indicates that the seals and the trumpets are not describing two *different* sequences, but the *very same sequence*. They are both describing the wrath of Christ poured out on an evil, unbelieving world, only the trumpets are more intense than the seals. They both describe the final judgment (compare the seal version 6.16-17 and the trumpet version 11.18), and they both describe the final salvation of God’s people (seal version 7.9-17; trumpet version 11.15-18).

They both describe history from the time of Christ’s ascension to the end of the world. The 7 bowls of wrath that are all poured out in chapter 16 will cover the same ground, but in still a more intense version, indicating more emphatically the certainty of God’s final judgment on the wicked. Repetition is a favorite literary tool in Hebrew writing.

This “triple feature” announces the certainty of these events. It tells God’s people, “Don’t miss this. The terrible things that are happening in the world and will happen in the world (seals), are all a part of Christ’s judgment on the world. He is ruling all things; he has the scroll of history in his hand; he alone opens the seals of God’s wrath. Meanwhile he will preserve you his people, he

will keep you faithful to him, he will use you as a witness of light in the darkness, and he will bring you safely into the new creation. I will say it again (trumpets)...I will say it a third time (bowls of wrath).”

(back to the trumpets themselves) As with the seals, this interlude in the trumpets does not occur after the trumpets, but describes the trumpets from a different perspective, shedding more light on what is transpiring *during* the six trumpets. It has the effect of, “at the same time, this is also happening.”

The interlude in chapter 7 shows that during the outpouring of the wrath and persecution of chapter 6, the people of God (the true Israel, Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus) are sealed and protected from apostasy and judgment (7.1-8) and they (from every people) will finally enter into the new creation (7.9-17). The interlude in chapters 10 and 11 first puts a limit on the 6 trumpets, points forward toward the close of history in the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet (10.1-7; 11.15-19). Second it proclaims the witness of God’s people in the midst of the trumpet judgments (chapter 10.8-11; 11.1-14).

### **The Oath of the Mighty Angel**

The mighty angel represents Christ and manifests Christ much like the ‘angel of the Lord’ manifested Yahweh in the OT. The parallel between the rainbow here and the rainbow in both Ezekiel’s vision of God’s throne in 1.26-28 and God’s throne in Rev 4.3 shows that the angel is under divine authority and brings divine authority to bear on the world.

The cloud announces God’s presence as it does throughout the Bible (the cloud at Mt Sinai, Ex 19.16; 24.15-16; the cloud on the tabernacle, Ex 40.34-35; the cloud over the mercy seat, Lev 16.2; coming in the clouds of judgment, Ps 18.11-12; 77.17). Compare the description of the angel’s face to that of Christ in Revelation 1.16. His legs recall Christ’s ‘feet like burnished bronze’ (1.15). “The radiance of the angel’s appearance marks him as one who bears the image of his Master, reflecting the Master’s glory as he brings the Master’s message” (Johnson

The angel’s size indicates how God’s word and purpose dwarfs the affairs of man. His word spans over all things and controls all things. Nothing is outside its pale; it speaks to all and involves all. He roars because his message concerns the entire universe and must be heard by all (Hendriksen). This is God’s dominating word; it cannot be obstructed, it will accomplish his purpose

Thunder is a consistent image in Revelation proclaiming God’s judgment and retribution (8.5; 11.19; 16.18). But the 7 thunders are not revealed. Since the thunders represent God’s judgments, cutting them short means God cuts short the tribulations of the world, corresponding passages like Mark 13.20, “And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.”

(John) has depicted “a world impenitent and inexcusable, surrendered by God’s wrath to the disastrous consequences of its own idolatry...Humanity must be stopped forthwith from endlessly producing the means of its own torment and destruction” (Caird). Johnson, “seal it up,

no more thunder judgments, no more delay, no more human rebellion with an endless cycle of injustice and misery.” This is God’s “Enough!”

The angel makes his oath standing on land and sea to demonstrate that all creation and everything in it is ruled by God’s word. He raises his right hand in the posture of an oath. He invokes God to witness and enforce the oath. The angelic creature in Daniel 12.7 “swore by him who lives forever” but this angel “swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it.” It is a more complete and dramatic oath than the one in Daniel.

And the angel swears that there would be “no more delay” (v. 6). He points to the 7<sup>th</sup> and final trumpet that brings the end of history: final, terrible judgment for the world and joyous deliverance for God’s people (11.15-19). The 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet will in fact be the last trumpet; nothing further will happen. It’s over with the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet.

### **The little scroll (10.2)**

*Background, Revelation 1.1-3.*

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

This Revelation is from Christ who makes it known to John through his angel. John then bears witness to God’s people of what he saw. Johnson points out when Christ takes the scroll in chapter 5 and begins removing each seal in chapter 6, then “the things that must soon take place” begin to fall upon the earth all the way until final judgment (vs 12-17). We must associate the scroll of chapter 6 with the revelation of Jesus Christ in chapter 1.

We’ve seen how closely the mighty angel is associated with Christ and we should just as closely associate scroll in chapter 10 with the scroll in chapter 5. As Johnson writes, it is very likely that this scroll is to be identified with the one in chapter 5.

The angel will give the scroll to John who is to eat it and then “prophecy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings” (v. 11). This then fulfills the pattern given to us in opening of Revelation that the revelation (scroll) of Christ would be communicated to John through an angel and John would then write it down/proclaim it to God’s people.

### **Take it and eat it (v. 9, background, Ezekiel)**

“But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you.” And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. And he spread it before me. And it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe... Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.  
Ezekiel 2.8 - 3.3

Ezekiel’s content was bitter “lamentations, mourning and woe” but sweet. “Front and back” connects Ezekiel 2-3 with the scroll in Revelation 5 (v. 1) which also makes the connection stronger that this scroll in chapter 10 is the same scroll as chapter 5.

Ezekiel is told, “take into your heart all My words which I will speak to you” (3.10). John also must internalize the message he is to deliver to others (Johnson).

Eating the scroll indicates “that God commissions him with the Ezekiel-like task of prophesying woe to an unrepentant world...” “Bitter” indicates the news of suffering and judgment while “sweet” indicates communion with God and indicates his goodness (Poythress).

“Eat so as to make the scroll a part of his inmost furnishing...the word of grace...must be spoken by the prophet-martyrs not only with their lips but with their lives...sweet, yet bitter...the way of victory is the way of the cross” (Caird) and this will be seen in the unfolding of chapter 11.

Some like Caird think that bitterness refers to the persecution which follows in chapter 11. That could be, but I side with Morris and others that bitterness refers to the sadness of the message of judgment. After all, it is the message itself that becomes bitter in his stomach, not some outside influence like persecution. This receives support from a passage like 2 Cor. 2.14-15:

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.  
Who is sufficient for these things?

### **The Mystery of God**

Scholars connect 10.6-7 with 6.11. They seem to cover the same ground. The mystery of God is the unfolding of God’s prophetic word which includes the suffering of God’s people (6.11). (See “mystery” in Dan 2.19, 27-30, 47). The open scroll indicates prophetic inauguration.

...the prophecy of God’s defeat of the evil kingdom is being ironically fulfilled by his evil kingdom’s apparent physical victory over the saints. God’s people are already beginning to win spiritually in the midst of their physical defeat. Their enemies are already beginning to lose spiritually in the midst of their apparent physical victory. Unbelievers begin to undergo unseen loss, since their persecuting activities begin to lay the basis for their ultimate punishment. Such antagonistic actions also betray their allegiance to and identification with Satan, who has already begun to be judged at the cross and Jesus’ resurrection. They already stand under this inaugurated judgment.” (Beale)

Because the saints share in the reign of Christ, they share in the sufferings of Christ. This perhaps best explains the *small* scroll. We reign ironically as Christ did. We are imitators on a small scale of Christ’s model of the cross (again 2.26-27 announces we will share in his reign and judgment). Also compare the interplay of “mystery” and suffering in Colossians 1.24-27.

### **John’s renewed commission (10.8-11)**

This reminds us of the action of Christ in chapter 5 (again the background is Ezek 2-3). And as the scroll in chapter 5 held judgments, so here, John will proclaim judgments. The sweet taste points to the power of God’s word to sustain John, the goodness of His will and the final hope it brings to His people. Its bitterness relates to the judgments to come (8.11 is the only other use of “bitter”). We should read “against” not “about” in verse 11: “You should again prophesy against many peoples...” Also “kings” always expresses the world’s wicked opposition to God in Revelation (16.14; 17.12; 18.3). The whole context is that of judgment.



## Revelation 11 – The Two Witnesses

### Measuring the Temple

Measurement indicates protection and safety. It indicates God's ownership, responsibility, knowledge, understanding; the city is under his control and care (morris). Measuring indicates his presence with his people. The temple indicates the spiritual life of the church. Compare it to Revelation 7 which is in the same location between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> seal as this is between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet. *Measuring = sealing.*

We know many of his faithful witnesses are killed between Christ's resurrection and second coming. We see those who have been killed cry out from under the altar in chapter 6. But chapter 7 indicates they are sealed and protected spiritually under persecution and death. The same complex situation is pictured here.

The outer court represents the physical life of the church, and the trampling of it the persecution and suffering the church will experience. The people of God are secured from apostasy and divine wrath but vulnerable to attack by persecution

The background is Ezekiel 40-48. And the city in Revelation 21 is measured to indicate its eternal security and safety. 21.15 *And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls.* Measuring is "a sign of the ultimate invincibility of the church" (Johnson)

### Holy City

Many have associated this with physical Jerusalem and its destruction in 70AD. But John would not refer to physical Jerusalem as "the holy city." The holy city is the new Jerusalem (21.2; 22.19). We are the bride of Christ. Earthly Jerusalem is associated with "the great city" (11.8). Sodom – Egypt – Jerusalem. It has become with them an unholy city.

"Great city" symbolizes all human community, Jewish or Gentile, that defies the true God. "man in organized community and opposed to God" (Morris - see the association of the great city 11.7-8 and 17.6).

Anti-Jesus Jews are no longer Jews (3.9; 2.9). Pro-Jesus Gentiles are now priests to God (Rev 5.9-10). We are the holy city, and Jews who refuse Jesus are part of the "great city" associated with Sodom, Egypt, and soon Babylon.

Again, Paul in Phil 3.2-3 writes "beware of those who mutilate the flesh." However there is not verb for "mutilate." It is a noun and reads more literally, "beward of the the mutilation" (*Gk. katatome*). But Paul says who believe, Jew or Gentile, physically circumcised or not, are the "the circumcision" (*Gk. peritome*). For anti-Jesus Jews, present circumcision has no more meaning; it's just a mutilation. Paul's condemns unbelieving Jews who persecute the church in 1 Thessalonians 2.15-16: *who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them*

*at last.* (However see Paul's great compassion for his fellow Jews in Romans 9.1-3, and his hope for their conversion in Romans 11.)

### **42 months, 1260 days**

This time span is described in three ways: 42 months (11.2; 13.5); 1,260 days (11.3; 12.6); and "a time and times and half a time" (12.14, derived fr Dan 7.25, a year, two years and half a year = 3 1/2 years). These are complementary perspectives on the same era of history. With the 42 months (11.2, 13.5) the focus is on church's enemies and their aggression. With the 1260 days (11.3 and 12.6) the focus on the church's witness and protection by God. The one that has Daniel's wording is a commentary on the protection of the woman (12.6). Notice the structure:

- A 42 months (11.2) church's enemies and aggression
- B 1260 days (11.3) church's witness and protection by God
- B 1260 days (12.6) church's witness and protection by God
- A 42 months (13.5) church's enemies and aggression

This time frame is half of seven to show that the time is limited. Seven would indicate a complete time of suffering; three and a half indicates that the time cut short by half. The time of persecution is limited. For 1<sup>st</sup> century churches it proclaims that they will have persecution but it will be limited and will end in vindication (11.11-12). This is the same promise for all Christians.

### **The Two Witnesses**

These witnesses are a symbolic representation of Christian witness in general throughout history. "Lampstands" indicate they are symbolic, representing the witnessing church (remember the 7 lampstands, 1.12,20, representing the 7 churches of 1.11). So this does not describe two individual members of the church, but rather describes the whole people of God in their role as kings, priests and prophets [1.6; 5.10; but especially the description of martyrs 3.12, 21; 20.6). The *two* witnesses indicates the missionary task (Lk 10, sent by two)

There are two because there must be two witnesses (Dt 19.15; cf. Mt 18.16; 1 Tm 5.19) and because they are after the imagery of Zechariah 4, where the olive trees are probably the king, Zerubbabel, and the priest, Joshua, anointed royal and priestly figures who picture Christ. The church is priest and king bearing prophetic witness. The Greek words for "bear witness" "witness" and "testimony" are all from the same root word from which we get the word "martyr." Witness and martyrdom, or witness and suffering, go hand in hand. ESV translates the word "martyrs" in 17.6, but translates the same word as "witness/witnesses" in 1.5, 2.13 and here in 11.3.

Jesus pronounced the blessedness of those who suffer and are persecuted for his sake in practically the same breath as declaring them salt and light. The clear implication is that when you are salt and light, when you bear witness in word and deed, you will suffer. In fact, part of our witness is the preciousness of the Lord for whom we are willing to suffer (Mt 5.10-16).

John describes the church's witness as holding to the testimony of Jesus (1.2, 9; 12.17; 19.10; 20.4). This means holding to the truth that Jesus proclaimed and the truth of what he

accomplished – the truth of his saving work. These two witnesses symbolize the whole church in its role as witnesses to God’s truth and against the world’s lies and wickedness.

A further indication that the two witnesses represent the whole church is found by comparing these two passages.

**Revelation 11:7** *And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them,*

**Revelation 13:7** *Also it ( the beast) was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them.*

In both contexts people from the worlds’ “peoples and tribes and tongues and nations” support the beast (11.9; 13.7). Victory is not spiritual and eternal for God vindicates the two witnesses. The beast can only kill them and silence their testimony, but the triumph is short-lived.

The martyrs provide proof by their very lives of the truth of the gospel, its hope and sustaining power, its glory, which all the more will bring condemnation on those who refuse it and who persecute. They are a torment to the inhabitants of earth because their testimony is a searing indictment of the world they live in [Caird]. Their witness is odious to unbelievers; they experience witness as torment. Think of John 3.17ff

The witnesses are royal and priestly heirs of Zerubbabel and Joshua and by their miracles show that they also succeed Moses and Elijah. We see the same protecting power, the same spiritual power, the same judgments upon those who refuse the word. The fire comes from their mouths, a word which begins their judgment as they refuse the gospel. The word is a fire that saves and judges (like John the Baptist, Lk 3.16-17).

This lines up with the effectiveness of the saints’ prayers Revelation 6.10 which result in the final judgment of 6.12-17 (think, “Thy kingdom come”). Also notice the power of the saints’ prayers in 8.3-5 where there is a direct relationship between their prayers and the outpouring of God’s judgment. (Note also Jesus’ promise of the power of prayer regarding the fig tree and mountain, Matthew 21.21, and James’ declaration of the power of prayer in James 5.16-18).

*Sackcloth* points to mourning. They are prophesying doom and their attitude accordingly is sad and penitent. “The church is a powerful church only when it is a penitent church. A comfortable, easy-minded church has no power to stir the world either to salvation or to opposition” (Morris). *Olive trees* indicate their dependence upon the Spirit of God (Zech 4) and their closeness to God

### **Beast**

“For whenever men lay claim to despotic power, refusing to acknowledge that they are responsible to God for the use to which they put it, there **the monster rises from the abyss**” (Caird). The beast represents demonized state power persecuting the church, represented by Sodom (Gn 19), Egypt (Ex 1-15) and even Jerusalem (“where their Lord was crucified”). Note again that now unbelieving Jerusalem *is* Sodom; Jerusalem *is* Egypt. The enemies of God oppose God/Christ and his people

“Bunyan’s story is, in fact, the best comment on chapter 11...there they were persecuted, and Faithful took the shortest road to the Celestial City; he was martyred, and like the faithful Christians in Revelation, was brought to life and ascended to heaven” (Kiddle).

*Thus came FAITHFUL to his end. Now I saw that there stood behind the multitude a chariot and a couple of horses waiting for FAITHFUL, who – so soon as his adversaries had dispatched him – was taken up into it, and straightway was carried up through the clouds, with sound of trumpet, the nearest way to the Celestial Gate.*

“As their oppressors look on in terror, the witnesses are summoned by God to enter heaven, imitating their Lord’s resurrection and ascension in the clouds (Rev 11.12; cf. A 1.9; Dan 7.13; Mt 26.64; Rev 12.5). Accompanying the resurrection-vindication of the witnesses is a “great earthquake” the first tremor that will remove the first heavens and earth (20.11; 21.1) and issue into the great quake of 6.12-17 and which we will see again at the 7<sup>th</sup> bowl (16.17-21).

Here only a portion, as a token of the whole, and the rest are struck with fear. Giving glory to God does not indicate conversion, but rather the forced acknowledgement of God’s glory, power and judgment. This coincides with Philipians 2.9-11 where *every* knee will bow and *every* tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, believers and unbelievers.

It can appear that witness is completely snuffed out, but it is never true. God always raises and vindicates. The seven days are cut in half; domination that aspires to completeness is cut off halfway through. This reminds us of the three days of Christ’s suffering. The church follows its Lord in death and resurrection. We share his victory. The martyr’s death is not defeat, but victory in union with Christ.

## The 7<sup>th</sup> Trumpet - Revelation 11.15-19

We have already heard the proclamation that there would be no more delay but that the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet would sound and bring the end of all things:

*And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.* Revelation 10.5-7

Recall that the last three trumpets have been designated as the three woes because of their terrible suffering and judgment. This is why it is introduced in 11.14 as the third woe. One may be surprised that it is called a “woe” because it doesn’t appear on the surface to be as brutal as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> trumpets. However, it is the final woe because it is none other than the final judgment itself.

“Wrath” (11.18) is always associated with the final judgment (6.16-17; 14.10, 19; 16.19; 19.15). “The time for the dead to be judged” is shorthand for the more extensive treatment in 20.11-15, clearly the final judgment. Finally, we read that it is the time for “destroying the destroyers of the earth,” the fulfillment of the prayers of the saints (6.10; 8.3-5). This is the final day Paul proclaims in 1 Corinthians 15.22-25:

*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.*

That is why “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and of his Christ.” God has always ruled and overruled all things, even those who opposed him, using even their evil to further his purposes in this world. But verse 15 indicates that all that opposes God in this world is finally removed and only the perfect rule of God in a perfect world remains.

And throughout Revelation as with the rest of the Bible, the final destruction of those who oppose God and persecute his people coincides with the deliverance and final rest of his people. So here we read of the reward of the people of God. Again, to show that this is referring to the final day of judgment and reward, look how similar verses 16-18 are to Revelation 19.4 which is a lead-in to the final marriage supper of the Lamb:

*And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” And from the throne came a voice saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.”*

Another interesting feature is that God’s name had been proclaimed three times before in Revelation as “him who was and who is and who is to come” (1.4, 8; 4.8). As we said before, “is

to come” indicates a forward motion, showing that he is the God of history who is bringing all things to his desired end. But here this name changes, because from the perspective of these elders, the final day has arrived: *who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.*

For these 1<sup>st</sup> century churches suffering ongoing persecution this passage is full of hope. God has not forgotten them, Their prayers and the prayers of those who have already been killed (6.10) are certainly heard by God. Christ will come “to judge the quick (living) and the dead.”

Perhaps this is a good place to bring in again 2 Thessalonians 1.5-10, which is Paul’s version of the same events depicted in the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet. As you can see, Paul is writing to believers under persecution and seeks to give them hope and comfort by setting before them God’s final justice to be enacted at the end of time.

*This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.*

# Revelation 12

## Introduction – 11.19

Like 8.5 that closes the seals while opening to the trumpets, 11.19 closes the trumpets and opens the seven visions. Especially compare 11.19 to the vision of the enthroned One and the Lamb (chapters 4-5). “In that vision and in this one there is an opening of heaven (4.1), enabling the prophet to see God’s throne (4.2; the throne appears as the ark of the covenant in 11.19). In both visions the scene is punctuated by the terrifying lightning, “voices,” and thunderclaps that attended the Lord’s descent to Sinai to give his law to Moses (4.5; 11.19; cf. Ex 19.18-20). (Johnson) However this scene not only repeats but magnifies Revelation 4, with more phenomena (earthquake, hail), and a vision of the Most Holy place by seeing the ark. This shows that what follows takes us to a new depth of divine revelation. That is just one of the reasons chapter 12 is considered *the center of the whole book and the key to the whole book*.

The ark revealed indicates that God has fully revealed his glory, both the glory of his law (the stone tablets were put into the ark) and his mercy (atonement cover). God’s presence is being manifested, the revealing of God himself. God’s presence will bring about the the renewal of all things (21-22). The following 7 visions and the 7 bowls that follow hurdle us faster to that final judgment and renewal.

The ark symbolizes the intimate and perfect fellowship between God and his people, a fellowship based on the atonement. Ex 25.22 “And there I will meet with you, and I will commune with you from above the mercy-seat...”

But for the wicked that same ark, which is God’s throne, is symbol of wrath because the the rejection of such intimacy, accomplished at such a terrible price and offered so freely to sinners, will suffer the most terrible consequences. This wrath will now be fully revealed, and it is indicated by *flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.*”

## Introduction - Structure

Chapter 12 also launches a new set of visions that end at 15.4. These visions can be divided by the introductory vision formulas that follow the first vision of chapter 12. They are translated in the ESV “and/then I saw” (*kai eidov*) or “then I looked and behold” (*kai eidov kai idou*), giving us seven divisions.

- 12: the conflict of the serpent and the woman and her seed
- 13.1-10: persecution by the beast from the sea
- 13.11-18: persecution by the beast from the land
- 14.1-5: the Lamb and the 144,000 standing on Mount Zion
- 14.6-13: the proclamation of the gospel and of judgment by three angels
- 4.14-20: the Son of man’s harvest of the earth
- 15.2-4: the saints’ victory over the sea beast and their victory song

What about 15.1, which also starts with “then I saw”? Because it, like 8.2, previews the next cycle, before finishing the present cycle. At the end of the seven seals, 8.2 mentions the seven

trumpets, but then 8.3-5 finishes the seals, and only then does 8.6 begin the trumpets. The two sections thus “interlock.” John uses the same interlocking structure here. At the end of these seven visions, 15.1 previews the 7 plagues, then 15.2-4 finishes the seven visions, and only then does 15.5 begin the 7 plagues.

8.2 Preview trumpets	15.1 Preview plagues
8.3-5 Finish seals	15.2-4 Finish visions
8.6 Begin trumpets	15.5 Begin plagues

These literary devices neatly interlock different sections and show how closely the sections are related to each other. Anyway, since 15.1 belongs to the next cycle of plague bowls it is not counted as one of the visions and so that gives us seven visions in 12 – 15.4, in line with the seven seals (6.1-8.5), the seven trumpets (8.6 – 11.19), and still to come, the seven plagues/bowls of God’s wrath (15.6 – 16.21).

### **The Woman and the Dragon – 12.1-6**

*Pagan context.* The basic drama of this passage is found in pagan literature in which a usurper, doomed to be killed by a soon-to-be-born prince, then tries to kill the prince at birth only to fail and later be killed by that prince. In the best known version in Asia Minor, Zeus and the goddess, Leto, are expecting a child who is to be Apollo. The dragon, Python, knowing that Apollos was destined to kill him, attacks Leto, but she is carried to safety by winds sent by Zeus and hidden under water by Poseidon. Python could not find her and four days after Apollo was born, he kills Python (paraphrased from Beale). “In Egypt it is Set, the red dragon, who pursues Isis and is later killed by her son Horus” (Caird).

In the Roman empire, the reigning propaganda held that Caesar was the sun god (on coins his head had beams coming out from it), so that in the warfare between light and darkness, Caesar was Apollos fighting the dragon. “John rewrites the old pagan myth deliberately to contradict its current political application. The killing of the dragon *is* being re-enacted, but not by the emperor, who turns out instead to be one of the dragon’s minions” (Caird). Also, the goddess, Roma, was worshipped in Asia Minor as the queen of the gods and mother of the world’s savior, Caesar. John will depict her as the new Jezebel, the seducer of the world, a travesty of the true “resplendent Queen of Heaven” which is God’s people here in chapter 12.

### *Old Testament Context – The woman*

The sun, moon and stars recall Joseph’s dream (Gen 37.9) where “the sun, moon and eleven stars represent Jacob, his wife and the eleven tribes of Israel, who bow down to Joseph who represents the twelfth tribe” (Beale). Jewish writings depict Abraham, Sarah and their children as sun, moon and stars. Other writings represent Jacob and his offspring as stars to show that they would not suffer shame in the time of Messiah.

In Jewish literature, the description of Solomon’s queen is taken as a description of Jerusalem “who looks down like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun..” (Song of Sol 6.10). This imagery is applied to Israel in Jewish writings, emphasizing her faithfulness in the wilderness or in exile. This text is combined with others to describe latter day Israel as resembling “the sun, the moon, and the stars.”



In Isaiah 66.19-20 God is Israel's sun and moon. In Isa 62.3 Israel, Yahweh's bride (v. 5), is a crown in God's hand, and in 61.10 she is clothed with the glorious robes and a headdress of a priest. One Jewish writing applies 61.10 to Messiah and Israel indicating their preservation from wicked nations and destruction. *This beautiful depiction in Chapter 12 indicates the latter-day faithfulness of the people of God and their intimate relationship to God.*

The 12 stars are the twelve tribes of Israel (and perhaps include the apostles, cf. 21.12-14). Again all of the people of God in Christ are now named "Israel," like the 144,000 of chapter 7, and like the NT states in several places (see Rm 2.28-29; Eph 2.11 with Phil 3.2-3; Gal 3.29 and 6.16; 1 Pt 2.9). The crown represents "the saints' share in Christ's kingship and the reward that the true people of God throughout the ages receive for their victory over...persecution, temptations to compromise and deception" (cp "crown" in Rev 2.10; 3.11). Her brightness indicates she reflects God's and Christ's image (as in 1.16; 10.1; 21:23; 22.5). It points to her heavenly identity, protection and purity (Beal).

#### *Old Testament Context – the Birth*

The woman cannot be Mary as Catholic writings hold forth. Israel is depicted as a woman when it is restored in latter-day times (Isa 52.2; 54.1-6; 61.10; 62.1-5, 11; 66.7-13). Jerusalem above is "our mother" (Gal 4.26-27, quoting Isa 54.1); the church is "the elect lady and her children" (2 Jn 1, 5, with 3 Jn 3) and the bride (Eph 5.31-32; Rev 22.17, 21; 21.2, 9). The corporate nature of the woman is also seen in the OT background in which Israel is depicted as a pregnant woman "whose birth pangs represent the suffering of foreign captivity and whose imminent delivery represents future deliverance from foreign oppression and salvation (Isa 26.17-18; 66.7-9 ["male child" *arsen*, like Rev 12.5]; Mic 4.9-10; 5.3; cf. Hos 13.13). Behind these passages lies Gen 3.15 itself, which refers to the seed that will strike the serpent's head and which is explicitly quoted in 12.17 ("her offspring" *tou spermatos autēs*). Note also the many verbal parallels between Rev 12.2 and Isa 7.11, 14: "sign," "height/heaven," "virgin with child/woman with child," "she will give birth to a son/she gave birth to a son." (Also check out the amazing parallels between chapter 12 and Isa. 26.17 – 27.1.)

The woman's travail represents the persecution of God's people and of the Messianic line during the OT and the intertestamental period leading up to the birth of Christ. The word translated "agony" in v. 2 further underscores this suffering. It refers to the suffering of disease (Mt 8.6), punishment (Mt 8.29/Mk 5.7/Lk 8.28), labor (Mt 14.24) or persecution (2 Pt 2.8). In Revelation itself this verb is used only of "torment" by demons (9.5) or by God (11.10; 14.10; 20.10; and the related noun is used in these ways 5 more times). Finally, in *4 Maccabees* the verb and noun are used sixty times to describe Jewish martyrdom for their faith (Beale).

#### *OT Context – The Dragon (primarily from G.K. Beale)*

In the OT this is the word for the evil sea monster symbolizing evil kingdoms that oppress Israel. God is described as defeating Pharaoh as a sea monster (Psa 74.13-14; 89.10; Isa 30.7; 51.9; Ez 29.3; 32.2-3; Hab 3.8-15; Babylon is the monster in Jer 51.34).

In the Jewish writing *Pss. Sol.* 2.29-30 the writer prays concerning Rome, their oppressor, that Yahweh “turn the pride of the dragon into dishonor” upon which God showed this insolent one “slain upon the mountains.”

In the latter days God will again defeat the Egyptian dragon (Isa 27.1). One Jewish writing based on Isa 27.1 compares the dragon with Pharaoh; another says that at the end of time Messiah will destroy “Behemoth” and “Leviathan”...those two great sea monsters.” John is rehearsing the Exodus deliverance. “Great dragon” (12.3, 9) alludes to Ez 29.3 which calls Pharaoh “the great dragon” the only “sea monster” text where this title is found. His home is in the sea (v. 18/13.1), he has ten horns like the fourth beast of Daniel 7.7.24, who also came out of the sea. That beast represents an evil empire and Jewish writing regularly associated it with Rome. The crowns in 12.3 also point to an earthly kingdom.

But while this metaphor stands for Egypt, Babylon, Rome and all demon-led political power on earth, it especially points to the devil himself as the representative head of evil kingdoms (12.9 makes this clear, along with 20.2, 10). The seven heads and ten horns indicate completeness of oppressive power and worldwide effect. Perhaps the heads indicate his cunning wisdom, the horns is power, and the crowns his authority to influence others (Johnson). The red color indicates his oppression (cp. 17.3-6 where the scarlet color of the whore is linked to the blood of the saints). The crowns “represent the devil’s false claims of sovereign, universal authority in opposition to the true ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’ who also wears ‘many diadems’ (19.12, 19-21)...the dragon’s crowns represent his blasphemous claims to earthly kingship (contrast 13.1 and 17.3, 7-13 with 1.5; 17.14; and 19.12-16)” (Beale).

It is often thought that the sweeping a third of the stars refers to Satan’s fall before time and his taking a third of the angels with him. However, this is taken from Dan 8.10 which depicts at least in the first place the rise of the Greek kingdom and its invasion under Antiochus of Israel and desecration of the temple. “The host of heaven and stars” represent both angels and the people of God, for the stars/angels represent saints on earth. Dan 12.3 compares the righteous to “the firmament and...the stars” (see also Mt 13.43; cf. the promises to Abraham, Gn 15.5; 22.17). In Jewish writing “Israelite saints have their true identity in heaven before the divine throne, so that when they are persecuted the angels and God himself are also regarded as being attacked” (Beale). Regularly Dan 8.10 in Jewish writing is said to refer to the persecution of God’s people.

That the “tails” of Satan’s demons afflict people on earth (Rev 9.10, 19) points to the tail of the dragon afflicting people. Also “the seven stars” in Christ’s hand in Rev 1.16, 20; 3.1 referred to the church’s from a heavenly perspective, and the “stars” of 12.1 were seen to be Israel, and that provides the best interpretation for these stars in 12.4. This reference to persecution matches the “agony” of the woman in 12.2. It sets up his destructive intent toward God’s people in preparation for his attempted destruction of the male child.

#### *The Action of 4b-6*

These verses give the briefest synopsis of Christ, his birth and then his resurrection and ascension (“caught up to God” – “caught up” is used of our own final resurrection in 1 Th 4.17; notice other synopses: Jn 3.13; 8.14; 13.3; 16.5, 28; Rm 1.3-4; 1 Tm 3.16). Christ’s ministry and even his death are omitted because the emphasis is on his consequent reign (John has already

referred to the connection between Christ's death and reign in Rev 5.9-10). John no doubt is including in his thinking Herod's attempt, Christ's temptation in the wilderness, the demonic opposition during his ministry and even Peter's rebuke of Christ (Mk 8.33). But perhaps he is especially thinking of the crucifixion itself, where Satan sought His death (Lk 22.3; Jn 13.27 – and Peter's destruction! Lk 22.31) and must have thought that he ruined Him until the resurrection demonstrated the true nature of his death and the death-resurrection-ascension utter defeat of Satan (Jn 12.31; Eph 1.18ff; 4.8; Col 3.15; 1 Jn 3.8; Rm 16.20; 1 Cor 15.25).

The clear reference to Psalm 2.7-9 demonstrates that Christ is its fulfillment (also Rev 2.26-28 and other uses of this Psalm: Acts 13.33; Heb 1.2-6; 5.5). "Today I have begotten you" in Ps 2.7 refers not to Christ's birth in these NT passages, but to his resurrection and enthronement. So in 12.4-6, "the period between Christ's birth and his ascension is skipped because Christ began to rule at the ascension in a more formal sense than before, and ruling is the purpose for which he was born. Generally, in the ancient Near East the birthday of a king was the anniversary of his maturity and enthronement to do what he was born to do" (Beale).

"Fleeing into the wilderness" represents Israel fleeing into the wilderness from Egypt and being nourished by Yahweh (Ex 16.32; Dt 2.7; 8.3, 15-16; 29.5; **32.10-11**; Josh 24.7; Neh 9.19, 21; Pss 78.5, 15, 19; 136.16; Hos 13.5) and Elijah from Jezebel (1 Kings 17; 19.3-8) and Moses (Ex 2.15). They all symbolize the church in Rev 11.5-6. "Mt 2.15 links the flight of Jesus' parents from Herod and their return to Israel to the exodus" (Beale). Rev 12.14 makes this explicit in its direct reference to Dt 32.10-11. Finally this flight into the wilderness recalls the final exodus-restoration when Israel will again be protected and nourished by God in the wilderness (Isa 32.15; 35.1; 40.3; 41.28; 43.19-20; 51.3; Jer 31.2; Ez 34.25; the comparison with the exodus is made explicit in Hos 2.14-15, and is referred to many times in Jewish literature in hopes of God drawing near and Messiah's return).

Psalms 78.19-20 and 23.5 that speak of God caring for his people in the desert and before the "afflicting ones" respectively became a model in Jewish writings for the Messianic age. One writing, for instance, applies Ps 23.5 "to God's former care of Israel in the wilderness as a pattern for God's sustenance of Israel in the Messianic age." Jesus himself, as the representative of His people, was protected in the wilderness (Mt 4) and "in Rev 12.6 the messianic community is pictured as beginning to experience God's end-time protection in the wilderness after the Messiah's ascension" (Beale).

This protection is spiritual, not physical, and relates to 11.1 and the tabernacle in 13.5-6 ("dwelling" = "tent" or "tabernacle") where the people of God also suffer for 42 months/1260 days. This echoes Israel's wanderings for 42 years. Notice how John emphasizes the persecution and suffering in this period (beginning and end) while showing the churches witness and its being sustained by God during this same period:

- 11.2 *forty-two months (trample)*
- 11.3 1260 days (prophecy)
- 12.6 1260 days (nourished)
- 12.14 time, times, and half a time (nourished)
- 13.5 *forty-two months (beast exercises authority)*

## The War in Heaven – 12.7-12

This is the heavenly counterpart to the earthly events in verses 1-6. “The war is not military but moral and legal: Satan is the *accuser of our brethren* (v. 10). *Satan* means in Hebrew ‘adversary’, in a legal sense, and he has his ‘place in heaven’ as a kind of Public Prosecutor (Zech 3.1ff)...His defeat therefore is not military but forensic: *They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb* (John was told that the military Lion of Judah had *conquered*, and saw a *slaughtered Lamb*, 5.5f). Michael is the defending barrister, who pleads Christ’s sacrifice ‘for the sin of the whole world’ (1 Jn 2.2) against the *deceiver of the whole world*” (Sweet). (Cp. Job 1.6ff for Satan’s role as accuser, and Daniel 7.13ff; 10.13, 16, 20-21; 12.1 for the association of the son of man and Michael.)

Jewish writings consistently has the role of legal “accuser” and Michael played the role of an advocate defending Israel from the accusations made by Satan in the heavenly court and also that God will do in the future through Michael and Gabriel what he has done in the past (Beale). In *Jub.* 48.10-19 we read that in Israel’s victory over Egypt at the exodus, Satan “was bound and imprisoned behind the children of Israel so that he might not accuse them.” The rabbinic reflections on Israel’s praise following this victory says that God will act in the future in this same way.

“Michael’s victory is simply the heavenly and symbolic counterpart of the earthly reality of the Cross. Michael, in fact, is not the field officer who does the actual fighting, but the staff officer in the heavenly control room, who is able to remove Satan’s flag from the heavenly map because the real victory has been won on Calvary.” (Caird)

“...there was no longer any place for them” is almost identical to the phrase in Dan 2.35 of Christ’s kingdom striking the other kingdoms, “so that not a trace of them could be found” (cp Dan 2.44 as well which speaks of the crushing of those kingdoms). Satan is cast down even as he cast down God’s people in oppression (v. 4). The announcement in v. 10 (parallel to v. 15) shows that in Christ’s ascension and the devil’s expulsion we have “the long-awaited inauguration of the prophesied messianic kingdom...v. 10 does not merely anticipate the future kingdom, but celebrates the fact that the kingdom has begun immediately following Christ’s death and resurrection” (Beale). *Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out* (Jn 12.31).

Satan’s accusations in Job and Zech 3.1-2 portray him accusing them of unfaithfulness and unworthiness of fellowship with God. It impugns God’s character as well. It could appear before Christ that Satan had a good case. Paul’s version of this is in Romans 3.25-26. But now Christ has “loosed them from their sins” (Rev 1.5) and purchased them by his blood (5.9). “He has nullified the devil’s power to put others to death ( Heb 2.14) and took this power for himself (Rev 1.18)” (Beale). In Luke 10.17-20, Christ sees Satan cast down in connection with his disciples’ authority over the demons, but points to their spiritual security through his redemption as the basis for everything (v. 20).

Verse 11 summarizes the purpose of the whole chapter, and especially 7-12. “The single intent...is to assure those who meet satanic evil on earth that it is really a defeated power, however contrary it might seem to human experience” (Ladd). “Christians can be assured that

the serpent begins to battle against their bodies only after he has lost the battle over their souls. This expresses one of the major themes of the book: the suffering of Christians is a sign, not of Satan's victory, but of the saint's victory over Satan because of their belief in the triumph of the cross, with which their suffering identifies them" (Beale). Satan rages but he is cast down and his time is short. Christ's accusations were overturned in his resurrection and now his followers have their verdict reversed because of being identified with his resurrection.

### **Back to the Woman and the Dragon – 12.13-17**

"The woman who had given birth to the male child" is, again, the church – the people of God. Background for "eagle's wings":

*You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself (Exo. 19.4)*

*He found him (Jacob, i.e. people of Israel) in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions (Dt 32.10-11).*

The church is pictured as latter-day Israel. As God protected Israel physically in the wilderness, so he protects the church spiritually. When facing his enemies, David cries out in Psalm 55.6-8:

*And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; Selah I would hurry to find a shelter from the raging wind and tempest."*

In Revelation God gives that protection to his people against the attacks of Satan. Nothing shall separate them from the love of God in Christ! Recall God's promise in Isaiah 40.30-31:

*Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

And as God fed them with manna in the wilderness so God nourishes the church in her wilderness, in the midst of her struggle and suffering in this world, in the midst of Satan's efforts to destroy her. It is understood that we are nourished and protected by the word of God which holds forth to us the Lord Jesus Christ, the bread of life.

The river out of Satan's mouth represents his deception (cp. 9.17-18; 16.13). The NT is full of the constant threats of false teaching, and the whole history of the church has been marked by Satan's deceptions in countless forms. Of course, such deception is still at every hand.

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was*

*coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

1 John 4.1-6

The ground swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num. 16:31-33). There are Jewish texts that describe the death of Pharaoh and his army in terms of the the earth swallowing them up. This speaks of God's ownership and governing of all creation. Nothing is impossible for him. He will guard his people.

Thwarted yet again, Satan then attacks the woman's "offspring," which recalls Genesis 3.15 and the mention there of the seed of the woman. This attack, as the next chapter will show, employs violence and we wield the powers of the government to seek to destroy the people of God. As in the first part of chapter 11, the church is protected in its spiritual fidelity, but terribly exposed as to its physical suffering.

## The Beast from the Sea – 13.1-10

In the last phrase of 12.18 the dragon stands on the sand of the seashore anticipating his calling forth both the beast from the sea (13.1) and the beast from the land (13.11).

Chapter 13 shows us the agents, instruments, or tools which the dragon uses in his attack upon the church. Two beasts are described. The first is a monster of indescribable horror. The second has a harmless appearance and for that very reason is even more dangerous than the first... The first is Satan's *hand*. The second is the devil's *mind*. The first represents the persecuting power of Satan operating in and through the nations of this world and their governments. The second symbolizes the false religions and philosophies of this world. (Hendriksen)

“The sea is the chaotic region from which threat and rebellion arise, and apt portrait of the abyss, the proper home of all uncleanness and hostility toward God” (Johnson) Jesus sends the demons from the demoniac ultimately into the sea (Lk 8.31), a picture of their future destiny in the abyss. This beast is associated with the beast that arose and made war against the two witnesses (11.7; the witnesses are the church, as we saw).

His heads and horns are the mirror image of the dragon (12.3). “His power and authority come from the dragon (13.2, 4).” (Mounce) The beast is a kind of incarnation of the dragon. But that is not all. Speaking of John's hearers, Wilcock says, “As the beast arose from the sea, they would no doubt have said to one another, first, ‘It looks like the dragon we have just been hearing about’; but then, ‘It also looks like one of the visions of Daniel’.”

That is because this beast is a purposeful composite of the four beasts of Daniel 7.1-8 (this beast even has all their heads: seven!). They were four different kingdoms, and here John presents this beast as the epitome of all evil kingdoms, pointing to Rome for sure, but beyond Rome to the continuing rise of beastly power against the church throughout the age between Christ's resurrection and his final coming (note v. 5, the same time frame that is given in 11.2, 3; 12.5, 14). It points to all persecuting powers. “The *beast*, like the *great city* (11.8), personifies all opposition to God and his people from the beginning...” (Sweet); it “represents all world powers who oppress God's people until the culmination of history” (Beale).

The sea-born beast symbolizes the persecuting power of Satan embodied in all the nations and governments of the world throughout all history. World-dominion directed against God's people wherever and whenever it appears in history: that is the beast. This beast assumes different forms: it has seven heads... though the forms differ, the essence remains the same: worldly government directed against the church. In this beast the persecuting power of Satan becomes visible. Hence the great resemblance between the dragon and the beast... (Hendriksen)

It is interesting that in his self-exaltation Nebuchadnezzar was made like a beast (Dan. 4.28-37). “All political power is the gift of God; but when men deify the state, either directly by a religious cult or indirectly by demanding for it the total loyalty and obedience that are due to God alone, it ceases to be human and becomes bestial” (Mounce). “Such rulers are described as beastly because they have fallen below the standard of human rule that God ordained for them” (Beale).

It is the difference “between the state functioning properly *under* divine authority, and the state acting illegitimately *as* divine authority.” (Wilcock)

In the war between God and Satan, between good and evil, the state is one of the defenses established by God to contain the powers of evil within bounds, part of the order which God the Creator has established in the midst of chaos (cf. Rom 13.1-7). But when men worship the state, according to it the absolute loyalty and obedience that are due not to Caesar not to God, then the state goes over to the Enemy. What Satan calls from the abyss is not government but that abuse of government, the omniscient state. (Caird)

The beast takes blasphemous names to itself (v. 1) and utters “haughty and blasphemous words” (v. 5) and utters “blasphemies against God and against his dwelling” (v. 6). This echoes the fourth beast of Daniel (see 7.8, 11, 20, 25; 11.36).

The names of blasphemy upon the seven heads reflect the increasing tendency of the Roman emperors to assume titles of deity. During his lifetime Augustus had allowed his eastern subjects to pay him divine honors, and at his death the Senate proclaimed him *Divus* (one like the gods). Claudius, Vespasian and Titus had anticipated the action of the Senate by using the title *Divus* on coins in their own lifetime. In the eastern provinces, where Greek was the official language, the coins bore the title *Theos*. On his coins Nero was referred to as Savior of the World, and he appeared as Apollo or Helios. The Roman senate regularly declared its deceased emperors divine. Domitian was addressed as *Dominus et Deus noster*, Our Lord and God. (Mounce and Caird)

So “The beast represents in the first place demonized state power that demands worship” (Poythress), “the deification of secular authority” (Mounce). John can say of Pergamum that it is “Satan’s throne” (2.13). There the faithful witness, Antipas, was killed “where Satan dwells” (2.13). John is saying that evil secular power is inseparable from the spiritual power behind it. Therefore, when Nebuchadnezzar, for instance, demanded the worship of his golden image (Daniel 2) he was doing the dragon’s bidding; he and those with him were the beast arising from the sea warring against the saints (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego).

### **The Parody/Counterfeit**

Another agreed upon feature in the picture of the beast is that it is a parody of Christ – a counterfeit Christ. Poythress gives these parallels:

The beast is an image of the dragon who brought him forth (13.1), just as Christ is the exact image of God, begotten by the Father (Col 1.15; Heb 1.3)

The beast has ten crowns and Christ has many (19.12)

The beast has blasphemous names; Christ has worthy names (19.12)

The dragon gives the beast his power, throne and authority (13.2), just as Christ has power (5.12-13), a throne (3.21) and authority (12.10) from the Father

The beast has a healed fatal wound counterfeiting Christ’s resurrection (13.3). The beast’s healing attracts followers as does Christ’s resurrection.

Worship is directed both to the dragon and to the beast just as Christians worship both the Father and the Son (Jn 5.23).

The beast is worshiped by the whole world (13.3) just as Christ is to be worshiped universally.



The beast utters blasphemies; Christ utters the praises of God (Heb 2.12)

The beast makes war against the saints, while Christ makes war against the beast (19.11-21). The song of praise to the beast in 13.4 counterfeits the song to God, the warrior, in Exodus 15.11.

The striking juxtaposition of Christ and the beast in 19.11-21 shows that they are the two main warriors in the battle. Christ is the divine warrior, fulfilling the imagery of Exodus 15.3; Isa 59.16-18; 63.1-6; Hab 3.3-15; Zech 9.13-15; 14.1-5. The beast is the unholy, counterfeit warrior, fluffing the imagery of Dan 7.1-8.

Satan counterfeits God in his mock creation out of chaotic water (13.1; cf Gn 1.2). Also, the beast from the earth (later called the false prophet – 16.13; 19.20; 20.10) counterfeits the work of the Holy Spirit, directing worship to the beast as the Spirit does to Christ (Jn 16.13), working miraculous signs, counterfeiting the Spirit's signs (13.13-14), and marking his subjects as the Spirit seals believers (Eph 1.13).

Together, the dragon, the beast and the false prophet counterfeit the Trinity. Paul speaks about such counterfeiting on the part of false apostles, whom he calls the servants of Satan, who also disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11.14-15). The dragon seeks to flood the people of God with deception (Rev 12.15). Though he influences many who are outwardly part of the church, thus the warning of 3.9 (“if anyone has an ear...” - a repeat of the 7-fold warning to the churches, 2.7, 11, 17, 29; 3.6, 13, 22) he cannot touch those whose names are in the Lamb's book of life (13.8).

However, we must remember why the beast continues to make war against the church. It is because the dragon has been cast out of heaven and he knows his time is short (12.8-12). The persecution of the church throughout history (the beast) is the emblem of the dragon's defeat. D-Day is here in the cross and resurrection of Christ (Jn 12.31; Rm 16.20) and V-Day is around the corner. The fierceness of the dragon's war is the measure of his desperation and the briefness of his time.

Therefore, the counterfeiting amounts to a parody of the power of the dragon and the two beasts. It is deadly serious, for sure, but the comparison is a mockery of the unholy trio. They are cast down, their time is short, their power is borrowed from God (for instance, “allowed” for a specific time, 13.5), they are ultimately pawns in the accomplishment of his purpose, and they will finally be cast into the lake of fire along with all who follow them (20.10, 14-15).

### **Authority and War and “Healing”**

The ten horns (with diadems) and the seven heads point to the completeness of the oppressive power of the beast, and this is underscored by the extent of his authority and influence over the whole earth (13.7-8). We must consider power from a broader view, including the influence of the second beast who offers a counter religion and philosophy and ideology and priority and meaning. *All* that opposes and challenges and undermines and replaces Christianity is part of the activity of the dragon through the beasts, whether through persecution, persuasion or pleasure. (Think how society adores and “deifies” rich and talented people, honoring not their character, but their “power,” while it turns its nose up at Christ.) John's point in 13.8 is similar to what he writes in 1 Jn 5.19, “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”

“

Paul reminds us of our true opponents and what armor we must have from God to defend against them (Eph 6.10ff). Peter exhorts us to be wide awake and sober because of our fierce and deadly enemy (1 Pt 5.8; see Satan’s activity in 2 Cor 2.11; Eph 2.2; 2 Tim 2.24-26). They both write in the midst of persecution (Paul is writing from prison), and they are stressing that the real enemy is not the human powers that persecute Christians, but the spiritual powers that energize them and that seek our compromise in the persecution. That is the real desire of the dragon (remember Job). The struggle is ultimately not to stay alive, but to stay faithful. “In the crucial test of faith they relinquish their lives rather than their confidence in God. This is true victory!” (Caird)

This warfare is on, but it is coming in greater intensity in the future. This is the likely meaning of the killing of the two witnesses after they had finished their witness (Rev 11.7ff). God’s people will be decimated physically, though not spiritually. In Paul’s description of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2 he says that he is “the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (3-4). Though Paul speaks of the future coming of this man (or institution), “the mystery of lawlessness is already at work” just as John says that though antichrist is coming, many antichrists have come (1 Jn 2.18; cp 1 Jn 2.22; 4.4; 2 Jn 7).

Finally, John mentions *three times* the fact of the beast’s resuscitation (“one of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound but its mortal wound was healed” – v. 3; “whose mortal wound was healed” – v. 12; “wounded by the sword and yet lived” – v. 14). This is given as a chief reason the whole earth marveled after the beast, and worshiped it and made an image of it.

“God must be the unmentioned agent of the beast’s “wound” (*hē plēgē*), since everywhere else in Revelation *plēgē* (usually rendered “plague” is a punishment inflicted by God” (Beale – a few are 9.18, 20; 11.6; 15.1, 6). “Mortal wound” is literally “plague (or wound) of death.” The background is Gen 3.15, where it is said of the woman’s seed, “he shall bruise your head.” The mention of the sword in v. 14 of the sword recalls Isa 27.1: “In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword (same word) will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.” Isa 27.1 is in the background of 12.3, 9 pointing specifically to the death and resurrection/ascension of Christ as the defeat of the serpent.

In Revelation a “sword” often signifies Jesus’ judgment of his enemies in the present (1.16; 2.12, 16) and future (19.15, 21) and he should be seen as the agent of the sword here in 13.14. “One of the heads of the beast is depicted as “slain” because of Christ’s death and resurrection, as 12.5, 10-12 together with 1.5 and 5.9 bear out” (Beale). This accords so well with the casting out of the dragon to the earth in chapter 12, his “death” so to speak, yet when he falls he rises to do great harm in the earth. As Jesus said on the brink of the cross and resurrection, “Now will the ruler of this world be cast out” (Jn 12.31).

His people as well conquer the dragon by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12.11). They keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Rev 12.17) and trample Satan under their feet (Rm 16.20), even though they lose their lives (12.11; 11.7; 13.7). “The dragon conquers by killing (13.15). The Lamb and his followers conquer by dying (5.5f, 12.11).” (Sweet).

By the way, *Targ. Neof.* Gn 3.15 (Jewish commentary on Gn 3.15) interprets the seed of the woman corporately: “when the sons of the woman keep the commandments of the law...they will smite you on the head; when they abandon the commandments you will wound them in the heel...in the days of King Messiah.”

What about the beast’s coming to life? What does that mean? “...it is better to link the beast’s resuscitation to the repeated rise and fall of oppressive states, world systems, or social structures that continue because the devil continues to inspire opposition to God’s people, even though he has been decisively defeated by Christ” (Beale). This brings the admiration and worship of those who put their faith in these states. “The revival of a powerful movement or an institution after serious trouble seems to indicate to its followers that it is invincible.” For instance, “The Empire seemed to survive all threats, thereby showing that it was eternal and attracting more worship than ever.” (Poythress)

After speaking of the faith of the communist or fascist Wilcock writes,

Even the liberal democracies – perhaps they most of all – lead men to put their faith in the beast by the miracle of his resurrection...Fear not the apparent death-wound, for good sense and democracy and the human spirit can never finally be put down. So it comes about that the whole earth follows the beast with wonder (verse 3), each one having seen how the head he idolizes can die yet rise again. And all whose hope is not ultimately in the blood of the Lamb have no hope except in some human system, to which wither expressly or by implication they give the blasphemous name of God; yes, even in the residually Christian West, where it is the value and goodness of the human spirit, rather than the One who created it, which are ‘worshipped, trusted and adored’.

## The Beast from the Land – 13.11-17

These verses “present the same situation as vv 1-8, but now focusing on the state’s ally, the second beast. “Whereas the power of the first beast in its boastful pride is overt and coercive, the influence of the second is covert and deceiving.” (Johnson) It looks like a lamb, but speaks like a dragon (“serpent” in the Greek, therefore deceptive: *that ancient serpent...the deceiver of the whole world*, 12.9). Jesus’ words are helpful: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” (Mt 7.15). Sweet writes, “The beast’s great signs and fire from heaven parody the Spirit and the true prophets” (Rev 11.3-13, who themselves picture Elijah).

“The coupling of Christ-like appearance and Satanic message, the status of prophet, the concern with worship, and the appeal to the magical, all add up to one thing: false religion...The beast from the sea is Satan’s perversion of society...and the beast from the earth is his perversion of Christianity” (Wilcock). As we have said, this beast is later called the false prophet (16.13; 19.20; 20.10). This beast would encompass religious, philosophical, social, political, even psychological ideology – all the “-ologies”! “It symbolizes false religion and false philosophy in whichever form these appear throughout the entire dispensation...the two beasts – antichristian government and antichristian religion – work in perfect cooperation” (Hendriksen).

Through his deceitful activity, the second beast garners adoration and allegiance for the first beast. “...the false prophet stands for the role of false religion in effecting the capitulation of mankind to the worship of secular power. It is the universal victory of humanism” (Mounce). This beast is “the sea beast’s religiously oriented accomplice” (Johnson) his “propagandist” (Bruce). The beast is set forth as a false apostle, succeeding his master in ministry and authority (Rev 13.12a; Acts 1.1-11), persuading others to worship his master because of his master’s resurrection (Rev 13.12b, 14b; Acts 2.22-47; and performing miraculous “signs” as concrete manifestations of his authority (Rev 13.13; Acts 2.43; 5.12; 15.12).

This presentation applies to the whole church age, but also applies in particular ways to those who first heard John’s words. “In John’s day the reference would be either to the local priests of the imperial cult or to the provincial council responsible for enforcing emperor worship throughout Asia” (Mounce). “In all matters of local government it (the council or commune) could be said to wield the authority of the first monster...the commune had made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first monster” taking “the initiative in elevating him (Augustus) to a place among the immortals, city vying with city for the right to erect a temple to Rome and Augustus. It was the commune that had given orders to make a statue to the emperor”(Caird).

Price, quoted in Beale, concludes that “the establishment of the provincial cult of Domitian at Ephesus, with its colossal statue, is what lies behind the depiction in Revelation 13 of believers being put to death for not worshiping the image of the beast.” This is why John alludes to Daniel 3 and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s refusal to bow down to the huge statue. These young men would be models for the church in such a situation.

“...in Asia Minor the culture increasingly expected public expressions of loyalty to the imperial cult, and local civil authorities not untypically mandated by law that inhabitants of towns and

cities show varying degrees of support for the imperial religion.”Public festivals in honor of the emperor were primary times of cultural pressure upon Christians when they “would refuse to participate in these corporate expressions of idolatrous religio-political loyalty” (Beale)

Though there may be some reference in 13.13-15 to the well-attested deceptions (ventriloquism, false lightning and sorcery) associated with the pagan temples, John has a much broader concern. He is casting the second beast’s influences in the form of the church’s influence (signs, fire) to purposefully set forth its mimicking and deceitful character, whatever the specifics will be. This is a picture after all.

The reference to “breath” means that the second beast is successful in making the image of the first beast represent true deity. The point of false religion and philosophy is to convince people that that humanistic power in whatever form lives and thrives – that it is worthy of their allegiance, adoration and following. Its purpose is achieved when people turn away from the true God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ. Any god will do; any power, any government. And not only pure power, but the power, and in effect, ideologies, of wealth, technology, entertainment, sensuality and whatever else can become part of the beastly landscape in the dragon’s dominant control of all those whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life.

### **The Mark: 666**

First, remember that the Lamb’s followers are sealed on their foreheads (7.3; 14.1). We saw that this is not physical mark, but rather it indicates God’s ownership as well as their allegiance. It is a *sign* that they belong to Christ, that they worship him, that they are like him, that they follow him. Slaves were branded or marked indicating that this particular slave belongs to or serves this master. “Very soon the expression ‘to receive the mark of someone’ began to mean to belong to someone, to serve or worship someone” (Hendriksen)

So in Rev 14.9 we read: “If any man worships the beast...and receives the mark on his forehead.” Worshipping the beast and receiving the mark are synonymous (cf. also 14.11 and 20.4). “Hence, ‘receiving the mark of the beast’ seems to mean: belonging to the beast, worshipping the beast. The ‘mark of the beast’ is the God-opposing, Christ-rejecting church-persecuting spirit of antichrist, wherever and whenever it manifests itself” (Hendriksen) Forehead and hand encompass all a person thinks and does. The mark is “a symbol of the beast’s ownership and control of his follower’s thoughts (forehead) and deeds (right hand)” (Johnson)

This mark of the beast, then, is a parody of the “seal” in 7.3-8, the divine name written on the foreheads of true believers (14.1; 22.4; 3.12). Since the seal of the believer is invisible so is the mark of the beast. It indicates the *character and allegiance* of those who belong to the beast: they “connote that the followers of Christ and the beast both are stamped with the image (I.e., character) of their respective leaders...the primary focus is on the spiritual identification with the Satanic beast.” That they have his blasphemous name indicates “that they pay homage to his blasphemous claims to divine kingship” (Beale). Temporarily their belonging to the beast provides safety, but eventually they will be cast into the lake of fire with the dragon and the two beasts. This sign is a sign of death.

666. Wow! How much has been written about this number! Attempts to connect it with one of the emperors is a guess at best. The prime suspect is Nero. If you take the *Greek* form of Nero’s

name (not the Latin) along with the title Caesar (*Nēron Kaiser*) and then transliterate that into Hebrew (*nrōn qsr*) then through the ancient custom of gematria in which each letter of the alphabet is assigned a number (1-9, 10-90, 100-400 for the 22 letters in Hebrew). Anyway, add up the values for *nrōn qsr* and you get, you guessed it, 666.

Here's the problem, do you really think that John is urging us in 13.18 to put our math pants on and be sure to do accurate calculations so we can know that it is Nero (or whomever). Is this the wisdom that the people of God needed at that time? They know that Nero easily fits the bill as a beastly manifestation. Do we really think they would do the gematria-exercise and discover, "Wow! The beast is Nero! I didn't see that coming! I never would've guessed Nero. Wonder why he is called the beast?" Pardon my sarcasm.

Salmon (quoted in Beale) has three rules that commentators have followed in trying to make any desired name equal 666: "First, if the proper name by itself will not yield it, add a title; secondly, if the sum cannot be found in Greek, try Hebrew, or even Latin; thirdly, do not be too particular about the spelling... We cannot infer much from the fact that a key fits the lock it is a lock in which almost any key will turn."

The number 666 should be interpreted *exegetically*, according to its own literature and context. This name next to the Lord's name in 14.1 shows that a contrast is intended between the two. If the Lord's name in 14.1 indicates a spiritual reality so does the beast's name and number, which is synonymous with his name.

Since the number seven indicates completeness throughout Revelation, these triple sixes are intended as a contrast to indicate incompleteness. 13.18 should be translated, "it is the number of humanity" (Beale, cp. 21.17) or "of man" (Hendriksen) or "a human number" (Sweet). Man was created on the sixth day, but without the consummating seventh day, man is incomplete.

"Six is not seven and never reaches seven. It ever fails to attain to perfection; that is, it never becomes seven. Six means missing the mark, failure." (Hendriksen) "...the triple repetition of sixes connotes the intensification of incompleteness and failure that is summed up in the beast more than anywhere else among fallen humanity... six repeated three times indicates the completeness of sinful incompleteness found in the beast. The beast epitomizes imperfection, while appearing to achieve divine perfections" (Beale).

This knowledge of the real futility of the demonic political power is what believers need. This parallels and basically repeats the exhortation of verse 9 "to exhort believers to perceive spiritually the deceptive nature of the Satanic, beastly institutions to which they are being tempted to accommodate." Here in verse 18 believers are "exhorted to see through the deceptive and imperfect nature of the beast." (Beale) This is in keeping with what is revealed in chapter 12, that for all the beast's destructive power, he is one cast down whose time is short. This same truth is indicated by the triple sixes.

## Consideration and Application

We are constantly warned in the NT against false and deceptive teaching:

*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.*

Colossians 2.8

Paul urges faithful ministry in Christ

*so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

Ephesians 4.14

Paul even names individuals to beware of like Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1.18-20; 4.14-15) or Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Tim 1.15). He warns against others in general: *Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain* (1 Tim 6.3-5).

Paul traces blatant false teaching to the demonic (1 Tim 4.1-5), and John writes it is the spirit of the antichrist (1 John 4.1-6). Paul writes of anyone who preaches a message that opposes Paul's gospel of free grace through faith in Christ, "Let him be accursed!" (Gal 1.9). Jesus warns us of false prophets who are wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt 7.15).

The answer? *To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn* (Isa 8.20). Let's be like the Berean Jews when Paul preached in their synagogue, *Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so* (Acts 17.11). Always, only we look to the Scriptures themselves and examine all things by the Scriptures.

So Paul's great commendation of the Scriptures: *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work* (2 Tim 3.16-17).

Recommendation. Take time over the next month to read one 8-verse section of Psalm 119 (there are 22 sections, so you can miss 8-9 days and still do it). Spend 4 minutes, meditating and jotting down anything that strikes you, and then spend 1 minute praying through the section, making those aspirations, prayers and confessions your own. Deepen your attachment to his word and your dependence on his word.

## Revelation 14

### Salvation and Judgment

#### Verse 1: The Lamb and His People

The immediate appearance of the Lamb in 14.1 contrasts Him with the false lamb of 13.11 and the beast of 13.1. The two sides of the great conflict are presented to us.

In the OT prophecy Yahweh will reign over his people and keep them in Mt. Zion or in his holy mountain (they are synonymous):

**Isaiah 4:5-6** Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. <sup>6</sup> There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain.

**Isaiah 24:23** Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders.

**Micah 4:6-7** In that day, declares the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted; <sup>7</sup> and the lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and forevermore.

(see also 1 Ki 19.31/Isa 37.32; isa 11.9; 27.12-13; 56.7-8; 57 13; 66.19-20; Jer 31.7, 11-12, Eze 20.40-41; Joel 2.32; Oba 1.17, 21; and check out Pss. 48.2-14 and 125.1-3 for the further association of safety and protection with Mount Zion)

We read in Psalm 2:6-8, *As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.* <sup>7</sup> *I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.* <sup>8</sup> *Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*

As we have seen, the NT regularly sees v. 7 fulfilled in Christ's resurrection and ascension (Acts 13.33; Heb 1.5), but here in 14.1, it is verse 6 that is particularly in view. For John, obvious the Lamb is this King and Son and that rule has begun. It is remarkable that these things concerning Mount Zion are all said of the *church*, of Gentiles and Jews who believe in Jesus Messiah, *not* of physical Israel, which, insomuch as she rejects the Messiah, becomes a synagogue of Satan (Rev 2.9; 3.9).

There is a sense in which we have already come to "Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Heb 12.22) where certainly are found the "spirits of the righteous made perfect" (Heb 12.23), that is, those who have already fallen asleep (1Thess 4.13ff). At the same time, we and they await the final expression of "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev 21.1). Rev 14.1 certainly speaks of the future inheritance and security of all of God's people (144,000) and that guarantees our present security as well.

As the beast's mark and name are synonymous (13.17; 14.9-11) so the names of the Lamb and his father are synonymous with the seal of the 144,000 in Rev 7. Like the seal, the name



designates ownership, authenticity. It shows they are really his and will persevere to the end. It's as though the Lamb says, "She is mine - *forever*. Hands off!"

God speaks of giving his people a new name (Isa 62.2) in the final time of blessing. She shall be called "my delight is in her" (Isa 62.4), "Sought Out, a City Not Forsaken" (Isa 62.12), "the throne of the Lord" (Jer 3.17), and "the Lord is There" (Ez 48.35). "This OT background suggests that the divine name written on believers is a figurative way of speaking of God's presence with his people, which protects them." (Beale) As Paul says, nothing "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The number 144,000 points to the completeness of God's people in contrast to the incompleteness of those who have the mark/name of 666. It is a way of contrasting those belonging to the Lamb, the new, brimming-full, unabridged true humanity with those who belong to the beast: defective, undone, fragmented humanity. 144,000 speaks of glory; 666 speaks of tragedy.

### **Verses 2-3: The Song**

The two other passages with a "song" (*ode* - 5.8-9; 15.2) celebrate conquering (5.5; 15.2) and redemption (5.8-9) and we can assume that that is the focus of the celebration here. The "new song" in the OT celebrates God's majesty in creation and salvation - all his mighty deeds (Ps 33.3; 40.3; 96.1; 98.1; 144.9; 149.1; Isa 42.10).

The "sound of many waters" and the "sound of great thunder" anticipate the celebration of God's reign after the defeat of the great harlot:

**Revelation 19:6** Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

The sound is great because as we saw in chapter 7, the 144,000 (verse 4) is also the "great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (verse 9). Only those who have experienced the redemption of the Lamb are able to sing this new song. This song is utterly sincere, bursting with the joy, gratitude, amazement and awe of those who recognize what the Lamb has done for them.

### **Verses 4-5: The Followers**

The structure with the end of verse three forms an *inclusio*:

who had been redeemed from the earth  
who have not defiled themselves with women for they are virgins  
who follow the Lamb wherever he goes  
these have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits

The middle two phrases describe the character of the redeemed as that character was exhibited on earth.

"Virgins" is a metaphor indicating the uncompromising faithfulness of all the true saints. In the other places where saints surround Christ (7.9, 17; 19.8-9) the whole redeemed community is

included. The whole of redeemed humanity is described as “Jerusalem... “prepared as a bride” in Rev 21.2. 14.4 is just a variation on that theme.

As an OT backdrop, Israel is constantly referred to as a “virgin daughter” and the like (2 Ki 19.21; Isa 37.22; Jer 17.17; 18.13; 31.4, 21; Lam 1.15; 2.13; Amos 5.2). Always Israel’s idolatry is described in terms of sexual immorality (see Eze 16 for instance). In this immediate context of Rev 14, we have the same thing in the juxtaposition of sexual immorality with Babylon and worshipping the beast and its image (14.8ff). The immoral “women” of v. 4 is a corporate version of “Babylon” in 14.8 which is described in a fuller way in 17.1-5 as “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth’s abominations.” Such religious, political and economic idolatry is also pictured as “harlotry” in the OT (see the graphic language in Eze 23 and cp. Jer 3.1-10 and Hos 1.2).

In the letters to the churches, Sardis still has some who have not “defiled” their garments (3.4; same word as here in 14.4). Idolatry is described as sexual immorality (2.14, 20) as it is later in 18.3, 9 and 19.2. “Likewise, Paul wants believers to be presented as a “pure virgin” (“virgin” is the same word as in 14.4) to Christ by warning them to avoid “the serpent’s deception” and a perverted gospel, which Satan introduces into the church through his “false apostles...disguising themselves as apostles of Christ” (2 Cor 11.2-4, 13-15)...That the group described in 14.1-5 is in contrast with the beast-worshippers in 13.11-18 also suggests that the idea of virgins is figurative, since the followers of the beast are guilty primarily not of immorality but of idolatry.” Beale

Since they do not worship the beast, these virgins naturally follow the Lamb wherever he goes (cp Mt 8.19; 10.38; Mk 8.34; Lk 9.57; 1 Pt 2.21-22; 1 Jn 2.6). They identify with Christ even to the point of suffering, thus demonstrating their faithful virginal character.

“Redeemed as firstfruits” does not mean that they are the first part of redeemed humanity with more to follow, rather it indicates their being uniquely dedicated to God, separate from the rest of humanity. In Jer 2.2-3 the whole of the nation Israel is called his firstfruits as distinguished from all other nations, which incur judgment because they abuse his firstfruits. This same idea of Israel’s unique separation and dedication to God is found in Eze 20.40-44. “Firstborn” is a similar term (Ex 4.22; Jer 31.8ff).

In contrast to the firstfruits, the unbelieving nations are judged (14.14-20). This is the same pattern we found in Rev 11.11-13: resurrection of the righteous and judgment of the wicked. As the rest of the harvest outside the holy firstfruits was regarded as common or profane, so the “rest” of the harvest of unredeemed humanity is regarded as common, unclean, even ripe for judgment. While his people are redeemed “from the earth/from mankind” judgment is poured out on those who worship the beast (9-11) and thus follows the call for further “virginal” faithfulness in 14.12!

As there was no deceit in the mouth of Christ (Isa 53.9; 1 Pt 2.22) so there is none in the mouth of those who follow him. This particular points to their being faithful witnesses even as he is (1.5; 2.13), in contrast to those “who say they are (true) Jews, and are not, but lie.” “Jews who deny Christ but still profess to be God’s true people are liars, since they are really part of “the synagogue of Satan” (2.9; 3.9).” (Beale)

1 Jn 2.22 says that “the liar...denies that Jesus is the Christ...This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.” Idolatry is a lie (Isa 44.20); to worship an idol is to “trust in lies” (Jer 13.25). The “liars” who face eternal punishment are those who have followed this lie and have not borne witness to Christ (Rev 21.8, 27; 22.15). This verse is taken from Isa 53.9 and its context is the suffering of Christ, showing that those who follow the Lamb must suffer as they bear faithful witness, otherwise they are liars.

### **Verses 6-11: The Announcement of Judgment**

This announcement from the angel has a focus on judgment. This angel is purposely similar to the messenger of the three woes in 8.13 (“loud voice”; “flying directly overhead”; addressing those “who dwell on the earth” 14.6 is literally “sit”; cp. Babylon sitting: 17.1, 15 and 18.7). Earth dwellers in Revelation are the deceived and the judged (3.10; 6.10; 8.13; 11.10s; 13.8, 12, 14a, b; 17.2, 8). The addressees are “the unregenerate multitudes, the majority of which are not expected to respond favorably to the gospel announcement” (Beale; cp 10.11 and 13.7 for the same group).

The content of verse 7 is likely to be read much as Phil 2.9-11, where *every* knee bows and acknowledges the Lordship of Christ. That statement in Philippians is good news to the saints who desire to see their Lord vindicated, and here this is good news (“gospel”) because it announces that similarly all must now fear God and glorify Him. This language is similar to that of Rev 11.13, “they became fearful and gave glory to the God of heaven” but since that is in response to the resurrection of the saints, it is final judgment acknowledgement, a forced recognition of God’s glory as in Philippians 2. (See also Daniel 4.30-37 on which this passage is based as it presents Nebuchadnezzar’s forced recognition of God’s glory, but very likely not as a part of his conversion.)

This announcement is in the context of final judgment, even inaugurating that judgment. The “judgment is the reason the command is issued. The time for repentance is gone when the final judgment approaches. Those addressed are not warned to give glory *before* the time of punishment arrives but “because” the time has arrived.” (Beale) It is at the time of judgment that unbelieving idolators will be made to acknowledge God’s sovereignty. At the very least this is a final offer of the gospel which goes unheeded.

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon” (v. 8) is taken from Isa 21.9, but “Babylon the great” occurs only in Dan 4.30 in connection with Nebuchadnezzar (see also Jer 51.7-9). Babylon destroyed the temple and sent Israel into exile where the faithful were tempted and pressured to engage in idolatry, and suffered because of it (Daniel 1-6). Rome played the same role in John’s day, having destroyed the temple and sent Israel again into exile, it now caused the faithful to suffer as they bore witness to God.

This second angel gives a further indication that the first angel’s announcement is one of judgment. We should read this as the wine that either causes or leads to or results in a passion for fornication (or intercourse) with her. Hos 4.11-12 reads “*whoredom, wine and new wine* take away understanding. My people consult their wooden idol...for a spirit of whoredom has led them astray. From 13.17, 18.3, 9, 11-19 we see that the wine was the promise of economic

security and political safety. When it “pays” to commit idolatry, all those whose names are not written in the book of life gladly lay with the harlot.

When economies fail it is a precursor of final judgment. “Those experiencing economic tragedy in the contemporary world should be warned that it is a forerunner of a final world collapse and universal judgment by God; accordingly, they should pay heed and take stock of their own standing before God.” (Beale)

Now a third angel appears (v. 9). The “loud voice” recalls that of the first angel and ties all three angels together as having a common message. The “if anyone” clause summarizes 13.4, 8, 12, 15-17. They drank the maddening wine of Babylon and now they must drink the wine of God’s wrath. This is a regular metaphor in the OT (Ps 60.3; **75.8**; Isa 51.17, 21-23; 63.6; **Jer 25.15-18**; 51.7). Babylon’s wine is temporary; God’s terrible, strong wine is eternal. “Torment” indicates extreme psychological and spiritual suffering, and is coupled with “weeping” and “mourning” in chapter 18. They are forever “restless.” As Isaiah 48.22 says, “There is no peace for the wicked.”

### **Verses 12-13: The Exhortation and Promise**

This exhortation shows that 6-11 is meant as a warning to those who profess faith in Christ not to compromise so as to avoid the awful judgment of the wicked. Verse 12, then is the main point of 6-12, in line with 13.10 and 13.18 (and the exhortations to the churches in chapters 2-3). Yes, it costs much to be faithful, but look what it costs to compromise! You can’t drink the one wine without drinking the other, so refuse the first so you can avoid the second.

14.12-13 is clearly linked with 13.10 and 13.18 by the phrase, “here is a call” or “this calls for” (literally “thus is”), and each coming in the wake of either the activity or coming judgment of the beast or Babylon. Again this echoes “to the one who conquers” said to each of the seven churches. Endurance in the midst of suffering is the constant message of the NT (Acts 14.22; Rm 8.17-18; 12.12; 2 Cor 4.17; 1 Th 3.7; 1 Pt 5.9-10).

Literally v. 12 reads “the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” This is better than the ESV and it keeps the two terms parallel. Therefore “faith” should be understood as the objective content of the gospel (see Paul’s similar use of “the faith” in the Pastoral letters: 1 Tim 3.9; 4.1, 6; 5.8; 6.10, 21; 2 Tim 3.8; 4.7; Tt 1.13 and Jude’s use in Jude 1.3 “faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” ) with Jesus as its source. This amounts to keeping the testimony of Jesus and not being liars who deny his truth.

The warning of judgment (6-12) is followed by the promise of blessing (13). The well-being of those who belong to the Lamb is a strong contrast with the torment and restlessness of those who belong to the beast/Babylon. “That this blessing is pronounced by the Spirit assures Christians that the blessing will be bestowed.” (Beale) “They take with them the record of their deeds” (NEB) indicated that their lives gave evidence of their faithfulness to God in the midst of suffering.

### **Verses 14-20: The Judging Itself**

Like Rev 1.7, v. 14 refers to Daniel 7.13. The crown especially indicates the “dominion” (Dan 7.14) he is about to exercise over his enemies. The angel in v. 15 is likely bringing a divine

message from the throne room (cp. Mk 13.32; Acts 1.7; Jn 5.19). As judgment finally would come upon Canaan when her sin was complete (Gn 15.16) so it will be for the whole world, and then the reaping of judgment will begin.

Although it is possible that 15-16 refers to the reaping of the elect and 17-20 the reaping of the wicked, it is more likely that both refer to the reaping of the wicked. The terms are very similar and the repetition serves to enlarge on the first and to underscore the severity of the reaping. This passage is based on Joel 4.13, the only place in the OT where harvesting with a “sickle” is spoken of: *Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.*

This is the only place in the OT where harvest and winepress are used together and this is the model for Rev 14. Since the Joel passage has to do only with the judgment of the wicked, Rev 14.15-16 likely does as well. Also, “whenever commands are issued from the heavenly temple or altar, they are always declarations of judgment (6.1-5; 9.13; 16.7, 17).” (Beale)

The final reference is to the holy city, the new Jerusalem, outside which complete and utter judgment falls upon the wicked. The same picture is found in Isa 62.12 - 63.6. Also, Rev 20.8-9 depicts the destruction of the wicked outside “the beloved city.” “The bridles of horses” is figurative and indicates the terrible severity of this judgment. It is striking to notice that in Heb 13.13-14 we are to go outside the camp to suffer with Jesus because we have a city to come. We bear the persecution of being rejected by the earthly city so we may inherit the heavenly city. Those who are unwilling so to suffer now must then suffer finally and terribly outside the heavenly city. Lesson? Choose your suffering wisely!

## Revelation 15

Since the newest section beginning at 12.1 we have had six visions, but before the 7<sup>th</sup> vision comes, it is interrupted in 15.1 by an introduction to the next section, the seven angels with the seven plagues, and then the 7<sup>th</sup> vision comes in 15.2-4. Or, you could say the next vision of the bowls begins in 7.1, but it is interrupted by the last of the previous seven visions. Either way, this “interlocks” the section that began in 12.1 with the section which follows in 15.5, just like John did in chapter 8 (where v. 2 introduces the trumpets, but they don’t begin until v. 6).

15.2-4 is both a conclusion to 12.1 – 14.20 and a part of the introduction to the bowls. As a conclusion it celebrates God’s justice that was announced (14.6-11) and carried out (14.14-20), even referring to the song of Moses (Ex 15) which they sang after God brought judgment upon the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. John sees that Exodus judgment as the model and preview of the final judgment of chapter 14, and the celebration on the shore of the Red Sea by the Israelites as the model and preview of the final security and joy of the redeemed people of God from all ages. Here is how 15.2-4 fits in with chapter 14:

14.1-5	Celebration of victory
14. 6-11	Judgment of the wicked
14.12-13	Encouragement to endure
14.14-20	Judgment of the wicked
15.2-4	Celebration of victory

Judgment takes place in the context of the praise and glory of God, and in the context of the security and joy of God’s people. The main emphasis falls right in the middle: endure to the end!

Also, the song of Moses in 15.2-4 serves as kind of launch pad to the next section of the seven bowls which are modeled on the Exodus plagues. When we arrive at the latter day plagues/bowls of chapter 16, Moses’ song is echoing in our ears. This creates anticipation that these plagues will also lead to final victory like the Exodus plagues did.

### **15.1 – Introduction to the seven bowl plagues**

This verse has a similar “section-marker” to 12.1 (“great sign in heaven”) indicating a new major section is beginning, and this new section continues in v. 5 after the interruptive finish of the seven visions in 15.2-4.

“Last” is parallel with “after these things” (“after this” ESV) in v. 5, and we have seen that “after these things” is not a temporal marker but is saying, “after these visions, another one came.” “Last” then means, “the last vision I saw.” Final judgment happened at the end of the seals (6.12-17; 8.1), at the end of the trumpets (11.15-19) and in the last chapter (14:6-11 and 13-20). The plague bowls that follow should be seen as occurring within the same time frame as the seals and trumpets, and within the 1260 days of the dragon’s attack on the church. Even if “last” means “the plagues of the last days,” remember, in NT thinking this would refer to plagues that began at the time of Christ’s death and resurrection and will continue until he comes again (Acts 2.17; Heb 1.2; and 1 Jn 2.18, where the present manifestation of antichrist in John’s day was a clear signal that they were in the last “hour”).

“Finished” means in part that this will complete the portrayal of God’s wrath begun in the seals and trumpets. “The full portrait of God’s wrath will be finished when all the bowl visions have been painted on the heavenly canvas.” (Beale). However, the primary meaning is best taken from 15.7 “bowls full of the wrath of God” and 21.9 “bowls full of the seven last plagues” so we could read 15.1 as “in them the wrath of God was filled up,” that is, they will set forth in a final way the terrible intensity of the wrath of God.

## **Verses 2-4**

### **The Setting and Singers**

As 14.14-20 describes the last judgment, these verses build “on that scene by picturing the beast’s defeat as completed and the saints as enjoying the results of that victory and praising God for it.” (Beale) The “sea of glass” is the heavenly counterpart to the Red Sea, which is confirmed by the “song of Moses” that is sung there. Like Israel at the Red Sea celebrating God’s victory over Pharaoh, depicted as a dragon and Leviathan in the OT (Isa 51.9-11; Ps 74.12-15; Eze 32.2), so now all the redeemed celebrate God’s victory over the beast at the sea of glass. We should note that the judgments and salvation that God accomplished in the OT not only have their fulfillment in the initial coming of Christ, but in the whole of his kingdom reign until its consummation in his final coming.

Again, the sea is the dwelling place of evil and chaos, associated with the bottomless pit, so that the beast rises from the bottomless pit (11.7) and from the sea (13.1). Here in 15.2 God’s sovereign rule and victory has calmed the chaotic powers of that sea. The fire indicates judgment as it does elsewhere in Revelation. With the background of the conquering Lion/Lamb (5.5-6) who has redeemed a people (5.9-10), and with this song being the “song of the Lamb” (15.3), this scene pictures the Lamb’s victory over the beast, after the pattern of God’s victory over the OT beast, Pharaoh.

The victory belongs to His people of whom it was said they conquered the dragon “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (12.11). Now it is said they “conquered the beast and its image” (15.2) even as the three young Hebrew men who refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image (Dan 3.12, 28ff). If they had succumbed to the “number” (666) they would have allied themselves with that failing, incomplete, broken humanity that tragically followed the beast. But they refused to bow down.

Their “standing on the sea of glass” (likely “on” not “beside” – same word for “on” in 11.11; 12.17 and 14.1) indicates that they “were involved in the battle against the sea beast and have fought in the midst of the unbelieving world” (Beale - cp. 17.15 for this definition of the sea). Unlike Israel that stood by the sea and watched, they by their powerful testimony (11.4-6) were directly involved in the battle, themselves conquering in union with the Lamb (3.21; 12.11 and here). “Harps” indicates they are the same 144,000 described in 14.1-5. “Standing” likely points to their resurrection and it did the Lamb’s resurrection in 5.6

Background to this “song of Moses” is found in Deuteronomy 32, also called the song of Moses. It ends with a graphic description of God’s bloody vindication of the blood of his people, the same theme in Revelation 6.9-11, 8.3-5 and most recently, 14.18-20.

## **The Song**

“Great” and “amazing” recall the song of Moses in Exodus 15. God is described there as “awesome in glorious deeds” (15.11 – same Greek word as “amazing”). The song speaks of “the greatness of his arm” (15.16 – closely related word to “great”). So “Exodus praise” continues forever!

“Just and true” show “that God’s sovereign acts are not demonstrations of raw power but moral expressions of his just character” (Beale). “Lord God the Almighty” and “O King of the nations” are parallel. He has all power over all things and demonstrates it in how he ultimately curses those who curse his people (cp Gn 12.3).

“Who will not fear” is taken directly from Jer 10.7, where God is distinguished from the idols men make (10.1-10; “there is none like you,” also v. 7). So here he is honored as the true God worthy of all fear in distinction from the would-be god, the beast, whom the world outside of Christ followed. “Holy” here declares that God incomparable, wholly separate and unique, the one and only living God who rules all things.

“All nations will come and worship you” recalls Ps 86.9-10, which also says, “for you alone are God” in distinction from idols, which further emphasizes the contrast between the false beast and the true God. “Righteous acts” can be translated “judgments” and refers to God’s righteous judgments and his vindication of his people. The praise of 11.17-18, 14.1-5 and here in 15.2-4 must be seen as the result of God’s answering the prayers of the saints with judgments (8.3-5) because they had cried out for deliverance (6.9-11), which is a constant pattern of the Psalms (18; 22.4-5; 30.1-3; 31.22; 34.4-6; 44.7; 54.7; 60.5; 86.13-17; 107.6, 13, 19-20, 28) and the ultimate pattern of history.

Part of our praise must be celebration of His sovereign power over the nations and his ultimate vindication of his people (cp. Psalm 2 as background to Rev 2.26-27). Our obedience can be more and more freed from fear as we realize that no matter what we suffer in loving others and upholding the truth of the gospel message, our Lord Jesus will come and completely vindicate his cause, his cross and his throne.

## **Verses 5-8: Introduction to the Bowl Plagues**

This resumes what John began in v 1, and *now* it is firmly planted in the context of the Exodus plagues by the song of Moses at the sea of glass. The bowl plagues, like the trumpet plagues are based on the Exodus plagues. In fact the bowls and trumpets are so closely aligned that it indicates that they occur simultaneously, not successively and that the “bowls go back in time and explain in greater detail the woes throughout the age, culminating in the final judgment...The trumpet visions may be compared to incomplete snapshots and the bowls to more detailed pictures” (Beale).

Notice the same order: Trumpet/Bowl 1: *earth*; T/B 2: *sea(s), blood, “die(s)”*; T/B 3: *rivers and fountains*; T/B 4 *sun*; T/B 5 “*darkened*”; T/B 6: *Euphrates*; T/B 7: *loud voice, lightning, thunder, earthquake, hail*.



The exodus context is in the forefront as we hear of the “sanctuary of the tent of witness.” This is better translated, “sanctuary, which is the tabernacle of testimony.” The testimony was the ten commandments placed in the ark of the tabernacle (Ex 25.21; 31.18) which expressed his will and formed the foundation and bond of the covenant between Yahweh the king and his people. Those commandments began with, were defined by and all flowed from the requirement that God alone be worshipped in direct opposition to the saturated environment of idolatry in which they lived (commandments 1 and 2, and secondarily commandments 3 and 4). So 15.5 pictures for us God’s judgments coming forth because His holy will and glory have been egregiously violated by the idolatrous allegiance to the beast.

The angels complete the picture as they are clothed in priestly attire, much like the son of man (Rev 1.13 with Dan 10.5 as background). They are closely associated with Christ, therefore carrying out the result of his intercession and death on behalf of his people. “Bowls” are mentioned about 30 times in the OT in connection with the service of the tabernacle and temple, thus further underscoring the priestly character of these angels. That the altar is mentioned in 16.7 reminds us that these bowls are the answer to the saints’ prayer under the altar (6.9-11) which were offered by the angel at the altar (8.3). The *golden bowls full* of incense representing the “prayers of the saints” (5.8) will be heard and God will pour out *golden bowls full* of His wrath!

Verse 8 shows that the seven bowls come from the sanctuary - directly from the power and glory of God which has been so desecrated by man’s idolatry (cp Eze 10.2-4 and Isa 6.4 for similar descriptions). The four creatures and seven angels are *his* agents to carry out *his* judgments. The last phrase means that nothing will interfere with God’s outpouring of wrath. He is sovereign; none can stay his hand. And perhaps it indicates as well that now intercession is impossible (Hendriksen).

*The plagues of Egypt.* What people think of as ancient, irrelevant myths, John declares are the lens by which we believers can interpret the suffering and catastrophes of the present day. We are living in the time of the plagues! The judgment of Egypt has become the judgment of the world. And as God powerfully delivered Israel, so he will powerfully deliver Christ’s people scattered among the nations.

This provides a striking application of the command to hear his word: hear the account of the plagues and the deliverance of his people. See what it means for the whole history of the world! See what it means for your encouragement, endurance and hope!