

Ancient Truth: John's Revelation

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Introduction to the Ancient Truth Series

Mankind is fallen and in need of redemption. The one single source of redemption is the God who created us. He has revealed Himself and His will for us, the path to redemption. The pinnacle of His efforts to reveal Himself came in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Most of us understand easily enough that His divine Son was born into a particular historical and cultural setting, one that is frankly foreign to us, and we to it. The distance is more than mere years of time, or language and culture, but a wealth of things that fall between Him and us. At a minimum, we could point out our Post-Modern culture, Victorian feminism, Enlightenment secularism, European feudalism, and Germanic tribal mythology – so much we can point out without much difficulty. What no one in our Western world today seems to realize is the single greatest barrier to understanding Christ is the thing that lies under all of those obscuring layers of influence: Western Civilization itself.

That is, the ancient Classical Greco-Roman world is built essentially on Aristotle and Plato. Those two are not simply alien to the people of the Bible, but their basic view of reality is frankly hostile to that of the Bible. Aristotle rejected Hebrew Scripture because he rejected the underlying worldview of the people God used to write that Scripture.

This booklet is not a long academic dissertation on the differences; that has been very well covered by far better qualified writers. But this should serve as notice to the reader how our Western intellectual heritage, including our basic assumptions of how a human can know, understand, and deal with reality, is not what's in the Bible. If you bring that Western intellectual heritage to Scripture, you will not come away with a proper understanding of God's revelation. If the rules, the essential assumptions, by which you discern and organize truth about your world, remain rooted in the West, you will not fully understand the precious treasure of truth God left for us in the Bible.

We do not need yet one more commentary on the Bible from a foreign Western intellectual background; we need something that speaks to us from the background of the Hebrew people. God spoke first to them. He did not simply find the Hebrew people useful for His revelation. He made the Hebrew people precisely so He would have a fit vehicle for His revelation. Bridging the divide between them and us is no small task, but to get readers started down that path, I offer this series of commentaries that attempt to present a Hebrew understanding for the Western mind. Not as some authoritative expert, but I write as another explorer who reports what he has found so far. I encourage you to consider what I share and heed the call to make your own exploration of these things.

A note about Scripture translations: There are dozens of English translations of the Bible. None of them is perfect, if for no other reason than translation itself is shooting at a moving target. More importantly, it is virtually impossible to translate across the vast cultural and intellectual gulf between that of current English-speakers and those who wrote the Bible. For the sake of convenience in this electronic format, this study uses the New English Translation, AKA the NET Bible.

Introduction to John's Revelation

This is yet another study of the Apocalypse, the Revelation of Jesus Christ given to John the Apostle. It seems everybody has their own idea of what it's all about and most of them are contradictory. The reader is often struck by how so many commentators seek to establish their unique approach. It gets tiresome, because most of them aren't so unique. There is an abundance of material hashing over the academic details. There is no need to plow that ground yet one more time.

It becomes necessary at this point to inform the reader that we will not follow the heresy commonly called "Dispensationalism." It is too easy to prove this view arose very late in history and was never part of the teaching of the early churches. The most obvious flaw is how that heresy asserts this book meant almost nothing to people who first received it from John, that it applied to some other time in the far future.

Therefore, we will begin with the most obvious point, that John wrote this to the churches under his care. He wrote it from his Hebraic and apostolic frame of mind. It is not about some far future events the church would never see, but about trends that began before John's death and would soon take a dramatic turn for the worse. He wrote this to the churches of Asia Minor, to reveal something of Jesus Christ as He is eternally. It's the Christ who is, was and always would be, not some Christ that might show up later. This is to the Church and for the churches John pastored at that time. It was not to increase their knowledge of things that would not affect them, but to improve their understanding of how things work from the spiritual and moral perspective of Christ. It is an extended parable of what God is like, how He reveals His hand on this earth regardless of the date and time.

By no means could we deny that there is a futuristic application to our reading of this Apocalypse. But to make the far distant future the whole message of this book is to render it useless to the Body of Christ. Any interpretation that denies or contradicts the easily discernible meaning that this book had for John and his flock is a lie from the start. This is a message to the Body and includes instructions on how to face very difficult times already upon them. That those times have returned to us now changes nothing, because they have come and gone throughout the ages and will return again and again, until the final end of all things.

John was the last living of the Twelve Disciples. The Spirit tells him his time is short and he prepares this message. His passing will change everything for the churches. Already we see from the rest of the New Testament how the gospel message has been under attack from Jews. The overt Jewish political persecution shifted to a more subtle and sinister attack by subverting Christian teaching. The Talmudic Hellenism gave birth to Gnosticism and a wide range of Gentiles took up the attack, as well. The Roman political oppression was bad enough, but the greatest threat of all was the isolation of Christian faith from its Hebrew mystical roots. Without that anchor in the Spirit Realm, faith is just a word. John wrote a highly symbolic message that requires a deep grasp of the Ancient Hebrew approach to reality or it means nothing at all. This wasn't simply an attempt to hide from Roman snooping of his mail. John hid the truth in plain sight, truth that the mere intellect cannot grasp, only a living spirit speaking through an awakened heart can find the truth in this message.

Revelation 1

The Apostle John was probably near 90 years old, having come a very long way from the teenage Jewish fisherman whom Jesus called into full time ministry. Now he's the Apostle of Asia Minor. His knowledge of Greek was about that of a schoolboy and he needed very much to pass an important pastoral message to his Greek-speaking flock. John was a true Hebrew-Christian Mystic and wrote a profoundly mystical and symbolic book meant to draw us into the moral spiritual realm above our material human existence. That is the place where we find sufficient grasp on the ultimate truth of God's divine personal character to discern how He does business in this fallen realm of existence. John probably had some help translating the intense Hebrew imagery into Greek.

The help would have come from his fellow prisoners on the Isle of Patmos. Forget what you may have seen in the movies; the island was large enough to have a small city and farmland. The prisoners sent there worked in mines. There probably were no chains, but the Roman officials could check every ship's manifest to insure people assigned to serve exile there didn't leave before their release. It was one of many exile locations Emperor Domitian used to isolate leaders of those who resisted his commands.

One of those commands was to acknowledge him as a deity. It was no major issue for most Romans. This would be but one more god in their pantheon, assuming they actually believed. It was the same old thing, where some ruler demanded a show of extraordinary loyalty. In practice, this was little more than standing before the carved image of the Emperor and tossing a pinch of incense on the small flame burning there, with a few words like, "Lord Caesar." This was hardly meaningless to John. His Hebrew heritage would not let him treat this lightly. There was no god but Jehovah; had not his nation gotten at least that one thing right after the Babylonian Exile?

Not only could John not do this himself, but he was compelled by the Holy Spirit to insist his church members also refuse. Either Christ was Lord alone, or He was not Lord at all. A Christian could not compromise on this issue, even at the cost

of his life. Some believers had died for it, but John was exiled. The whole thing was a symbol of the eternal fight between human governments and God Almighty.

Thus, while praying one Sunday on the island, a massive vision took him away from a fleshly sense of awareness. Such experiences are scarcely describable in human language. Yet he knew it was critical for his flock to see what he saw, and understand the wisdom it conveyed. What should the church expect from human governments? What was typical in moral and spiritual terms?

By this time, the churches had long passed around, not just copies of the Hebrew canon of Scripture, but letters and accounts of Christ's life. John himself had written his own recollections, giving an account from a wholly different perspective than the others. Most of his flock was neither Roman nor really Greek, but had a more Eastern outlook. There would have been Jewish Christians to help explain the symbols John used. Having seen the Hebrew scriptures and its vivid imagery, having a fairly mystical outlook from their own culture, John knew they would understand this extended revelation in the same symbolic language. By expanding on this base, the material would read like typical mystical mad ramblings of no consequence to anyone outside the churches. To John, the Living Word of his Gospel was now going to incarnate Himself as the Living Word of His Church.

It was important that his flock understand the other half of the gospel message. The account of Jesus' life on earth was a critical foundation, but the account of His eternal work in the coming age must be revealed, as well. The Last Days had already begun with the empty tomb John visited that bright Sunday morning so long ago. That term in Scripture refers to the period between Ascension and Second Coming. There was a period of transition lasting some 40 days before Jesus finally ascended. Then there was another transition period of roughly 40 years for the judgment against the nation of Israel for their rejection of the Messiah. The final period of transition would pass with John's life, as he was the last living Apostle. The churches must grasp the one, most important message not yet delivered from the last of those who had touched Jesus in the flesh.

We know there were other churches in that area beside the seven named. It doesn't matter, because the symbolism of seven was a part of the message – seven meant holiness, a completion of revelation, fulfilled authority. This was not a prophecy of historical periods to come, but seven different kinds of churches with their unique problems. These types would be visible throughout history, until the Return of Christ. What were their problems, and how would they face the ages without living Apostles?

A clear understanding of Jesus Christ, Risen Savior and Lord of all, was the foundation of understanding everything else. Beyond simply associating with Christ the full range of symbols that belonged to the Hebrew legacy, the critical point was to note this is the Lord who reigns regardless of time and space. John had at first hoped he might see His Lord's return. Without knowing how long it might take, it was of the utmost importance the churches were properly

equipped. This was John's message, John's intent; at our spiritual peril, we ignore what this book was in John's mind.

Revelation 2 & 3

We turn now to the messages to the Seven Churches. Again: Don't read too much into the precise details. We could easily bury ourselves in details and too easily lose the primary message. These are seven real churches with very real problems, but the symbolism is the primary focus. We need to identify some terms. The Nicolaitans, as explained in a previous volume in this series, were an immoral cult group claiming the legacy of Nicolas, one of the first appointed Greek-speaking elders in the original church of Jerusalem. Those who claimed his name were Platonic extremists, a part of the Gnostic movement insisting that sins of the flesh had no effect on a redeemed spirit. It seems they believed Christ was a phantom, divine and spiritual, but did not actually come to earth in the flesh.

The phrase "Throne of Satan" was tied to emperor worship, because John uses it in connection with places where major temples to the emperor were found. "Synagogue of Satan" describes the presence of a strong Jewish Talmudic persecution of Christians. Finally, the twin symbols of "eating food offered to idols" and "sexual impurity" were far more than the mere actions described. Together they indicate any form of compromise, which included raising any thing to the level of devotion belonging to Christ alone. Paul made it clear an idol was nothing and temples reselling food from the altars were simply adding to their temple income. While eating this food itself was no sin, Paul was careful to point out how sinners considered it a strong indication one supported the pagan worship. That was reason enough to avoid it. "Adultery" emphasized the spiritual meaning of idolatry, but could easily include the physical act.

We believe the Church at Ephesus was John's home church, the central office as it were, for John's ministry. There in the city was a major temple, a major port and a regional seat of government. These people were organized and knew how to get things done. Jesus addressed that body, calling Himself the Light of Truth, the One who held the power of every church's witness in His might right hand. The right hand was the ancient Eastern symbol of power and authority. It would be typical of such a congregation to have built up a solid base of organization. Their message of truth was clear, as was their commitment and the high standards that naturally resulted. Yet, in their fastidious organization, they had lost contact with the spirit of agape. Their witness was no longer a light to the lost, because they had regulated the life out of their work. Their practice of faith didn't require an active reliance on the heart of conviction. The promise of obedience to the Law of Love was living eternally in that love.

Smyrna had seen many sackings and looting over the centuries. This church had learned to hold quite loosely to the things of this world. They had few material goods and constant persecution shook their earthly peace. Indeed, it was about to get worse and some would lose their earthly lives. Jesus called to them as the Lord of Eternity and stood ready to welcome them home into that eternal existence, where nothing could ever harm them again.

As the sword represents authority to punish evil, the Church of Pergamos faced Jesus as ultimate Wielder of the Word in judgment against sin. They did have a testimony for Jesus' name, but failed to fulfill the deeper moral meaning of serving Him. One, they had teachers acting as Balaam did, inciting the church to compromise on issues that seemed minor at first, but brought them to moral ruin. Two, this gave room for Nicolaitans to operate. In both cases, the claim of "free from the Law" was carried beyond scriptural meaning, discarding every restraint. We note this city had an impressive array of temples to various pagan deities whose rituals directly contradicted revelation, so the temptation to stray from high moral standards faced them at every turn. They must distinguish themselves by feasting on the Bread of Life (manna), not by aping the Jews, but obeying the higher Law of God that Jesus taught. We note the Jews perpetuated a legend that the Ark of Covenant had been hidden before Babylon invaded around 600BC, with the pot of manna still inside it. This image was taken by John to signify that Jesus was the true manna, promised from the beginning, hidden until His birth. As for the "white stone," this would be any one of several tokens of special status indicating the favor of one's government. This token could be presented as proof one held a privileged place and could demand special treatment. Jesus also mentions the ancient practice of giving high-ranking servants a new name or title.

The church at the great commercial center of Thyatira faced a Christ whose pure vision did not require outside illumination, but bore its own spiritual light to see the heart of every matter. His feet resembled bronze while still in the oven, a process that produced a flame too bright to gaze upon directly. He walked in purity and truth, treading down evil like brazen feet in grass. This church had made a home for some cult, a demonic presence in the form of a self-appointed prophetess. As with Jezebel, Ahab's queen, she was the dominatrix behind a male authority figure, probably the local pastor. The original Jezebel demanded all bow the knee to her idols. This woman served Satan directly, tempting the believers to compromise with her beauty and delightful social presence. Her refusal to be corrected would see her sicken and die, while those who clung to her teachings would suffer the same fate. Aside from this, the church had no major trouble, so anyone with sufficient self-discipline to escape this trap was qualified spiritually to rule far more under the authority of Him who ruled all other power and authority absolutely. This was hardly a promise of political power, but the moral power to overcome self and serve Christ regardless of puny human efforts to stop the gospel message. This pure testimony would give them a spiritual brightness second only to Christ Himself.

Sardis was once the capital of Croesus, the richest king of legend. In John's day, the town was insignificant and so was the church. Jesus spoke to them with symbols of greatness to show their lack of it. The church was dead. It had all the appearances of honor, but most of the congregation was not regenerate. They were converts of mere habit and custom. The image of citizenship rolls recalls the ancient practice of cities keeping a list of full citizens. Those who died had their names erased in the annual ceremony of roll call. Jesus was about to call the roll and correct the register. Those who were not truly His would have their names

removed. Those who stood firm against this hypocrisy would find themselves in His robes of righteousness, recognized before the Father.

In the City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia, the Jews had no love at all. They never understood that their rejection of Christ left them outside the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ had inherited the full authority of David and could admit or deny anyone citizenship. David had the power to ignore established customs and pass his throne to any of his sons. Jesus here asserts that same authority to open the gates of Eternity in defiance of Jewish claims. Those who found a home for their souls in the gospel message preached by the church would be welcomed into the Kingdom. When the “hour of trial” came – the test of citizenship through which the whole world must pass – they would be inside the gates already. The coming of such a test would be sudden, so Christians cannot rest, lest they lose the crowns by which they would honor His Name. Indeed, these would not only be inside, but would form the pillars of God’s royal court, never to depart again. It did not rely on their strength, which was little, but God’s. Yet, His strength was sufficient to mark them as true priests of God, who in times past wore in the earthly Temple the words, “Holiness to the Lord” on their heads. For the Christians at Philadelphia, theirs was the high privilege of serving as recruiters for the Lord’s Kingdom.

Laodicea could afford to refuse Roman aid and rebuilt their city from private funds after an earthquake around 60AD. They produced black wool and had a fine medical academy built around the hot springs issuing from the rocky hill above the city. They produced the Phrygian eye salve that was famous in those times. This church apparently faced no threat from Jews or other persecutors. This made them morally fat and lazy, spiritually naked, blind and wretched. This would be a church that could afford anything they wanted to spice up church gatherings that otherwise had no meaning. Their testimony before the throne was as unpalatable as their famous water running in open sluices from the hot springs. It arrived in their homes having cooled too much for bathing, but not yet cold enough to refresh in drinking. Wealth and comfort were not inherently sinful, but this church was not what Christ built on earth in the souls of men. This church was built by those hardly changed by the transforming power of the Spirit. They could afford criers to share the gospel for them, musicians to worship for them, refined and educated speakers to teach them and builders to make a beautiful and comfortable facility. Our Lord was outside trying to come in and change their lives, but they saw no reason for it. Thus, they could hardly expect to join Him when this world passed away.

Revelation 4

Who’s in charge? This is the ultimate question John answers in Chapter 4. It is not enough simply to note in passing that Jehovah is Creator and Lord. We stand in dire need of recognizing the full impact of what that means; we need it often.

Only a fool would see in this description by John as anything to be taken literally. Literalism requires intellectual dishonesty, a rejection of truth. Far too often in Scripture, we are warned no man can see God and live. Fallen flesh must flee His

wrath, as He is the very definition of holiness. We are warned quite pointedly in other that places things in Heaven, the place of Ultimate Reality, can only be symbolized here on earth. The best we can hope for is characterization in terms of what it demands of us. Questions of its nature or behavior, its being or doing, are irrelevant. John describes his vision of God Almighty in terms of his own context, a context that is not so hard to understand if we but choose to grasp it.

John provides a certain amount of context by telling us we are about to see something of Ultimate Reality; he is indicating what Heaven demands of us. Not mere information, every element of this description aims to conjure a response in terms of full commitment. A symbolic door is opened and he is commanded to come up and see. To prevent dying, he is allowed to enter a different mode of experience, a high degree of separation from his flesh; he is “in the Spirit.” We know immediately that what follows cannot be a vision of human eyes, but a statement of impact on the soul from perception with spiritual eyes. The central basic assumption is that Jehovah is God, that there is no other and He is most certainly actively involved in His Creation. John makes a claim on behalf of God regarding ultimate authority in terms of the ancient Hebrew revelations. Modern readers tend to make too much of the conveyance and miss the message it brings.

As surely as God is the Master of the whole universe, we know all other claims to authority depend on His. Any presumed authority must acknowledge His claim, or forfeit any respect from His servants. Indeed, all earthly allegiance by Christians is conditional and cynical. We seem to understand the concept of individual accountability these days, but generally miss the full context of why this element exists in the Kingdom. We inject the modern concept of “human rights,” something alien to the context of God’s revelation regarding human government. The terminology of rights itself is dangerous. We assume “the consent of the governed” is somehow a reflection of biblical teaching, which is patently false. It is absent from the whole of revelation; rather, the Bible assumes all living things are under the absolute authority of God. Thus, they are subject in varying degrees to the authority of human rulers. The man-centered assumption behind attempts to hold civil government accountable to people is shaking a fist in the face of Almighty God, never mind that governments also shake their fist in God’s face. Governments are accountable to God’s Laws as He revealed them, not to some imaginary objective standard arrived at by human reason. When they reject that accountability, He still uses them like a meat company uses cows.

God rules. What we experience on earth is not reality, but one big lie fully encompassed within the Fall. There is no excuse for His children getting wrapped up in human events. Godly political theory was established with the Covenant of Noah, modeled in the Covenant of Moses and has not changed through all the great human effort to design something better. To the degree we even attempt to analyze it academically, we must build from the assumptions of ancient tribal social structure and Eastern feudalism. You cannot possibly obey God without that basis; it is fundamental to the original concept of church organization, too. Yet, God remains the ultimate enforcer of His Laws in this world. Nothing in His Word justifies our attempts to force the hands of any human ruler; our operating assumption is that such things are God’s concern, not ours. We know the truth

and walk in it, and that truth rejects the human impulse to fix something God says is permanently broken. The range of opportunity to act in witness of His truth is far different from modern Western assumptions, because the West fundamentally rejects God's revelation as the starting point.

We have a command from God to put His Laws above those of any human government. We take for granted that such allegiance will inevitably lead to conflict with human governments. Your property, safety and life will most certainly remain subject to human governments, which are in substance nothing more than a claim to monopoly on force. As such, we know the proper place of human government in God's plan. Our holy cynicism expects no government to do what's right, but to nonetheless serve God's purpose. John knew it, as did all the Apostles. They would have considered our modern approach in political activism as arrogance against God.

What follows this chapter in John's Revelation is pointing the finger at sin. John and his flock most assuredly suffered at the hands of oppressive human government. By no means would John countenance a "just revolt," since there is no such thing in his world. In the brief lifetime of the Covenant of Moses, God could command a revolt against a godless ruler (1 Kings 11:29-39). The means of knowing His will on such things were established in Covenant Law. The Law of Moses ended at the Cross and God's dealings with humanity took a wholly different track. God is no longer directly sponsoring a home team, a human government in His name. That will never come again. John takes the eternal viewpoint typical of regenerate Jews who truly understood the teachings of Christ. The ancient Semitic assumptions, clarified against the revelation of God in Christ, are the biblical viewpoint. The substance of the Apocalypse is revealing to Christians what we can see from such a viewpoint regarding the nature of tribulation. Specifically, the bulk of John's Revelation is an explanation of what we should expect from human governments, and hints at how we should react, explained in the form of a symbolic narrative. This is the quintessential biblical teaching method of parables.

Ancient rulers sought to awe those visiting their courts. Typically, this would mean decorations of precious materials and other symbols of extravagance. The ultimate symbol of power was unconcern over things of commercial value. The ruler was a cut above common humans, operating on wholly different concerns and could treat as common what others regarded as precious. God need not decorate His throne and Himself; He is inherently rare and precious. Thus, He appears as jewels Himself. There is a central prominence in the rainbow, symbol of the Covenant of Noah. John renews the emphasis, portraying God as the Lord of that covenant. What follows is built on that declaration of the basis for God's dealings with human governments.

There are other prominent symbols. The "24 elders" clearly represent humans, as angels are never described this way elsewhere. The obvious meaning is that they represent the faithful (judged already: white robes and victors' crowns) from both the Old Testament (12 Tribes) and the New Testament (12 Apostles). Ancient rulers typically kept seven advisers in their presence at all times, a number

symbolizing something set apart as sacred. Unlike the stormy seas of human sin and tumult, before God's throne everything is placid and settled eternally, making that sea into glass. The Four Creatures represent nature, all that is noblest, strongest, wisest and swiftest. Nature does not hesitate to consistently witness to His glory. At their greatest clarity, these virtues focus attention on God's holiness and celebrate it accordingly.

Countless songs in every language have long taken up the two hymns of praise John records here, justly so. Music began as a form of worship. Anything eliciting our best artistic expression is precious to us. Whether the tune be simple and easy to hum, or complex beyond the ability of even elite performers, regardless of what instruments are included, we could hardly produce anything worthy of the One on the Throne. By extension, there is nothing we produce with our lives worthy of Him. Any price we might pay in devotion to Him is too little, and anything that lasts comes from His power in us. This is the ultimate message of John: All you experience in this Vale of Sorrow is really insignificant before the Throne of God. More to the point, all the human suffering, both the ordinary and extraordinary, in the daily life of His Servants is just background noise, mere circumstance. The loss of life itself is just a circumstance, much less any other thing we might hold in stewardship for Him.

From this basis, John proceeds to reveal how the Church must understand the tribulation that must surely follow.

Revelation 5

It is all too easy for us to lose sight of the context. We have seen the Lord of Glory, described to us in terms unmistakable to those familiar with the Bible and its symbolic frame of reference. We have noted that a central element of the revelation at hand is His Covenant of Noah, the divine Law regarding human government, because the symbol of that covenant figures prominently in the vision. From this, we would rightly assume that much of what follows connects to that covenant. The key to this Apocalypse is more than simply noting it is a revelation of Jesus Christ; it reveals what He wants us to know about our dealings with human governments, particularly in the persecutions we can expect from such institutions. This is the message to John's flock and to the Church at large throughout history.

Having seen the Creator of all things in His courts above, what does this require of us? What does He demand from those of us allowed to perceive the fullness of Who He is? This chapter is a tight continuation of the previous. The vision of Jehovah on His Throne in Heaven flows further, as John brings into focus what God Almighty holds in His right hand. From his exile at the hands of the Roman government, John is granted a vision into the Spirit Realm, a different plane than our mundane existence. What John sees are symbols of eternal truth, themselves invisible to human eyes, incomprehensible to the human mind, but revealed by God in a form His Holy Spirit brings to life in His children. This is moral truth, the essence of revelation, the character of our Creator insofar as we can receive it. For His children, he holds forth a revelation in His right hand. The right hand of

a ruler and judge is the hand of power and authority to deliver and enforce His judgment.

Hebrew symbolism allows objects to hold multiple identities. The scroll resembles a typical Roman legal document, because it is written on both sides. It also represents a last will and testament, the final act and explanation of what shall be the disposition of all that one has accumulated during the years of life. It is full moral and legal authority to act on behalf of the one who created the document. It can only be opened upon the death of the one who composes its contents. The authority to open it must be equal to that which made the seals. Thus, we see seven seals, a symbol of things sacred, of a divine nature. It must be opened by One who commands the Seven Spirits and no other.

As an officer of the Court, a mighty angel calls for anyone worthy, anyone possessing legal authority to break the seals. There is no one. At this, John wept bitterly. The obvious reason for his sorrow is that the His Church is denied the final instructions God has for her. Without proper authority, John must not pass on this revelation (Daniel 12:4, 8-9). He knew he was the last living apostle and this last portion of truth, the final key of clarity, would die with him.

Then one of the elders, one of the faithful servants of the Lord, tells John to restrain his tears. There is One worthy, after all. The elder uses unambiguous terms: The victorious Messiah, the One who has conquered all things, has come forward to open the scroll. This One is further described as the Final Passover Lamb, slain by the hands of sin, yet alive again by His own authority over Death. Horns represent power; seven makes it divine power. Eyes see clearly the truth of things; seven make a divine clarity of vision. Together, this represents His authority to send forth the Seven Spirits of Almighty God throughout all Creation. He stands before the High King, the Lawgiver and Judge of all things, as a faithful Son. Having been sent on a quest, a mission of testing and unspeakable sorrow, He brings to His Father the proof of victory. He has won the right to bask in the glow of His Father's approving gaze. He also shows Himself worthy to take the full vestment of divine authority and break the seals and open the Scroll.

In recognition of this, the Elders and Four Living Creatures offer Him the same praise as to the Father. He now holds the authority to receive and answer the prayers of all the saints – past, present and future – to grant understanding and instruction in the matter at hand. His Blood is the last and final offering for redemption, paying for all sins, for all time. There is now no meaning at all, no validity to national boundaries, to ethnic identity, nor any other category of human division. For those slow to understand, that includes the divide between Jew and Gentile. We who share in His Blood receive His power and authority to serve on the earth. God help us if we do not grasp this point: In His name, no authority on earth can demand anything contrary to His commands. It may well mean we join Him in death, but we cannot capitulate to any other authority. As souls He has saved, we recognize no other loyalty.

The chapter ends in a climax that won't let this rest. This is no single act of worship, but eternal worship without end. Indeed, this whole scene takes place outside of time and space constraints. It is truth eternal, from before Creation,

continuing after the End and unmistakably manifested in Creation during its brief span. This is Ultimate Reality, Truth that cannot be found by any level of human intelligence or talent. It is out of reach. We do not arrive at such an understanding; it is granted from Above, the only way anyone gets it here below. Once revealed, once granted from God, it is most certainly within reach and we are bound by its requirements. By His help, we apply this divine perspective to all we experience, letting revelation provide the necessary order and meaning to all other things.

We take our places with hearts and souls open, ready to receive the revelation of the Scroll.

Revelation 6

It becomes necessary at this point to comment on the structure of the following chapters of John's Revelation and some basic concepts. Please note that the Seven Seals, the Seven Trumpets and Seven Bowls are parallels. That is, rather than a sequence of different events, it offers a characterization of reality from the eternal viewpoint. Thus, the three sevens overlap a great deal in meaning and repeat some ideas. To the degree that there is a sequence, it is a logical one, not chronological. In a broad general sense, the three cycles all reflect God's judgment against sin. Judging sin means people on the earth will suffer, whether saved or lost. While He does to some degree distinguish between those who adhere to His moral character against those who are clueless about moral truth, the greater difference is in what suffering means to them. Reading between the lines of the Law Covenants allows us to see God's moral character and how He intends us to live after the Fall. Adhering to that ameliorates the effects of His wrath. John focusses on the nature of sin and judgment in these sequences.

Why would Christians desire to see suffering and judgment? This is hardly some spite for having been persecuted, since such suffering afflicts all equally. Rather, they ignore the suffering as they grasp the greater importance that wrath is His truth revealed. Regardless of what it costs our flesh, we should pray more than any thing else to see God's revelation. Such revelation cannot come without destruction of a fallen world. Sin has so deeply stained the universe, all Creation cries out for such a cataclysm (Romans 8:18-23) to end this big lie. That which sin has brought must be removed and it cannot be other than painful. Still, we rightly cry out for the justified suffering of sin's removal. Bear in mind: All that falls upon earth from the Judge of Creation falls equally on sinners and saints. The differentiation is in how these two different groups face that wrath.

So it is we cry, "Maranatha; come Lord Jesus!" All the while, we know it will mean immense suffering for all flesh. What John describes in the three sevens is a blessing on us. We don't wish to see the bulk of humanity descend into eternal punishment, but we did not choose for them to remain outside grace. Those who understand God's viewpoint on things look forward to the end of this world.

Further, we cry out for The End even knowing it will only get worse before it gets better. John makes it clear that, in these Last Days, Satan will be loosed to deceive the nations as he did in Eden. It will be the same kind of deception, but

on a different scale. The curse against him in the Garden was binding, which John describes in cryptic symbols, but that limitation will be somewhat lifted at the very End. We don't look forward to that, but to what follows it. Let us understand what we look forward to as John's vision continues.

The famous Four Horsemen echoes Zechariah's vision (Zechariah 6). These represent spirits that serve the purpose of God in judgment. They tend to appear together, as is easily shown in human history. John describes the symbols clearly. The white horse and rider is political domination, a celebration of eminence. This spirit is sent into the world to drive men to endless jockeying for power. It is altogether natural that such activity brings war, symbolized by the red horse and rider. When war's work is done, we typically expect social and economic collapse (calamity). War is the fastest means for transferring wealth from the many to the few. In this case, the prices symbolize a standard day's ration of food for one adult jumping to match the price of a whole day's labor – just barely surviving. The price of everything else no longer matters. With such turmoil, no one is surprised at widespread death from warfare itself, starvation, disease, and resurgent natural predators. It's all part of the same package and John's comment regarding a quarter of the population is actually typical in most wars.

The Altar of God in Heaven has already seen the sacrifice of His Son. Often in ancient religions, the altar would contain sacred ashes stored for future use. In this case, we see the souls of those who joined Christ on the Cross and became a sacrifice with Him. In the normal process of human political wrangling, oppression and widespread suffering, true believers are frequently targeted, as they can never give full allegiance to any earthly master. When these martyrs ask how much longer before the thing for which they died comes – the full revelation of God's judgment and full reign on earth – the answer indicates God's patience and purpose. The inclusive sacrifice of Christ's followers is not complete; the store of ashen souls is not yet large enough for the final ritual.

If the results of opening the sixth seal are taken literally, then several events in following chapters could not happen. Stars do not literally fall to earth; the phrase as used today symbolized the same thing in John's day. Throughout human history, having the visible luminary bodies move, darken, change colors, or fall down was a standard symbol of grave events on earth. John paints the image lavishly, adding that the whole thing rolled up and the earth disturbed, to boot. Sewing it up, John mentions seven classes of mankind, showing that no part of humanity can escape the judgment of the first four seals. Much as they strive to have peace, it will never happen. Peace among humans can only arise from peace with God, whom they cannot face with the consciousness of their sins. So, they beg the earth to bury them, but it could never do them any good. There is no place so far, no barrier so solid, that God cannot touch you.

Thus far, we have the first round revealing God's wrath.

Revelation 7

Readers should note many of these symbols appear in Daniel 7.

Jesus taught us to deny the flesh nature, to sacrifice it on His Cross. Paul warned that the flesh would hinder spiritual growth. Thus, we learn that the sufferings of this world are of no significance in the Kingdom. Pain, sorrow, loss of property and the loss of life itself are but circumstances in the Kingdom of Heaven. We are called to bear such losses with grace as the means freedom. However, there are times when it serves the Kingdom purpose to prosper us in the flesh, as well. However, we should hold worldly things lightly, never to be held by them. They are mere tools of service, not holy in themselves and certainly not our gods. John left us at the end of the last chapter with the question: “Who is able to stand?” The answer is Christ and those who are His. We are able to stand all the horrendous judgments of God’s wrath because it affects only the fallen fleshly nature, which hardly matters to us.

We now see a vision of the spirits of the Four Winds, holding back destruction until the Saints are marked as such. There is a number given, wholly symbolic in meaning. While the number 12 typically means the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, squaring it intensifies the concept: the thing in its totality. Multiples of ten symbolize that the source of souls is the whole of humanity. That the list of Tribes cannot be taken literally is noted in the absence of Dan – the premier symbol of idolatry and spiritual failure. The name of Ephraim, which tribe led the way in chaining the Northern Tribes to idolatry and rebellion, is replaced with Joseph. Levi is included, which had no inheritance in the Land of Canaan. At any rate, most of the literal Tribes were lost altogether. Rather, this is but a symbol of the New Testament Israel: the followers of Christ. This is not Replacement Theology because it’s not about people and their DNA; it’s about the mission and whoever takes their identity from a commitment of faith to that calling. This is not Israel the Nation, but Israel the Mission. The act of sealing them is to mark them as God’s special possession among humans. John makes it clear that in the midst of trials and tribulations, we dare not lose focus on what really matters. He is our God and we are His people. He knows our number and our names, individually and intimately. Nothing in Heaven and earth can change that.

The next vision is the same image from a different perspective. While the first offers a symbolic number announced from Heaven, the second is not numbered, nor is John able to estimate, nor could anyone else. God knows, but He’s not telling because it’s the wrong kind of question. We find this multitude celebrating their election, giving all glory and honor to their God. Heaven itself cannot help but join the celebration. When John is asked who they are, he has no answer. He is told these have passed through “the great tribulation.” Don’t get lost in making this some literal event; you would miss the critical point that God’s people will tribulate. Tribulation is inherent in serving God; it’s a critical identifying attribute. Just shedding the weakness of the flesh requires a mountain of grief, for only by passing through the fire of testing can we be refined. This massive multitude gains their purity and identity by having passed through such testing by faith. To the churches in Western Asia of that day, this reaffirms Rome’s persecution as the ultimate mark of God’s favor. While such attention would mean death, the ultimate sad end of all things for sinners, it is life and hope for Christians.

The Apocalypse gave hope and strength to believers under the Roman lash. John is telling them not to get wrapped up in this world and its sorrows, but to see their privileged status as those who dwell spiritually in the Courts of God. What they stand to lose here is no comparison with the unspeakable riches of eternal promises. This pulls the churches into a wholly otherworldly viewpoint. Yes, we weep at the loss because it hurts, but we dare not let such loss make us think Our God does not love us. Indeed, He loves us enough to break us from our reliance upon the things of this world for any comfort. We ought instead to be glad we are rid of such concerns. This is what John's Revelation meant to his flock. Any attempt to draw from this book a weight of concern about events on this earth does violence to the text.

How I sorrow that the Church has been enticed away from this truth, to become wrapped up in human concerns. Jesus didn't die on the Cross and rise from the grave to change this world, but to change some of us while in this world. Calling it "spiritual meat" and finding excitement in some pseudo-Gnostic secret meaning reflected in the news reports of today is idolatry. Indeed, the mainstream of evangelical faith is a prostitute to such petty political wrangling because it refuses to see that everything important is rooted in Heaven; all things on this side of Eternity are mere circumstance. He is risen – He resides in Heaven where our focus should be.

Revelation 8

We take a moment here at the beginning of this chapter to note again John's use of repeating cycles in this Apocalypse. The judgments of God against sin in the Seven Seals are repeated in the Seven Trumpets, but from a different perspective. We also notice how the sevens in both cases are broken into 4+2+1. The first four judgments are upon the earth; the number four symbolizes God's wrath. As we go along, John uses repeating cycles to emphasize the point. This cycle centers on trumpets, which were used in any number of ways to notify the people of something important happening: a marshaling of troops, the command to stand down from battle, a coronation or a call to assemble for worship.

At the beginning of the chapter, we see the standard Temple prayer service, but this time in the Real Temple in Heaven, of which the earthly Temple was a shadowy image. In the daily prayer service, the worshipers gathered in the Temple courts. They await in silence for the completion of the ritual, but this one is a bit longer than usual – a half-hour. The trumpets are passed to the Seven Spirits, as they prepare to signal the great events in God's judgment. Rather than the standard silver censor, the angel brings forth the golden censor of the Day of Atonement. The High Priest normally would take fire from the Altar of Burnt Offering (covered in bronze) and put some into that golden censor, and then receive incense from another priest. The censor hung from long chains, making it possible to handle it when hot. He would swing the censor by the chains to kindle the fire under the incense as he strode in before the Altar of Incense (covered in gold), upon which he poured it out. We note the angel does not bring the prayers, but the smoke of incense that signals such prayers, which rises alongside the smoke.

These were prayers for God to reveal His wrath against sin. As noted before, we rightly pray, “Maranatha!” The meaning of “Come Lord Jesus” includes His coming in judgment against sin. While it may affect us, too, we discount our losses in this world for the pressing necessity of bringing about full redemption of Creation. Thus, such prayers bring about the angel scooping coals from the Altar of Sacrifice a second time and tossing it to the earth. The fire of God’s wrath has been kindled; we hear a tumult of voices, thunder, lightning and earthquakes warning all mankind. It is no accident these resemble the Plagues on Egypt, but they are not meant so literally.

The first trumpet brings a fiery hail with blood. Blood spilled on the ground is defiling, in this case destroying trees (rulers) and grass (peasants). We note here that “a third” in Jewish culture represents a very large amount, but something less than a majority. With the second trumpet, John recalls what was for him the recent explosion of Mount Vesuvius, just a decade or so before – a flaming mountain thrown into the sea. Mountains were a symbol for kingdoms and this one represents all human government coming apart in cataclysm. As usual, the sea means the mass of humanity and a great number died – “o;turned to blood.” Even those who preyed on them (sea creatures) and traded in human souls (ships) were destroyed. The very source of humanity (streams flowing to the sea) was stricken by a falling star called “Wormwood” – a bitter poison that killed slowly and painfully. Piling it on, John relates yet another symbol of dramatic change in the world order: destructive portents in the sky. We often see rulers, both earthly and spiritual, stylized as heavenly luminaries, and many of these are destroyed.

In short, John has shown us God intends to set the politics of the world ablaze with instability. Gone are the days when an empire or nation could stand for centuries. Again, we see echoes of Daniel 2 and 7, where ancient kingdoms were glorious after their fashion, but not so with latter regimes and secular states during the Last Days – a term for the period of time between Christ’s Ascension and His Return. We note that the lifespan of most earthly governments has steadily shortened historically. Further, the likelihood of violent conflict within and between governments has grown. Thus, we see a clear fulfillment of John’s symbolic prophecies: Nations and states arise quickly, do hideous things and crumble violently. While John’s focus would have been Imperial Rome, it’s obvious this applies to every government built on the same dehumanizing principles, which is virtually every government since Rome. This will continue to worsen until it reaches a fever pitch just before His Return. How quickly Christians in every generation forget the ephemeral nature of human politics!

Meanwhile, a flying messenger warns us: We haven’t seen anything yet.

Revelation 9

We have seen how the wrath of God against sin revealed in the Seven Seals is paralleled in the Seven Trumpets. Thus, the first four seals were about conquest and war; the first four trumpets were about political instability. Do we get the feeling John teaches that we as believers should never trust human government?

There's a concrete reason, as we shall see. The Fifth Seal was a revelation of God's saints; the Fifth Trumpet is a revelation of those who are not saints.

The falling star echoes Isaiah 14:12 and Luke 10:18. Neither mentions a discrete event on some specific date, but a reference to Satan's place in the grand scheme of things. Satan was cast down to the earth as a signal part of his punishment for rejecting his role in Heaven, forbidding him to come into God's presence in Heaven. That is, Satan is confined to this plane of existence, bound under the Laws of God that apply after the Fall. John sees him given authority to open the Abyss, the holding place of all demons until the Final Judgment. This is the same place the legion of demons begged to go, hoping to avoid a confrontation with Christ while inhabiting the soul of the man in Gadara. This represents in some way a greater restriction than simple confinement to human space, so you can imagine their eagerness to get out. Once opened, a foul cloud obscures the light of revelation. The smoky haze resolves into a massive cloud of locusts. These were no ordinary locusts; they had the power to torment. Unlike ordinary locusts, they do not eat every hint of greenery in sight. Rather, they go after those lacking the Seal of God. Whatever it is they do, it has no effect on those who bear the marks of Christ.

In that part of the world, few things were dreaded so much as a locust plague. Joel 2 provides a graphic description of the normal locusts plague as the army of God's judgment, likening their noise to horses drawing chariots. The image here makes no sense literally, except to project the idea of fearsome and unstoppable pests. Rather than marching relentlessly to devour, they attack and destroy the peace of mind for the Lost. They do not kill, only torment; they do not devour food, but devour time from souls. The span of time is roughly the entire life cycle of normal locusts, but also the standard season of warfare. If we step away from the gritty details, we see a broad symbol of fallen mankind increasingly blinded by the Lord of Darkness. This is the darkness that can be felt deep in the soul, a spiritual famine. It makes people suicidal, yet at the same time fearful of death that delivers them more fully to Satan, whose title here is "Destroyer."

But there's more. With the Sixth Trumpet, the authority of God's power, symbolized by the horns of the altar, calls for the release of the Four Winds. These are the same winds held back until the people of God were marked. We have just seen what happens to those not marked. The winds were held beyond the Euphrates, not a literal place, but the place beyond the boundaries of the familiar, far from home. It's the place from whence came every real threat to ancient Israel and Judah, the legendary land of every danger and deepest spiritual darkness and death. The Four Winds stir up this spiritual death, represented as a demon army so limitless John had to be told some fantastic number: 200 million.

If the Lost souls around us were merely spiritually dead, that would be bad enough. Worse, this world will increasingly come under the influence of evil spirits without number. This is a uniform force, drawing on lost souls to build up a massive, unitary world of unspeakable evil. Good old-fashioned hedonism and idolatry is almost harmless by comparison. This growing darkness turns all of

human existence into a spiritual black hole, sucking in the entire Creation. While no such force can stay God's divine election from pulling souls out of this gravity well, it is clear those who come away from it late will have much farther to go just understanding what has happened to them. John saw every element of human existence torn and twisted away from the Light so that virtually nothing in the minds of newly born souls can find a recognizable point of reference in the Kingdom. It's not just a new spiritual birth, but also an utterly alien existence. Today, we see countless souls apparently reborn, but unable to move beyond the doorway of Life. Their human souls are in shock at the vast array and depth of changes it brings. Such is the evil of Western Civilization with such a depth of materialism that even the concept of spiritual comes up short; the word means almost nothing compared to what it means in the Bible. This is what John sees in the Army of Darkness from across the Euphrates.

The vast gulf between Light and Darkness will widen greatly. Thus, it's actually no surprise that there is no repentance. Such would simply be inconceivable to those enslaved by this fearsome army. With so much in common, it's also no surprise that there is really very little preventing some dark purpose from binding all humanity under a single government. As the years, decades and centuries grind past, every generation is that much closer. Yes, it's clear there is room to see a final One World Government of evil in this vision without buying into the heresy of Dispensationalism.

Revelation 10

Let us review: John writes this book to reveal the nature of revelation. The only proper understanding of Ultimate Reality begins with revelation, what comes down into this false reality from that Ultimate Reality. We cannot know it intellectually, but we must absorb it in our hearts; we must surrender to total immersion of our selves beyond any hope of our control. The very thought processes must be washed, renovated and reorganized into a framework of truth and understanding from God's point of view. Human logic itself must bow the knee to revelation, bringing into our awareness the Light from above for reconciliation. John is almost militant in rejecting the Western rationalist frame of reference as the basis for understanding anything that matters. He demands a return to the parabolic style of teaching and symbolic logic Jesus used; any other approach to Revelation results in madness.

John sent to his flock a message of comfort and hope. God sees our sorrows; He knows intimately in His Son the mindless rejection of truth that brings oppression and persecution. Pain and suffering are inherent in this fallen world and they only increase as our awareness of sin grows. The presence of the Holy Spirit compels us to resist sin and this divides us from the mass of humanity. John reveals in mystical visions the fullness of what the Lamb has done after His Ascension to the Throne of Heaven. He writes here the very nature of sin, wrath and redemption – how things work during this age before the Return of Christ. While it all points to a final climax on the way to that Return, it is critical that we understand the pattern, the nature of things contained in these visions. Again, they are not fully grappled in the mind, but absorbed into the heart where the

Holy Spirit works above the conscious mind to change our natures into that of Christ. Modern writers of Christian faith would rightly follow John's example and struggle to bring disciples across the divide from modern Western materialism into the mystical world of ultimate truths, opening the spiritual eyes and provoking a contemplative, other-worldly mindset. This is the only hope for facing a world that hated Our Lord first and now hates us because of our allegiance to Him.

In the previous cycle of the Seals, we hit an interlude in chapter 7. Now we come to a similar pause leading up to the last of the Trumpets. We begin with the vision of a particularly high-ranking angel. There is no reason to presume this is Christ, but an archangel adorned with symbols fitting the occasion: the rainbow of Noahic Covenant, the cloudy garment of heavenly authority, and the legs of fire showing the holiness of God Almighty in contact with the earth. Whatever else this says, it reminds us God's authority is far above that of any human authority; He rules all rulers. The angel stands on land and sea to establish the authority of his message, which is universal to all living beings. The roaring voice cannot be ignored. Our attention is fully arrested; we are brought up short, as we would be if we had heard that of a lion. The echo from Heaven confirms the authority of the message he brings, but John is not permitted to reveal the content, only the fact. Some things are too holy for men to try reducing them to mere words. We are prepared to receive a revelation that is tied to God's dealings with human authority, an authority prescribed in the Covenant of Noah, as symbolized by the rainbow.

The archangel's manner of raising his hand before Heaven is rather like our modern military salute, rendering honor and indicating the source of authority yet again. Swearing by the Eternal One, we get but a short message: No more delay. The mystery of God would be fully discharged, complete at the Seventh Trumpet. We know Paul used the word "mystery" repeatedly in his letters. While there is some overlap in his usage and John's here, it hardly means in the Bible what the term indicates for us today. Something is a mystery in the biblical sense when it defies human logic. It is hidden, in that fallen minds cannot grasp it, but the elect are allowed to experience that mystery by the invasion of God Almighty into the human personality at spiritual rebirth. It's a mystery because it rises above logic and human language. There will come a time when this work of God is complete, finished and all those whom God has elected will be marked as such. Then follows the final revelation and time will be no more.

The archangel holds this mystery in his hand, represented by the little book. John echoes the experience of Ezekiel 2 and 3, where the prophet in exile was called to speak to his nation. God says His Word is sweet, and so it is. Ezekiel was to take that Word to a people who would have no excuse for rejecting the message because it would be in their own tongue, from a man who was one of their own. They rejected that message then, and later they rejected it finally in executing their Messiah. As Paul says in Romans 11, the mystery of truth is their rejection brings the Messiah directly to the rest of the world. Thus, John must take this sweet Word to "many peoples, nations, languages and kings." In this, John represents all of us.

However, John adds a unique element to the image, for after tasting the sweetness of God's truth, it brings bitterness to his stomach. Not to the point of regurgitation, but simple heartburn. Today we use that term as a symbol of being upset and rightly so. In the Hebrew mind, the belly was the seat of emotions and feelings. Fully absorbing the truth of God will turn your stomach upside down, and your world, too. Following Christ will magnify the common suffering of humanity, because it demands things that bring pain to the flesh. What we would like to forget is the old teachings of mortification – the flesh must die that the spirit may shine forth in truth. All our human hopes, dreams and plans are forfeited at the foot of the Cross. Serving the Kingdom will never come at your personal convenience; quite the contrary.

Thus, we come full circle, for the whole theme of John's Revelation is explaining why human governments inevitably turn to persecution of those who follow Christ. While human governments as a concept were ordained by God in the Covenant of Noah to restrain by the sword those destructive human lusts against each other, men have consistently refused to obey that covenant. Indeed, government itself rejects the covenant, so that sword will inevitably turn against Christians who do no harm. Fallen human government is granted what little it can grasp, for true justice and authority escapes fallen man. The world no longer tolerates the godly shepherd government of tribal elders, so what's left will never work as it could and should. Every human government inevitably claims the privileges of deity, placing them in league with Satan and bringing God's wrath. Thus, they come and go at His whim; like cattle they have no real clue. The whole mission of the Church is to carry this mystery of the Kingdom throughout the whole of humanity, knowing that it will cost us our human lives. To this precisely we have been called as the natural result of divine election. It ends only with our death, but in the wider sense, it ends when God says it is finished.

Revelation 11

As the interlude between the 6th and 7th trumpets continues, John presents us with a continuing vision of the Church Age, the Last Days between the Ascension of Christ and His Return. After his commission, John is presented with an image of what that commission will produce. Once again, in the parallel cycle of visions, we are presented the witness of the Church and the Word of God.

First, John is told to measure the Temple of God in Heaven using a measuring rod. Ezekiel is allowed to watch an angel do something similar in chapter 40 of his prophecy, but the vision of the Temple in Heaven for him was a future promise, not yet accessible. For John, it is a current reality. We are members of this real Temple, as he noted in 3:12. However, the outer court is not yet sealed. Thus, the Church remains subject to persecution, as symbolized by spiritual Gentiles (non-believers) trampling the earthly Temple for 3½ years.

That length of time is a long-standing symbol of tribulation, any period of tribulation regardless of actual span. Thus, whether it be counted in days (1260), months (42), or years (3.5), any period lasting 3½ years is symbolic of tough times, just the sort of thing John and his flock were facing. In this case, it turns

out to be some 2000 years, so far. It is during this same period the outer court of the Temple will see the spiritual Gentiles facing the Two Witnesses.

These two are easily recognized from Zechariah 4 as the Two Trees – Two Witnesses – symbolic of the offices of Zerubbabel and Joshua. The former was the royal heir to the throne of David, representing the civil law in Israel during Zechariah's ministry, appointed by the Persian Emperor. The latter was the High Priest, representing ritual law. The Two Witnesses are parallel with Jesus' teaching of the Two Laws, revere God (Ritual Law) and love your neighbor (Civil Law). In the New Testament Kingdom of Christ, the place of the civil law is taken by our commitment to God's high standard of justice among humans, to love our neighbors as ourselves, the standard which is required of civil governments under the Covenant of Noah. John pointedly reminds us of Noah's Covenant by frequent references to its symbol, the rainbow.

The old ritual law is replaced directly by faith in the Covenant of Christ, to love God with all our beings. Thus, during these Last Days, the witness of God's Law and Faith remain on the earth. They are unassailable, just as the old Law of Moses required two independent witnesses to establish a testimony in court. These unfailingly point to God's standards of righteousness, by which no man can stand without Christ. We see from Genesis 9 God made the natural order of seasons and so forth dependent on humanity keeping a civil order on the earth. Fail that requirement and natural processes become chaotic to match social chaos, as John notes with echoes of the Exodus Plagues.

There comes a time when that witness will be finished. In the previous cycle of Seals, this was mentioned as waiting for the final number of those to be sealed by God as His Own. Instead of the Four Winds let loose to destroy, here the final and most despicable of human governments – the last Beast – will rise from the Abyss and destroy any semblance of honoring either Justice or Faith. Thus, it will be a return to the conditions in the Days of Noah:

But the Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind had become great on the earth. Every inclination of the thoughts of their minds was only evil all the time. (Genesis 6:5)

The Two Witnesses will be denied burial, which is the ancient symbol of utter contempt. They will lie in the open in the symbolic places associated with evil governments. In Sodom, it was a sacred duty to their gods to commit the unnatural sex acts now named for that city. Such wanton lust is a particular form of idolatry in spiritual terms. Egypt was the epitome of pagan magic, where even at their kindest, the pharaohs were racist and arrogant, holding themselves as gods. Together, they symbolized all the worst in human government, which naturally results in the ultimate injustice of all time – the Crucifixion of Christ. Here, John reveals the root nature of human government, a tendency that climaxes in the final One World Government.

All of fallen humanity will breathe a deep sigh of relief, no longer accountable on any level for discerning right from wrong. All that matters is desire. For a brief season, things will be very hard on any Christians left alive. The symbolic

shortening of the 3½ years to 3½ days indicates a higher intensity, too. Still, it is notably short-lived, for no sooner does the world begin to celebrate this new freedom, but the Lord resurrects these Two Witnesses. We can surely read this as the Lord symbolically reasserting His rule in some way just before He withdraws them into Heaven. Immediately comes the beginning of The End, as noted by an earthquake. Of all the events in that part of the world, nothing made men feel smaller and more utterly helpless than earthquakes, against which there was no conceivable defense. We note the disaster kills immediately the same number of people God told Elijah He had reserved as His Righteous Remnant, a symbolic reversal.

That the rest suddenly began to acknowledge the God they had persistently denied comes far too late. The Seventh Trumpet sounds the last Great Judgment. However, we are spared that vision on earth during this cycle. Instead, the focus turns directly to the response in Heaven. We know only that there is a declaration in Heaven that Christ will personally take over as Lord of all governments. Eternity begins. The response is a hymn so grand no music can do it justice.

Then the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies, is opened in the Temple in Heaven. The Ark of the Covenant is exposed for all to see. Among the obvious symbols offered here is the final and ultimate revelation of God Almighty in all Creation. It is moments from being remade, as the elements of the Universe begin crumbling at the presence of her Creator, with lightening, voices, thunder, earthquakes and hail. We are about to see the final unveiling of God.

Revelation 12

With the destruction of the City of Man in the last chapter, John now begins a whole new vision. Here we take a moment to examine the major players, the primary roles from Heaven's point of view. Again, we do well to recall that a precise one-for-one reading of the symbols, as though they represent some discrete earthly entity, is foreign to the Hebrew mindset from which the Bible was written. These are conceptual roles, not necessarily identified persons or entities.

The Woman is clearly Israel. Not the earthly nation, this is Israel the Mission, as she should have been – the wife of Jehovah. As Eastern potentates often did, He chose her while still a child and groomed her for the role in ways not always pleasant. We know the real Nation of Israel was hardly faithful and seemed mostly unwilling to accept the requirements for her election. Thus, John does not paint her as the harlot she was, but as the chaste bride she should have been. We see in the image echoes of Joseph's dreams (Genesis 37:9-10).

Her primary function within her role as the Bride of God was to bring forth the royal heir, Christ. We see her on the verge of doing so. Opposing this event was the Great Dragon, obviously Satan. From here, we get the mythical assertion that his fall from Heaven brought with him a third of all the angels. Again, while the basic principle is true – those angels under his authority fell with him, becoming demons – the numerical portion is not meant literally. This is another “rabbinical third.” The point is that Lucifer began his existence as the Covering Cherub, the robe that God wore between His utter holiness and all Creation, to protect that

Creation (Ezekiel 28:11ff). He violated his commission and hijacked God's glory for himself. A part of the judgment against Lucifer was restricting him to human space. After bringing about the Fall, Satan's goal was to prevent redemption by having the Messiah killed before His time, as we recall from the Christmas accounts in the Gospels. Thus, John presents the image of him waiting to devour the Son at birth.

However, the Lord frustrated these plans. While the rejection by the Jews ultimately resulted in their destruction as a literal nation with the loss of their homeland, the conceptual Israel was not lost – the mission yet stood. She was preserved in the wilderness, the way God preserved His purpose in that literal nation by killing off the whiny generation in the Wilderness Wandering. Again, we note the time amounts to 3½ years – a period of tribulation. In a certain sense, the conceptual Bride of God is yet waiting to be brought forth at the final revelation, the redemption of all things when Christ returns.

It becomes rather obvious that this is not a chronology of events, but an abstraction of things that take place outside time and space. There was in a certain sense a war in heaven, with Lucifer attempting to retain his status after his rejection by God for sin. The conflict has echoes and implications throughout the History of Redemption as recorded in the Bible. Daniel's prophecy mentions this as a real-time event in chapters 10 and 12. All those under Lucifer's authority lost the fight and were condemned to the limits of human space.

We can participate in this victory over the Kingdom of Darkness. The loud voice in Heaven declares this accuser has no authority or credibility before the Throne of God. However, that victory comes at great cost: We must exchange clinging to this life for clinging to the heavenly Life. Our power over the false Accuser is in the Blood of the Lamb, the spiritual DNA from rebirth. This is the Word incarnated in our beings, expressed in our words and actions, in our allegiance first to the Kingdom of Heaven over any other kingdom. We must be willing to face all manner of suffering here as the price of that choice. These are the parameters of victory, the holy trinity of following Christ on earth.

This defeats Satan's claim on our souls, depriving him of total victory. In his prison here, Satan is determined to vent his wrath on all who share that confinement. Our flesh remains subject to this woe under the Curse of the Fall, even while our spirits are free and beyond his grasp. So, our Enemy sets about persecuting the Spiritual Israel, a phrase now meaning all true believers in Christ. To keep the conceptual Israel safe, the Lord has carried her away on eagle's wings (Exodus 19:4) to wait out the time of tribulation. Satan can touch our flesh, take our very lives, but he cannot change what we are. The spewing of water is a flood of false human religions, all the world offering everything except a genuine faith in God. As with the false priests in the Wilderness (Numbers 16), the earth devours them, because the ground upon which they pretend to stand cannot bear them to live.

Satan is left with little he can do. What lies within his power – those humans who remain fallen sinners – will be used against the tangible representations of the Kingdom of Heaven. Not simply the human flesh, nor the worldly possessions,

but the very act of human organization around our pursuit of the Word on this earth will face his wrath. Once our souls leave this flesh, we are utterly safe, as a part of the Bride of Christ. So long as we keep a foot in this Vale of Sorrow, we will suffer for that identity. Expect it; be surprised and fearful when it does not happen. Such suffering here is the identifying mark of His Servants.

For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, the message remains a call to that otherworldly perspective. We must see the world through the eyes of faith in order to understand what God is doing. For John's flock, this was clearly not a call to disregard their suffering on the human level, but to turn it on its head to become the mark of God's love.

Revelation 13

We continue examining the major figures in the Last Days – that period of time between Christ's Ascension and His Return. While it is abundantly clear John writes of things happening in his day, each would be an example of a type. That is, while The Beast is the Roman Empire, any government that operates with certain similarities to Rome is also an example of the Beast. Thus, while Nero was as much an example of the Antichrist as any man who ever lived, he was but one example. It is critical that we understand John was explaining the situation of his day in terms of eternal principles, as a means to facing ephemeral circumstances.

God had His Two Witnesses; Satan has his counterfeit pair. John opens this vision on the shore of Patmos and sees the indescribable beast rising from the sea. That is, he sees an evil government rising from the fallen human population of the world. While the seven heads are specifically identified in a later chapter, it is enough here to note how it is a blasphemous mockery of the sevens of holiness: the seven lights, the seven angels, the seven spirits, etc. The ten horns and crowns indicate a total dominance over the human race. We take a moment to observe that Rome set a precedent in human government, depersonalizing offices, procedures and citizens in a hideous and crushing dehumanization of all men. The law of contract displaced the law of covenants. This was a departure from the previous very personal rule of ancient governments among mankind. Thus, the Beast is described as utterly rapacious. It's no surprise to learn the Beast gains all this directly from Satan.

Among humans, to see something suffer a fatal blow, then recover, creates the image that thing is indestructible. This goes for governments, as well. For those languishing under the lash of oppression, this creates a sense of dread. For those who willingly serve such a power, it becomes the excuse for elevating their favorite Beast to godhead. It is common to hear such things as, "There's no other place I'd rather live. This is the mightiest nation on earth; no one can defeat us!" We know it certainly seemed that way in Imperial Rome, yet we have seen it throughout these Last Days. When such governments proceed to make official pronouncements claiming divinity, divine favor, or divinely ordained power and authority, their actions are those of total unaccountability. For this, Satan empowers them further, as this serves his purposes.

Without fail, such governments always turn against true believers. This is because those following Christ can never give the unconditional allegiance human governments demand. We always reserve our ultimate allegiance for Christ. Thus, every human government makes enemies of Christians, labeling them in various ways as enemies of the State. Because the State has seized the authority of the sword within the Covenant of Noah, this empowers it to dominate in this world, even as it speaks evil of the Kingdom of Heaven. But those who truly belong to Christ can never treat the State as God. John makes a solemn warning not to compromise on this. Further, he shows how any entity using earthly means of force will inevitably fall to such force. Thus, the Kingdom outlives all states and governments, even at the cost of property and life.

For every false god, there is a cultus, a religion to enforce the demanded reverence. John reveals in verse 11 a second beast rising from the earth. This is simply the reverse of the symbol of Satan's lying flood being swallowed up. These Satanic lies surface in one form or another all the time. In this picture, John describes yet another blasphemous mocking of Christ, the Lamb of God. However, this lamb speaks the exact same lies as Satan. John draws the dramatic image of a national civic cult, a religious devotion to the State. In John's day, this was the cult of emperor worship.

Since that time, it often reappears in various forms of cheer-leading and political enthusiasm. This is all a facade, though. While the Beast appears indestructible, it's a lie, as is the appearance that the Second Beast performs signs and wonders. These deceptions are enough to persuade people to build monuments to the State, or to men who represent the State, often at great cost of resources. These monuments become sacred. Should people dare to point out the tendency to hide the very real evil, they are charged with civil blasphemy and their lives are destroyed, figuratively if not literally. This civil cult becomes the means to enslaving all. Marks on the body serve much as tattoos on people in the Rome Empire, marks of ownership by some person or institution. The hand is the minimum mark, for it shows ownership by the State over all human activities. Marking the forehead is reserved for true devotees. Either way, every human necessity for life becomes subject to State control.

The number of the Beast – 666 – has occasioned any number of silly efforts to make it represent a concrete name. While it's possible to match various names with numerical values, according to any number of schemes, none of it matters. Remember, this is symbolic of all Beasts. Measure any man against the Kingdom and regardless of his human greatness, he will ever fall short. Things sacred are in sevens, and three sevens – 777 – is the trinity of holiness. Satan, the Beast and the Second Beast are the false trinity. Three sixes are a trinity of failure, of sin, of falling short of God's standards. It matters not the man's name. Whoever rules on a human throne can never reach God, can never please God, but is forever stained by the mark of the trinity of Darkness.

Revelation 14

The horror of human sin and its final consequences on the human race take on a different meaning from the viewpoint of Heaven. The previous two chapters gave us the drama of Satan fighting the Lord and the awful results on the earth. In this chapter, John shifts the viewpoint to Heaven and shows us what The End will be like.

First, we are treated to the beatific vision of Christ the King and His citizens. The number is symbolic for the whole of His people, those granted to Him by His sacrifice as the Lamb of God. In contrast to the previous passage with the Mark of the Beast, these have the Mark of God on their foreheads. Like the sound of God's approval at Jesus' baptism, John hears the sound of God's favor again. These citizens of the Kingdom sing a new song, a song of final redemption, which they alone can sing. The reference to virginity is contrasted with descriptions later in the chapter of the Harlot, merely symbolic of spiritual purity. They are the firstfruits of the human race, the spiritual harvest Jesus mentioned in places such as Matthew 9:35-38. Here, they have been cleansed and gathered to His flock.

Before the earth is renewed, some final measures must be taken to ensure God's justice. The Angel of the Gospel makes one last pass through the heavens to repeat the requirements of the Covenant of Creation: all Creation must acknowledge God as Creator. A second angel follows to announce the fall of the Harlot Church, here identified with Babylon. The third angelic herald gives the final warning regarding worship of the Beast. The wrath of God against sin recalls the Cup of Wrath Jesus faced in the Garden of Gethsemane. He tasted it for us, so we avoid it; not so for those who reject His Lordship.

John again takes a moment to encourage the saints suffering persecution. We know this judgment is coming; we have no idea when. In God's patience, we await the final revelation of God Almighty to all Creation, a revelation that must include His wrath on sin. John hears a voice from Heaven reminding him to write in no uncertain terms: In that Last Day we who serve Him are better off dead before it arrives. Thus, should the Beast take our lives, it is a good thing. This is confirmed by the Holy Spirit, who connects it clearly with those who devote themselves to living Christ on the earth, by relentless service and doing good.

Finally, the time of warnings is past; Jesus Christ returns. We see Him "coming in the clouds" as we are told repeatedly in the New Testament. He will come with His sickle to make the final harvest of His saints. An angel comes from the Presence of God and tells Him it is time to move, reminding us even the Son does not know that final hour, but only the Father. At that time, He will draw out all His redeemed ones left alive.

That done, the angels of the Harvest of Wrath will come for those who did not turn to Christ. We have here echoes of Jesus' parable of the Harvest (Matthew 13:24-20), itself an echo of Joel 3:9-13 where he speaks of final battle of man against God. Isaiah, too, warned it would be like this (63:1-3). God would save the Righteous Remnant and destroy all the rest of humanity in one fell swoop. While John does not mention here the symbolic Final Battle around Jerusalem, he

describes the consequences of it in gruesome imagery. The depth of blood would cover the entire length (some 200 miles) and breadth of Israel. We are reminded this is not to be taken literally, but is a symbol of what sin does in the human soul and to all humanity. Sin's price is beyond measuring.

For John's flock, all of this serves to reinforce the call to focus on the spiritual plane. For the lost, this life here below is all they have. The sheer tragedy of that truth is impossible to put in words. When all this is gone, they will find themselves suffering eternal torment even more impossible to put in words. The spiritual focus is denied them. For us, this life is an unspeakable gift of grace. We rejoice in living as a chance to share His love with others. We rejoice in dying so we may go to be with Him. That modern Western culture has lost touch with this otherworldly viewpoint is also tragic. Songs of longing for Heaven are songs John would sing.

Revelation 15

We have seen the cycle of judgments repeated twice so far in the Seven Seals and the Seven Trumpets. We note the second cycle increased the intensity. As we enter the third cycle of the Seven Bowls, the intensity increases yet again. This presents the rather obvious principle that Our Lord will up the ante as time rolls to its end. We have already seen how the Enemy will certainly intensify his efforts to prevent mankind from ever having a chance to hear or understand the revelation of God. Thus, there is a distinct element of crescendo in revelation and in the reality of spiritual conflict.

In this case, John refers to them distinctly as plagues, echoing the Ten Plagues of Exodus. Indeed, the bowls of wrath themselves individually echo parts of that experience. It should be obvious John relates the final work of God in Time to the finality of the Exodus. That is, in the Exodus was born the independent existence of the Nation of Israel, loaded with promises for the future. That future included not least the promise to Abraham that his children would be a blessing to all the earth. Their failure to become that blessing largely explains the work of Christ during His lifetime on earth. In Him, the Lord fulfills every unfinished work in Creation. During this time between His Ascension and His Return – these Last Days – He does that work through those who follow Christ. Just as the Ten Plagues on Egypt did not come from the hands of Israel, so the increasing wrath of God in these Last Days does not come from ours. Just as those plagues were frightening to Israel, the wrath of God against sin is frightening to us. Just as they climaxed in deliverance through total destruction of the enslaving power, so our final redemption comes through total destruction of sin's power here.

The destruction of sin's power will most certainly destroy this fallen Creation as we know it. While our Christian character does not lend itself to vindictive celebration at death and destruction, we must retain the knowledge that every natural and human tragedy serves to remind us that this world cannot remain if the Lord is to finally redeem all things. So it is in our personal lives; He cannot redeem us without first destroying everything He did not build. We do well to

willingly place on the altar not only our lives and possessions, but also all our hopes and dreams. Our old lives must be utterly destroyed.

This is painful enough, but as time wears on, for each new soul turning to Christ, it becomes more painful than for the previous. The grand powers of the Dragon, the Beast, the False Prophet and all who serve them have long and steadily drawn the human race as a whole farther and farther from the revelation of God. A large part of this effort has been to broaden the gap between typical human assumptions about reality and those of the Kingdom. For the very most ordinary human today who comes to Christ, the leap from flesh to faith has never been wider in human existence and the rift grows every day. Complicating this is Babylon, the Harlot Church, which ever lives to bring the exercise of the faith into compromise with the world. Human misery was never God's plan; He never intended that people should die. But we chose sin and sin is death. If we choose in Christ to face that death in this life, we step across that chasm of separation. Failure to go the whole way leaves you anchored in the old life. John warns his flock that there is no compromise, no place in mid-air to halt halfway across.

John begins this vision with seven angels prepared to carry out the Last Judgments of God on sin. This is a moment of celebration! Thus, the peaceful sea of humanity before God's throne is now aglow with the fire of His holiness. Standing on this is the host of the Redeemed, as they prepare to offer their praises to the Lord. Echoing Exodus again, John refers to this as the Song of Moses (Exodus 15). Added to that is the Song of the Lamb. Notice the focus of the praise in that last line: "All nations will come and worship before You, for Your just decisions have been revealed."

Where the standards of God's Law are revealed and upheld, no living heart can fail to rejoice. With this introduction, the Temple in Heaven opens its doors. The seven angels emerge, each dressed the same as the image Daniel had of Christ (Daniel 10:4ff). Their bowls are handed to them. At that moment, the presence of God filled the Temple as impenetrable smoke. We see this same image at the dedication of the Wilderness Tabernacle (Exodus 40:34-38), and again when Solomon dedicated the First Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8). His presence remains during the Seven Plagues. The implication is obvious: Until sin is completely removed, no one can come into God's presence.

Thus, the subtle message of John reminds his flock they must look often into the mirror of the soul in God's Word and see:

Examine me, and probe my thoughts! Test me and know my concerns! See if there is any idolatrous tendency in me, and lead me in the reliable ancient path. (Psalm 139:23-24).

Revelation 16

It cannot be said often enough in studying the Bible: Context is everything. The whole context is required – cultural, historical, linguistic and intellectual – as well as the adjacent text. The Book of Revelation is itself a context. In the past two chapters, we've seen a lot of condemnation on Babylon, the ancient city in

Genesis symbolizing idolatry and arrogance in human government. Further, it symbolizes moral compromise, often tied to the Harlot Church. The first Babylon used man-made religion as an excuse to enslave mankind. As we enter chapter 16, Babylon as a symbol is still front and center in much of what happens. The symbolic meaning rests in part on the prehistoric city of Nimrod and the later empire that conquered under Nebuchadnezzar.

The parallel between the Exodus and these last judgments is painfully obvious. Paul made it clear that the Exodus and Conquest were recorded as symbols for our spiritual journey (1 Corinthians 10:1-11) and it's no great leap for John to extend that parable to illustrate our departure from this plane of existence into Eternity. Thus, the last plagues on fallen humanity will be the gateway to a New Heaven and a New Earth. As God commanded Moses to execute the symbolic actions for each plague, so the voice from the Temple in Heaven commands the angels to dump their bowls of wrath.

The First Bowl mimics the sixth plague on Egypt (Exodus 9:8-12), generating painful sores on the flesh of those dwelling in spiritual Babylon who worship the Beast and have his mark. The Second Bowl recalls the first plague on Egypt (Exodus 7), as well as the Second Trumpet. All life is gone in the sea. The Third Bowl extends the plague to every source of water on the planet, an intensification of the Third Trumpet. The angel pouring that bowl rejoices and the altar carries the refrain, with phrases drawn from Deuteronomy 32:3-4 and Isaiah 49:25-26 to indicate how this is God matching the punishment to the crimes.

One thing upon which all life is dependent – the sun – is next turned against sinful mankind, as the Fourth Bowl vastly intensifies the energy output, scorching the earth. Yet, this dire suffering only intensifies the blasphemies of the fallen. This is quite the reverse of God's comforting words to His people seen earlier in 7:16. The Fifth Bowl brings upon the throne of the Beast, in the City of Babylon, that tangible darkness of Exodus 10:21-23 in the ninth plague. However, this darkness brings intense pain. This will also be insufficient to turn hearts in repentance to Him, just as with Pharaoh.

Thus far, the Bowl Judgments are difficult to relate to spiritual realities in reference to known Hebraic imagery. It seems to leave the whole earth as thoroughly devastated as the Exodus left Egypt. These first five bowls follow a rather logical sequence of an earth that becomes uninhabitable in a more literal sense: ubiquitous disease strikes the world, water becomes universally poisonous starting with the oceans and progressing to the sources, the sun becomes unstable and heats up, until the whole earth becomes unlivable. While there may well be a literal meaning to this doom, it is far more important to see this in the broad general sense of fulfilling the threat inherent in the Covenant of Noah. Should mankind allow government to fail its original purpose of keeping social order – promoting shalom – God would withdraw His hand from actively keeping natural order. Thus, as moral chaos rises, God provokes a matching chaos in His Creation and we must remind ourselves not to lose sight of this basic principle in John's writing here.

As Babylon symbolizes all of Satan's efforts to destroy God's witness on the earth, so Jerusalem was the symbol of His throne, and the Temple His presence. In that sense, Jesus called Himself the Temple. The one natural barrier between Babylon and Jerusalem was the Euphrates. In the Sixth Bowl, that river is evaporated. The "kings of the East" are a standard symbol of every pagan force against God's truth, though they were compelled to come and worship the baby Jesus. This time, the Trinity of Evil manifests itself as frog-like spirits issuing from the mouths of the Dragon, Beast and False Prophet. These perform false signs to rally all human governments for one last battle.

John pointedly quotes Jesus warning us we cannot predict this "day" as a recognizable single event in human space and time. Rather, we are reminded in Isaiah 41-46 how the drying of the Euphrates was a good thing, coming as a promise from God to remove the barrier to their Return and how drying the river flow under the walls of the imperial capital of Babylon allowed the conquering Medo-Persians to enter the city unopposed. In spiritual terms, this is not some fearsome battle, but a last pitiful outburst of the doomed Kingdom of Darkness. The forces against truth gather at Armageddon. The name is a Greek derivative of the Hebrew term Har-M'giddown, the Mountain of Assembly – Mount Zion. (There is no justification in Hebrew for making this out to mean any valley of any kind, much less the Valley of Meggido; see Zechariah 14.) The Armies of Darkness have always striven to fight the revelation of God wherever He appears throughout human history. Satan always fails, too.

With the Seventh Bowl, we first hear from God that all things are finished. The forces of fallen humanity gathered in anticipation of a great battle meet with war from the earth under their feet. There is no place to stand as the ground heaves like never before since Creation. Babylon is ripped apart and all the cities of humanity crumble into dust. The final recompense of resistance to God's revelation falls and that cup that Jesus drank in the Garden is passed to the Beast. Even as the ground quivers like gelatin under their feet, recalcitrant sinners receive from above, like the seventh plague of Egypt (Exodus 9:13-21), hailstones at some 88 pounds (40kg) each. Yet, all of this saw men's hearts hardened in blasphemy.

As always, a literal meaning would miss the point entirely. John is warning his flock that God is aware of the ways of Satan working amidst fallen humanity, building barriers to the gospel of Jesus Christ. No one denies there may be here a measure of literal description of the very last moments before Christ's Return, but we shouldn't make too much of that. Rather, it is vital for us to see that humanity as a whole is a tool of Satan turned against the followers of Jesus. These are dark visions of sorrow and hopelessness in the flesh, but behind it all is a glorious truth in the spiritual realm. Suffering on this earth for the sake of Christ is merely a sign of spiritual power and victory over the Fall. If you and I do not suffer the loss of property, comfort and life itself, we aren't much of a threat to Satan – he only fights where he sees a threat to his authority.

Revelation 17

Compare and contrast – these are the basic watchwords of the rest of this book. Here we are introduced to the Harlot, who takes the name of Babylon – she pretends to marry herself to human government. Recall here that the name of that ancient city is synonymous with all the attractions of civilized living and human unity by human power alone. There is an underlying theme in Hebrew culture in which, while admitting living in a city might be safer and is obviously more comfortable, a true Semite will remain in his tents, living simply and trusting God for protection and comfort. He is altogether willing to create his own tribal society if no one else will join him. The rustic and pastoral existence, with few of the distractions of urban ferment, is the noble moral ideal. The image of Babylon is the opposite of all that, and here represents human organized religion that defies the very meaning of true devotion to Christ, and aligned to secular government purposes.

John receives an invitation from one of the angels of the Seven Bowls. Keep your eye on this one, for it is he who provides a contrast later in the book. This time, the invitation is to meet the Harlot of Souls. She sits on “many waters.” While this conjures the image of old Babylon sitting astride the Euphrates, it also has the usual meaning of all humanity, whom she rules in one sense. The angel confirms this further by describing how the rulers and all mankind have used her, have been used by her and how she has intoxicated the whole human race with her luxury. This is not an indictment of commerce itself, but against the drive to excess of human convenience and self-indulgence, for it is this that rules the mass of humanity.

We note that John is carried away into the wilderness, the spiritual wilderness just as Israel wandered after the Exodus for forty years. It was the same wilderness where Jesus faced temptation and, unlike His native nation, won His victory there. Thus, while the Lady New Testament Israel is safely protected there, the Harlot is under doom. That’s because she is there astride the Beast, now described as a red dragon. Thus, organized religion seduces governments, drawing them by her fashionable dress and enticing ways. From her cup, she sips the vintage of “Everything has a Price.” Proudly she wears on her forehead the unique mark of the Temptress of Souls who knows no limits. Her special delight is the power to bring persecution upon true believers who dare to point out her immorality.

When John showed puzzlement at this image, the angel explained. This Beast has ruled in the past, but at this point is restrained by Christian witness. In due time, when the Lord is preparing to return, the Beast will arise as never before, but will rule only briefly. The sinners of the world will be amazed by the return of the Beast. The angel further explains that the current City of Rome represents a manifestation of the Beast – the City on Seven Hills (see note below). The Harlot of Souls became a dominant figure in the Roman Empire shortly after John’s time, but in her many disguises had often dominated other human governments in times past. Yet, in another sense, the seven heads are seven symbolic rulers. However if it is we wish to count empires of the ancient past, the angel says there

were five. Rome is one at that time and one final manifestation will come at The End, an end that will come quickly.

The role of the Beast itself, representing the longing of mankind to dominate each other, is a problem of its own – “an eighth king and yet is one of the seven.” As we saw before, the ten horns and crowns represent the trends of human government across the sweep of human history; the Covenant of Noah figures large here. They are portrayed as the final global government of the earth, a union of all human political power behind a single ruling entity, the final manifestation of The Beast during his single hour of reign – symbolizing a very short time in divine terms.

The cause of that quick and sudden end will be the irresistible urge to attack genuine Christian faith. As soon as they have finally marshaled themselves for one last death stroke against that faith, it will be eclipsed by the Lord’s Return. Before all that, the angel warns: Even as she reaches the pinnacle of her control over humanity, the governments she seduced will devour the Harlot. Again, in case the reader is slow of heart and mind, let no one be fooled into worshiping the material manifestation of religion as the answer to all human ills; it’s just an aspect of the Harlot. She could as easily represent the near-religious fervent belief in the Free Market philosophy or other political notions that do not embrace Noah. These governments will embrace her in any form as the way to rob people of their humanity. They will use her enticements as means to enslaving all property and making people into mere property.

The chapter ends with the angel’s warnings about the tendency of human government to inevitably turn against truly moral faith, regardless how such governments start. Further, it is the nature of human government to betray everything it embraces and promotes to the citizens. In the end, every human government surrenders to the service of the Beast. The primary path to slavery is the insatiable human appetite for comfort, luxury, aimless entertainment and very excuses for pride. What seems to be such a fundamental human activity drifts so easily from improving survival into hedonism. It would be easy to confuse the objection to luxurious excess with primitivism, asceticism, and other silly notions. The difference is not in what one does, but the morality of motives and purpose: All Creation exists to glorify God.

John’s fascination is normal, with the symbiosis of desire and slavery, with the Harlot’s enticement braided with the Beast’s coercion and with the fundamental fatal flaws of human nature after the Fall. When we first embrace the spiritual viewpoint and draw back from our own humanity to see what God sees, we are also stunned by the infinite sorrow. Only in Christ do we escape.

Note: While we correctly identify John’s description with Rome, it’s not for the reasons one might assume. There are scant few references to Rome as the phrase “City on Seven Hills” in John’s time; it’s a phrase that seems to have arisen in popular literature much later. While John was surely thinking about Rome in his time, the significance of the phrase is more about a profane imitation of holiness, mimicking the sacredness of the number seven, plus the pride symbolized by the image of a city set on a hilltop. In this case, Rome claimed a miraculous birth of sorts, which claim became an excuse for all sorts of evil.

Revelation 18

We saw in the last chapter how Babylon is identified with human lusts as expressed through the market place. Don't get lost here; Babylon is a consistent symbol taking on different meanings on different levels, with a common thread in the market for human souls. The first Babylon sold primitive astrology and human pride as the means to capturing the human race under one evil rule seeking to smother divine revelation. It aimed to replace the ineffable spiritual pull with something hedonistic and material. Here it is more specifically the market place of cosmopolitan religious ideas – choose your beliefs to fit your lifestyle. The real god here is Mammon (AKA Materialism), a guise for Satan. Babylon is always identified with the urban setting, cultural sophistication and highly specialized labor and goods. Not necessarily harmful in themselves, these things always leads to moral slavery. Instead of serving human need, humans serve the deity of commerce, where everything has a price and nothing else matters. This Harlot builds commerce through the marketing of every human desire, regardless how abominable, seeking to capture the church. This is a long way from the simple pastoral lifestyle of trust in God.

There is so much of this in our world today that it is hard to know where to begin. Even selecting the more egregious moral degradations leaves us with a very wide selection. The sex trade, from every angle, is an obvious element. The related pornography business is equally obvious, especially the various perversions that are so popular. Gambling, chemical substances, acts of violence and just about everything we call “entertainment” today falls under this heading. Most of these tend to be blatant in their appeal to human weakness. But we could say the same for the brisk trade in loans, speculations, most forms of stock and other securities, all of which lend themselves to a form of slavery. These pretend to be responsible professionals handling “your” wealth. Most mainstream religion treats these as degrading in one sense or another. However, John points out that the underlying theme is spiritual adultery, also known as idolatry. For each of these vices, along with many other commercial activities that typically avoid the label using some squeaky clean veneer, the underlying error is serving and worshiping something – anything – rather than God. How many churches are trapped in the false vision of building bigger and drawing larger crowds? How many seek huge budgets to buy stuff and great visual and sound systems? How about that vigorous search for staff with just the right talents, as opposed to developing staff from the folks God sends locally?

In a thousand ways, we all find something so important to us that we have to sacrifice some piece of our spirituality, some element of holiness, in order to keep that thing. Any element in our lives tying us to this fallen realm is inherently evil. It is less the activity itself and more the net result within our souls. Each of these idolatries is an expression of human appetite that can be righteously fulfilled, but mankind insists on flavoring it up by dodging the requirements God put forth so clearly in His Word. Babylon the Harlot feeds on human addiction and the misery of false guilt. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Beast (human government) teams up with her to feed on the power it gives. Frankly, both would be powerless

if no one was buying. But there is always a buyer and a seller, and these bear the Mark of the Beast.

Therefore, we hear the refrain already echoing across the text since we began this study: “Babylon is fallen, is fallen!” This is true in one sense from the very beginning, for it requires a fallen soul to be trapped by her seductions. Thus, the angel coming aglow from the presence of God Almighty announces yet again that Babylon has fallen. By no means are we surprised to see she is the haunt of evil beings, for thus has it ever been. The point made here: This is both her life and her doom. In the end, there will be nothing left, for she will consume all her customers. She is not content as symbiotic parasite, but must consume it all. Thus, we note she will crumble not merely under the hand of the rapine taxation of her beau, the Beast, as we saw in the previous chapter. She will fall eventually because the market in sin carries the seeds of its own destruction. Sated lust only grows a bigger appetite and at some point, there is nothing left offering a new thrill. In the end, the market for her flesh will collapse under its own weight.

Take a moment here to notice the gender characterizations. The worst of fallen masculinity is oppressive control and brutal power. It calls up fear in every form. The worst of fallen femininity is the siren song of provoking lust, seeking to control through the fleshly appetites for comfort. Wherever and whenever the merchant cult has taken control through materialism, feminine demonic power is always in the lead, a perversion of the nest-building instinct of motherhood. The quintessence of human failure is a man too self-absorbed and inhumane to serve as shepherd of souls, paired with a woman willing to take control and ride his back to gain power against her divine call to trust. She refuses to rest in God for provision of what she needs for her redemption through motherhood, but must have total control by any means necessary. In both images, love is totally absent. The gender imagery here is no accident.

The believers who carry the Mark of God are called to get away from Babylon; she is the perversion of good motherhood and good church fellowship. This call echoes down through the ages in the Old Testament. In Jeremiah 51, Babylon is the target of prophetic warnings. The prophet repeatedly calls God’s people to come out (vv. 6, 9, 45 & 50). It is echoed by Isaiah (48:20; 52:11), and similar sentiments are scattered throughout the prophets. The warning is clear not to give oneself over to such commerce, to become independent of the fallen economy of the world. Use it as a tool but don’t serve it. Not that we should cease all buying and selling, but to cease being enslaved by it. Of all people on this earth, Christians should be the first to resist advertising. Instead, we incorporate it into our church management.

The angel calls for a full cup of vengeance against the Harlot Church. We note that the merchants who depended on her for their livelihood will join the governments of the world, weeping from a safe distance as she is destroyed. At some point, all economic activity will suffer a catastrophic failure. As it reaches the peak of power, it will last but a short time even by human standards. All the luxuries of human existence will be forgotten and bare survival will be the order

of the day. This affects a worldly church as it does the rest of the world of human institutions.

John provides one last stark image to jolt his readers awake: “The blood of the saints and prophets was found in her, along with the blood of all those who had been killed on the earth” (v. 24). Allowing yourself to become wrapped up in worldly materialistic concerns will kill you, spiritually and literally. You cannot afford to ever come to the place you regard human commerce as essential to your religious life. If you can’t simply walk away from the provisions of the market place on short notice, you serve the Harlot – Babylon is your goddess. Christians must maintain but a light grip on all the things of this world. That includes how we do church.

Revelation 19

A scene opens with great rejoicing. The judgments have been declared, described from three different angles in the Seals, Trumpets and Bowls. There is a logical order to what follows. First, the Siren Song of the Harlot Babylon has been silenced. There is an antidote for false religion that enslaves humanity. How could we not rejoice in knowing her end will come?

The camera angle shifts again to Heaven. We see and hear an innumerable multitude rejoicing at the end of the Harlot. The constant refrain goes back at least as far as Moses: “Just and true are Your ways, O Lord!” From their heavenly perspective, they see the smoke of her immolation drifting upward endlessly as a burnt offering to God. Who could refrain from adding their own rejoicing? This is the point at which all in Heaven and on earth confess that He is Lord.

In the Ancient Near East, coronations typically combined with weddings. Even if he already had a queen, he married himself to the nation he ruled. Thus, the Eternal Wedding Feast begins. There is nothing left for the Bride to get ready. In contrast to the Harlot’s flashy, pornographic appeal to lust, the Bride is utterly pure, beauty personified. She is fully clothed in the righteousness God has granted His saints. The angel from those with the Bowls reminds John to note that the ultimate blessing, the most praiseworthy aspect of salvation, is partaking in that eternal feast. Further, the angel notes that there is nothing more important God could say, so he declares with finality that these words are the true message of God.

Recall that Jesus Himself warned His disciples not to get wrapped up in the powers of His Kingdom as manifested on earth in miracles. Such an obsession hearkens back to the black magic of those destroyed by the Flood, seeking to return to the authority of Adam before the Fall, but without the moral innocence. This is seeking Heaven in the lower realm, where Heaven can never be. Jesus instead called on His disciples to focus on leaving this world, to rejoice more that they belonged to Heaven (Luke 10:17-20). For far too long we have had teaching and preaching making much of what God does for us here and now; noticing that we will see Heaven becomes an afterthought. The greatest miracle of Heaven is not healing, deliverance from demons, nor even raising the dead; it is God including us in His redemption as an escape from this prison existence. The angel

pointedly emphasizes this otherworldly viewpoint as from God. He does it again in his response to John's effort to worship him; he disclaims any superiority in rank. The angel belongs to Heaven as a servant; John belongs to Heaven as a royal family member.

Whereas the first of the Four Horsemen was just an ordinary conqueror, a normally ambitious ruler of men, Jesus comes as the ultimate Ruler of All. In ancient times, the power to appoint a new legal name was reserved for rulers. Secondly, they would often give their servants a secret name, which served as a sort of password for sending urgent commands by some messenger; to hear a command addressed to that secret name proves it could come only from his Lord. Since there is no higher authority than Christ, He gave Himself a secret name. No war, famine and death follow in His wake. Instead, it was the uncounted multitude of reborn souls sharing in His conquest, all riding white mounts, clad in the righteousness only God could grant.

To further confirm His identity, we are told He has the Sword of Truth in His mouth (Hebrews 4:11-13), same as in the first chapter. To rule with iron was an unbreakable rule, as He is the final Executioner of God's wrath on sin. He destroyed sin on the Cross and will destroy all who cling to sin in the End. The final symbol is the title emblazoned on His clothing: "King of Kings, Lord of Lords."

Standing where he could not be ignored, an angel calls the carrion eaters to a feast about to begin, the flesh of all those who rejected Christ. The removal of the Harlot signals for man's last thrust at Heaven. At their finest moment, when all the forces of humanity are gathered, fearsomely united in one great army against God, it ends before they can attack. It's almost anti-climactic to note that the Beast and the Prophet are simply taken captive. No drama, no heart-wrenching scenes of unspeakable human effort. It's over. The two are tossed unceremoniously into the Lake of Fire.

All the rest of human rebellion dies simply by the Truth. The same Word that brought all things into being simply dismisses life from their bodies, and they fall. There is more than enough for every bird to be full. This, too, is part of the Wedding Feast. From the viewpoint of Heaven, all of this is a simply footnote. The greatest combined effort of all humanity is hardly worthy of notice before the Lord. Indeed, it results in death and destruction.

Just as Babylon is a parabolic image of evil, so the final battle at the Mountain of Assembly (Har-M'giddown) is symbolic. There may well be some final assemblage of humanity against a perceived base of Christian operations in this world, but it's more important to realize fallen mankind has always been united in one thing only: Opposition to the convicting power of God's Word. You and I know from experience sinners remain sensitive to the truth about their sin; we call it the guilt complex. For those of us who fully embrace the Spirit Realm by faith and renew our minds to focus on spiritual concerns, the Beast is already defanged. Upon this earth there will certainly come a day when that spiritual reality will be manifested in some final way. What that will be no man can envision.

Revelation 20

Our greatest struggle in grasping the message of John to the churches in his care was to understand it from his viewpoint, a viewpoint given completely to spiritual realities impossible to describe in normal human language. Thus, as with Jesus, John used parables. The Apocalypse is a collection of parables, formed into one long parable. Those with spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear will receive the message (Matthew 13). Everyone else will see and hear the ravings of a madman. It had nothing to do with secretive mutterings to exclude outsiders. Outsiders exclude themselves. Western materialist assumptions in particular are a fundamental barrier to understanding. Western readers would assume John used coded language to avoid Roman censors, out of fear for his life if he dared to write more literally. John didn't choose this literary method out of fear; he was ready to die at any moment for his faith. Rather, he chose this method simply as a return to the teachings of Jesus, Who is the central figure and sole reason for this writing. It wasn't about Rome, but about the blazing mystical truth and how Rome was merely a shadow of evil. Finally, John chose this form of communication because it's the one God has used since the Fall to reveal Himself and His purpose.

Israel had failed utterly in her calling. While the Covenant of Moses was for her alone, its underlying assumptions about human existence were a message meant for the whole world. We need only see the Book of Jonah to understand this. In Jonah's prophecy, Nineveh did not convert to Judaism, but embraced Jehovah as Creator and repented of their sins under the broader Covenant of Noah; that was enough. We find precious little evidence that Israel brought that message to the world very often. Instead, the nation under Talmudic leadership withdrew further unto itself, leaving the whole world in an even deeper darkness. It's no surprise that Jesus healed so very many and delivered them from demons. He was correcting Israel's failure. Satan had held the world enthralled to his lies and even God's People had deserted the true Old Testament faith. Things had very nearly returned to the spiritual nadir that had occasioned Noah's prophetic ministry.

Thus, at the beginning of this chapter, we step back a bit and review the history of Satan. We begin after the Cross, when an angel bearing the warrant for Satan's arrest chains and confines him in the Abyss. This is hardly a literal place, but symbolic of divine judgment for eternal beings in an eternal place, which the human mind cannot conceive. Prior to Calvary, Satan ran free among men and deceived all through various forms of heathen worship and idolatry. This power was broken, in that wherever the gospel message went, souls went free. While we can hardly grasp it, we understand somehow that, while the Spirit of God did indwell humans before Christ, it came at a much higher human cost upfront. The path to spiritual life was fraught with all kinds of delays and deceptions. The Day of Pentecost ushered in a new spiritual reality, in that the Spirit breathed life into dead human spirits prior to any huge individual investment in getting to know God's legacy of revelation. So instead of having to struggle for a spiritual awareness first, people were granted that awareness to guide them a deeper understanding afterward. John does his best to offer a parable of what this meant in terms of Satan being restrained from a previous power of deception.

It would be silly in the midst of a parabolic revelation to suddenly declare a literal meaning for the millennium (2 Peter 3:8). With insufficient space here to recount the entire debate, we note that the idea of a literal millennium oozed into Talmudic Judaism from the Zoroastrian faith of Persia. That Christian heretics then embraced it shortly after John published this message is hardly a surprise. As the last living Apostle to die, John foresaw a great falling away via heresies, rather like a dark cloud on the horizon. The symbolic meaning of a thousand years is well established in the Old Testament, as well as in previous chapters of this book – it stands for the entire period between Christ’s Ascension and His Return, these Last Days.

The meaning of “the first resurrection” is clearly established, as well, in the New Testament. It refers to spiritual rebirth, the death of the old self and new life in Christ (Galatians 2:20; John 11:26; Ephesians 2:1; etc.). Typical of spiritual logic, we gain this rebirth in preparation for a more literal manifestation at The End, a “second resurrection” (1 Corinthians 15:50-58). The principle of spiritual (parabolic) reality preceding fleshly (literal) reality is too obviously a fundamental concept in Christian teaching. It is the very nature of what Jesus did in the New Covenant. The Old Covenant required coming first through the Law Covenants on the physical plane before finding grace. At the Cross, Jesus reversed the order, allowing spiritual birth first, and then permitting the reborn to find the spiritual meaning of the Laws. Thus, John does not refer strictly to literal martyrs in the sense of Roman execution, but all “martyrs” who have died in Christ and become a living witness while still in the flesh. Having gained the first resurrection, they live forever, sharing His royal authority over all Creation. Still trapped in a physical body is merely a circumstance. A more literal rendition of these images would mean none of us goes to Heaven until Christ returns. John intends his flock to celebrate their status as those living in Christ whether here or there.

However, somewhere near the end of these Last Days, Satan will be loosed once again as before Christ. This is what precipitates the visions in previous chapters of the Beast, the Prophet, the Harlot and the Final Battle. As before, spiritual logic dictates we understand these as current spiritually reality, with numerous manifestations throughout time, until the final manifestation at The End. Just as the revelation of God came in bits and pieces and reached its climax in the Son (Hebrew 1:1-4), so we expect the revelation of the nature of Satan to reach its zenith at some point.

Rather than subtle workings through various agents in humanity, Satan will finally tip his hand and appear in person, insofar as such a thing could happen. Note that Gog and Magog come “from the four quarters of the earth” as a symbol of the whole human race, as we saw in chapter 16. Also as before, their gathering as a single army is symbolic of fallen man’s unity against the Truth. It also refers to one final effort to stamp out Christianity and Christians. In this image, John describes the fire of God’s cleansing holiness devouring the whole of sinful mankind. That holy fire takes on an eternal form as the Lake of Fire, where Satan follows his two greatest servants. This is, indeed, a symbolic depiction of horrific events at the End of Time. Our problem is the silly literalism that embellishes

John's sketchy image with all sorts of conflicting details that stretch it into absurdity.

In a related vision, John sees what happens to all mankind who missed the first resurrection. The White Throne of God as Judge of all Creation calls all sinners irresistibly; there is no place to hide. The only hiding previously possible was a matter of ignoring the truth. Every human stands before Him now in full awareness. In Heaven is recorded all the moments of each human life. However, all that really matters is the one record, the Lamb's Book of Life. This Book was known at least as far back as Moses, though not by that specific title (Exodus 32:30-34). By now we know it is not a literal scroll, not a tome of pages and ink, but an eternal record written on the heart of God. It is clear the Lord knows the names of all who are His (Luke 10:20). Because these last are not found in the Book of Life, they must be judged by what is found in the books of their sinful lives. Without the Blood of the Lamb, all human action is pointless from a spiritual viewpoint by virtue of operating under the Fall. It was never so much what they did but that they lived closed off from the moral awareness God wired into us at Creation. No one escapes this second resurrection, neither at the bottom of the sea, nor even in death and Hell. All of them find the "second death" in the Lake of Fire. Those who are listed in the Lamb's Book die only once, in the flesh.

Yet again, it becomes obvious John calls his flock to understand that the pain, misery and suffering of this life is natural to the fallen human condition. For so long as God leaves us here, we rejoice in His use of us. We remain stretched between Heaven and this awful place, longing for release to be with Him face to face. If we cling to this world in any way, or the things of this world, we show we do not understand Christ's teachings, or the Book of Revelation.

Revelation 21

How easily we lose our way, if we become distracted by efforts to make sense of these things from a human viewpoint. This chapter is filled with images from Old Testament promises, freshened and clarified by New Testament teachings. As it is throughout this Apocalypse, logical consistency as we think of it is hardly a consideration. Rather, let us lose ourselves in divine logic, a vision of God's promise, a promise that can only be hinted at, not fully told.

John begins with a New Heaven and Earth in the sense of "fresh," brought back to life as opposed to something brand new. Within the limits of human awareness, as far back as human memory can reach, the original always somehow fell short of God's glory. This New Heaven and Earth is not something hitherto unseen, but restored to original perfection as God had intended from the start. All traces of the Fall have been wiped away. This had been promised by the prophets (Isaiah 65:17, 66:22-23) and somewhat literally described by Peter (2 Peter 3:10-13).

The vision includes a fresh Holy City, Jerusalem of God. The meaning of this was clearly established by Paul (Galatians 4:26) and more fully developed by the writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 11:10, 16, 12:22, 13:14). The morality of living in the

wilderness was a reaction to knowing no city built by man would ever be clean and righteous. Only the city built by God could fulfill the hopes men have always had when building cities. Outside of Christ, living in the city simply exchanges one set of problems for another. In the New Jerusalem, people won't need to lock their doors.

In ancient Eastern kingdoms, a city was regarded as wed to her king. While details may vary, there was an assumption of affection and the ruler was to be warm and visible, not aloof. He would protect the residents, be able to heal their woes, would renew and repair broken infrastructure, provoking them to boast proudly of him to foreigners. John indicates all that this was ever supposed to mean finds its ultimate manifestation in our God. Indeed, John quotes Him directly, speaking from His throne to give it full force of Law: "Look! I am making all things new!" Our God is known for His renovation of all Creation. Then, to ensure it was recognized as a fundamental element of understanding Him, that it is an expression of His nature, God commanded John to be sure he recorded this.

God spoke further, but the word is impossible to translate simply. "It is done" falls short. This is a single word in Greek, based on the verb translated "to generate" – in this context, pointing to the source (God) and the state of completion by His command. It takes into account that this is a vision of things to come from our perspective, yet is the final end of the matter decreed in Eternity. He repeats the declaration of verse 8 from the first chapter and refers to Himself as the source of the Water of Life. Anyone who prevails over the powers of this world by His authority will stand before Him in Christ, as a natural born heir. We then are given a representative list of people excluded: timid, rejecting faith, disgusting, murderous, gigolo, sorcerer, heathen idolaters, and deceivers. The list is representative, of course. Their souls are unredeemed, destined for the Lake of Fire.

The same angel of the Seven Bowls who showed John the Harlot city (17:1) in the wilderness will, by contrast, take him up on a high mountain to see how God does it: The Bride of the Lamb. This was hardly built up over time by human effort, but descends in completed form from Heaven. Its beauty beyond description, John lapses into images of symmetry, precious stones, transparent materials and light. This place will be more secure than any city ever was on earth, with angels for guards. Each gate will be named for a Tribe of Israel, yet built on the priceless foundation of the Twelve Apostles.

The size of the city is not a matter of physical distance, but of symbolic numbers already well known: multiples of 12 as the Trinity combined with the number of mankind (3x4) to represent God's Kingdom among men, with multiples of 10 to represent the full range or totality of things. The transparency of materials signifies purity beyond imagination. We do not recognize the names of these stones with any precision, but they appear similar to those in Exodus 28:17-21, used on the High Priest's breastplate to bring the names of the Tribes before God. As they are here the foundation, they remain present eternally. The mention of pearls may be a reference to Jesus' warning about entrusting the revelation of

God to fools (Matthew 7:6). Thus, the pearly gates represent the Word as the means to enter the City as opposed to the Flaming Sword of Eden.

There will be nothing resembling a temple, because God and His people will be of one household, united in a fellowship that transcends human understanding. Unlike the withdrawal of God from the Nation in the Wilderness, we have the promise of God's literal presence. In Exodus 33 we see the Lord requiring Moses to move the tent of meeting outside the camp, because the Lord knew His holiness would destroy the people if His presence remained in the camp. In the New Jerusalem, we will participate in that holiness directly. Built of light itself and filled with the Presence of Eternal Light, no one will lack understanding – it will be the nature of our new existence to grasp it all intuitively. Our souls will offer no internal barriers to truth filling our entire being. There will be no glory separate from, as a mere reflection of, that Eternal Light. All who are left alive will have free access. Nothing out of place will ever come near the City, because the only ones living will be those listed in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Thus, we come to the realization that no language exists to describe something infinitely better than the best we have here. For example, how would we describe an existence not marked by the passage of time, or even the awareness of time? We cannot; yet we are told it will be so. John offers his flock a vision so vastly unlike their current precarious existence that it demands a different outlook on things.

Revelation 22

Who can forget strolling along the banks of watercourses? The gurgling brooks, washing creeks, and roaring rivers; no less beautiful might be the shaded streams flowing across flat meadows. People have made paths following water routes since ancient times. The comfort of water flowing nearby is highly valued. John opens this final chapter with a vision of the Water of Life flowing in abundance from the Throne of God. Who could resist?

Indeed, the main street of the City runs on either side of this River of Life. This is shaded by a galleria of Trees of Life. What was closed to humanity by the Fall in the Garden of Eden is now openly accessible to all who enter the City. The Garden now grows as a park in the Eternal City. Whatever need we might have, imagined or unimagined, is provided there. John reminds us that the curse of the Fall is broken completely there. There are no lights in the sky because the Lord implants His own Light of Truth into our very beings. All we lost is restored and more beside. The language of Genesis is loudly echoed here, but the story goes in reverse.

The final section opens with God's declaration that His Word is true. While that may seem obvious, John includes it here because there is no higher authority to affirm the Word than the Creator of all things. We find the Word of God is self-affirming. That is, upon hearing it in any form, the soul whom God touches will be quick to embrace. Such is our primary evidence for deciding to treat someone as a fellow servant of God – they are anxious to know what He requires. Any other response justifies dealing with that person as spiritually dead. John makes

the audacious claim that his Apocalypse is the Word of God, on a par with the prophecies of old. He writes it knowing that this will close the canon. Very shortly afterward, the need for this book will become immense, as various parts of it become present reality.

Then he quotes a warning from Jesus about His Return – the word is best understood not as shortness in time to come, but as “suddenly.” There will be no prior notice, no advance warning. The implication is a command to get started right away doing what the teaching of this book calls for, to take these eternal truths and apply them to our lives as actions. This means to immediately pull away from the Harlot, loose our grip on this world and turn to face New Jerusalem. Our inheritance is the otherworldly understanding of life in this world. Everything is just an opportunity to live out the truth of His Word until He calls us home.

Just to be sure we understand the lesson, John repeats the scene of falling down at the feet of the angel who has been escorting him through all these visions. Again, we are reminded that the angels, powerful and knowing they may be, are merely servants of God, applying their powers on our behalf. We are the purpose and focus of all this effort to reveal God. Unlike Daniel, John is commanded not to seal up these visions, but to publish them. Not in the sense of trying to make men change their behavior by any human means, but to reveal the Word by living it ourselves. It is not for us to compel men to obey, but to obey ourselves, lest we interfere with someone else who is obeying. Let the Covenant of Noah do its work until all things are fulfilled.

That fulfillment will come when all things are ripe. Jesus states it bluntly again: His appearance will be sudden and it will be too late to curry His favor then. He already knows the story, from beginning to end – indeed, He is the story, beginning to end. We who embrace that story will enjoy the City of Life. Indeed, our citizenship is already secure; everyone else is doomed. We dare not adopt any of their habits. Jesus speaks to identify Himself one last time as the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of every promise in the Old Testament, the fulfillment of all Israel was meant to be. Now He rules the New Israel, the Church.

Unlike the Covenant of Noah, which is enforced against the will of fallen men, the Covenant of Christ is an offer that can scarcely be described for richness and joy. “Come,” says He and so say we. Whoever is moved by a desire to participate will not be disappointed. John then closes with a warning not to take this book lightly. It’s not like some work of man, subject to editing and modifications. It stands on that eternal truth, the revelation of God. Change it and the message of invitation is harmed; so will your life be harmed.

The final seal on the book is the Word of Christ: “Surely I come suddenly.” Don’t rest in this world. Grace calls us to a higher plane.

Addendum: A Brief History of Dispensationalism

We won’t name names and define the vast jargon of various wild heresies regarding the End Times. Here we simply outline the story in general prophetic

terms. If you feel led to study this mess, here is the single most recognizable search term: Dispensationalism. With that, you'll have the most easily identified gateway to a vast land of religious stupidity. Dispensationalism is a fancy word for a heresy now already old. It refers to dividing human history into periods of time under distinct covenants or "dispensations" from God. It misreads all of Scripture by rejecting the Hebrew mystical viewpoint of God's revelation. Instead, it participates in the same fundamental error of Judaism and the Talmud by embracing Hellenism to produce a legalistic reading of Scripture.

So in order to explain the nature and magnitude of heresy in Dispensationalism, we need to establish the proper understanding of Scripture. Reading through the New Testament, we see where this false Hellenistic epistemology first destroyed Old Testament religion and became a primary point of conflict between Jesus and the Sanhedrin. While paying lip service to the idea of a Spirit Realm, Hellenism renders it meaningless by asserting we cannot refer to the concept of a separate eternity for any meaningful discussion of how men should live. This disembowels the reverence for God and His holiness, killing off the ancient assumption that man has a spirit that can connect with eternity and feed truth back down to the mind. This leaves humanity stuck with nothing higher than reason and intelligence as the means to evaluating sensory data. It also rips away the understanding that man is fallen, including a fallen mind and intellect. It makes a god of reason. Placing the mind on the throne of human choice is the fundamental nature of eating the Forbidden Fruit in Eden.

God showed the futility of trying to fix the problem from the human end. A part of the intent behind Moses' Covenant was offering the national failure of Israel as a kind of proof. As Lord of all things, God steered human events to bring about a particular intellectual background best suited for revelation. We are granted glimpses of His firm steering hand on history through the early chapters of Genesis. Right after mankind was driven out of Eden, men began seeking how to claw their way back into Paradise by any means possible. It ranged from the rise of science and technology to delving into the dark corners of black magic, even playing with demons. It became utterly untenable for mankind to have that sort of debasing freedom, as the whole world was quickly running directly into the mouth of Hell. There was no way to protect those few who had begun calling on the Lord in worship. So God killed off that first round of human failure and started over with Noah. The Covenant of Noah demanded that men stand up, as Adam had not in Eden, and govern their own households as good shepherds.

It is not important to understand all the historical details that man's mind so dearly loves. God clothes the facts in a narrative that gets down to the point of what He demands of us. To survive on earth with any hope of claiming what little good the Lord salvaged from the Fall, we must do things His way. We must seek ways to subject our fallen minds to a moral standard He revealed in the form of a framework of justice. The mystical approach is necessary, woven into the fabric of His revelation.

There was another failed attempt to ignore His revelation in the Tower of Babel. God had ordered Noah to spread out and build human communities that were

tribal and somewhat closed. Mankind decided to unite itself into one big tribe under a single chieftain who was a fearsome predator, not a loving shepherd. So the Lord enforced His original decree by making it impossible for humans to unite in communications. It's one thing to be at peace with your neighbors, but you cannot possibly obey God's revelation and cling to His moral imperatives if your communities aren't clannish in the sense of small and somewhat insular. This is fundamental to human nature at its best, contrary to what most of modern philosophies assert. No one has any business meddling in your daily affairs if they aren't related by blood or covenant.

Arising from this scattered and mixed multitude of isolated cultural backgrounds was Abraham, a fellow with an education perfectly fitting him for God's traumatic calling. Abraham left behind everything he valued as a human, took with him that deep mystical educational background and put it into practice as a nomad with little attachment to the comforts of this world. At the end of his life, his sons understood the world from a frame of reference well on the path to as near perfect as possible for fallen humanity. In order to prepare the land in which they were to build a better understanding of life here in this fallen world, they had to leave it while God did the preparatory work necessary. First, the worst of humanity needed one last chance to make things as bad as could be. In no human writing do we see anyone saying good things of these Canaanite people and their ways. When His chosen nation was large enough for His plans, God brought them back to take control of the land and slaughter the loathsome inhabitants. In the process, He made life in that foreign land of Egypt so unbearable for His people that they should have been eager to leave that temporary home. He even destroyed the entire collection of cults that had delved so deeply into black magic there in Egypt in the process. However, He made sure first that Moses finished his education by adding some final elements from Ancient Egyptian culture, the final touches on how He wanted His people to see their world.

But His people were not ready and He had to kill off a whole generation of them until another culture arose that reclaimed the odd mixture of high intellect and mystical detachment that characterized Abraham, their ancestor. With a bit of training, they were able to conquer like few primitive nations ever. They overcame numerical and technological superiority at every turn by their trust in moral purity, yet utterly failed every time they forgot it. They had all the advantages, since the Creator Himself wrote the whole story of revelation, editing out all the junk mythology that masked His ancient truth. Once they held the territory, they lost no time in devising any number of ways to forget their past purity. Over the course of centuries, these people best prepared to build a path to the gate of Heaven kept running off to Hell. Even when God found ways to punish His people, they kept finding in the punishment itself new ways to depart from the one path of truth.

At about the same time, Satan sensed his opportunity to create an intellectual driving force to destroy the ancient mystical assumptions held by virtually all of humanity. Bit by bit, each new wave of imperial conquest bore with it a cultural and intellectual conquest that pushed human minds farther and farther from the truth. Satan turned these forces directly against the people of God, enticing them

to leave the harsh nomadic life of simplicity, to embrace the urban delights of materialism. God's people bought it all.

Their ultimate failure was directly attacking His truth born in human form. Fundamental to their decision to attack God was a complete rejection of His written record of revelation. Clinging to the words and external trappings of His revelation, they tossed aside all the mental equipment necessary to use those words. They embraced Hellenism, adopting a broad mixture of intellectual assumptions that fundamentally excluded God from everything, even as they ran around waving His name over their hideous perversions. In essence, they replaced their God with their own intellects.

The grand story fizzled to a sad end. The one nation best equipped to understand God Almighty turned against Him. As if it were an experiment in a laboratory to prove His point, God showed how the ideal setting with the direct revelation of His truth would not offer mankind a path back to Eden. When they arrived before the Flaming Sword, they could not pass because nothing on this level of existence could prepare them for it. Having made that point, God then revealed why the best He could offer on that level was to give men a decent existence. That offer remains open to all humanity until Time is no more. Meanwhile, the only way back to Eden and what it represented had always been to face the Flaming Sword directly. So in Jesus He threw open a direct path to that Sword of Truth. Let men die in the flesh first while still living, then discover what it meant, what it demanded of them. He saw to it the legacy of His revelation was preserved through that failed nation as something to study after facing the Sword. Die first, then begin a new life working your way backward across the narrative of revelation, back to Eden's gateway.

This is what nailed Jesus to the Cross. Christ rose from the grave to prove He was right and they were wrong. His own people strove mightily to put Him back in the grave by murdering everyone who followed Him. The message of truth only spread farther for it. When physical violence proved pointless, they substituted a more subtle attack. Using the very same false epistemology that destroyed their own faith, Jews tried to pervert Christian teaching by emptying the gospel message of its mystical truth. Gentiles took up this Hellenistic attack under the guise of Gnosticism. The Jews drifted farther into Hellenism, and could scarcely remember their previous mystical ways. Most Gentiles in that part of the world never had a taste of Eastern mysticism, so Hellenism was something Gentiles had to actively reject. God handles spiritual birth, but actually following Christ was a very large undertaking against many enemies. Eventually Rome renewed the physical violence with a passion and efficiency Jews could not have imagined.

Christians had no friends in the world. Satan raised up a series of truly predatory intelligent men in the mold of the ancient Nimrod. Around 300 AD, one of them realized the powerful unity of otherworldly Christians, and how it might offer some political opportunities. So he made some show of embracing their faith as his official governing principle and suddenly Christian leaders were tempted with political power they had never imagined possible. It was too much for them, now

with three centuries of intellectual drift away from their Lord and Savior. John had seen this coming, though not in precise details.

When the leadership of church organizations had been fully compromised, pulled into political government directly, they began crushing those who clung to the old mystical spiritual understanding. Most of that mystical legacy was lost and for several centuries, only a precious few here and there carried the light. Those whose names we remember in history were not among them, for the most part. Rather, those famous people were only somewhat affected by those who bore the truth, a folk who remain essentially hidden from human records of that time. Sometime later, the Reformation brought us more politics in the name of genuine faith, bearing only a small measure of a very confused genuine commitment to Christ. Arising from this somewhat religious political movement was an effort to point out how the established religious hierarchy was even more wrong. Attacks on the office of the Pope ranged all over the intellectual and political map. Some of those attacks labeled him the Antichrist.

Efforts to defend the Pope's worldly authority also ranged all over the map. One of them was an attempt by an educated priest to write some fictional material published under a Jewish pen name. The idea was to undercut the popular Protestant teaching about the Pope as Antichrist. Up to this time, virtually no Christian scholar had ever taken literally any part of John's Revelation. Interpretations varied within a narrow group of symbolic approaches. This priest's book was later reworked by another much more fanciful reading of the Apocalypse in the process of translating it into another language.

Some long time later, a Protestant huckster name Darby found this second book and translated it into English. The timing was perfect for the ultimate deception. He began preaching the ideas he got from the book during a time of widespread emotional stirring over End Times by people whose understanding of Scripture was far removed from the first century Christians. It has been common through human history during times of political turmoil to attach religious meaning to their political aspirations. Such fervid imagination typically ends in a strain of arrogance about being God's very own special people. It's the same spiteful arrogance that kept Jonah from wanting any part of redemption for the Assyrians. It was the same arrogance that characterized Jews under Rome, who were spitefully arrogant toward all Gentiles and who killed the Lord Jesus. It should surprise no one that latter day Jews with political aspirations found this wild heresy useful enough to sponsor secretly some American crooked scoundrel with a talent for writing so he could put this awful heresy into his Bible study notes – C.I. Scofield. American church members took it all in as gospel.

Thus was born into American consciousness the wild notions of Dispensationalism. It smells just a little bit like the gospel, but is chiefly political in aim. It keeps the Talmudic Jews front and center as somehow having unfinished business with God. It points to the Cross while denying everything Jesus taught and did, turning it all on its head. The Judaizers win again. Today's Christian Zionism is destroying the gospel as few efforts of Satan have ever done so far. The jargon for the vast collection of beliefs about the End Times is

confusing and it serves no good purpose trying to study them. The various flavors all share the same godless purpose of ripping the heart out of John's Revelation by making it seem to say precisely opposite of what John had in mind.