

Revelation Bible Study #30

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 12:1-5

1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. **2** She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. **3** And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. **4** His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. **5** She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, **6** and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

Introduction

Having been told that he must again prophesy, St. John begins to do exactly that as a new vision begins. Unlike the previous apocalyptic cycles we have gone through, the seventh trumpet is not immediately followed by a *new* cycle of sevens. Instead, the Apostle sees mysterious personas and a kind of otherworldly “bestiary” which impacts cosmic history. From this point forward, it is difficult to interpret the creatures and persons in this section without speculation: nevertheless, we shall endeavor to keep our interpretations free from the “outside influence” of historical movements and persons which are not identified in Scripture.

The other interpretive perspectives on Revelation are not so bound. The historicist looks for where these words have been fulfilled in Heaven or on Earth; the preterist looks for a mostly-earthly fulfillment in the circumstances surrounding the first Jewish war; the futurist looks to *current* signs of potential future fulfillment regarding eschatology; the idealist tries to find the messages pertinent to all generations – but with the difficult task of avoiding *inserting* his own ideals into the text, which not all idealists do. Whenever the exegete is forced to speculate (as many passages forthcoming shall do), using outside historical circumstances or external perspectives creates a risk of making one's entire interpretive message a house of cards. For instance, in the late 20th century there was a stir among futurist communities regarding a “Beast” supercomputer in Brussels which many a believer held was the “666” entity in Revelation 13. The story went that this computer would be utilized by the antichrist to control humanity from Belgium's capitol; unfortunately for these interpreters, it turned out that the supercomputer was a fabrication made by a speculative novelist.¹ Thus by taking an exegetical risk, entire systems of interpretation had to be re-worked with this massive correction in mind! By binding ourselves to the text of Scripture alone, we stand on much firmer ground.

Vs.1-2

1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. **2** She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.

St. John records signs occurring in Heaven; he is not recording matters that he observes happening on Earth. However, note that they are not *Heavenly beings or realities* in Heaven. Unlike the

¹ <https://www.zdnet.com/article/it-myths-does-the-beast-of-brussels-know-everything-about-us/>

living creatures, the angels, the trumpets and seals and torches and Christ Himself, the woman and the dragon is portrayed as a sign – σημεῖον²³ – a visual miraculous authentication of a message God is giving, and potentially the message itself. In other words, the vision which St. John receives is directly shown to be symbolic. Previously, the Apostle watched heavenly realities have hard material effects on the physical world; now, earthly realities, circumstances and persons are represented in a kind of “stage play” in Heaven.

The vision takes on a dream-like quality, and thus consciously refers to dreams and visions mentioned in the Old Testament. The woman wearing the sun and a star-crown, standing upon the moon, is indicative of a connection to Israel. The Patriarch Joseph, given a prophetic gift, had a dream in which his father Jacob was the sun, his mother Rachel was the moon, and his eleven brothers were all stars – and all bowed to him.⁴ This was to indicate that he would be in a position of power by which his family would pay homage, fulfilled when he rose to power in Egypt. But in this passage, the celestial figures do not bow to the woman; they *adorn* her, identifying with her strongly enough that she forms a kind of representative relationship with them. Everything ancient Israel is, is found on her.

The imagery goes beyond a mere connection to Israel. The sun, moon and stars are an inheritance for the nations,⁵ so on the one hand they denote blessing. In fact, the stripping of the sun, moon and stars is a sign of wrath.⁶ But since their light and wondrous features were a temptation for ancient Israel, who in their times of apostasy frequently worshiped the celestial bodies.⁷ The woman then, being clothed with these entities, *is not stripped* of the blessing, as they are ever-present with her. In addition, since she wears them, she is given no reason to worship them. This is factored into finding her identity in the fifth verse.

Vs.3-4

3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

The ninth verse identifies the red dragon as satan. The visage presented demonstrates the meaning inherent to the word δράκων,⁸ which is related to the Greek term for *looking*. A dragon in this sense is something with a marvelous appearance, and it appears that the devil is taking pains to mock or appropriate things which belong to God alone. God appears on the throne with a reddish hue from His carnelian appearance,¹⁰ so the dragon has a similar color. The elders cast their crowns before God constantly, and Christ will be wearing many diadems upon His return,¹¹ so the dragon wears as many as he can. Finally, the seven torches of the Spirit are blasphemously copied as seven heads on the dragon; just as there are seven torches but one Holy Spirit, there are seven heads yet only one devil.

This also factors into the third of the stars being swept down. Various traditions identify the stars as angels, and claim that the devil recruited one third of the total number of angels in his war against God. After all, Abaddon is identified as both “star” and angel in the ninth chapter, and God cast him in order that he might accomplish the purposes for which he was sent. Thus a conclusion was

2 Transliterated “semeion,” Strong's #4592

3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4592.htm>

4 Genesis 37:5-8

5 Deuteronomy 4:19

6 Isaiah 12:9-13

7 Jeremiah 8:1-3

8 Transliterated “Drakon,” Strong's #1404

9 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1404.htm>

10 Revelation 4:3

11 Revelation 19:12

drawn that the devil “cast” these angels in a sense of recruiting them, or they were thrown out of heaven as punishment for joining him. Whether this interpretation is correct remains a mystery, since St. John has told us that he saw it all as a *sign*, something deliberately symbolic: we are not given specific interpretive metrics by which we could say that the thing signified by the stars being cast are actually angels in rebellion – though this certainly could be the case. Whether this framing of the events is true, the point of the clause is not to tell us how many angels rebelled against God; instead, the point is to expose that the devil attempts to do things that *only God* has the right to do, from wearing crowns to sending out servants.

The dragon seeks to devour the Child, whose rule he knows shall undo his own. In Eden, God foretold that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent,¹² and Isaiah prophesies concerning Leviathan (also called a dragon),¹³ that God shall slay him to establish peace and security for His people Israel.¹⁴¹⁵ While the devil knows that God will accomplish His purposes, it appears that he believes he can *delay* the inevitable in perpetuity if he only continues to persecute Christ and His Church as strongly as possible. The devil has not stopped for one instant since he began to attack the Divine. He had Christ killed, but this did not stop Him; he then persecuted the Church, but those who persecute the Church inevitably either stop or convert to Christianity themselves; since he cannot fully extinguish the Church and nor can he destroy Christ completely, he sends in subversive teachers to corrupt it from within.

Vs.5

5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

The woman gives birth to the Christ, whose “rod of iron” is mentioned in Psalm 2:9. In the letter to Thyatira Christ divulges that He will rule *through* His Saints.¹⁶ But before that is to happen, she is to be “nourished” - that is, kept in the God's care, for 1260 days. This is not a physical 1260 days, but being half of seven years suggests that the time period is symbolic of the Church era, from Pentecost to the Second Advent. Just as the deliverance of Christians takes on parallels with the Exodus throughout the seven trumpets, so too does the Israelite wandering through the wilderness finds its antitype in the Church's sojourn on earth before Christ returns.

This leads us to ask, who is the woman? At first appearance, we may be tempted to agree with the Catholic Church that she is the virgin Mary. After all, she is depicted as giving birth to Christ in this passage, something Mary most certainly did. However, this would produce difficulties in addressing the 1260 days as applying to her. The Scriptures do not countenance a 1260 day wilderness occlusion for Mary, though a Catholic exegete would speculate that this is in reference to Mary, Joseph and the Christ child sojourning in Egypt to hide from Herod.¹⁷ If that were the case, they would have to explain why our text has her in the wilderness *after* Christ's Ascension.

One may also note that the symbolism concerning the sun, moon and stars brings forth to mind the notion of ancient Israel, whose institution and choosing in the Old Testament was for the sake of producing and protecting the line of Christ. But before we say that ethnic Israel is represented by the woman, we must be careful to remember that the sun, moon and stars are *blessings* and an *inheritance*

12 Genesis 3:15

13 Isaiah uses the term תַּנִּין, “Tannin,” Strong's #8577, with a strong connotation of devourer found in Jeremiah 51:34 and Nehemiah 2:13. <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8577.htm>

14 That is, the Church.

15 Isaiah 27:1-5

16 Revelation 2:27

17 Matthew 2:13-15

which are not stripped from her; in light of the generations that perished in the wilderness of Sin, the Assyrian Captivity, and the Babylonian Exile; in addition to the countless numbers of Israelites that worshiped false gods or bowed to Jeroboam's golden calves, such lofty status could not apply to the vast majority of them. To interpret the woman as representing the ancient race is made more confusing by the fact that the larger portion of them *persecuted* the prophets,¹⁸ actively joining in the dragon's campaign to prevent the incarnation of the Messiah!

Excluding ethnic Israel then, we are left with Mary, but left unsatisfied. Indeed Mary does give birth to the Christ, but the inheritance and blessing of the celestial bodies do not belong to Mary alone, and nor is she the only individual who contributed to bringing Christ's incarnation to pass. She is the product of four thousand years of effort to protect the faithful line; first through the line of Seth, then the line of Shem, then the line of Abraham to Jacob to Judah, all the way down to the Davidic dynastic line.¹⁹ Every last one of the faithful in this long line of stewards of the promises of God stands to receive the promise of inheritance through faith in Christ. Thus true answer regarding the woman's identity is that of the Church, the *true* Israel, preceding, including, after and *through* Mary. Though St. John very well may have seen Mary's likeness wearing the laurel of stars on her head and standing on the moon, she *represents* all the faithful saints who came before Her as part of God's plan to send Christ to earth to save sinners.

18 Acts 7:51-53

19 Luke 3:23-38

Revelation Bible Study #31

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 12:7-12

7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

Introduction

When St. John began seeing signs in Heaven, two identifiable figures were introduced. First there is the woman, best understood to be the Church as represented by Mary. Second, there is the dragon, which represents the devil. Wearing the sun and stars while standing on the moon, the faithful receive blessing and inheritance from our Lord. The devil on the other hand attempts to *take* that which does not belong to him, namely in the appearance, authority, and actions which belong to God alone. The contrast is stark; the woman stands and trusts in our Lord, while the devil gathers diadems and glory *for himself*. Naturally then, the two will be found in opposition to one another, and after Christ's Ascension the arc of history becomes a recounting of persecution of the Church.

But before history takes that long turn, St. John receives further vision about how it got to such conditions. There was a conflict in Heaven which immediately precedes the Incarnation, and the devil was cast to earth. With an understanding that he is unable to stop what is coming, nor to accuse those who were soon to be redeemed by the Christ, he begins his campaign of wrathful persecution against Jesus even before He is born. When this fails, he turns his wrath on the Church (and mankind in general).

Vs.7-9

7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Exegetical Reminder

In the first verse of the twelfth chapter, St. John recounts that he is seeing *signs* in Heaven. Thus, we are not to take everything in this passage as having a literal correlation with spiritual entities. So we know that there was a *conflict* in the heavenly realm, but we do not know its nature, scope, length of time, or any other detail outside of what the Apostle writes. All we know is that there was a *conflict* between Michael, the devil, and each party's respective angelic hosts, which results in satan's loss and the events of the first six verses. The woman's flight to the wilderness for 1,260 days is

recapitulated (that is, shown again) in verse 12 on account of this. We are given no permission from Scripture to speculate on anything further, and must work with what we are given; that this war, including the victory of the saints with Christ against the devil, occurs *before* the Incarnation.

Michael

The first party in this conflict is identified as Michael the archangel. His name means “who is like God?”¹ He is spoken of elsewhere in Daniel and Jude,² where we learn that he is an angelic prince set over the children of Israel and has had conflicts with the devil in the past. He appears to have charge over more than just the Old Testament saints, since he prosecutes the war against the devil; but this does not permit us to assume that he has some “second-in-command” position in Heaven, or that since the New Covenant was established that he became the patron angel over the Church. He is simply shown here as having charge over a certain group of angels.

It is also worthwhile to note that Michael and his angels are apparently the *initiators* of the war in heaven. The text shows the devil and his angels *fighting back*, as though put in a defensive position. This is consistent with the reading of Ezekiel 28:12-19, in which the king of Tyre is compared with the devil. Of note in that passage is the fifteenth verse, in which the prophet writes “you were blameless in your ways, from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you.” The closest we could surmise as the cause of this celestial war, with Michael being the aggressor (and presumably ordered to act by God), is that it was begun the moment satan was found to have sin within his heart. Since God is Omniscient, He is not the one who found unrighteousness in satan: He already knew about it. It is more likely that Michael discovered wickedness in the devil, and obtained permission from God to wage war, whereas previously when fighting over the body of Moses he refused to step beyond his authority.³

When did this war happen?

Attempts have been made to connect this passage to the seventy-two disciples that Christ sent to preach and heal throughout Judea.⁴ When they return, they rejoice to let our Lord know that demons submit to them. Christ replies with:

“I saw satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in Heaven.”⁵

While at first glance this might appear to be the moment in which the devil was sent to earth, such a position does not remain coherent after further investigation. If the devil and his angels' fall in Revelation is connected to this moment from Luke's Gospel, then the reason for his fall would not be Michael and his angels' efforts, but the actions of disciples – who spent their time casting out demons that *were already on earth*. This would also negate the connection in the first six verses to Mary and the Incarnation, since it would presume that the dragon did not actually attempt to kill Christ when He was *en utero*.

Regarding the time in which this happened, it is more reasonable to assume that it happened before the Incarnation, perhaps close to its beginning. Given the devil's presence in the Throne Room at the first two chapters of Job and in the third chapter of Zhechariah, it is unlikely that the war occurred any earlier than the third century BC. When Christ tells the disciples that He saw the devil fall from

1 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4317.htm>

2 Daniel 10:10-14, 12:1,4, Jude vs.8-10

3 Jude vs.9

4 Luke 10:1-12

5 Luke 10:17-20

heaven like lightning, He was saying that it was on this basis of satan's fall that the disciples are given authority to trample on them. As the devil and his company had fallen already, Christ raises up the disciples as a new kind of army for dispelling them further in service to the proclamation of the Word.

Let us return once more to Ezekiel 28:15, which says “you were blameless in your ways, from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you.” One might object that the curse placed on the serpent in Genesis 3:15 *is* that moment, either prior to or after the war in Heaven, that he is barred from going up. But his appearances in Job and Zechariah refute such a notion. It is more likely that Ezekiel is using the prophetic perfect tense (that is, speaking of a future event with grammar suggesting it already happened) to tell us that the devil had not been completely barred from the celestial realm yet; in the book of Zechariah, written after Ezekiel, satan is shown accusing Joshua the high priest *in Heaven*, whereas St. John tells us that “there was no longer any place for them” in Heaven after the conflict. A consistent reading of the verse shows that the devil, at some point after the Exile but before the incarnation, was barred from ever entering the Throne Room again.

Vs.10-12

10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. **11** And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. **12** Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

The voice makes this proclamation at one of two moments. Either he proclaims it when the Incarnation occurs, since salvation is now guaranteed to be accomplished, or it is at the same time as the celebration of Christ's entrance into the Throne Room in the fifth chapter. When Christ approaches to open the seven seals, the twenty four elders proclaim that He is worthy, has made people to be a kingdom for Himself, and has brought salvation.⁶ Since the devil attempts to destroy Christ before His birth in the first few verse of the chapter, it is more likely that the Apostle hears this declaration at the start of the Incarnation. The praise offered may be understood to be saying “Now that satan is gone from heaven, we rejoice: this means that the incarnation is going to happen, and Christ shall accomplish salvation for mankind.”

Note the *soteriological* emphasis. The devil is shown to be an accuser of the brethren, constantly attacking men by assaulting them with guilt and (before his expulsion) acting as a kind of prosecutor in the Heavenly court to incur the wrath of God against sinners. He did the same in Zechariah's vision, accusing Joshua the high priest so as to have him destroyed.⁷ He is thrown out of Heaven, not *only* on account of his wickedness, but also as a gesture which asserts that he may no longer accuse humanity before God. The redemption of mankind, starting with the Incarnation and being completed with Christ's death and Resurrection, leaves him unable to lay a case before our Heavenly Father's feet.

The devil

Thus far we have highlighted the devil's penchant for appropriating Divine matters to himself. He wishes to *be* God but cannot, and so in lieu of being Divine he pretends as though he were wearing a costume. The unrighteousness found in him was apparently this very covetousness of the Godhead, as Isaiah writes in comparing him to the king of babylon:

⁶ Revelation 5:9--14

⁷ Zechariah 3:1-5

“You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”⁸

For Satan, it was not enough to merely be the prosecutor of mankind. At some point, he earnestly desired to be the ultimate judge of humanity. Being thrown out of Heaven for all time is the final answer to the devil's selfish desire for deification; his great rage is thus set against all the earth and mankind. Being so cast out means that the devil's days of “playing God” are numbered; so, if he cannot claim humanity as their judge, he works through endless deceit to lead men astray so as to bring them to damnation. Thus the proclamation rings out that he goes to earth “in great wrath,” for he has only a limited time to pretend he is the judge of all. He does not cease to be the one “who accuses them day and night before our God,” but he does so now from *earth* with the intent of ensuring that as many as possible are damned.

The Saints

St. John writes of the saints, that “they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” This statement is an interjection which highlights the role of the Church Militant – that is, Christians fulfilling the Great Commission – as the primary means of opposing the devil here on earth. Though there is a message of *fear* for all the earth on account of the devil's wrath, this clause is intended to strengthen the resolve of Christians everywhere. To remain in the faith, proclaim the Gospel, and to stay loyal to Christ even when faced with immanent martyrdom, *these* are the tools which dispel the devil's power and counter his persecutions.

The proclamation appears to flow better without the eleventh verse:

“Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

But when it is inserted in the sense of a parenthetical, the intent becomes clearer:

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

(And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.)

Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

It appears that St. John himself, writing under inspiration, includes this parenthesis to keep the reader from fear. The devil indeed has great wrath, and the world does right to be afraid. But the Body of Christ must not fear, first because the Apostle has written elsewhere that “perfect love casts out fear,”⁹ and second because we are not left powerless in our militant state. By bringing the Gospel out into the world, by God's help we make an end to the devil's angry flailing and end up conquering him.

⁸ Isaiah 14:13-14

⁹ 1 John 4:18

Revelation Bible Study #32

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 12:13-13:4

12:13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. **14** But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. **15** The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. **16** But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. **17** Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

13:1 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. **2** And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. **3** One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. **4** And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

Introduction

Much ink is spilled in preterist and historicist commentaries attempting to identify the beast which rises from the sea. Claims are made that it represents the Roman empire, that it represents a certain political power, or that it has connections to the Nero Redivivus myth. Certain heretics also have a penchant for claiming the Church (beginning with whichever doctrine they don't like) is this beast or the woman that rides the beast, and on and on it goes. As we exegete this text, we shall be paying *greater* attention to the preceding context which places significance on the beast from the sea in the first place. If one does *not*, then the identification of the beast makes little sense – or even worse, little significance.

St. John promises that whoever reads Revelation, hears it, and keeps what is written in it is blessed.¹ One must ask the question, in what sense is someone blessed if these realities, circumstances, and persons portrayed in the thirteenth chapter are mere historic accidents? If the beast from the sea is Rome, what good does this book do the believer today? Perhaps a preterist or historicist could claim that identification of the beast contextualizes history, but such a notion makes the book of Revelation bless us in the same way a history textbook does – in other words, it *demotes* the prophetic word to that of secular historiography. We shall do no such thing.

Vs.13-14

12:13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. **14** But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a

¹ Revelation 1:3

time.

These two verses are a recapitulation of the first six verses. For 1260 days (that is, three and a half years or “a time, times and half a time”) the woman – the Church – is to be in the wilderness, being nourished until such time as she is delivered from all who pursue her. This is to say that the New Covenant era, spanning from Christ's Ascension to His Second Advent, has this dynamic present with it continuously. During this time, it is not as though she is *entirely* safe, as the next verses will demonstrate, but she is there primarily for her protection. However, the wilderness is not merely a place of *safety*; since the Church is the true Israel,² then she too must go through the same preparatory process of the desert wanderings *ancient* Israel underwent.

The wings bestowed on the woman gives this passage a unique connection with the book of Zechariah,³ which features a woman being taken into the wilderness by means of flight. But in contrast, the woman from Zechariah's vision is not the Church residing in the wilderness, but a personification of wickedness which is brought to Shinar. The woman that is the Church is given *wings*, showing freedom and mobility; the woman called wickedness is shoved into a basket with a leaden lid. Zechariah wrote his vision as a means of helping the children of Judah who had come out of the Babylonian Exile to see that their former wickedness was to stay *over there*: it no longer belongs to them. By contrast, St. John sees a vision whereby the Church is placed under the discipline of the wilderness, not as an exilic punishment but as a means of keeping her pure and undefiled for our Lord. It is as though the Church is being told “You are not being punished by the wilderness as the Israelites were in Numbers. Nor are you being placed here as an exile like the children of Judah. This is a place of safety for your sanctification.”

Vs.15-17

15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. **16** But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. **17** Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

The devil pours water out in an attempt to drown the woman *by flood*. Though this is most likely symbolic language describing the torrent of persecution launched at Christians, that the devil is behind it demonstrates his penchant for playing God. Yet again, he is shown appropriating to himself actions and decorum which belong to God alone. In Genesis, God flooded the entire World in order to extinguish wickedness from the earth; here the devil produces a flood in an attempt to extinguish righteousness from the earth. Satan's murderous campaign is thwarted by the wilderness opening its “mouth” and swallowing the waters. This is an indication that the wilderness is not a place of *testing* for the Church, but a place of *perfecting*. The last time the earth opened its “mouth” and swallowed something was when the sons of Korah were killed in that very fashion;⁴ here, the earth does this as a means of protecting the Church. In other words, the Church is not being *punished* as the wilderness dynamic persists, but is rather being shielded.

The devil stands on the sea shore, so as to call something forward. He attempted to kill the woman clothed in the sun, that is the Church; he attempted to kill the Christ; he *further* attempted to destroy the woman; all of these efforts came and went to no avail. The beast which rises from the sea is then best understood as a pre-existent figure which the devil calls up and changes to *assist* in his efforts to extinguish the Body of Christ. It can be no other than the World, that second enemy of the Church,

² Romans 9:6, 1 Peter 2:9

³ Zechariah 5:5-11

⁴ Numbers 16

first established by the rebellion of Nimrod in Genesis 11, but now under the control of the devil.

Ch.13, Vs.1-2

13:1 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. **2** And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

The preceding verse make it clear that the devil cannot destroy the Church directly. He failed to stop Christ's Birth and failed to stop the Church from being placed in the wilderness for protection and sanctification. So, standing at the "sea" in St. John's vision, he apparently calls forth a creature which *bears resemblance to himself*. The devil is described as a dragon with seven heads and ten horns; so too does the beast. The devil has diadems which he wears, so too does the beast. Thus this beast's emergence is an appropriation of the creation of animals which were drawn from the waters and the creation of mankind, which was originally made in God's image.⁵ Christ promises to give new names to believers and for them to have His Name on them;⁶ for the members of the beast, blasphemous names are written on its heads. The authority promised to the saints is unjustly appropriated to the beast by the devil. Thus the devil mocks and appropriates things which God has done in the beginning (creating the animals and man), and that which God promises to do in the end (blessing believers).

It is true that the beast has some similarities with the beasts shown in Daniel 7, and many a commentor believes that this means the beast is the Roman Empire – Daniel's fourth beast. But in that chapter, the lion and bear and jaguar and monster are presented as four kingdoms, with the final one being the worst of them;⁷ in contrast, the beast which rises from the sea has traits of *all four* of Daniel's kingdom beasts. The implication is that it represents *all kingdoms*, or a Worldwide span of its power. It is not a single empire, but the World, which St. John has highlighted from the words of Christ Himself that it hates the Church.⁸

The World, or collective humanity seeking to appropriate divinity, began in earnest at Babel, during which construction mankind was united in a singular attempt at becoming independent from our Lord. God scattered the nations by confusing their languages, leading to the tower never being built. But as Christ warns in John 15, the inevitable hatred against Him and the Church comes from the world in a seemingly newly united front. At some point, satan took such control over it that he was able to provide nonbelieving humanity with that singular purpose – albeit not independence from God as Nimrod and others initially desired, but rather a hatred for and persecution of Christianity. When Christians were put to death by Romans, it was the World's doing, and unbeknownst to the World it was done on behalf of the devil. Yet this same thing is shown when the Japanese shogunate killed missionaries, when hindu extremists slaughtered believers, and when the ISIS terrorist group slit Coptic Christian's throats; they are all doing this in service to the devil through their being part of the World.

Ch.13, Vs.3-4

3 One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. **4** And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

There was a belief that the wounded head of the beast represents Nero, due to the "Nero Redivivus" urband legend that was going on around the same time that St. John wrote Revelation. If this were the interpretation, then the beast arising from the sea would be a Roman empire captured by a

⁵ Genesis 1:27

⁶ Revelation 2:17, 3:12

⁷ Daniel 7:23-27

⁸ John 15:18-27

resurrected emperor Nero, which would take over even more of the known world (including Persia) and thus begin to persecute believers. To which point we remind the reader why we denied this position in the second lesson in the study series:

Another problem is that the Nero Redivivus legend was popular enough to produce imposters, Nero lookalikes who attempted to capitalize on the phenomenon and raise up rebellions to take over Rome. One of them, Terentius Maximus, operated in Asia Minor, to which the book of Revelation was first distributed! Making matters worse, this occurred during the reign of Titus (79-81 A.D.).⁹ So if St. John was referring to Nero Redivivus, then two horrible consequences are to be found:

-An early date to Revelation's writing (ca.60's A.D.) would find the churches in Asia Minor afflicted with something of a false prophecy. The text says that the wounded head would cause people to marvel and follow the beast; he would be firmly entrenched in the political system represented by the figure. But the Nero imposters who rose up were all either killed or exiled after going public, with no one worshiping them. The seven churches receiving this book would necessarily see at least Terentius' execution and breathe a collective sigh as they made St. John out to be a false prophet.

-A late date to Revelation's composition (ca.96 A.D.) would make St. John look insane, if indeed he was writing about Nero Redivivus. He would be citing an urban legend that had fizzled out already after a number of failures. It would be a sign that the Apostle was getting his "inspiration" listening to various pagans talk about the rumor, then catastrophizing it into "Nero as Beast," and turned Nero into a wicked parody of Jesus. To interpret the passage as being about Nero, and then to assign a late date to the composition, is to make St. John out to be a fool, even to those seven churches that first received the book.

A *better* understanding of the wounded head is to recall Christ's prophecy in Matthew 24:23-24. "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." Christ's head was wounded when a crown of thorns was placed thereupon during His Passion; *false* christs, whether men pretending to be the Messiah or men constructing false christs out of their heresies, would necessarily share this characteristic. Here, St. John informs us that the fake Jesus figures arising from false teachers come from the very same source as those who are killing Christians: the World persecuting Christians in service to the devil.

9 Cassius Dio, Roman History, Epitome of Book LXVI.
https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/66*.html

Revelation Bible Study #33

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 13:5-10

5 And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. **6** It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. **7** Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, **8** and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. **9** If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

10 If anyone is to be taken captive,
to captivity he goes;
if anyone is to be slain with the sword,
with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

Introduction

The beast which rises from the sea has been identified, not as a single empire or people but the World – that is, collective humanity seeking divinity, the Christian's second enemy.¹ If it *were* a single entity like the Roman Empire (as historicists say) or a future persecutory kingdom (as futurists insist), then the entire sense of the text is changed, as well as how one would interpret it. For instance, we have identified the “forty-two months” as a catch-all term for the Church era, from Pentecost to the Second Advent. The historicist who thinks the beast is Rome must go into granular detail about how 1260 days is actually 1260 years or torture the number to make it terminate at the Edict of Milan or something similar. The futurist must look for whatever the most powerful “enemy” country is in the world and speculate on whether the groundwork is being laid for some new entity to arise. The preterist must demonstrate how this relates to his own reading of the Jewish war's timeline and whether Nero was truly returned in some fashion.

The typological view is not required to jump through these hoops. The Christian is blessed to know that *all* generations of believers will face persecution from the world,² because this means that he knows what to *expect*. The earthly life of a believer ought not have many surprises regarding the state of the world, the state of the Church, and the movements of history; this passage bolsters that blessing.

Vs.5-6

5 And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. **6** It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

The beast has a blasphemous “mouth” which is connected to the authority granted to it. This is to say, the authorities which persecute Christians will not do so without a stated reason. When the Romans put Christians to death, it was on the basis that Christians denied the divinity of Caesar and

¹ The three enemies are the devil, the world, and the flesh.

² 2 Timothy 3:12

would not offer incense to his image. Believers were also denounced as “cannibals” for the dogma of the Real Presence in the Eucharist, and as debauched for holding “Agape feasts” (characterized by Roman polemicists as orgies).

This is not relegated to Rome only. When Jewish persecution of and violence against Christians occurs – even today³ – it is from the notion that Christians are idolaters for worshiping Jesus. Muslim attacks on Christians are predicated on the idea that Christians are polytheists, having an essential misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. Atheistic persecution against believers relies on whatever ideology the atheists in question adhere to, since man's nature does not tolerate a vacuum of beliefs; for instance, the communist Soviet Union held that Christianity is a “bourgeois” kind of opiate used against impoverished workers, hence their establishment of the “league of militant atheists.”⁴ Every institutionalized persecution against the Church – and every other persecution of us, frankly – has a *reason* stated, and those reasons are all slanderous, predicated on false assumptions about the faith. This is not surprising, because the devil who gave the blasphemous mouth to the beast is the father of lies.⁵

Vs.7-8

7 Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, 8 and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

The world as enemy of the Church is truly something which spans the entirety of the earth. All nations, states, races and cultures will be affected by its “makeover” by the devil. It is for this reason that Christians have been attacked, killed, driven into hiding, imprisoned, and robbed in every place wherein missionaries begin to proclaim the Gospel. Yet the word “conquer,” translated from νικάω,⁶⁷ may be too strong of a translation given the context of the chapter. In the modern sense, to “conquer” something is to win total control over it; this has not happened to the saints. We must recall that the woman who represents the Church is placed in a *wilderness* for the same period that the beast has authority, meaning that she is still being nourished during these difficult times despite the troubles being inflicted upon her. Since both periods end at the point of Christ's Return, this passage is *not* contradicting Christ's promise that the gates of hell would not prevail against the Church,⁸ or His promise to be with His disciples forever.⁹ It would be more appropriate to say that the Church is *subdued*, or that an apparent victory¹⁰ is gained by the world in persecuting Christians to the point of going into hiding.

The eighth verse may appear, at first blush, to verify a Calvinistic understanding of predestination. After all, whoever's name is not written in the book of life is found worshiping the beast itself. This worship is *unwitting*, as many of them believe they are worshiping ancestral deities or “allah” or the Jewish facsimile of the true God, or in the case of atheists and agnostics they believe they aren't worshiping anything at all. Nonetheless, they *are* worshiping, whether they like the thought of it or not. The elect, however, do not; being in humanity's most starkly contrasted minority, Christians are the only ones going “against the crowd.” However, this is not a sign that their predestination is

3 <https://www.12news.com/article/news/crime/pastor-william-bill-schonemann-murder-suspect-adam-sheafe-admits-crime-jailhouse-interview-new-river-arizona-operation-first-commandment-coconino/75-d81b56a8-f327-4aa8-b755-dfa3f75cc42c>

4 <https://history-maps.com/story/History-of-the-Soviet-Union/event/League-of-Militant-Atheists>

5 John 8:44

6 Transliterated “Nikao,” Strong's #3528

7 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3528.htm>

8 Matthew 16:18

9 Matthew 28:20

10 Νικάω has a connotation of victory.

unconditional – that is, being chosen for no discernible reason as calvinism proclaims. They are *believers*, and their having been written in the book of life is predicated on this very fact; since Christians are justified by faith alone and not by election, their elect status is determined in light of faith (*intuitu fidei*) which God foresaw before time began. As this broaches a topic with a marvelous amount of depth and breadth, this is all we shall say concerning it for the time being. For the moment, suffice it to say that the book of life is Christ Himself.

Vs.9-10

9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

10 If anyone is to be taken captive,
to captivity he goes;
if anyone is to be slain with the sword,
with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

The phrase “if anyone has an ear, let him hear” is intended here to command the reader's attention. The pronouncement which follows is clear, concise, and completely free of any figure of speech which would require special interpretations. Without mincing any words, St. John informs us that there will be captivities and executions – namely for believers. His tone suggests a “so be it” attitude which he (and *we*) must have. Here, St. John hearkens back to the admonition of Christ that believers “count the cost” when deciding to follow Him.¹¹

To our great relief, we must recognize that this text is not promising that this *will* happen to *every* Christian. Violent persecution was sporadic in the first few centuries of the Church, and in her catacomb years she was often subject to times of peace. In the Ottoman Empire, there were periods in which Christians were permitted to live in peace, so long as they paid a special tax to the government for being Christians. Nevertheless, every believer must be prepared for such a time that arrests and martyrdoms may occur once more.

The call for endurance is repeated in Revelation 14:12, after the reader is promised an end point to the persecutions and to witness punishment against the enemies of God. The Christian is exhorted to *trust* that God has a plan with everything that is happening, and that His permitting the attacks on the Church serve a greater purpose. We are to trust that He will make things right beyond the point of our satisfaction just as He did the martyrs under the altar in Heaven.¹²

¹¹ Luke 14:25-33

¹² Revelation 6:9-11

Revelation Bible Study #34

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 13:11-18

11 Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. **12** It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. **13** It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, **14** and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. **15** And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. **16** Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, **17** so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. **18** This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

Introduction

Before discussing the matter of the “beast from the earth,” one must recognize a theme of “copying” present in St. John's vision. The devil remakes the world, the first beast, in his image as an appropriating act. He attempts to “re-do” the events of creation so as to make himself out to be the god of it and to do the opposite of what the true God actually does. He did the same with an attempted flood to drown out the Church in the twelfth chapter, mimicking the Biblical flood which wiped out the wicked as he tried to wipe out the righteous.

The second beast and its actions are a continuation of this theme. If the devil has attempted to copy both Creation and the Flood, it should come as no surprise that he also appropriates and mimics the Atonement as well, and tries to make his own bastardized version of Israel. In order to do this, someone must be raised up to be a subversive false teacher to point to his false christs. The same way that the devil could not create an entire new world, create a true global flood, or create a new mankind, so too is it impossible for him to create or incarnate a human being for himself to stage an “anti-Atonement;” thus heretics are groomed and symbols are created to fit the role that he designates.

Vs.11-12

11 Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. **12** It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.

The second beast is contrasted with the first by its origins in “the earth.” The beast from the sea represents the World, or the second enemy of the Church; it comes from the teeming, chaotic waters of pagan humanity's ebbs and flows. This means that the second beast comes from the Church, where believers are supposed to be standing on the solid ground of God's Word. He *looks* the part of a Christian, having the horns of a lamb so as to appear to be in Christ's flock; but he speaks like a dragon – that is, speaking on behalf of the devil.

The second beast is not a false christ himself. That personage is the wounded head on the first

beast. The beast from the earth is a false religious teacher whose goal is to get Christians to *worship* the false christ, with the help of the world system. It is connected to the warnings that Sts. Peter and Jude wrote concerning false teachers,¹ and St. John himself wrote about them as being among the many antichrists arising from within the Church.²

A false teacher, one who points to or formulates a false Jesus, typologically fulfills the role of the beast from the earth. An example of this phenomenon would be that of valentinian gnosticism. Valentinus and others posited a false Jesus by defining Jesus to be a descendant of the “aeons,” nothing more than a teacher figure representing deities formulated by platonic thought. The aeons were children of a nameless, formless “monad” figure; the gnostic “gospel” featured this false Jesus teaching people to save themselves by disparaging material reality. Valentinus is thus typologically connected to the beast from the earth, pointing people to a false Jesus (formulated by worldly philosophy) while enjoying state protection (he was never persecuted by the Romans the way the Christians were).

Vs.13-15

13 It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, **14** and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. **15** And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

The fire is not understood here as a physical, miraculous hail of flame (remember, St. John is still seeing *signs* in this vision).³ Instead, by it he means that the false teachers will appear by all accounts to be true “prophets.” In the Old Testament, to call fire down from heaven is Elijah's proof against the prophets of baal,⁴ as well as a king's military detachments.⁵ Since Pentecost, the office of prophecy (that is, proclaiming the Word to God's people) has been taken up by the pastoral office, this means that the types which fulfill the antitype of the beast of the earth will typically either come *out of* the pastorate, inhabit it, or attempt to fulfill its requirements. Arius was a presbyter. Marcion was raised by a bishop, and became an ascetic. In the more modern context, Marshall Applewhite studied in seminary to become a pastor as well.

The false teacher commands that images of his false christ be made, and he gives a voice to these images. This is to say, the engagement of various movements toward the practice of *pseudepigrapha* is predicted here. Pseudepigrapha is writing which proclaims a false authorship, or claims that certain important figures said something that in reality they did not. Various false gospels claims to have been written by an Apostle despite them contradicting the *actual* Word of God, which the Apostles would never do. They also feature “Jesus” saying things He never actually said, giving a voice to the image of the false christ. Even if the heretic does not employ pseudepigrapha, his conception of Christ inevitably ends up being false, constructing a false Jesus by way of saying “Thus Saith the Lord” where God has not spoken.

The persecution of Christians who do not follow this false presentation of Jesus is noted historically. Justin Martyr laments in his *First Apology* about the way in which Simon the Samaritan magician was getting Christians persecuted as a form of collateral damage to his own antics while never being persecuted himself; he says much of the same regarding Marcion.⁶ It may also be that various heretics had Christians put to death by the Romans in order to have their competition wiped

1 In the Epistles of 2 Peter and Jude

2 1 John 2:18-19

3 Revelation 12:1

4 1 Kings 18:36-40

5 2 Kings 1

6 *First Apology*, ch.26. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0126.htm>

out; for a long time, offering incense to an image of Caesar was a sign of loyalty which bore the punishment of death for refusing. Naturally, this meant Christians (who would not offer the incense) were executed for their loyalty to Christ.

Vs.16-17

16 Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, **17** so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

Various theories have been posited regarding what exactly the “mark of the beast” is, from writs of selling to tattoos to microchips, the list goes on and on of various theories. Ultimately however the “mark of the beast” is an infernal mirror in reference to the Greatest Commandment, which reads thus with the following admonitions:

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. **6** And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. **7** You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. **8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.** **9** You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.⁷

Just as the devil staged a mockery of creation, the flood, and the Atonement, so too does he gather together a false Israel. The Church is the true Israel, the chosen people of our Lord; nonbelievers become the “chosen people” of the devil. With the directives following the Greatest Commandment, God tells Israel to bind it upon their right hand (that is, all that they do) and upon their forehead (all that they believe and think).

There is a persistent belief that there will be some microchip, tattoo, vaccine pass, and (in the case of seventh day adventists) worshiping on Sunday. But by their nature, these things cannot be that which *damns*, and Scripture attests that the mark of the beast merits damnation. Later one, an angel proclaims “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of His anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”⁸ So the mark is guaranteed to damn anyone who takes it; on the contrary though, anyone who believes in Christ and is Baptized will be saved.⁹ So any interpretation of the mark which undoes the salvific promises our Lord gives cannot be true. If the mark of the beast were a microchip, then it would have to, miraculously, only be given to people who will never believe in Christ. If it were Sunday worship, that interpretation would require the exegete to definitively prove that no one worshiping on Sunday actually believes in Christ.

It is better to understand that the mark is persistent, lifelong disbelief in the Gospel; one is voluntarily under the devil's kingdom, and rejects the Gospel. Such a person will necessarily, instinctively, devote his works to the devil (the right hand) as well as his thoughts (the forehead). That no one may buy or sell unless they conform to this loyalty to the devil is attested at various times in history; it is not absolute. Christians have not always been able to operate openly as Christians; after all, during the first Jewish war Christians had much difficulty with currency. Rome's gods were stamped on coinage outside of Judea, while inside Judea the rebels began coining their own money stamped with the false religion arising out of rejecting Christ.

⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4-9, emphasis added

⁸ Revelation 14:9-10

⁹ Mark 16:16

Vs.18

18 This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

The devil wanted to be divine, yet cannot despite all of his power. The World came about as an expression of man's desire to be divine, which is constantly frustrated despite mankind's amazing achievements. The sinful flesh of man seeks to be divine, as our own concupiscence acts like a child-king, yet our limitations as fallen humans mean that we fall short; a man can think great thoughts and do magnificent things, but he shall never be divine. Six is one less than seven, which thus far has been used to denote completion of the arc of history; seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, etc. The three enemies of the Church, as well as the three entities St. John describes, *never* terminate in that seventh. These three “not-quotes” or “not-enoughs” which are united in their main purpose of destroying the Church both from without and within.

The number “six” is referred to as the number of a man. This is on account of mankind being created on the sixth day of Creation in Genesis 1. Humanity was originally made in the image and likeness of God, making Adam the highest material created being. Man was the closest thing to God in all of material reality – but of course he is *not quite* divine. It is a number suggesting *nearing* completion or perfection, but never getting there. This goes far towards explaining the persecution waged against the Church, for the Church consistently bears witness against the world, the flesh and the devil that they are *not* and *shall not ever be* God.

Revelation Bible Study #35

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 14:1-5

1 Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. **2** And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, **3** and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. **4** It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, **5** and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.

Introduction

Over the course of this vision,¹ St. John has focused on the activities of the Church's *enemies*. The devil, presented as the sign of a dragon; the world, presented as a beast from the sea; and false teachers, presented as a beast from the earth. The devil persecutes the Church directly until she is safely in the confines of the wilderness. The world puts persecutory pressure on the Church, both with violence and social pressure. The false teachers attempt to funnel believers into the world's belief systems, especially by utilizing false christs, false qualifications, and cooperation with the world to get rid of those who will not go along. It is no exaggeration to say that the tone of the twelfth and thirteenth chapters is *dour* – and this is by design, as St. John has explicitly said that it is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.²

Starting in the fourteenth chapter, the focus *shifts* to our Lord and all who belong to Him. This includes a return of discussion on the angels, the living creatures, the 144,000, and the Church at large. The situation which is inflicted on the Church cannot hold forever; God shall not permit it to go on in perpetuity, lest the Body of Christ be extinguished. Eventually, the upward spiral of cosmic history culminates in a final deliverance of the saints away from the chief enemies which have assailed them for centuries. This begins with a new and distinct “144,000.”

Vs.1

1 Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

The phrases “then I looked” and “then I looked, and behold” are prominent in only three books of Scripture: Ezekiel, Daniel, and Revelation.³ In each instance, the prophetic writer is remarking on something he sees in the middle a vision, effectively using the phrase as a kind of tone-changing punctuation. This is important to note, as it tells us that St. John is still recounting the details of this particular vision, which began in the twelfth chapter; we are thus charged with maintaining the same hermeneutic rule introduced in Revelation 12:1, that we are speaking of *signs*. The 144,000 are thus to be interpreted as symbolic.

¹ That is, the vision which begins in the 12th chapter.

² Revelation 13:10

³ Ezekiel 8:2, 10:1, Daniel 7:4, 12:5, Revelation 14:1, 14:14 to name a few.

Naturally, there will be a temptation to claim that this is the same 144,000 from the seventh chapter.⁴ The differences between the groups are enough to make such a position untenable. The latter crowd is not enumerated according to any tribal identity, and they have the Names of the Father and the Son *written* on their foreheads, as opposed to awaiting a seal from angels. This is because the latter group pertains to the *New Covenant*, while the previous 144,000 was an approximation of the Old Covenant saints. On account of the New Covenant, the seal placed on this second group is not done by angels, but by the Holy Spirit upon receiving Baptism. The Names of the Father and Son are on their foreheads, and we may wonder why the Holy Spirit's Name is not present; this is because He is the one who so sealed them.⁵

The “Mount Zion” to which St. John refers is not the physical mountain here on earth, but the same Heavenly Jerusalem that the author of Hebrews writes about.⁶ They are gathered there, at least in spirit, as witnesses of our Lord's faithfulness. The mark of the beast must be countered by a *separate* sealing and mark, namely that of union with Christ and regeneration. If a believer belongs to our Lord, he is considered as being on Mount Zion, a well-fortified and protected place.

Vs.2-3

2 And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, 3 and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

The “roar of many waters” further differentiates the latter crowd of 144,000 from the previous group. Isaiah and Jeremiah both proclaim that *hostile* groups of Gentiles have a roar as many waters, groups that are to be judged.⁷ Meanwhile, Ezekiel says that God's Glory and the cherubim sound like many waters;⁸ St. John concurs with the sound as one particularly made by Christ as He speaks.⁹ We understand that these “harpists” are the same as the 144,000 mentioned here, as St. John identifies them later as “those who had conquered the beast and its image.”¹⁰ But before he tells us this, it is hinted by the sound of waters. If the reader is a student of the Old Testament, he recognizes that the previous prophetic use of the term – both in Isaiah and Jeremiah's hostile sense and in Ezekiel's celestial sense – means that this latter group is comprised almost exclusively of sanctified Gentiles. They sound like many waters because that is how their crowds sounded on earth; but they sound like *thunder* and roaring waters, because they have been delivered from death and into glory.

In Revelation 7, there is a sense that the number 144,000 suggests a certain *smallness* regarding the number of Old Covenant saints. This is on account of the vast multitude of Gentile saints which take up a shout of praise after they are shown.¹¹ The comparison is easily understood. However, *here* the number 144,000 suggests the smallness of the Church in comparison with the rest of humanity, which has by and large taken the mark of the beast. While their actual number is in the hundreds of millions, St. John sees this sign as a means of establishing unity between Old and New Covenant believers, who both faced being horribly outnumbered by pagans during their respective eras. St. John is verifying by his vision the words that Christ spoke to him on earth, that the gate is narrow which

4 Revelation 7:1-8

5 Ephesians 1:13, Acts 2:38

6 Hebrews 12:22

7 Isaiah 17:12-14, Jeremiah 51:55

8 Ezekiel 1:24, 43:2

9 Revelation 1:5

10 Revelation 15:2. As we shall see in a later lesson, the fifteenth chapter is more or less a recapitulation of this periope.

11 Revelation 7:9-10

leads to life, and few find it.¹²

Vs.4-5

4 It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins. It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb, 5 and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless.

Scripture is not positing here that only virgin males compose the multitude of New Testament saints. Nor is it saying that they were *physically* virgins. On the one hand, the symbolism of virginity means that they have not committed (or are not counted as having committed) spiritual harlotry – that is, idolatry; since the Church, the bride of Christ, is declared pure by justification and made pure by regeneration, the believers which comprise her are counted as being unstained by spiritual fornication. This is in contrast to Israel under the Old Covenant, which wantonly played the harlot with false gods.¹³

On the other hand, these are explicitly *men*, as opposed to the Old Testament comparison of virginity to spiritual faithfulness which always presented Israel as a female. While spiritual faithfulness is certainly emphasized here, another comparison is being made between these faithful saints and the ancient armies of Israel. Deuteronomy 23 outlines that any “emission” in the Israelite army's battle camp resulted in a temporary exclusion of the individual soldier; if he wanted to participate in the war, utmost importance was placed on being ceremonially clean. Israel's army was to be comprised of *holy men*. Christians are expected to stay clean – that is, unstained by the world¹⁴ – in order to continuously participate in the Great Commission. In fact, since they are justified by faith, they are *considered* clean as virgins, despite whatever sins they may have committed.

This dynamic is witnessed with the men who served as David's war-band. When he visited the priests at Nob, David asked for the show bread of the Tabernacle to feed his men; Ahimelech the priest gave only one condition, that they had abstained from “women.”¹⁵ While perhaps it may be a stretch to say that St. John's vision makes this comparison directly, the Church Militant is in the same position as David and his men, always on the move so as to escape persecution while also making the monarchic claim that God has provided; for the Old Testament this was David, but in the Church era it is our Lord Jesus who rightfully claims the Throne.

The show bread is also referred to as the “Bread of the Presence” in Exodus,¹⁶ and by its nature it is typologically connected to the consecrated bread of the Eucharist, by which we receive the Body of our Lord Jesus. It is in this way these 144,000 are always following the Lamb, in that He is constantly leading His Church with His true Presence, both in this world (the Church Militant, corresponding with David's war-band) and in the next (the Church Triumphant, corresponding with virgin attendants).

12 Matthew 7:13-14

13 Jeremiah 18:13-17, esp. Ezekiel 16

14 James 1:27

15 1 Samuel 21:1-6

16 Exodus 25:30, also in Numbers 4:7

Revelation Bible Study #36

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 14:6-13

6 Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. **7** And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”

9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, **10** he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. **11** And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”

Introduction

With the 144,000 New Testament saints,¹ St. John sees that the Church is not merely a victim. While the infernal trio (the devil, the world and the false teachers) are attempting to destroy the Church, the Church Militant follows Christ wherever He leads them, and counters their mark by being sealed with the Holy Spirit. Now it is time to see what the angels are doing during this time period.

The vision focuses on the interaction of angels against the infernal forces that wage war against the Church. Thus it is not meant to exclude the other duties of angels described in Scripture. They remain ministers of fire tasked with helping believers during their earthly sojourn,² and they remain active in assisting the Church in matters of bringing the Gospel to the forefront.³ It is this latter part that we see in action in this passage, but *oriented* toward the enemies of the Church. And it is in sequence at that. First, the angels are tasked with helping spread the Gospel to the nonbelievers, that those who will repent have the chance to do so, that they may be spared in the Judgment; then, with the proclamation of Babylon's judgment the nonbelievers are *warned* that they shall not have victory if they continue in their wickedness; finally, for those who never repent, all that is left is for them to be damned, a preaching of the Law as the final opportunity for them to come to knowledge of the truth – that they need a Savior.

Vs.6-7

1 Once more, the number is symbolic to show that the Church is small compared to the body of nonbelievers.

2 Hebrews 1:7, Matthew 18:10-14

3 Revelation 7, etc.

6 Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. 7 And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

The angel proclaims the Gospel in the sixth verse, and a form of the Law in the seventh, but these are not mutually exclusive. We must recall that the word "Gospel" means *good news*.⁴ To the nonbeliever, the return of Christ is terrifying to think of, but to the believer it is a blessed hope.⁵ So the angel *first* preaches the Gospel to everyone, that Christ has died for our sins and risen for our justification, so that they may repent and believe; it is eternal, in that all saints, from pre-Abrahamic times to the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, were saved through faith in it. It is also eternal in that the *consequences* of the Gospel are eternal, namely that of eternal life for those who believe in Christ.

Some interpreters make the mistake of believing that the proclamation of the seventh verse is that eternal Gospel being proclaimed. The idea would be that what is Gospel for the believers is a warning for nonbelievers, thus functioning as Law. Perhaps others, out of a perverse love of wrath, see God punishing people as something to rejoice in for its own sake as opposed to rejoicing in God delivering His people, but the context of the passage forbids us from seeing it this way. The sixth verse features an *eternal* Gospel; the seventh verse features a warning concerning the *hour* of God's Judgment. This is to say, the Gospel shall ring forever: Judgment shall occur in an *hour*. Certainly the *consequences* of that Judgment are forever, but priority is still placed on salvation and the freely offered mercy of Christ.

The Law comes as a warning, intensifying the need to believe. The angel's proclamation in the seventh verse presents the stakes in stark terms, so that no one has an excuse. They have been informed that Christ has died for the sins of mankind, that He rose again for believers' justification, and that He shall return to judge the living and the dead. Before Judgment Day, the angels are tasked with ensuring that this message rings out to all of humanity.

Vs.8

8 Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."

The "Mystery Babylon" figure has not appeared yet. Thus, the second angel's proclamation denotes a future event (for St. John's audience at least) in which this figure shall fall. Angels will be tasked not only with helping the Church make the well-meant offer of the Gospel to all people, but they shall also play a role in announcing and enforcing the destruction of God's enemies.

Later chapters of Revelation, namely the seventeenth, will make it clear that the harlot Babylon is a religious figure, a sort of foil to the righteous woman shown in the twelfth chapter. However, as St. Peter refers to the city of Rome using the same moniker,⁶ the entity known as Babylon rested in that place as St. John wrote. Without skipping ahead too much, let the reader understand that she is connected to (and most likely identified with) the figure of wickedness from Zechariah 5.

In the meantime, the angel proclaims Babylon's eventual fall. Like the angel from the sixth verse, this is a proclamation *to* the nonbelieving world. Since all peoples (that is, all nonbelievers) partake in her spiritual harlotry, the message goes out to them to *depart*; there is no victory to be won with her, and no eternal life to be had with her. If they resist the Gospel proclaimed by the first angel, and ignore his warning concerning Judgment, then the next step is to inform them that God shall not permit them to have the ultimate victory which they crave – especially not through Babylon.

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2098.htm>

5 Acts 1:10-11, Titus 2:11-14

6 1 Peter 5:13

Vs.9-11

9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10 he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name.”

Jesus makes it clear, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that sins damn but faith saves. He says plainly in St. Mark's Gospel, “whoever believes and is Baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”⁷ This is basic soteriology. Those who refuse to believe, do so because they prefer their evil deeds over the offer of salvation.⁸ Otherwise, they would turn and believe, being thus justified by faith in Christ.⁹ This is crucial in understanding the image and mark of the beast. It cannot be allegiance to Rome or worshipping Roman gods or utilizing Roman marques of commerce¹⁰ as the preterists or Catholics might say:^{11,12} since literally every individual who takes it is *damned*, this would mean every Roman who converted to Christianity in the first century is damned despite all the promises of God in this regard. Any interpretation of the mark which nullifies the Gospel is to be rejected, so we retain the interpretation that the mark consists of lifelong rejection of the Christian faith.

The language concerning eternal damnation is difficult. First, we are bound by St. John's hermeneutic guidelines¹³ to recognize that his description of damnation is symbolic. Second, we are *also* bound to St. John's heavy use of the Old Testament. Jeremiah and the Psalmists utilize wine as a representation of the human reaction to God's wrath;¹⁴ this is to say, that being subjected to His full anger at sin and wickedness is akin to a confused drunkenness, leading men to staggering and despair. Fire likewise *may* be symbolic for the painful experience given to those who are damned; it is possible that burning is merely a description of the thing, but since the angel is speaking of a future event it is still on the table. All we know for certain is that damnation is a horrible, eternal experience.

The third angel proclaims this to the mass of nonbelievers, likely working through the Church, as the final resort of evangelism. The nonbeliever may ignore the promise of salvation through the Gospel; he may balk at the warning concerning judgment; and he may disbelieve the promise of destruction against Babylon in which he trusts. But the last warning, concerning being tormented forever, is the single worst thing that can happen to anyone. The heathen are taught honestly that they shall suffer without relief if they continue on in their unbelief; in this fashion, they are warned. Having been offered something good, while being informed of the bad that comes to them if they do not repent, there is no excuse. No one on Judgment Day may say “I had no knowledge of this,” and no one may accuse God of injustice for giving them what they have chosen. They have been adequately warned, each man according to his understanding, and they have decided upon damnation; thus they shall suffer.

Vs.12-13

12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

7 Mark 16:16

8 John 3:19

9 Romans 3:21-25

10 That is, the supposed ash mark on one's skin required to do business at the Agora.

11 For a particularly sprawling, silly example of this teaching: <https://www.newcovenantway.com/the-mark-of-the-beast>

12 The apparent position of Rome is that the mark is the use of Roman coins: <https://www.catholic.com/qa/the-mark-of-the-beast>

13 That his vision is symbolic, consisting of signs. Revelation 12:1

14 Psalm 60:2-3, 75:6-8, Jeremiah 13:12-14, 25:16-17

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”

St. John calls for believers to continue enduring in the faith. This is a rephrasing of his original call to endurance,¹⁵ but on a more positive basis. His first exhortation to perseverance is predicated on the vast and relentless march of persecution against Christians by the devil, the world, and the heretics; believers are to understand that they may suffer for their faith. Here, however, he exhorts us to endurance on the basis of the good that God is working through the angelic host; deliverance is nearer to all believers than it was in the beginning of their faith. Not only this, but endurance is necessary for the sake of those who *will* become Christians. As the angels proclaim the Gospel and their various warnings, the Church stands by to receive those who hearken unto their declarations. They must be Baptized, catechized, and made strong to stand in the assembly along with the rest of the penitent; here, our patience is a precious thing to God, who uses both the angels and the Church to show mercy to sinners who have not yet come to know Christ.

The “dead” are actually alive. When a believer sheds his mortal coil, he does not experience death the same way that a nonbeliever does. To the contrary, Christ promises that whoever trusts in Him shall never die – and St. Paul explains that this is on account of our already having gone through a kind of death at our Baptism.¹⁶ But for those saints who are parted from their bodies before Christ's Return, their works follow them *because they are still alive*. Thus they are blessed forever.

15 Revelation 13:9-10

16 John 11:24-27, Romans 6:1-6

Revelation Bible Study #37

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 14:14-20

14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. **15** And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” **16** So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

17 Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. **18** And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” **19** So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. **20** And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.

Introduction

This passage is the first true depiction of Judgment Day in the book of Revelation. In the Throne Room, the seventh seal's opening was met with silence.¹ When the seventh trumpet was blown, there was a declaration of victory and a vision of the Ark of the Covenant.² In both passages, St. John goes right up to the *point* where Judgment Day would be enacted, and then his vision starts in another prophetic cycle. Now however, utilizing the symbolic language of signs,³ St. John gives the reader something to *behold* in the mind's eye concerning the final day. It is not to be taken as a description of the day itself, but imagery which presents the stark nature of the Day of the Lord.

On account of the symbolism utilized, the vision relates many of Christ's own eschatological statements and parables in the Synoptic Gospels. In fact, the language employed regarding the vision *necessitates* understanding Christ's predictions, as otherwise the interpreter is restricted to seeing only a mass-death event. If this were the only thing said about the matter, then one could only conclude that the Church is at some point extinguished, and God responds by killing everyone. Such, however, would rob the Christian of any true hope of victory, or even a view of Christ's return; as the rest of Scripture does not countenance such an opinion, this cannot be the sense of the text. This is in direct repudiation of the “pessimistic amillennial” position best characterized as “everything will get worse until the Church loses, then Christ returns.” Yet it also denies the triumphalist “postmillennial” position which takes the opposite view – that everything will *improve* and the Church will take over the world until Christ returns.

Vs.14-16

14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. **15** And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud

1 Revelation 8:1

2 Revelation 11:15-19

3 Revelation 12:1

voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” **16** So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Our Savior appears on a white cloud. St. John's vision is the same as the passage of Daniel which speaks of a Son of Man coming with the clouds to inherit an eternal Kingdom. He wears a crown to signify that His actions have to do with the Kingdom of God. Now that the entire world has been offered the Gospel and warned concerning Judgment with the three angelic proclamations of the previous passage, our Savior now takes His victory.

Christ told us that Judgment Day is best described in terms of a harvest. In fact, in St. Mark's Gospel our Lord employs a parable which is pertinent to this passage for its identical meaning:

26 And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. **27** He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. **28** The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. **29** But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”⁴

Christ said in His own words that He would harvest the Kingdom for Himself once it became “ripe.” That is, when after sowing the Word for so much time, the full number of those who would believe and be sanctified is reached, the end shall come. Christ reaps not to destroy, but to gather. Similar imagery is given in the parable of the wheat and the tares,⁵ in which believers are represented as wheat, the desired produced, and nonbelievers are represented as tares – having an appearance of believing, perhaps even living a moral life, but unsaved because they lack faith. Over and against the pessimistic eschatological worldview, Christ's parables show believers and nonbelievers continuing in their struggle until His Return, with great difficulty in differentiation by the time Judgment Day comes.

When Judgment Day happens, the Church is gathered together *first*. This will indeed involve clouds, as Christ shall return upon the clouds; St. John's vision is in harmony with St. Paul's proclamation that “dead” believers shall rise first upon His Return, and believers shall go with them to be with the Lord.⁶ This of course runs counter to the preterist position (that this passage merely describes war, blood running down the Jordan after Romans slaughtered jews, etc.); if all believers were gathered together by 70 A.D., beginning with the dead, how is it that St. John was left on earth to receive the vision? Worse yet, if all believers were gathered then, why then did St. John persist *after* 70 A.D. to continue proclaiming it?

Vs.17-20

17 Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. **18** And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” **19** So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. **20** And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.

With the believers gathered together to be with the Lord, a different sort of reaping takes place. The believers have been gathered by Christ Himself, just as St. Paul predicts; they are not identified with any sort of fruit or grain, but instead are merely *with the Lord*. The nonbelievers, however, are gathered for the sake of receiving the wrath due for their non-belief, persecution against the Church, and all of their sins. They are “pressed” like grapes, because it is Christ Himself executing the punishment due to them; this is a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy concerning the Savior, who not only

4 Mark 4:26-29

5 Matthew 13:24-30

6 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

has taken the wine of God's wrath Himself, but stains Himself red in executing wrath against those who rebel against Him unto the end.⁷ This is the beginning of torments which are in the presence of the Lamb as promised by the third angel in the previous verses.⁸

In the previous passage it is said that the nonbelievers will “drink the wine of God's wrath.” This description of Judgment Day gives a special twist on the imagery. The first image that might come to mind is God holding a cup of wine and pouring it down a wicked man's throat to express His anger; but here, St. John reveals that the men are the grapes used to fashion the wrath reserved for them. Their damnation shall be akin to being squeezed, fermented, boiled, etc. This is on account of sin being a form of “storing up wrath” in oneself.⁹ The believer, like wheat, is sanctified and grows upward toward Heaven; the nonbeliever retains his sins, which make him closer by analogy to a grape ready to burst with its juices. The damned thus experience the fruition of the sins they have stored; for those who did not heed the Gospel, damnation shall be painful in the same sense that being burned is painful, but also with the kind of squeezing sensation that bursts capillaries and veins. The result of the “fermentation” process and drinking the wine of God's wrath shall leave them delirious and frightened. The more one sinned, the more wrath was stored up in their person, the worse their punishment shall be.

By “the angel who has authority over the fire,” two possibilities are salient regarding his identity. The first is that this is the angel who is seen with a censer after the seventh seal is opened, suggesting that his attendance over the first burning of incense and the prayers of the saints puts him in a position to pass the command of judgment from Christ to the executory angels.¹⁰ The second possibility is that this angel is Abaddon, the angels tasked with being in charge of the bottomless pit.¹¹ The greater point the Apostle is making, regardless of the angel's identity, is that Christ *shall not take possession* of the damned. When Christ reaps, He takes His Church into safety; when the angels reap, the damned are taken *away* from our Savior to await His punishment.

They are taken outside of the city, which is the Heavenly Jerusalem. The author of Hebrews mentions the existence of the celestial city,¹² which is presumably the place Christ is preparing for the saints.¹³ In the Old Testament, executions were performed “outside the city,”¹⁴ and it is the designated place for unclean things – whether diseases or idols.¹⁵ While St. John closes his symbolic vision with this sort of language, it speaks to the eternal separation between the saints and the damned. The damned are not merely kept out of the new Jerusalem, punished once and then ignored for eternity. They are made separate from God and the saints in every sense of the word. On account of this, since Christ is spoken of as King and Shepherd, He does not remain present to punish the damned for every moment of all eternity – after all, once Judgment Day occurs He will have a blessed Kingdom to run! He shall inflict damnation on those who do not believe, and then leave them to their fate.

7 Isaiah 63:1-6

8 Revelation 14:9-11

9 Romans 2:5

10 Revelation 8:1-5

11 Revelation 9:1-11

12 Hebrews 12:18-24

13 John 14:1-3

14 1 Kings 21:13,

15 Leviticus 14:39-41, 2 Chronicles 33:15