

Revelation Bible Study #1

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

Revelation 1:1-3

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

Introduction: The Place of Revelation in the Christian's Life

Revelation is the single most difficult book in Scripture. It is difficult to summarize, difficult to preach, and exceedingly difficult to interpret. Nonetheless, St. John promises in today's reading that we are blessed for reading it, blessed for hearing it, and blessed for *keeping what is written*. The time is near, St. John says, giving the reader a sense of urgency; thus he relates that it is of *utmost importance* that the believer read and understand this book.

We might find it odd that the author says “the time is near.” Revelation was written a little less than two thousand years ago, leaving us to wonder what exactly he meant. Clearly, as the latter portions of the book say, the ultimate event described is the return of Christ, the abolition of wickedness, and the commencement of the eternal fates awaiting humanity – and none of that has happened yet. This is, in fact, a feature in the New Testament that is commonly overlooked, that the extended Church Age was common knowledge among the Apostles. Christians are called to be in for the long haul until history finally lurches toward Judgment Day. St. John was well aware of the parables Christ taught indicating a “delay” in the Second Coming. Here is but one example of Christ mentioning this dynamic:

36 “But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. **37** For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **38** For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, **39** and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **40** Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. **41** Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. **42** Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. **43** But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. **44** Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

45 “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? **46** Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. **47** Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. **48** But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ **49** and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, **50** the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know **51** and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.¹²

1 Matthew 24:36-51

2 Just as Noah warned of impending judgment, but took over a century to build his Ark, so too is the return of Christ an impending Judgment that appears to be taking a long time. In the 48th verse, the wicked servant says “my master is delayed,” meaning that it was understood that a “delay” would happen!

St. Peter also adds that this “delay” will be cause for great consternation, to the point of being mocked by nonbelievers. Nevertheless, the Apostle reminds his readers that God is in control of time itself:

1 This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, **2** that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, **3** knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. **4** They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” **5** For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, **6** and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. **7** But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. **9** The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. **10** But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.³⁴

St. John could not have lacked awareness of these things. He was there during Christ's ministry, learning at His feet, and he was among his fellow Apostles at various times with plenty of discussion on eschatology (the study of the last things). There is no reason that he would contradict the consensus of the Church on these matters, that we are in it for the long haul. But that leads us to some questions regarding time and purpose.

Time

If the testimony of Scripture is clear that Christ shall return at some unspecified point but the Church should be prepared to wait a long time, why does St. John say the time is near? Why does he say in Revelation that these things shall “soon take place?” Simply put, he denotes that the future events which will occur are all part of a *process*, an unfolding of history which culminates in the eventual return of Christ to earth for the enactment of Judgment Day. This is to say, the things that St. John writes about got started soon after Revelation's scroll was complete. When Christ returns for Judgment Day and the resurrection of the dead, then the entirety of it shall be fulfilled. One of our chief tasks in interpreting Revelation is to determine what has already passed and what is left yet unfulfilled. As this book tells us what believers ought to expect, we shall have a special emphasis on what believers in the modern era are to expect as well.

Purpose

If the return of Christ is already proclaimed in the Gospels and the Epistles, why then should there be an extensive document like Revelation? There is already plenty of comfort found

³ 2 Peter 3:1-10

⁴ The scoffers would not be able to mock Christians if there was not some apparent delay in the return of Christ. To explain this long period, note the comparison of water to water – from Creation to the great Flood. While God created through water, He waited two thousand years or so before flooding the earth with that same water. “By the same word,” the Apostle says, the heavens and earth are slated for judgment; this is to say, by the same dynamic, meaning a long epoch before the return of our Lord.

The long wait is explained on account of salvation. God wishes for the maximal number of people who would come to saving faith in Christ to be brought into the Church; Judgment Day occurring in the first Century A.D. would have been intolerably merciless!

in the Gospels and Epistles after all! And the dynamic of persecution which Revelation warns about is already a running theme in the Epistles.⁵ Why then would there be any need for believers to have a document like Revelation, given this potential redundancy? To this objection, we reiterate the third verse's promise of benediction that one who reads, hears, and keeps the book is blessed. While Christ tells us the fact of the world's hatred toward us as we await His Return and proclaim the Gospel,⁶ and the Epistles teach us how to conduct ourselves while that happens, the Apocalypse brings us the blessing of knowing what to *expect*. Revelation informs the Church of the dynamics that shall arise over the centuries, helping us to walk in wisdom as we navigate a perilous world.

Authorship

Scripture is best defined as the inspired writings of the prophets, Apostles, and those associated with them. If, as some claim, the writer of Revelation was “John the Evangelist” or “John of Patmos,” some random Christian minister who claimed to have a prophetic vision, then Revelation does not fit the prerequisites to be called Scripture. It would have to be removed from the Canon and relegated to the status of apocrypha or even pseudipigrapha – something akin to the book of Enoch. However, if indeed it is the Apostle's writing, then it is most certainly Scripture. Following this, we must briefly present the proofs of Apostolic authorship, lest any should doubt the document's origin and thus find themselves bereft of the blessings promised by the text.⁷ Let us then briefly demonstrate Johannine authorship so as to verify that this book is truly Scriptural in nature.

Internal Evidence

The second verse in this lesson's reading is a chiasm which demonstrates a familiar writing style to the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles. The Apostle was in the habit of writing small chiasms as a sort of calling card, a habit that would make pseudopigraphal pretenders easy to spot. The following is but a small list of introductions:

1b He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,

2 who bore witness

to the word of God and

to the testimony of Jesus Christ,

even to all that he saw.

This same structure is found in the first two verses of John's Gospel:

1 In the beginning was the Word,

and the Word was with God,

and the Word was God.

2 He was in the beginning with God.

Here is from 1 John 1:1⁸

That which was from the beginning,

which we have heard,

which we have seen with our eyes,

which we looked upon

5 Especially catalogued in Acts. Christians are also exhorted in their Exilic conduct throughout 1 Peter.

6 John 15:18-27

7 Even Luther at first doubted Apostolic authorship, citing the author's willingness to call the book a prophecy.

Nonetheless, he treated it as Scripture, translating it into the German Bible and preaching on it throughout his ministry.

8 The entirety of 1 John 1:1-4 is a series of repeating chiasmic statements. We include only the first verse for brevity's sake.

and have touched with our hands,
concerning the word of life

This is similar to the introduction to 2 John's introductory verses:

1 The elder to the elect lady and her children,
whom I love in truth,
and not only I,
but also all who know the truth,
2 because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever

The same is seen in the introduction to 3 John:

1 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.
2 Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul.
3 For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came
and testified to your truth,
as indeed you are walking in the truth.
4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

St. John has a habit of relying on similar structures in his language, such that clear patterns of writing are demonstrated throughout *all* that he writes. It is not just in structure either, as Revelation contains much of the same **themes** of light and darkness, good and evil, Christ as the Lamb of God,⁹ and so forth. Pseudipigraphal texts like the “Secret Book of John” attempt to mimic his style of introduction, but lack the substance of motif that the Apostle was well-known for doing. St. John obsesses over revealed truth over mystery, light over darkness, and salvation over condemnation. While the Greek of Revelation is considered to be “clunky” by scholars on account of St. John's constant reference to Old Testament pericopes, it is nonetheless internally consistent with other verified Johannine texts regarding its thematic emphases.

External Evidence

Early Church testimony shows a witness to the notion that Apostolic authorship was common knowledge, verified by Church Fathers who were close to St. John or his immediate disciples. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus specifically mention the Apostle by name as the author, and this is significant since Irenaeus was tutored by St. John's disciple Polycarp, and Justin Martyr was intimately familiar enough with Polycarp's death that he may have been the author of *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*. Both men were close enough to the writing of Revelation that their testimony of authorship is granted greater weight than the later Church Fathers writings which deny the Apostolic origin.

Justin Martyr (155 A.D.):

And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem; and that thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place.¹⁰

⁹ John 1:29, Revelation 5:6-10

¹⁰ *Dialogue with Trypho*, 81.4, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/01286.htm>

Irenaeus (180 A.D.):

John also, the Lord's disciple, when beholding the sacerdotal and glorious advent of His kingdom, says in the Apocalypse, “[Revelation 1:12]”¹¹

Conclusion

Apostolic authorship of Revelation is demonstrated by consistent thematic messaging, consistent linguistic structures, and *very* early Church witness. It reads like something St. John wrote, says things that match what St. John wrote in his other books, and the men who learned under his disciple Polycarp testified directly that he wrote it. This is a “slam dunk” case for Revelation's canonicity, far stronger than, say the Epistle of Jude's authorship. Jude gives us half of a verse to work with concerning whether it was the Apostle St. Jude or St. Jude the brother of James the Just; while in our study of that text we made the case for Apostolic authorship of Jude, there is enough leeway to say it could also be the other candidate. With Revelation, on the other hand, we have an incredible amount of evidence mounted which tells us we can confidently see it as written by the beloved disciple of Christ, and thus we can move forward to receive the blessings it promises.

¹¹ *Against Heresies*, IV.20, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103420.htm>

Revelation Bible Study #2

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

Dating and “Historical Context” in Interpretation

What role does our knowledge of history play? Before conducting further study in the text itself, we do well to seek out the approximate year the Book of Revelation was written and to understand the historical context in which St. John wrote. While it is not essential to our hermeneutic, or how we interpret the book, it *is* important as a matter of response. Various schools of thought hinge their arguments for how they understand Revelation on certain times, places, and events, usually to teach some false doctrine or to make absurd claims. One such school of thought is the “Full Preterist” school, which claims that all of Revelation has been fulfilled – even to the point of saying the Second Advent has already occurred!

Their method is like this:

- Step 1: Read something St. John writes about in Revelation.
- Step 2: Find some first century historical circumstance that appears to match St. John's symbols.
- Step 3: Proclaim that this is the only valid interpretation of that symbolic figure.
- Step 4: Add this interpretation as “evidence” that all of Revelation is fulfilled.

Thankfully, this hermeneutic method fails more often than it succeeds, because it presupposes its conclusion (that all prophecy has been fulfilled) and ends up in humiliation when actually examined. By placing the study of history above the Word of God, the full preterist runs the same risks that are found with interpreting Scripture according to Church Tradition, human reason, and other unreliable sources. To put it bluntly, the full preterist is on the same hermeneutic ground as someone interpreting the Bible while drunk, allowing his inebriation to guide his judgment.

Example: the “wounded head” in Revelation 13.

The text states that a beast arises which has seven heads, but one is wounded. “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.”¹ Both the full preterists and those advocating for a late dating to Revelation (circa 96 A.D.) point to “Nero Redivivus,” something of an urban legend which was popular in late 1st Century Rome. After the death of emperor Nero in 68 A.D., the rumor began that he was either going to rise from the grave or faked his death, and that at some point he would return to rule over Rome once more.² So, the scholars reason, the Nero Redivivus myth simply *must* be the subject of St. John's “Beast from the Sea” and its wounded head, for there is it in black and white that a “head” had a mortal wound yet somehow persisted so as to return.

Only there are problems with this narrative. Seutonius recollects that Emperor Nero was stabbed *in the throat* by a man named Epaphroditus, after which he gracelessly expired before an

1 Revelation 13:3

2 From the Sybilline Oracles, IV.16-175. <https://sacred-texts.com/cla/sib/sib06.htm>
Dio Chrysostom, *On Beauty*.

https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Dio_Chrysostom/Discourses/21*.html

armed troupe.³ Accordingly, it was not that Nero “seemed to have a mortal wound” and was later healed; rather, he simply died. A “healing” in this case would necessarily be a physical resurrection, which would go against much of the resurrection narratives in Revelation to begin with.

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!⁴ Making matters worse, this occurred during the reign of Titus (79-81 A.D.).⁵ 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. The Nero imposters who rose up were all either killed or exiled after going public. 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.

Of course this raises the question of just who the wounded head is, what the beast is, etc. It could very well be that if Revelation was written before Nero's death, circulation of the book *inspired* people to formulate the Nero Redivivus theory. We will go over that when we approach the text. Nonetheless, the *hermeneutic* aspect of the matter is what is important for us to discuss at this time. Following the example provided regarding Nero Redivivus, we see the danger of the preterist method. If every symbolic figure or event in Revelation has to have a one-for-one fulfillment in easily recognizable historical circumstances and occurrences, we find a danger to the inspiration of the book. Someone might say “Revelation is not inspired, because John made a false prophecy about emperor Nero,” even though the *actual text* says no such thing, not even mentioning Nero at all! Far greater care must be taken when handling the context, and the **text** must take priority over what is observed happening in St. John's day.

Dating Revelation's Composition

Now for a more positive example of utilizing the surrounding historical context. Revelation was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., most likely five years prior. We know this precisely because of the plain text present in Revelation 11 and in the letters to the seven churches.

The Temple

11:1 I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the

3 L.J. Trafford, “The Men Named Epaphroditus,” *The History Girls*. <https://the-history-girls.blogspot.com/2018/07/the-men-named-epaphroditus-by-lj.html>

4 Revelation 1:4, 1:11

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

altar, with its worshipers.

-St. John writes about the Temple as though it were still standing. He would not do this if he wrote after its destruction.

11:2 But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. **3** And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

-St. John writes that the outer court was intact, the “holy city” was not occupied by Gentiles yet, and witnesses apart from the Apostles shall prophesy there during this time.

11:8 Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city—which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified.

-The two witnesses die in a period when Jerusalem (where Christ was Crucified) is still standing.

To the Seven Churches

When St. John wrote Revelation Jerusalem was still standing, Gentiles were not occupying the outer court, and the author asserts that Jerusalem is apostate to the point of being named after pagan cities – suggesting that Christians had left.⁶ If this is the case, placing the text above historical observations in priority, then we must conclude that Revelation was written before the “First Jewish War” ended in 70 A.D. The circumstances are such that, at most, the city is under siege.

In addition to this, we will be going through the letters to the seven churches.⁷ The spiritual circumstances they are undergoing are that of internal persecution from false teachers, namely the nicolaitans;⁸ who are condemned in 2 Peter and Jude by virtue of the same language being leveled at them. Before St. Peter had died, there was a coordination between him and the other Apostles to describe Nicolas' movement as being like Balaam; Revelation, Jude and 2 Peter *all* describe the false teachers in their day with strikingly similar language. Since St. Peter died between 64-68 A.D., and in our previous studies we have dated St. Jude's epistle around the same time, it stands to reason that Revelation was composed shortly after St. John spoke to the other Apostles about his vision and what Christ said about the nicolaitans.

We may describe the timeline thus:

- 1 St. John receives the vision and message from our Lord Christ on Patmos.
- 2 While beginning to put quill to papyrus, St. John gets in contact with St. Peter and informs him of the vision, namely regarding the problems the nicolaitans are causing, the Balaamish tendencies being evident.
- 3 St. Peter coordinates with St. Jude, both write their respective Epistles and they enter Church circulation.
- 4 St. John finishes writing Revelation and sends it to the churches in Asia Minor.

Remember: Revelation was not written in a canonical *vacuum*. St. John's vision makes constant reference to works of the Old Testament as well as the New. That leads us to conclude that the internal evidence for dating other New Testament texts comes into play for determining when Revelation was

⁶ Their identity will be discussed when we arrive at commentary for that part of the text.

⁷ Revelation 2-3

⁸ Revelation 2:6, 2:14-15

⁹ Discussed in more detail in the 2 Peter and Jude study series.

written. One might even notice how many churches in Asia Minor are mentioned in Acts, how many Epistles are written to churches there, and the impact of the “dispersion” written of by Apostolic authors in the 50s and 60s A.D. All of this culminates in the conclusion, becoming more and more undeniable, that an early date is demanded for St. John's Apocalypse.

Revelation Bible Study #3

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

Revelation 1:4-11¹

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, **5** and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood **6** and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. **7** Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

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

9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. **10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet **11** saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

Seven Churches in Asia and St. John's Audience



The seven churches mentioned in the fourth verse are all in “Asia,” or Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea constitute seven congregations who would presumably be the recipients of Revelation, as though it were an Epistle. This raises the question to us today: is Revelation intended to be Catholic, or

¹ This passage will be the topic of the next text as well.

universal in its application? Or is the message St. John received and wrote something more restricted in nature, or *particular*, as though it applied chiefly to these congregations? Believe it or not, this is actually a formative question for how we read Revelation moving forward.

If Revelation was intended to be an address to *the seven churches only*, this would lend some credence to the “Full Preterist”² position. The overarching tenor of the book would be that fulfillment of the entire book was immanent so as to encourage the Christians who were living there during a time of persecution. This is to say, the Full Preterist would claim that the specific audience (Asia Minor) and the language of nearness for the events described meant that St. John was giving them a prophecy they could expect to see completed in their lifetimes. From Revelation 1:4 onwards, this would be the operating assumption in the back of our minds while reading every verse... *if preterism is true*.

The problem with this restriction is found in Revelation 1:7. “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.” The Full Preterist might say that this was fulfilled by the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., with members of every tribe of Israel present and members of the Sanhedrin who had Christ crucified being there to see His judgment. The problem with this interpretation is that St. John speaks *globally*, not locally. If Christ is “the ruler of kings on earth,” as verse 5 says, then “all tribes of the earth” wailing cannot mean “some of the tribes of the earth.” Christ truly is Ruler over *all* kings, not just those in the near east! And if He is Ruler over *all* kings, then we cannot restrict the number of tribes either. “All” means “All!” If the book were so particular that it only applied to its main audience, then we should expect to see incredibly limited language, similar to the second and third Epistles of John, or Philemon, etc.

But this same universal language is applied to other topics as well, veritably *saturating* Revelation and insisting on a universal scope. A limited audience expecting immediate fulfillment would lead to great confusion regarding the global following of the “beast from the sea” in Revelation 13,³ the concurrent authority of the “beast from the earth,”⁴ global application of punishments from the Seven Bowls,⁵ and mourning of ungodly kings for Babylon.⁶ The sheer scope of the events described being entirely complete just a few short years after the churches in Asia receive them is simply not tenable. Yet St. John *does* say that there is an immanent fulfillment in *some sense* to these churches when he says “the time is near.”⁷ How do we make sense of this?

The Place of Asia Minor

Asia Minor plays an incredibly significant role in the New Testament. The following locations in Asia Minor are mentioned at least once: Antioch, Tarsus (St. Paul's place of birth), the seven churches of Revelation, Galatia, Cnidus, Iconium, Colossae, Miletus, Mysia, Pamphylia, Phrygia.⁸ Certainly, by the time Revelation was written, the Christian community there had expanded, especially as the political situation in Judea was becoming increasingly more unstable and Nero was actively persecuting Christians in Rome.⁹ It is safe to assume that a

2 The word is derived from the Latin term “praeter,” meaning past, fulfilled, etc. Full Preterists believe that all of Revelation, even the Second Advent of Christ, has been fulfilled.

3 Revelation 13:3

4 Revelation 13:11-18

5 Revelation 16

6 Revelation 18:11

7 Revelation 1:3

8 Acts 9:11, Galatians, Colossians, Acts 27:7, 14:1, 16:7, 20:5, and more.

9 Assuming, of course, our premise from the previous lesson that Revelation was written around 65 A.D.

plurality – if not a *majority* – of the Christian Church resided there. This came about as St. Paul and his assistants went on their missionary journeys, *all four of which* passed first through Asia Minor where he was planting churches, spreading the Gospel, and catechizing new believers.

St. Peter addresses the “elect exiles of the Dispersion”¹⁰ in his first Epistle, adding Cappadocia, Asia, Pontus and Bythina. St. James addresses “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion,” referring to the Church as the “twelve tribes” - that is, the new Israel. This is in keeping with the record of St. Luke in the Book of Acts. At first the Church was headquartered in Jerusalem, but there was a persecution launched which scattered Christians away from that initial base of operations.¹¹ With an inhospitable desert to the east, an linguistic barriers to the south in Africa, Christians dispersed to relatively familiar territories where Greek and Latin were the predonimant tongue; they remained in the confines of the Roman Empire, leading to a focus on Asia Minor. After Saul's conversion,¹² there began a concerted effort to engage in missionary activity – and this centered around Asia Minor. As we said, every one of St. Paul's missionary journeys went first through Asia Minor (hence his Epistles to the Ephesians, Galatians, etc.) and *returned* through there on his way back.

What this amounts to, historically speaking, is that Christianity ended up being centralized in Asia Minor. Every single one of the seven churches is found in a strategic location for spreading the message to the “frontier” churches in other areas, or to the churches in hiding in Judea. This makes Revelation a truly *Catholic*, or universal, book; it is addressed to cities which may more easily distribute the message to other churches (especially Ephesus, a port city), and these cities represent the landmass with the highest concentration of believers at that time. Other areas with a Christian presence were under duress. In Rome they were undergoing persecution from Nero. In Corinth and other Greek cities, they were struggling with the “super-apostles” attempting to take over the churches;¹³ these false teachers receiving Revelation could lead to disastrous rewrites, censure, or even the book being burned. Jerusalem was a no-go zone, as Judea at large was fomenting the civil unrest that would result in the “first jewish war” from 66-70 A.D.

So Revelation was delivered unto the people who would spread it to the other churches. Its scope is universal, even to Christians who were at the time far away from Jerusalem – and this point is incredibly important, as the preterist message relies on all Christians taking comfort from the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. We must ask the question, in what sense would a particular book written to Christians who were nowhere near that city offer any comfort at all? And if it does not apply to us today, then certainly it did not apply to believers who were in these frontiers. Such an interpretation goes against the blessings that St. John promises to those who read it, and all the universal language which accompanies it.

10 1 Peter 1:1

11 Acts 8:1-4

12 Acts 9

13 2 Corinthians centers around St. Paul responding to their claims.

Revelation Bible Study #4

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

Revelation 1:4-11

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, **5** and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood **6** and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. **7** Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

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

9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. **10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet **11** saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

Precepts in Hermeneutics

Scripture teaches us how to read it. Part of that is in believing the precepts given to us plainly by the text which guide our further reading. In other words, while a particular book of Scripture might have circumstantial details contained in its text, the significance of these details is usually given to us *elsewhere in the text*. Exodus will tell us that the Lord killed the firstborn in Egypt, but this does not tell us the *significance* of the first Passover, nor how we interpret it. We cannot know until we pay attention to what God Himself says: “I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord.”¹ By direct statement of the text, we learn that our Lord was judging the false religion and fake deities of Egypt; this prevents us from claiming that the Passover was merely symbolic, that it was just a punishment on Egyptians themselves, etc. Instead, by the given *precept*, we recognize that our Heavenly Father was establishing His supremacy over all others by pouring out wrath in this way.

So it is with Revelation. Before interpreting the various symbols, events, and personages described, we must pay attention to those precepts which guide our understanding of them. For instance, the title given to Christ in vs.5 of this reading, “ruler of kings on earth,” teaches us about later passages, the most glaring of which being the passage on the whore of Babylon. “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality,”² the angel says to St. John; knowing that Christ is their ruler, their dealings with the “mother of prostitutes and of earth's

1 Exodus 12:12

2 Revelation 17:1-2

abominations”³ is best understood as a *rebellion* against our Savior.

The first chapter of Revelation gives the bulk of such hermeneutically beneficial precepts, and identifying them is crucial for understanding the entirety of the book. As we move forward in giving commentary, we will not only identify these but begin to track them when we read through other passages in the future. On account of the seven churches having been the subject of the previous lesson, they shall be skipped here.

Vs.4-6

4 John to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The author extends the standard ending to New Testament epistolary greetings – “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” being the loose formula – with a more cryptic greeting. “From Him who is and who was and who is to come,” a phrase repeated in the eighth verse regarding our Heavenly Father. This is our first clue that what St. John is going to write is *apocalyptic literature*, a genre of prophecy which covers broad cosmic and spiritual history. This will be the topic of the next lesson in Revelation, how the genre must be taken into account moving forward. For now, suffice it to say that past, present and future (in Heaven and on earth) are *all* included in apocalyptic literature, whereas typically prophetic writing stays in the realm of present and future (while staying mostly about earth). He adds the “seven spirits” as well, which we will address later in the discussion of the lampstands and eyes in the latter half of the first chapter; it is likely a reference to the “sevenfold Spirit of God,” making the greeting a Trinitarian formula.

Just as our Heavenly Father has three traits assigned to Him regarding *time* with past and present and future, three key praises are given to Christ Jesus:

-The faithful witness

-The firstborn of the dead

-The ruler of the kings on earth

These are three important precepts for reading Revelation. St. John concurs with the author of Hebrews that Jesus, being *witness*, is the final revelation Himself of God unto men in the last days;⁴ this tells us that the book of Revelation will ultimately center around the Person and Work of Christ Jesus. As He is called the firstborn of the dead, St. John is highlighting the central moment of all human history, the Atonement and Resurrection, as being the highest priority for believers. When the Apostle calls Him the ruler of the kings on earth, this is to say that Christ has the authority and power to do what is going to be promised in this book.

The Gospel language used in the doxology, that Christ loves us, freed us, made us a kingdom, etc., functions in multiple ways. First, it restricts the audience to *Christians*; this document is for the eyes of believers only, being of little to no benefit to a nonbeliever. Second, since past (freed us, made us a kingdom), present (Him who loves us), and future (to Him be glory and dominion forever), this points to a parallel between Christ and the Father. The Father is and was and is to come; so is Christ, but with specifics of this dynamic regarding His relationship to the Church. Thirdly, this doxology maintains and reinforces the focus on Christ Himself which is crucial to understanding the book of

3 Revelation 17:5

4 Hebrews 1:1-3a

Revelation as a whole – the very first verse of the book tells us it is “the revelation of Jesus Christ,” after all.

Finally, the language here is similar to and likely referencing 1 Peter 2:9, St. Peter's great statement on the status of believers before the eyes of God: “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” This begins to point us to the need to study *other books of the Bible*, on account of the Apostle assuming we already know these things. He feels no need to explain them to his audience, but brings it up as a means of reminding them. Revelation is a book intended to be read by catechized, confirmed Christians *only*. Someone who is not familiar with right doctrine already will have no hope of understanding it.

Vs.7-8

7 Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

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

This is a continuation of thought from St. Paul and the other Apostles, who taught that Christ would return the same way He departed from earth before Pentecost – by means of cloud.⁵ He departed this earth floating up into the sky, He shall return in the same fashion for Judgment. That element of Judgment is an important element of Revelation of course, being the topic of multiple chapters dedicated to it. But this is not all that the verse is accomplishing; in addition, with this unity of messaging, Revelation is firmly placed in the corpus of Apostolic literature. It rests on the firm foundation of the rest of Scripture, and demonstrates that St. John did not write this book on a whim. Even after faithfully recording the visions he received, He still took time to write his experiences in such fashion that there were no deviations from already established Biblical doctrine. This introduces a necessary practice in interpreting Revelation, that we must have the rest of our Bibles open while reading it!

The title ascribed to God, Alpha and Omega, references the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. He is the beginning and the end of all things, our starting point in faith and to whom we look forward for eternal communing. It is a high term that is applied to both the Father and Christ in Revelation, demonstrating the dogmatic proclamation that Jesus Christ is also Divine.⁶ It also proclaims continuity with the Old Testament, especially Isaiah 44:6, in which our Lord says “I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.” Revelation is of course *drenched* in the language of and references to Old Testament apocalyptic literature.

9 I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. **10** I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet **11** saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”

St. John writes in reference to persecution that is afflicting the Church at the time. He has taken the exhortations to heart that St. Peter gives in 1 Peter regarding Exilic conduct – which amount to patient endurance.⁷ After all, St. John was in exile at Patmos as he wrote Revelation, a *literal* Exile that required much of the same righteous conduct. The exilic state of being is no mistake here, as God commanded the prophets to write messages of encouragement and

⁵ Acts 1:6-11, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

⁶ Revelation 21:6, 22:13

⁷ Cf. 1 Peter 3:8-15

exhortation to those exiles of Judah living in Babylon.⁸ St. John is thus envisioned as carrying on the same tradition of prophetic encouragement and exhortation to the true Israel, the Church!

“In the Spirit”

To summarize, the passage points us to a number of precepts that will guide our hermeneutics. Revelation is Apocalyptic literature; it is built on the foundation of the Apostolic and prophetic writings that came before it; it is meant to be read exclusively by catechized Christians; and it deals heavily in typology.⁹ St. John writes from the perspective as Apostle, yes, but also as a prophet in exile writing to other believers in exile, maintaining a tradition which was observed among the Old Testament prophetic school. Yet there is one more guiding principle given to the reader, which is more important than any other; the principle of prayer.

The Apostle relates that he was “in the Spirit” when he first received the message from our Lord. We must not assume that this meant he was in some sort of trance. He does not use the word ἔκστασις,¹⁰¹¹ from which we have the English word “ecstasy” but typically rendered “trance;” this word is used in a few instances in Acts,¹² covering visions from St. Peter and St. Paul and taking a connotation of being “filled with the Holy Spirit” as is spoken of in various Old Testament passages. The Spirit overwhelms a believer with a special presence, and then either empowers him, speaks through him, or speaks to him. Elsewhere the term is used to denote astonishment.¹³ Regarding the visions St. Peter and St. Paul had, they were brought into a trancelike state immediately in order to experience their vision, being filled with the Holy Spirit; St. John, on the other hand, was already “in the Spirit” before hearing a voice, and no ecstatic mood is mentioned.

What exactly does being “in the Spirit” entail, if it is not some contemplative trance state? We must recognize that believers already have the Holy Spirit from the moment of their Baptism onward.¹⁴ He dwells with and in every Baptized believer. But if one is to be in the Spirit in addition to Him dwelling in us, then one must go where He promises to be. As God speaks to us through the Word, to read the Scriptures is to be in the Spirit.¹⁵ And with prayer, one communes with Almighty God with the help of the Holy Spirit;¹⁶ thus the only *revealed* means of being “in the Spirit” are that of Word and prayer. These two activities are almost certainly what St. John was doing when he received the vision of Revelation.

This is a hermeneutic principle above all others. The Christian may take great comfort in knowing that he does not have to try out mystical means of uncovering God's truths, for St. John received this vision without having to perform mantras or empty his mind. Instead, by patient prayer and study of the Word he was prepared to hear and see what God gave him. At the same time, we rejoice to know that Revelation is not just an object of cold ink on dry paper; it is the *product* of God's movement toward St. John. We cannot interpret it by our own feelings or ecstatic experiences; on the other hand, we cannot interpret it by reason alone. We must rely on God through prayer and study, being thus in the Spirit, that our Lord may show us the interpretations just as He showed the vision to the Apostle.

8 This has, of course, involved literal writing both before and after the Exiles, with similar language seen in Habakkuk 2:2

9 The Babylonian Exile may be conceived here as a type which foreshadows the Church era we live in today.

10 Transliterated “ekstasis,” Strong's #1611

11 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1611.htm>

12 Acts 10:10, 11:5, 22:17

13 Mark 5:42, 16:8, Luke 5:26, Acts 3:10

14 Ephesians 1:13, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

15 2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 Romans 8:26-27

Revelation Bible Study #5

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

Revelation 1:12-20

12 Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, **13** and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. **14** The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, **15** his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. **16** In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, “Fear not, I am the first and the last, **18** and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. **19** Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. **20** As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

Introduction

This passage contains the only description of Jesus Christ found in all Scripture. While naturally this is an exciting thing for believers to look into, it is just as important to study the *surrounding* language which tells us things *about* Christ. St. John has already declared directly in his Gospel that Jesus is God,¹ but here one has an impactful way of showing that to be the case – one which weighs heavily on how we read Revelation.

Before discussing the visage of our Lord Jesus, we must recognize the purpose of the visit and why Revelation begins this way. It is in this moment, after the Apostle sees the glorified Christ for a second time,² that the reader must have his Old Testament open, ready to look for references which expand our understanding. Namely, *chiefly* even, that this vision serves as a second ordination.

St. John's Second Ordination

The habit of the Church, from the completion of the New Testament onward, has been to ordain ministers by the laying on of hands by elders, an act which conferred a specific spiritual gift that verified his call to Word and Sacrament.³ During the days of the Old Covenant, priests were ordained by the procurement of vestments and the “filling of the hand” with whatever was pledged to them after a seven day waiting period.⁴ Kings were anointed via mediation from some mediating group, whether that be the prophets or the people, the military, or the priesthood.⁶ For pastors, like priests and kings, installment into the vocation is via a mediated call: God works through human beings to place these men in their positions.

1 John 1:1

2 The first being the Transfiguration

3 1 Timothy 4:13-15

4 Exodus 28:40-43, Leviticus 8:31-36

5 Afolarin Ojewole, “Ordination’ in the Old Testament,” found here: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234674032.pdf>

6 1 Samuel 10:1, 11:15, 1 Kings 1:39, 2 Kings 11:9-12

Old Testament *prophets*, however, seem to have been ordained by the direct action of God Himself, typically through a *theophany*. Moses sees God arrive in the burning bush.⁷ Samuel is called as God stands directly beside him when he lies in bed.⁸ Isaiah and Ezekiel both have visions of God, the former seeing God on His Throne and the latter seeing God on His Chariot.⁹ The one exception is that of Elisha, who has his direct encounter with the Divine almost immediately after being anointed by Elijah.¹⁰ There are also times in which a prophet is called merely by hearing the Lord speak to him, but these are often accompanied by visions containing objects as seen with Jeremiah's call.¹¹ With the formula of Theophany and Call being so prevalent among the prophets, we see the exact same pattern played out as Christ appears to St. John and calls him to relay a *new* prophecy for the Church.

It is inescapable that Revelation takes on the character of Old Testament prophecy, but with one particular prophetic book in mind. The mention of the seven lampstands in our reading are a *development* of the lampstand that Zechariah sees in his prophecy, and the presence of Christ is a *development* of the olive trees in the same chapter.¹² Previously the golden lampstand was singular, representing the unified Israel of the Old Covenant congregating at one Temple in Jerusalem; now, the Israel of God is unified despite worship being conducted in multiple congregations and among many races. When Zechariah had his vision, Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor (the two olive trees) were anointed to shepherd God's people; *now* God's people are shepherded by a single Anointed One – Jesus Christ.

Following our previous definition of Apocalyptic literature, prophecy which discusses cosmic history in both Heaven and on Earth, Revelation is distinct from previous apocalyptic works in that it comments on how Heavenly realities have changed from their previous descriptions in the Old Testament. St. John had previously been called and ordained as an Apostle, and he still retains the title. But at this moment he is being called additionally to be a prophet who gives a message to the children of God in their state of Exile. Unlike the other Old Testament prophets, who hardly ever interacted with each other, part of writing this final book in the canon is *developing* Old Testament cosmic imagery to reflect the changes made at the New Covenant. In this way, the Church is encouraged in this “vision to end all visions” that what we observe happening on earth is also, in a sense, observed in Heaven.

The Visage of Christ

While he could have gone into detail about spurious matters like how tall Jesus is or what His shoe size would be, the Holy Spirit guides the Apostle to describe Christ with theologically important details. St. John first calls Christ “one like a son of man,” a title which had previously been Christ's title for Himself. This applies the prophecy of Daniel concerning the Son of Man to Jesus,¹³ and it is one which promises that the Son of Man, being equal to God, shall inherit an everlasting dominion. But Christ is also the High Priest making intercession for the Church; He is clothed in this vision with a robe and sash which are typically worn by the Levitical priests,¹⁴ but without an ephod or turban: this is on account of His being ordained to the order of Melchizedek.¹⁵

The physical description of Christ shows that He is entirely Divine. St. John refers to the

7 Exodus 3:1-10

8 1 Samuel 3:1-9

9 Isaiah 6:1-8, Ezekiel 1:1-2:4

10 2 Kings 2

11 Jeremiah 1:4-19

12 Zechariah 4

13 Daniel 7:13-14

14 Exodus 28:4 and elsewhere.

15 Hebrews 7

white hair on Christ's head with nearly exact language to the Ancient of Days' hair in Daniel,¹⁶ demonstrating that the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man, though these are two different Persons, have the same description because they are the same Being. His feet being like “burnished bronze” are that way on account of being “refined in a furnace,” that is, He was the One who walked with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Nebuchadnezzar's furnace.¹⁷ His voice, ringing with great tumult like crashing waves and thunder, mirrors that of Ezekiel's observation that God sounded like many waters;¹⁸ Isaiah also describes the roar of nations sounding like many waters, and Christ's voice imitating this sound demonstrates His rule over them all.¹⁹ His face shining in the 16th verse hearkens back to the Transfiguration,²⁰ as well as the shining face of Moses.²¹

Christ is holding seven stars, identified as the angels to the churches, demonstrating His care and shepherding over all believers. The two-edged sword from His mouth is that of the Word, which is not only depicted as a sword in multiple places,²² but also reminds us that Christ Jesus is the Logos, or Word, spoken of in John's Gospel.²³ Given the sheer amount of Old Testament references that are contained in these few verses, it is little wonder that the Word would be present in this fashion with such a great blade!

The Reaction and the Message

Like other prophets when they encounter God, or even an angel, St. John falls to the floor as though dead. Christ speaks the same words as many of these encounters, saying “Fear not,” for only He could bring the Apostle back to his feet like this. When He lays His hand on St. John, however, we also note a moment of familiarity and affection. In the Old Testament passages in which God speaks to men directly, God does not come up and *touch* them. Jesus does this, we suspect, as a means of telling St. John that He remembers the Apostle and still loves him. Though he is about to receive the “vision to end all visions,” St. John is still the disciple whom Jesus loved, and this shall not be forgotten.

Christ presents Himself not only as the One who died and rose again, but also as God Almighty. He calls Himself the first and the last, echoing the words of the Father in the previous verses who says He is Alpha and Omega. He also pronounces that He has the keys of death and hades, meaning that the authority over life and death which the Father speaks of in Deuteronomy 32:39 also belongs to Him.

The message highlights what we have been discussing about apocalyptic literature. He instructs John to write “the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this,” meaning that this shall continue the past+present+future dynamic of the apocalyptic genre. That much is certain, since the Old Testament is immanent within every word of the preceding verses. Given the universality of the text, both past and in present, we are given a final heuristic which applies to the letters to the seven churches; not only do the messages apply to the 1st Century churches, and not only do they apply to us today, but the behaviors seen and messages to them are demonstrably present in previous congregations in the Old Testament, as we shall demonstrate in the next lessons.

16 Daniel 7:9

17 Daniel 3:24-25

18 Ezekiel 43:2

19 Isaiah 17:12-13

20 Mark 9

21 Exodus 34:29

22 Hebrews 4:12, Ephesians 6:17-18

23 John 1:1

Revelation Bible Study #6

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

Revelation 2:1-7

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

2 “‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. **3** I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. **4** But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. **5** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. **6** Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. **7** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

Introduction

Now we approach the letters to the seven churches. As stated in the previous lessons, Revelation is apocalyptic literature, and the seven Epistles are no exceptions. While each congregation receiving a message from Christ was a real place with real historical contexts to what they receive, there is a reason that each of these letters is included in a catholic work like Revelation. This is to say, the message to each church in Asia Minor will serve as being immediately applicable to that church in the first century, but it will *also* serve as a valid historical hermeneutic tool for Old Testament patterns and *also* as a pattern established in the future, enduring to the present day. In other words, as Apocalyptic literature covers broad swaths of history, the past&present&future dynamic will hold true for Ephesus and the others. It also reinforces the “already but not yet” dynamic of eschatology as found elsewhere.

The letter to Ephesus is dense with theological and historical references. The historical matters (e.g., trouble with the nicolaitans) have been seen repeated from the Old Testament to this day. Theological matters also, ranging from the ethical to the revelatory, are also seen in similar application. The following commentary includes but a small selection of applications to which the letter is found to be useful.

Vs.1

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

To the angel of the church

The word “angel” literally means messenger. This means we are left with two options for what the reference. Either they are messengers as in *pastors*, or they are literal angels watching over the congregations. In the former option, St. John would be sending his message to Polycarp and other disciples who would continue the church's growth in the latter generation. A strength to this view is that it would make little sense for an angelic being to need the Apostle's penmanship for delivering the letter. As a pastor is the prime authority over the congregation, sending a message to him makes more sense, as he would be *the* individual who passes along the message

first.

However, there is Scriptural warrant for the letters to be meant for angelic beings. St. Paul brings up angels in his discussion on head coverings,¹ with the presumption that angels are present in the churches. In addition to this, Daniel's vision included Michael the archangel as being the prince angel set over Israel;² now that the *Church* is Israel, presumably he is set over the body of Christ. While there are some traditions which claim that there are seven archangels³ total and that each of these was resting upon the lampstands of the churches for the seven letters, it is not Scriptural and shall be ignored. Nonetheless, a point does stand in favor of the “angelic beings” view, in that the universal application of the letters moving forward would potentially need immortal (ie., angelic) interlocutors.

Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks among the golden lampstands

St. John has already been informed that the stars are the angels, whether they represent men or angelic beings is neither here nor there when considering the *point* Christ is making here. He walks among the lampstands, meaning His presence is always with Christians; He verifies the words reiterated to all Christians in Hebrews 13:5, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Vs.2-3

2 “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

Works, toil, patient endurance

The Ephesians were sent an Epistle by St. Paul, which emphasized Christian duty in light of the Gospel.⁴ They received an Apostolic message of patience and duty as a response to the rigors of life. Christ speaks of their efforts as being to their credit. He sees what they are going through, especially as it pertains to their endurance of *persecution*.

Those who call themselves apostles and are not

This refers to the “super-apostles,” a prominent group of men who falsely claimed to have authority surpassing that of the Twelve in the first century.⁵ St. Jude argues that their archetypal behavior and arguments are found in the Old Testament by way of Korah's rebellion,⁶ which included an assertion that the people were equal to Moses in every respect.⁷ It is also found in Nadab and Abihu,⁸ who offered “strange fire” before God and were killed for it. In other words, the notion here of the false apostle is one who claims authority from God when it has not been given; it is a kind of sinful attempt at usurping God-ordained spiritual authority which has precedent in the Old Testament, continuing on to the first century AD and repeated over the course of the past two millennia. In a modern context, One could find this “super-apostle” archetypal heretic in the persons of Emmanuel Swedenborg, Mary Baker Eddy, Ann Lee, Joseph Smith, etc. Christ praises the Ephesians for rejecting such people with false claims to authority, and we do well to do the same – for even this aspect of the Apocalypse has the “already but not yet” dynamic.

1 1 Corinthians 11:10

2 Daniel 12:1

3 The first document to do this was 1 Enoch.

4 The first three chapters concern what Christ has done for us, the latter concern what we do in light of being saved.

5 2 Corinthians 11:1-5

6 Jude vs.11

7 Numbers 16:1-35

8 Leviticus 10

Vs.4-5

4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

The Agape love which Christ commands us to have toward Him and toward one another is non-negotiable.⁹ The Ephesian Christians were willing to suffer persecution for the sake of Christ, and stood firm in the witness, but they lost the love for one another which is so essential to the outworking of true faith. If a church loses true doctrine or fails to confess Christ, then it is no longer considered Christian – that is, its lampstand is removed because it is no longer a *church* according to Christ Himself. But while the Ephesians were faithful in matters of *doctrine*, their *works* were found sorely lacking. It would not be a large stretch of the imagination to suppose that this meant members who were in need went hungry or unclothed, or perhaps they did not visit those who were imprisoned on account of their faith; these offenses which are mentioned as part of the judgment of the goats on Judgment Day, as neglecting to do good is a sign of a lack of faith.¹⁰

This harsh-sounding judgment has precedence in the Old Testament as well, featuring most prominently among the prophets. Micah, for instance, will write oracles condemning the children of Israel and Judah for their greedy disregard for the poor, perversion of justice, and especially their prophets' habit of “fleecing the flock.”¹¹ On account of this lack of Agape love for fellow Israelites, judgment was pronounced on the people, to the point of being completely abandoned by God in the case of the Northern Kingdom; God says in no uncertain terms that the North will not be His people in the book of Hosea.¹² As many condemnations heaped upon their idolatry as there were, just as many are heaped upon them for their refusal to love their neighbor as themselves.

In the Church setting, this is doubly so. Not only have Christians been given express command by Christ Himself to love one another as well as the poor, but they also have *precedent* in seeing the judgment of God against those who refuse to do so. God is the “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows,”¹³ requiring that we who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit do so as well. While saints are justified by faith alone, this faith will produce such works as to bring about the kind of charity. When this charity is absent, as was observed in the pre-Reformation era (especially with indulgences making the plight of the poor even worse), God is willing to take lampstands away and give them to others.

Vs.6

6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Nicolaitism, founded apparently by a former deacon named Nicolas,¹⁴ advocated for unrestrained lives. According to Epiphanius, Nicolas founded his sect after attempting to be celibate but finding it too difficult; legend has it he was so obsessed with sexual matters that he declared “Unless one copulates every day, he cannot have eternal life.”¹⁵ If this account is true, it little wonder that Christ hates their works. Nicolas had not understood true conversion and his belief in celibacy was not Biblical, but instead of seeking help with his struggles he decided to go along with what his natural instincts told him. He made matters worse by refusing to recognize the authority of the Apostles to

9 John 13:34-35

10 Matthew 25:31-46

11 Micah 3:5-12

12 Hosea 1:6-11, the latter two verse of which apply to the Church alone.

13 Psalm 68:5

14 Whether this was the Nicolas ordained to the diaconate in Acts 6 is not clear.

15 Epiphanius, Panarion, xxv.1

correct him, and thus in rebellion ended up starting a minor movement in the Church. It is likely that at least a few of the “super apostles” came from his camp. More discussion on this sect will be had in subsequent study on the letters, especially as it pertains to Old Testament precedent and the past 2000 years of Church history.

Vs.7

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

The expression “he who has an ear, let him hear” is a direction to those who are inclined to listen to the words stated. Anyone who *can* understand this *must*, indicating that its application goes beyond the confines of a single church in Ephesus. Whoever can learn the words of Christ and garner the habit of being faithful to Christ, refusing false doctrine and loving his neighbor (especially those in his own congregation), shall be “the one who conquers.” Just as much as these promises of life applied to the Ephesians in the first century, they also apply to Old Testament saints and Christians throughout the centuries.

The Tree of Life which was planted in the Garden of Eden was never destroyed. It appears that after God cast Adam and Eve out *so that* they would not eat of it,¹⁶ Since “Paradise” means something akin to “orchard,” it appears that Eden was taken up to Heaven until such time as it is replanted in the earth after Judgment Day. When this happens, the saints are permitted to eat of it and thus live forever.

In each of the letters, Christ gives contingent promises - “to the one who conquers, [promised thing].” The subsequent letters after the one directed to Ephesus are all cryptic, requiring interpretive work to understand. Here however, it is best to understand Christ's promise as being straightforward. God created Eden with the intent of mankind living among its trees; our Fall led to an expulsion from it, as well as the death which came with eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Part of redemption is a *restoration* of that which God intended in the first place, as well as an *advancement* from the initial state of mankind. When Paradise is restored, Christians will have surpassed the initial untested righteousness of Adam, having greater knowledge and experience; nonetheless, Eden shall be returned to earth and our place in it restored.

There is, however, a typological reference here with serious import to our reading of the letters; the straightforward language introduces this double-fulfillment. The Cross is the true Tree of Life for the Christian, for its fruit, Jesus Christ, provides for us the eternal life that we have. We take and eat of Him at the Eucharist, and thus receive the strength of faith and forgiveness necessary for all our needs. This is a *present reality* for every believer, that our Lord gives us eternal life now, we are saved *now*. The believer, united to Christ in Baptism, resides where Jesus resides, at the right hand of the Father; this means that, spiritually speaking we are already in the Paradise of which He speaks.

This introduces a key hermeneutic to understanding Revelation, one which we might express best in a single statement: “The future is far away, and the future is present.” The things which Christ relates to us in Revelation are indeed fulfilled in a future event – there *will* be a Judgment Day, there *will* be a bodily Resurrection, and there *will* be an eternal blessedness which includes believers no longer having to confront death. Yet as Christ takes us out of the kingdoms of sin, death and the devil at our Baptism, and feeds us the fruit of the true Tree of Life with His body and blood, all these things – like almost everything in Revelation are a present reality for us. The “already but not yet” dynamic saturates Revelation the same way it characterizes the life of believers – hope for the future, and faith right now.

16 Genesis 3:22-24

Revelation Bible Study #7

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

Revelation 2:8-11

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. **10** Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. **11** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

Introduction

The next letter from Christ is sent to Smyrna, which is just under fifty miles away from Ephesus. The congregation there, subsisting in relative poverty, is nonetheless one of the two churches among the seven which does not receive rebukes from Christ (the other being Philadelphia). Their harsh conditions, especially the persecution they underwent from slanderous Jewish groups, seems to have served as a crucible by which they were sanctified. Nonetheless, Christ tells them that they shall endure more – and thus receive a blessing from our Savior Himself. Speaking directly to poverty and unjust treatment, the letter to Smyrna speaks to every age the Church has gone through – from the days of the prophets to the current era.

Vs.8

“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

Our Heavenly Father spoke of Himself as the Alpha and Omega, in apparent reference to Isaiah 44:6, in which our Lord says “I am the first and I am the last; besides Me there is no god.” Here, Christ appropriates to Himself this very title by saying that He, the one who died and came to life, is that same first and last. This is a clear rebuttal against any sort of Arian interpretation of the Scriptures,¹ for here our Savior restates His divinity *again* after doing so in Rev.1:17. Though Revelation was written far before the Council of Nicea and the heyday of the Arians, there was nonetheless still confusion over the true identity of Jesus then just as there was during His earthly sojourn.²

Yet one cannot claim a Modalist interpretation either.³ The Father is held as distinct from the Son not *only* in St. John's Gospel, but all over the New Testament. When Christ refers to His death and resurrection here, it is to distinguish Him from the Father in terms of personhood. The Father is the first and the last; the Son is the first and the last that also died and came to life. Remember, Christ and St.

1 Arians claim that Jesus is not God, but rather some powerful being created by the Father.

2 Matthew 16:13-17

3 Modalists believe that God is one Person who changed appearance and name whenever it suits the occasion – at one point as the God of Israel, another point as the Father, another as the Son, and another as the Holy Spirit. They believe God is wearing

John assume that those who read Revelation are *already Christians*; they already believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day after His crucifixion. The utility of mentioning this is can only thus be as a matter of identification for Persons in the Godhead.

Vs.9

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Poor but Rich

St. John here communicates the words of Christ, which verify and reinforce His messages from St. Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew 6:19-21, during the Sermon on the Mount, Christ says:

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The congregation in Smyrna was impoverished in terms of earthly wealth. The city itself had multiple rebuilding projects, from Alexander the Great to Marcus Aurelius.⁴ Despite its competition with Ephesus as the foremost city in Asia, poverty was still an every-day reality for the people. Nonetheless, while the average churchgoer in Smyrna was poor, *spiritually* they were rich.

This dynamic is seen throughout the Old Testament, the New Testament, and Church history. While certain figures like Abraham or David have been spectacularly rich, countless others have been impoverished in terms of earthly means while being rich spiritually. Elijah the prophet, for instance, was itinerant to the point of having no home of record, yet was of such faith that God took him up to Heaven without ever dying. Those children of Judah who returned to the land after the Babylonian Exile underwent great poverty, but nonetheless they bear the distinction of having literally paved the way to the Temple, into which our Lord would walk during His earthly sojourn. To this day, hundreds of millions of Christians live in financial distress and do not know where their next meal will come from; just as He cared for those in Smyrna and granted heavenly treasures to them, so does our Lord care for these.

The Synagogue of Satan

Regarding the “synagogue of satan,” or those who claim to be jews but are not. While it does end up applying to non-believing jews in general, this persecutory group is almost certainly in reference to the judaizing sect which attempted to subvert the first century Church. After all, this group knows about Christians, and knows enough about Christ to engage in a slanderous campaign against His true followers; they show themselves to be the judaizers by a pattern of directly harassing the Church (seen also in the church at Philadelphia in Revelation 3). During the years of the first Jewish War,⁵ when this was written, the standard nonbelieving jew was busy fleeing or fighting the Romans in Judean land; the judaizers, on the other hand, were known to harass various figures like St. Paul wherever they went. It was enough of a problem in St. Paul's day that, in addition to writing the entirety of Galatians against them, he tersely warns believers to “look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.”⁶ These labels are given on account of their core beliefs; they held that in order for some to be saved, he had to become a jew, being circumcised and earning his salvation by observing the works of the Law. The slander aspect comes from their boast in the superiority of jewish lineage, their claim to be the real followers of Christ, and the accusation going

4 A brief history may be found here: <https://greekreporter.com/2024/09/09/history-ancient-greek-city-smyrna/>

5 A.D. 66-70

6 Philipians 3:2

out that the Gentile Christians were effectively pagan. Eventually, the judaizers' contributions to what we call “judaism” today would result in the application of the “synagogue of satan” label on a broader scale: while it is valid to apply it to all non-Christian jews today on account of the same behaviors and beliefs, at first it was more narrow.

Their claim to be jewish, which they apparently boasted of, was only valid insofar as outward means of discernment are concerned. Strictly speaking, in the physical sense a jew is a descendant and member of the tribe of Judah; *spiritually* speaking, one truly belongs to the tribe of Judah if his *heart* belongs to God, having his heart circumcized rather than his flesh.⁷ In other words, one is part of the tribe from which Christ hails as soon as they are united with Him in Baptism, which *is* the new circumcision.⁸ The group which is slandering the church in Smyrna lays claim to jewish heritage by blood, but in actuality they belong to the devil; this recalls the murderous slander of those who attacked Christ. He calls them the children of the devil also in John's Gospel.⁹

John 8 and the letter to Smyrna both touch on a group that is familiar with Jesus and yet engages in slander. In John 8:31, the group Christ speaks with is specifically identified as “the jews who had believed in Him,” potentially those who departed after He spoke on the topic of eating His flesh and drinking His Blood.¹⁰ Similarly, this “synagogue of satan” happens to be familiar enough with the Christians to *slander* them in Smyrna – something that Christ said would happen to the Apostles and indeed all believers.¹¹ It would appear that this group, which claimed familiarity with Christ but rejected His true words (they preferred emphasizing their bloodline and the Mosaic Law),¹² formed the basis of the judaizing heresy. This is not to say that the jewish *religion* is not condemned here as well, but that particular religion is founded out of explicit rejection of Christian doctrine anyway, something the judaizers were keen to do despite their *prima facie* allegiance to Jesus.

As with the other letters in this *apocalyptic* work, this same dynamic of slanderous interlopers is nothing new, nor will it stop until Christ returns. There always has been, and always will be, groups which play identity games against the Church or use subterfuge to prevent the growth of true Christianity. During the post-Exilic period, Sanballat and Tobiah opposed the rebuilding of the Jerusalem walls through rumor and slander, even going so far as to hire false prophets to further their aims.¹³ During the intertestamental period, there was fierce debate between Samaritans and jews regarding who the true people of God is and how people are saved, occasionally breaking out into violence: a sort of climax to their debate was when John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple. The situation was such that St. John remarks “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”^{14,15} In the modern context, an entire *movement*, dispensationalism, denies that the Church is the true Israel, and claims that jews are still God's chosen people. They may or may not engage in “dual-covenant” theology, by which the claim is made that jews are saved regardless of whether or not they believe in the Gospel. Slanderous arguments against who is a true Christian or not can *also* be found in those corners where denominational zealots proclaim all who are not part of their particular institution to be damned¹⁶ – the “One True Church”-ism seen in traditionalist circles today echoes the demand of the judaizer that one must become jewish in order to be Christian.

7 Romans 2:28-29

8 Galatians 3:27, Colossians 2:11-12

9 John 8:31-47

10 John 6:52-71

11 John 15:18-25

12 The book of Galatians specifically writes against them.

13 Nehemiah 6

14 John 4:9

15 The irony is palpable, given that the judaizers are described in language that suggests they are *spiritual* Samaritans.

16 In Roman Catholicism, this doctrine is referred to as Feeneyism.

Vs.10

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

The “synagogue of satan” motif is inherently connected to the persecution of believers. In fact, Christ had earlier told St. John and the other Apostles that the coming persecution would start with being thrown out of synagogues and later martyred.¹⁷ It is no coincidence that Polycarp was martyred by an act of collusion between Jews and Roman pagans. Nonetheless, here Christ comforts the church by reminding them that God is still all-knowing and has determined a time in which that tribulation shall stop; ten days.

Imprisonment is a common feature of persecution throughout the centuries, whether voluntary or involuntary. Jeremiah was cast into a cistern,¹⁸ the prophets of God had to live in caves during Jezebel's reign of terror,¹⁹ and Micaiah likely died in prison after Ahab sent him there for prophesying his imminent death.²⁰ Christians in the modern era are imprisoned quite often, from Watchman Nee to the martyrs in Syria. What Christ says will happen to the churchmen of Smyrna applies to all believers.

The “ten days” may be symbolic. After all, Daniel and his friends were given a voluntary reprieve from the requirement to eat unapproved foods for ten days.²¹ Later on in Revelation, symbolic numbers will be utilized regarding times of Church occlusion,²² similar to the “seventy weeks” prophecy in Daniel 9.²³ Here we should maintain a focus on genre: apocalyptic literature, in its all-tenses applicability, relies on symbolic numbers to make a point. Here, the 10 days assigned to Smyrna's persecution seems to suggest a *short* duration; ten days is far shorter after all than the 1260 days of the woman in the wilderness or the symbolic 1000 year Christian millennium.

Note that Christ gives two promises in this passage. The first is given in this verse, which reflects James 1:12,

“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”

In addition to being a solid case for the canonicity of James, it demonstrates the unity of New Testament witness concerning the persecution of Christians and the required response to it. We must *endure*, so that we may serve as effective witnesses and thus receive great rewards from God. By enduring, it is meant that one stay faithful to Christ and in belief in the Gospel. This endurance is a *lifelong* one; Christians are justified by faith alone, but the faith which saves is a faith which continues even unto the time when a believer is taken up to Heaven. Temporary faith does not save.

vs.11

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

The second promise predicates the first in vs.7, which promises eating the tree of life in the paradise of God. These are not *equivalent* promises, but they are related. The one who conquers is given the fruit of the tree of life, which guarantees that they shall not suffer the “second death” (eternal suffering and separation from God in the lake of fire). All peoples have to go through a first death –

17 John 16:1-3

18 Jeremiah 38:1-13

19 1 Kings, 18:1-6

20 1 Kings 22:26-28

21 Daniel 1:8-16

22 Revelation 12:6

23 Daniel 9:24-27

Christians die at the moment of their Baptism,²⁴ while nonbelievers have the first death at their deathbeds. But there are two separate Resurrections; the Resurrection of the Just,²⁵ and the resurrection of judgment.²⁶ This connects the accounts of Luke, John, and Daniel,²⁷ who all relate two distinct *types* of raising happening at the same time on Judgment Day. Everyone will be risen all at once, but the blessed Church will forever experience *life*, while the damned shall experience eternal *dying*.

24 Romans 6:1-4

25 Luke 14:14

26 John 5:29

27 Daniel 12:2

Revelation Bible Study #8

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

Revelation 2:12-17

12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

13 “I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. **14** But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. **15** So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. **16** Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. **17** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

Introduction

Pergamum is the northernmost church among the seven, with a similar distance between it and Smyrna as Smyrna is to Ephesus. While this church was standing strong despite violent persecution, it nonetheless had to deal with such false believers in its midst that Christ responds with something like “If you do not take care of this problem, I will.” Comparing the circumstances to the Israelites who suffered from some of their numbers falling for Balaam's trickery, the passage establishes not only that the Church is the true Israel, but each congregation is Israel *in miniature*, with many of the same struggles as the Old Covenant people.

Vs.12

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

As we discussed in the introductory lessons, the two-edged sword is likely a material symbol of the Word of God. The Word is already spoken of as being sharper than a two edged sword,¹ and has already been mentioned in the first chapter. We are left asking why our Lord would bring up this blade a second time. It is likely because a sword is a symbol of authority,² and the Pergamum church is in a situation where the devil, who wishes to usurp God, has utilized the sword of pagan violence in order to try to extinguish the Church. Christ bringing up the sword from His mouth reminds them that He has true and ultimate authority. It brings to remembrance the core message of Habakkuk, wherein God tells the prophet that He is sending the Babylonians to enact Judah's Exile: even though they were pagan, they were not beyond God's ability to control their destinies. Just as God judged Babylon, so too would He be able and willing to judge those pagans at Pergamum who had harassed the Church, and to successfully counterattack the devil. Christ's sword, the Word, shows His authority by Divine power

1 Hebrews 4:12, Ephesians 6:17-18

2 Romans 13:3-4

and the Father's decree.³ This does *not* imply, however, that our Lord was dictating the persecution of the church, rather focusing on His authority to *stop* it when the time came.

Vs.13

“I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

The “throne of satan” may be a reference to the Pergamon Altar, which was a large temple edifice shaped like a chair, complete with halls suggesting armrests. It was not dedicated to any pagan deity in specific; someone may sacrifice there to any deity they'd like, so long as city authorities had approved of it. It would make sense for the devil himself to reside at Pergamum, since it was a veritable *center* of pagan idolatry: temples and sanctuaries were built to honor dionysius, athena, hera, demeter, asclepius, and even deities that were foreign to Greco-Roman paganism like isis and serapis.⁴ In the early second century A.D., a temple to the emperor Trajan would be erected in Pergamum as well.

While Christ says plainly that satan dwelled in Pergamum, we cannot say that it is *because* of this religious pagan pluralism observed in the city; after all, paganism was everywhere in the world during the first century! It could have been simply that he was residing there at that time to incite persecution against the congregation, culminating in the martyrdom of St. Antipas. The traditional narrative concerning St. Antipas is that he was burned to death in a bronze altar shaped like a bull for the “crime” of conducting exorcisms. It is more likely, from the text alone, that Pergamum was called a dwelling place of the devil given the persecutory activities; Christians being attacked for their faith by pagans, who are under the control of satan, is a larger evidence for the devil's presence than merely having pagan temples nearby; wherever we are killed for our faith, there satan is.

The congregation in Pergamum is steadfast in the faith despite having immense pressure from the surrounding pagan culture. They are commended here for staying strong even when one of their own was killed in their presence, while they themselves live so near to where the devil was at the time. This reflects a pattern which would be played out multiple times in the history of the Church, wherein Christians stayed loyal to Christ despite persecution from nonbelievers; it is also reflected in the “hall of faith” in Hebrews 11, where Old Testament saints underwent martyrdom for standing up for God during times of Israelite apostasy.

Vs.14-16

But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

We return here to the topic of the nicolaitans. Christ compares them to Balaam, a wayward prophet who began to engage in simony – that is, selling grace, or making a profit by selling the blessings of God. Balaam sold the Word to King Balak, who was nervous about the encroaching mass of Israelites getting closer to his land. Balak found great frustration on account of the continued blessings poured out on Israel instead of curses,⁵ but Balaam eventually counseled the king to send women to tempt the men of Israel.⁶ In so doing, while they could not undo the promises of God they could interrupt, frustrate and hamper the relationship between the Israelites and the Lord. The plan was a success, leading to God pouring out His wrath on twenty-four thousand people by plague, which only

3 Matthew 28:18

4 “Serapis” is a gestalt deity made from various Egyptian and Greek figures.

5 Numbers 22-24

6 Numbers 31:16

stopped when Phinehas killed an Israelite man and Midianite woman in the middle of their lovemaking.⁷

The comparison between the Nicolaitans and the teachings of Balaam is not *new* to the New Testament. Christ approves here of the characterization offered by St. Peter and St. Jude,⁸ that this particular antinomian sect was comparable to Balaam, only Christ goes further. Yes, the two Apostles were correct to say that Nicolas and his followers were like Balaam in their rank simony and greed; but worse off, they were teaching Christians to cast off all restraint, enticing them with sexual license and actively encouraging them to eat food offered to idols – something that the Church had already determined ought not be done in terms of knowing volition.⁹ Christians could eat meat without asking about its origin, but it was not something they should seek out; the nicolaitans on the other hand seem to have developed a doctrine of *intentional transgression*, something akin to saying one must continue in sin that grace may abound.¹⁰

The Apocalyptic application of the letters in Revelation is incredibly pertinent here,¹¹ as this sort of heresy has been around for a long time – and will continue until Christ returns. Balaam's doctrine serves as an archetypal form of the antinomian false teacher, something continued in the doctrines of nicolaism. This is discussed further in 2 Peter and Jude, with the latter especially delving into the archetypal understanding of how false teachers operate.¹² To name just a few groups which fit the mold, their bizarre sexual doctrines have been found in the teachings of:

- The nudist “Adamite” cult disappeared in the 4th century AD
- The “brethren of the free spirit” cult that believed union with the Divine meant all their sins were not actually sins.
- The pantheistic 17th century offshoot of Puritanism called the “Ranters”
- The oneida cult, founded by “free-love” advocate John Humphrey Noyes
- and “The Family International,” a free-love cult founded by a former Christian Missionary Alliance minister.

Christ tells the church at Pergamum to repent, lest He war against those involved with nicolaism by means of His sword. Since Balaam was killed by the children of Israel in a war of vengeance for their earlier perfidy,¹³ this is a threat from Christ to do the same thing, destroying those who are engaged in the heresy. Note that He tells the *church* to repent, or else He will war against the *heretics* in their midst; the operative assumption here is that the believers in Pergamum would not want this to happen, perhaps out of care for the individuals involved. Despite the wicked nature of their heresy, it is nonetheless more favorable that the congregation should either convince the guilty to turn from their ways or excommunicate them than that they should be destroyed by our Savior's judgment. For the congregation to repent is to stop tolerating the presence of nicolaism, that by repentance or by ejection the transgressors may be brought back into salvation.¹⁴

Note that the comparison is not merely symbolic. Christ says that the nicolaitans are holding “to the teaching of Balaam.” It is not *just* Nicolas's doctrine here, but a much older one. Christ's response to this infestation is the same as it was during Balaam's day: to attack the offending parties until the children of Israel took care of the problem themselves. In other words, though we are in a new

7 Numbers 25:1-9

8 2 Peter 2:15, Jude vs.11

9 1 Corinthians 8, 10:14-22

10 Romans 6:1-2

11 Again, the Apocalyptic genre of Revelation applies much of its descriptions to past, present, and future (Rev.1:19).

12 See the Jude study at <https://verylutheran.biz/sunday-school-archives>

13 Numbers 31:1-9

14 1 Corinthians 5:3-5

Covenant, each congregation should expect, even in this day, to have similar treatment to ancient Israel; it is Israel in miniature, in covenant with God, having His personal involvement with the people. Though the Church corporate is, at the “macro-level,” the true Israel, the same can be said of each congregation since *Christ Himself treats them that way*. Since the letters to the seven churches are all universal in scope, one may expect that this same dynamic is found in *all* of the churches of our Lord, wherever they may be. Their relationship with God may be comparable to different eras or events in the Old Testament, each one having different circumstances than others. Thyatira, the next congregation addressed, has a female dubbed “Jezebel,” suggesting that the church was undergoing a similar period to that of Ahab's rule.

Vs.17

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.”

Our Savior gives a triple promise here to three things that are well within the “already but not yet” dynamic of Biblical eschatology. After He multiplied the loaves and fish, our Lord Jesus says that the true “bread from heaven” is Himself,¹⁵ whose flesh believers sacramentally eat at the Eucharist as it is hidden in, with and under the Communion bread. A “hidden manna” was also present in the Ark of the Covenant,¹⁶ which itself had disappeared from view: since the Ark was a symbol of God's presence, to be in the presence of that hidden manna – or to *eat* of it! – would be a promise to be in God's presence forever. This is “already” in that we have the presence of Christ at Communion; it is “not yet” in that we have not received the fulness of the Resurrection yet, by which death will be conquered just as the manna in the wilderness staved it off.

While some commenters point to the ancient practices of using white stones to denote innocence in a court of law or as an invitation to a wedding, it is more likely that it denotes a share of Christ's presence in their lives. The stone is *white*, denoting purity, and it is a small, pebble-like stone, denoting that it was taken *from* a larger rock formation.¹⁷¹⁸ Since Revelation expects its readers to be well-grounded in Scripture, this is likely a recollection of Psalm 118:22, which states “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” This verse is referenced no less than five times in the New Testament,¹⁹ with St. Paul stating clearly that Christ Himself is the Cornerstone.²⁰ St. Peter's name granted by Christ means “stone.” Stones and names are clearly associated, just as the notion of a Cornerstone is associated with Christ. It is also likely that His Name is on this stone given to believers, one unknown (or not belonging) to anyone except to those who possess it, because His Name is the only one which saves.²¹ Believers are not only given a permanent presence with God via the “hidden manna,” they're also granted a possession which reminds them of the true Stone by whom they are saved eternally. This happens “already” in receiving Christ and His Name at our Baptism; it is “not yet” in that this blessing does not yet have the tangible quality that Christ promises at His return – when all of those stones are brought together as a single, unified Temple of God in the New Earth.

15 John 6:26-35

16 Exodus 16:33, Hebrews 9:4

17 From ψῆφον, transliterated “psephon,” Strong's # 5586.

18 <https://biblehub.com/greek/5586.htm>

19 Matthew 21:42, Mark 12:10, Luke 20:17, Acts 4:11, 1 Peter 2:7

20 Ephesians 2:20

21 Acts 4:12

Revelation Bible Study #9

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

Revelation 2:18-29

18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

19 “‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. **20** But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. **21** I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. **22** Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, **23** and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. **24** But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. **25** Only hold fast what you have until I come. **26** The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, **27** and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. **28** And I will give him the morning star. **29** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Introduction

Located to the southeast of Pergamum, the “route” of the letters to the churches is now resembling a semicircle. The intention appears to be that the letters would be delivered in such fashion that the messenger delivering them could return to Patmos and tell St. John of the journey's success. It is only fitting, then, that the congregation in the center of the journey should receive the longest message. Thyatira's letter bears a great resemblance to Pergamum, but gives further details, describing a parish with a troubling tolerance for an inner Nicolaitan population – one which had developed into the Carpocratian heresy.

Vs.18-19

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. **19** “‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

One may theorize that this repetition of the description of Christ¹ is due to some economic aspect of Thyatira's day to day experience. Perhaps there was a bronze trade in the city, and the feet of burnished bronze would remind the people that Christ is the true source of their living. This is a dubious explanation for the greeting; the letter to Pergamum includes the reference to the sword of Christ as a means of encouraging the congregation that is *going through persecution*. The bronze feet of Jesus is more easily understood as a reference to the fourth man in the furnace in Daniel 3, as connected to the situation in Theyatira. The congregation would normally receive an exhortation to endure persecution, but vs.19 Christ states that they *already* have that patient endurance: thus He

¹ Revelation 1:14-15

reminds them of the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar to tell them that He walks among them. The congregation, undergoing persecution *from within* by the Jezebel figure, must have felt quite furnace-like, since there was no leaving it but only enduring the circumstances until Christ delivered them.

Vs.20-23

20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. **21** I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. **22** Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, **23** and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

The church in Thyatira has a female member who has styled herself as a prophetess, but whose teachings are nothing more than a stylized version of what the Nicolaitans taught, including sexual immorality and eating sacrificed food. Christ had previously referred to this sect as being akin to Balaam in His letter to Pergamum, citing the sexual license of the Nicolaitans as being akin to the mixed Israelite/pagan marriages introduced by the wicked prophet. Here, this female member is called Jezebel, a title given by Christ in reference to the wife of king Ahab. Jezebel was an outsider, a Phoenician by birth,² and instead of being a prophetess she had the prophets of God *killed* in an effort to replace the worship of the true God with the worship of baal.³ Christ thus condemns her doubly by giving her this title, first by saying she is not a prophetess but a persecutor, and second by identifying her efforts as that of trying to replace Christianity. Unlike the wife of Ahab though, *this* Jezebel persecuted the church by false teaching and enticement rather than outright killing. Nonetheless, her sin is just as severe in the eyes of our Lord.

Jezebel refuses to repent despite having been warned. The consequence of this is a great tribulation and humiliation. Since she was a promiscuous slattern, her bed will ironically be used as a sickbed instead of a place for adultery. Her illegitimate children shall die, suggested by vs.22 to mean those who follow her teaching,⁴ forming a reversal of the state-sponsored murders committed by the original Jezebel. This sentence pronounced on her, predicated on her refusal to change, is saying that her intent to kill the Church by spiritual poison will result in her death by sickness. What she was intending to happen to Christians shall happen to her instead.

Christ says that “all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.” This is to say, He is God: the prophet Jeremiah records God saying “I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”⁵ By reminding Thyatira's church that He is God, Jesus reminds them to take Him seriously; He will give to those who do not believe the just reward for their efforts (damnation), and for those who believe, He shall reward their good works in the hereafter. This is a reminder to all believers that what we observe happening in every antinomian group shall result in the same sentence. The liberal “Lutherans,” Episcopalians, Methodists, etc., shall all suffer a similar fate if they do not repent of their refusal to justly treat Christ as God, who has all authority over them.

This applies also to the “local heretic” problem found in congregations today. Every now and then a church is plagued by someone who attends, yet despite all warnings is not leaving the gathering of believers. Some circumstances do not permit that they depart – perhaps they are caretakers to an elderly faithful member, or the congregation is foolishly dependent on the heretic for funding. Either way, while these false believers are warned by the minister and elders, they nonetheless persist in their

² 1 Kings 16:31

³ 1 Kings 18:4

⁴ Philemon vs.10, 1 John 2:1 and elsewhere, to convert someone is to become a kind of spiritual father or mother to them.

⁵ Jeremiah 17:10

error and try to rope others into it; like the church in Thyatira, our Savior tells us that when it is unavoidable, *He* shall be the Judge of this individual and the liberator of the faithful.

Vs.24-25

24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. **25** Only hold fast what you have until I come.

Those who are not roped into Jezebel's heresy have no further instructions but to continue doing as well as they had before. They are not given the same warning as the church in Pergamum, since they had apparently attempted to discipline the Jezebel figure before, but to no avail; she refused to repent. All that is left then is to continue in the Christian walk as they were before. Christ says He lays on no other burden, as it is apparent that their efforts are concentrated on service and faithful teaching. The faithful Christians of today are given the same exhortation, to continue doing what they are doing after it is evident that their apostate peers are not budging. We are called to continue the Christian walk, lest our focus on combating the heretics go so far as to constitute neglect of the faithful under our charge, refusal to help the poor, or even letting other false teachings sneak their way in.

Christ refers to something called "the deep things of satan." This is most likely in reference to the Nicolaitan teaching, given the immediate context of discussion on the Jezebel figure. As we mentioned in the previous lesson, there was a development in the Nicolaitan movement which went beyond sinning freely (that is, not worrying about whether one is sinning or not), finding itself asserting a positive good to knowingly eating food sacrificed to idols. Since this Jezebel woman styled herself to be a prophetess, it would not be surprising if she referred to the Nicolaitan doctrine itself as the "deep things of satan;" perhaps the logic was that Christians, being freed from sin and death by the Atonement, were now free to seek out black magic and practice idolatry. After all, the historical Jezebel *was* a practicing witch.⁶

The intentional aspect of committing iniquity is observed elsewhere in history. Cult leaders like Carpocrates, a proto-gnostic heretic who spread his teaching while St. John was still alive, held that transgression is an obligation for those seeking enlightenment. According to Irenaeus, They practise also magical arts and incantations; philters, also, and love-potions; and have recourse to familiar spirits, dream-sending demons, and other abominations, declaring that they possess power to rule over, even now, the princes and formers of this world; and not only them, but also all things that are in it. These men, even as the Gentiles, have been sent forth by Satan to bring dishonour upon the Church, so that, in one way or another, men hearing the things which they speak, and imagining that we all are such as they, may turn away their ears from the preaching of the truth; or, again, seeing the things they practise, may speak evil of us all, who have in fact no fellowship with them, either in doctrine or in morals, or in our daily conduct. But they lead a licentious life, and, to conceal their impious doctrines, they abuse the name [of Christ], as a means of hiding their wickedness; so that "their condemnation is just," when they receive from God a recompense suited to their works.⁷⁸

If Irenaeus' witness is correct, it appears that the Jezebel figure is an early adopter of Carpocrates' doctrines. Yet since the blasphemous activities of the Nicolaitans are already cited as including sexual immorality and eating sacrificed meat, this suggests that Carpocratean doctrine evolved out of what Nicolas was teaching; whereas Nicolas was concerned with fleshly pleasures, Carpocrates was concerned with the black magic afforded by antinomianism. "Deep things of satan" indeed, if Jezebel and her followers were communing with demons!

6 2 Kings 9:22

7 Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I.XXV.3.

8 <https://web.archive.org/web/20040513115803/http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/bible/carpocra.stm>

Vs.26-29

26 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, 27 and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. 28 And I will give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

The first promise has little to do with any present reality. Insofar as we belong to Christ and thus benefit from His authority it is certainly applicable, but few Christians today experience being royalty in the immediate sense. The fact of the matter is that the true Church has seldom ruled over anything secular whatsoever, and even during the height of Christendom this promise remains to be fulfilled for all of those believers who died before Constantine's conversion. Christ refers back to Psalm 2:7-9, "I will tell of the decree: the Lord said to me, 'You are My Son; today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your heritage, and the ends of the earth Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel;" it is related here that Christians shall receive authority from Christ to rule over others – what is said about Christ from Psalm 2:7-9 shall be applicable to them fully, whereas now we only receive the adoption as sons.⁹

Since this is fulfilled at Judgment Day, the question is left to us as to who exactly it is that we shall rule. One might posit that we shall rule over other Christians, but that is not plausible since they too are recipients of this promise. Another explanation is that this may be some other group of non-Christians (perhaps those who were ignorant of the Gospel their entire lives), but Scripture does not appear to permit this, as texts concerning Judgment Day speak of eternal damnation for all who do not believe.¹⁰ Thus while we rejoice in the present-day promise of adoption into God's family, the eschatological fulfillment of this promise remains a mystery until the Last Day.

The second promise more easily reflects the "already but not yet" aspect of eschatology, being more readily understood. In Revelation 22:16, Christ refers to Himself as the "bright morning star," so Rev.2:28 here contains a promise that Christ Himself is the inheritance of the believer; this is *already* in that believers are united to Christ in Baptism, we receive Him in the Eucharist, and He dwells in our hearts continually.¹¹ It is *not yet* in that we do not see Him walk among us until after the Resurrection. When that *does* happen though, we shall rejoice to hear that the same Christ who gave Himself to be our Atoning Sacrifice for sin shall give Himself to be our constant holy Companion and benevolent King.

9 Romans 8:15

10 Revelation 20:15

11 Something elaborated on in Revelation 3:20

Revelation Bible Study #10

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

Revelation 3:1-6

1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. **2** Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. **3** Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. **4** Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. **5** The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. **6** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Introduction

Located directly to the south of Thyatira, Sardis is a city with a peculiar history in relation to its congregation. The short, dire message given to the church reflects a state of fallenness despite reputation; so too did Sardis fall from its initial greatness. Once the capitol city of the Lydian Empire, it was then conquered by the Persians and subsequently by Alexander and then inherited by the Romans. Possession of Sardis passed many hands in the same way that Jerusalem – the more famous capitol of Judea – passed from empire to empire. While its larger size (compared to other cities) gave it great use to the states controlling it, Sardis remained a shadow of its former capitoline glory. Christ sends this letter to the church there with roughly the same message: “you are just like Sardis, now repent.”

Vs.1a

“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: ‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

This introduction is similar to that of Ephesus, which reads “‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.”¹ The parallel greeting, both of which cite the possession our Lord has over the seven spirits/churches/lampstands, tell the reader that the substance of the letters are roughly the same. Christ had previously threatened Ephesus by saying He would remove their lampstand if they did not repent;² in the warning to the Sardis church, Christ speaks of coming to them as a thief – presumably presumably because *their* lampstand was already removed, and they must be restored lest the congregation perish on the Last Day. The reference to the seven spirits, stars, lampstands is a reminder of Christ's authority to do as He pleases in both churches' cases; His authority is immediate, not relying on being carried out through intermediaries nor slack in its execution. He is not far off, but sees all the corruptions which are taking place among every fallen church.

1 Revelation 2:1

2 Revelation 2:5

Vs.1b-3

“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. **2** Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. **3** Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

The Sardis church is pronounced dead. There is no information given as to the precise reasoning for their “deadness,” leaving it to the reader's imagination to figure out. From St. Paul, however, we do have an understanding that whatever is not done from faith is sin,³ so the incomplete works of the Sardis church suggest that their faith was lacking – leading to works that did not please our Lord. Still, without explicit details we have a vagueness about it. Since the letters to the seven churches are *catholic*, or universal, in their application, this insinuates an intentional vagueness. This is to say, the specifics of what led to the Sardis church being so decrepit are not described because there are a wide array of reasons that *any* church might be perishing despite having a good reputation.

In the twenty-first century a great many church bodies have made a name for themselves trumpeting how Biblical they are, how much they hold to the inerrancy of Scripture, and how strong they stand against liberal theology; unfortunately a great number of these bodies (especially “Confessional Lutheran” ones) are dying because of their emphatic refusal to do evangelism to grow their own congregations. The Roman church has great public relations when it comes to feel-good statements by the modern pope and the pretty cathedrals; but for the past 80 years at least, this has covered up a rotten growth of child molestation by corrupt priests.⁴ History is replete with congregations, bishoprics, denominations, and more that fit the description of Sardis. Since Christ admonishes the Sardis church that their works are incomplete *and* they must remember what they have learned, His exhortation is one of both dogma and practice; any Church body which abandons doing either right is surely doomed.

One may ask why Christ is addressing a church that is “dead” in the first place. We must remember that death is not the cessation of existence or life. To the contrary, Christ tells the Sardis church that they must *wake up* because Christians do not truly die – the New Testament language concerning the parting of a saint's soul from his body is one of *sleep*.⁵ A church which is dead may, at least in theory, wake up from the stupor of their sinful practices and re-embrace good doctrines and practice. If they do not repent of this, then they are still asleep, remaining unaware that Christ will return *for judgment*; throughout the New Testament, the phrase “like a thief” is used to describe the unexpected nature of our Lord's return.⁶ He is not necessarily promising an immediate punishment, although that is certainly on the table as it were. But ultimately a church with its lampstand removed is a church that is not Christian in anything but label; the majority of those who attend, assuming they are corrupted by heretical doctrine, may very well be sent to the fires on Judgment Day.

Vs.4-6

4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. **5** The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. **6** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

3 Romans 14:23

4 <https://apnews.com/general-news-301822e3d7a04b0b88a1c40738c4a513>

5 Matthew 27:52, John 11:11, 1 Corinthians 15:6, 1 Corinthians 15:18-20, 1 Thessalonians 4:14-15

6 Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:3, 4; 2 Peter 3:10

Our Lord uses the phrase μολύνω,⁷ literally “to smear with mud.” It is a defiling that takes place by active volition, as the conjugation of the Greek text denotes a roundabout way of reaching a reflexive tense: the fallen saints are smearing spiritual filth on *themselves* by soiling their formerly clean garments. The one who is soiled is *willingly* going along with the hollow Christianity of the Sardis congregation; those who are not are considered clean, and thus our Savior has not abandoned them. Their unsoiled garments are indicative of an unwillingness to follow along with the crowd; since they are unstained by wicked doctrines, they will be dressed in the same kind of white garments that Christ Himself and the angels wear.⁹ As the promises contained in the letters have the “already but not yet” dynamic, we find the “already” in the fact that everyone's garments were at one point clean; this is accomplished in Baptism, which washes away our filth. It is “not yet” because it points to the future glorification of those saints who receive eternal blessedness on Judgment Day.

So Christ promises that the faithful believer surrounded by bad Christians is not going to be judged in the same way as his fallen contemporaries. Though He speaks to the congregations as collectives, He does not forget the individual Christian, especially if he is holding fast to the true faith. This caveat must not be construed as *earning* one's salvation, despite the word “worthy” being used to describe them. The Sardis church had a population of those who were soiling that which Christ's work on the Cross had made pure; in telling them to repent, Christ is giving the same message as what God says in Isaiah 1:18.

“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”

The members of the Sardis church who have *not* been soiled are those who have maintained a state of grace by continued faith and reception of the Sacraments. After all, being Baptized means having one's sins washed away.¹⁰ As such, they still *confess Christ*, who has promised elsewhere that whoever acknowledges Him, He will acknowledge before our Heavenly Father.¹¹

This encouraging promise is applicable especially to those who find themselves a faithful minority in a corrupted church. Though an institution may be apostate (as many, many of them are today), it is extremely doubtful that any Christian denomination is so fallen that it has no saints whatsoever. To the contrary, they serve as a faithful remnant *within* these groups. Much in the same way Athanasius spoke on behalf of true doctrine when the Church was infested with a near majority of arians, or when Luther spoke out against the abuses and errors of the papacy, during times of “deadness” within the churches there is always someone who stands in favor of the truth.

7 Transliterated “Moluno,” Strong's #3435

8 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3435.htm>

9 Daniel 7:9, Mark 7:2-3, Acts 1:10

10 Acts 2:38, 22:16

11 Matthew 10:32

Revelation Bible Study #11

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

Revelation 3:7-13

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

8 “‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie— behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. 12 The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Introduction

Situated to the east of Sardis, Philadelphia was built in 189 B.C. by Eumenes II, a Greek ruler who administrated his kingdom from Pergamum during the pre-Roman era.¹ As it was a part of the jurisdiction of Sardis, it has hardly any historical importance other than having been built by a Hellenistic king. But the church there, like the church in Smyrna, receives only praise and promise from our Savior; this leads us to conclude that the letter from Christ is written to them on account of the city's *name*. Philadelphia means something akin to “city of brotherly love.” When Christ told the Apostles “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another,” He used the term *Agape* – sacrificial love. Thus the church at Philadelphia embodied a higher kind of love than their home city's name suggests, especially in their tireless love for Christ Himself, for Whom they were willing to suffer.

Vs.7

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

This greeting has a distinct quality to it, which does not have a *strict* parallel to the first chapter's descriptions. The letters to the other churches have greetings which directly quote or speak of things found in the first chapter – the seven stars, seven lampstands, the two-edged sword, etc. But here, we have only a reference to a key of David, which does not have a parallel. In Revelation 1:18 our Lord says “I have the keys of Death and Hades,” but we would find ourselves hard pressed to believe that these are equivalent to the “key of David” mentioned here. To the contrary, it seems that by using a *different* key than those, our Savior is saying that He is

¹ That is, the “Hellenistic Period,” which ended with the death of Cleopatra (d. 30 B.C.). Though it was fractured, this period is the closest that one could come to a “Greek Empire” after the demise of Alexander the Great.

using a different key because the keys of death and hades are reserved for *wrath*. But just what is the key of David? It is found in a quote from Isaiah:

And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.²

These words are spoken by Isaiah regarding one Eliakim son of Hilkiyah.³ The oracle spoken condemns a steward of David's house named Shebna, whose actions demonstrated a kind of attempted usurpation. Shebna was guilty of carving a tomb for himself in the house of David, effectively declaring it to be his own. After God pronounces punishment on him, He elevates Eliakim to the position of steward in his place, including having the key – or power of administration – over the kingdom. The 1st century readers of Revelation understood well that Christ has the *throne* of David, as spoken of elsewhere in Isaiah,⁴ but here they learn that Christ also *administers* His kingdom unilaterally.

This is in direct contrast to the synagogue of satan and the antichrist. The synagogue claims a position for itself which it does not have, believing themselves to be the true heirs of Judah; like Shebna, they are removed as Christ is elevated. Unlike Eliakim, however, this elevation is both to the administration *and* the Throne. Christ takes by Divine Right what Shebna and the jews cannot. We bring up “antichrist,” as the prefix for the term can mean “anti” as in “in the place of.” Anyone who would claim the office of Christ, or even administration of His Church, is by definition an “antichrist;” here our Lord quotes from a passage suggesting that all such men, including all popes who appropriate the title “Vicar of Christ” for themselves, are cast down. For anyone wickedly making the claim that they sit on the throne of David or have his key, it is likely that the *other* keys are to be used for them – the keys of death and hades.

Vs.8

“I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

The direct administration of the Kingdom by Christ Himself is here employed to directly benefit the Philadelphia congregation. There a door which shall be opened, a clear path to safety, which is given by Christ to this church on account of their refusal to deny Him. This tells us that there was *pressure* for them to deny Christ, likely by the judaizing faction that was harassing Smyrna's Christians as well.⁵ While the church in Smyrna was spoken of as impoverished, the church in Philadelphia has “but little power,” suggesting that their small size limits their witness. Yet it is not the power of a congregation nor its influence over a land which determines if God is pleased with them; it is their *faithfulness* to our Lord, which the Philadelphia church demonstrates by continuing to believe and serve.

Vs.9

Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

In the discussion on Smyrna, the “synagogue of satan” was identified as a 1st Century label for the judaizing heretics who went about harassing Christians. By the 21st century it has broadened to the general jewish religion, which makes the same unmerited claims that the judaizers did: that they are the chosen people of God, that Gentiles must be made to be like jews if they are to have any hope, that the

2 Isaiah 22:22

3 Isaiah 22:15-25

4 Isaiah 9:7

5 Revelation 2:9

Law of Moses is still valid and in force, etc. They say they belong to the line of Judah, but that heritage properly belongs to Christ and His Church, which is the true Israel.

The text here develops a theology of *reversal*. The synagogue of satan, which had a great deal of power and claimed a great reputation, will be forced to bow before the Christians in Philadelphia who have *but little power*, and to learn that it is the Christians who are beloved by Christ, not the Jewish people. This is a promise made to the specific congregation, denoting that it would be accomplished during their lifetimes. How is this to be accomplished? Most likely by the Judaizers fleeing from Smyrna, which is promised a ten-day persecution.⁶ Since Philadelphia will be untouched by the trials which shall beset the Church, it will become a safe haven, and the false claimants of the faith will find out. When that is to happen, they shall be corrected.

This promise from Christ is one of both wrath and mercy. In one sense, this is a punishment, as it enforces a humiliation on the Judaizing sect which will be required to admit its errors. On the other hand, Christ does not promise the same wrath that He did for the Jezebel figure of Pergamum: they are not slated to be *killed*. Unlike the prophecy concerning Shebna the steward,⁷ they are not to be killed but shall instead be made low. Since this is a Catholic letter, one may gather from it that there is a broader application here. Obviously, the Judaizing heresy is sinful, but as it pays lip service to Christ there is a larger possibility of correction than for one who has fallen to the Carpocratian false teaching. We should be thankful for this dynamic, as it permits a certain mercy to those we may know that have fallen to the dispensationalist, Zionist, or “messianic Jewish” teachings, that there may be a course which God intends to employ that corrects them instead of destroying them as He ultimately will for the antinomian sects of today.

Vs.10-11

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

The hour of trial is connected to the ten days of tribulation Smyrna will undergo. In the first Century, this is likely in reference to the first Jewish war which culminates in the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D. The upheavals will span the entire Roman empire but settled on “the earth,” in reference to the land of Judea. Philadelphia has already been tested and found pure, so no further testing is needed – now they shall be a safe haven to other Christians and, ironically, the same Judaizers who saw the Temple as their true center of worship will flee to Philadelphia after the Temple is destroyed. Yet, as we have demonstrated thus far all the letters apply to the Church throughout *all* history: we may take comfort in knowing that during times of upheaval and violence which inevitably spread to Christians, there is always a safe haven which God has provided. For instance, during the persecution of Christians in the French Revolution, there were neighboring Christian countries and the Americas for believers to flee to. During the persecution of Christians in Japan, neighboring Shanghai was at various times a safe place for the “hidden Christian” population to go.

Vs.12-13

The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

The believer here does not receive a promise that he shall be an inanimate object; this is poetic language used to denote that the true Temple, which shall *not* be destroyed during the coming war, is

⁶ Revelation 2:10

⁷ Isaiah 22:17-18

Christ's Body. It is an already, in that the Temple was declared to be thus at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit began to dwell in all believers.⁸ It is a “not yet,” in that the New Jerusalem has not yet come down to earth as described in the last part of Revelation; we are a part of the Temple now, but not yet dwelling in the Eternal City. We also have not yet received a set of names for our possession, outside of the title “Christian.” One day, Christ shall take on another Name, which no longer reflects present and future salvation, for salvation shall be completed on Judgment Day; we do not know what this Name is, but we may assume that it will reflect His complete victory over sin, death, and the devil.

One might note that Christ calls our Heavenly Father “my God.” This is not a denial of His own Divinity, but an affirmation of His humanity. The first part of the letter includes Christ's affirmation that He has the key of David, meaning He is steward over the Kingdom just as much as He is her King; He administers this according to His human nature. While He is speaking thus, He includes the affirmation here that He is the high priest of the true Temple, the Church; this requires human language, and in this we understand that He worships the father according to His human nature, although by His Divinity there is no need.⁹

Addendum:

Note on the chiasm of Revelation 3:8-10. It denotes an emphasis on reversal. The Philadelphia church is humble and vulnerable, but is elevated and protected; the synagogue of satan claims an unearned reputation, but shall be humiliated; the judaizers claim they are God's people, but they will learn that God loves the Church. This is a central aspect of Christianity which is properly embraced, that God reverses the fortunes we see in the world today. As it stands, the wicked appear to prosper and the righteous are made to suffer; this is reversed in the course of the Eschaton. The Church appears to be cast down and spread across the earth in the dismay of division, but is actually united and beloved by God; one day He shall make this known to all.

I know that you have but little power,
and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.
9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan
who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie--
behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet,
and they will learn that I have loved you.
10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance,
I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world,
to try those who dwell on the earth.

⁸ Acts 2:1-4, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

⁹ Hebrews 7:22-28

Revelation Bible Study #12

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

Revelation 3:14-22

14 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

15 “‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! **16** So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. **17** For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. **18** I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. **19** Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. **20** Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. **21** The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. **22** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Introduction

Laodicea, being to the southeast of Philadelphia, is the site of the final church to be addressed. It was a wealthy city, situated at an advantageous trade route and having rich irrigated soil from the Lycus river and its tributaries.¹ In addition, the elites residing there had a taste for high Greek culture, including both in art and philosophy. Since 100 B.C. there was a sizeable Jewish presence as well, which is noted for regularly sending gold to the priesthood.² The congregation established there was thus founded on a *proverbially* rich soil for evangelism, as there were people there who were familiar with the Old Testament and those intelligent enough to receive the Gospel as presented at Mars Hill.³ but with a unique danger of taking on the characteristics of the city itself. While Laodicea was rich, it was also a *free city*, meaning it was permitted self-governance by the Roman Empire and was thus not obliged to conform to every single Roman edict nor adopt Roman coinage. This opens up a potential for Laodicea to be *aloof*, or lukewarm, to the concerns of the greater Empire – and for the city's church to be likewise lukewarm toward God.

Vs.14

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

This greeting recalls St. John's greeting at the beginning of the first chapter. “Amen” means “truly” or “so be it;”⁴ Christ referring to Himself this way is likely shorthand for this phrase which *ends* with Amen in the first chapter, and includes the phrase “faithful witness” to which we have citation in this greeting:

1 <https://turkisharchaeonews.net/site/laodicea-lycus>

2 <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/laodicea>

3 Acts 17:22-34

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/281.htm>

Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.⁵

This introduction describes everything Jesus Christ is to the believer, to which we can only – as St. John does – respond with a resounding “Amen.”

Various English translations have, translated the last phrase in the verse as “the beginning of God's creation,” seeming to prefer it as being connected with the descriptions of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22-31. This translation choice is unfortunate though, in that it opens up potential misunderstandings from those who are unaware of the Greek term being used. To say that Christ is the “beginning of God's creation” may sound to some like Christ was *created*, which would be the Arian heresy. It is not implied in the text though, because the word “beginning” is translated from ἀρχῆ,⁶⁷ which has a *much* stronger connotation of origin, first principles or rulership. This latter understanding, by which we would translate the phrase into “the Ruler of God's creation,” is preferable given the clear references to the first chapter found in this verse. Since Christ is called the faithful witness and Amen and the ruler of kings on earth – using ἄρχων,⁸⁹ for “ruler” – in Revelation 1:5-6, and the letters have all had parallels or references to the first chapter, it is the most sensible option for translation.

Vs.15-17

“I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

There is a theory that the irrigation water which found its way to Laodicea was not potable due to its temperature, being a lukewarm runoff from hot springs 5 miles or so from the city. Whether or not such historic geological patterns are true is not pertinent to the poetic illustration the text presents to us. The congregation in Laodicea was like lukewarm water, rendering it useless. Cold water refreshes and hot water purifies; lukewarm water is not preferred for human consumption, being useful only for irrigation and long-term water storage; after all, at lukewarm temperatures bacteria proliferates and the drinker could get sick. A “cold” church would refresh Christ by emphasizing charity to their disadvantaged neighbors, for to give a drink to the poor man is to give a drink to Jesus.¹⁰ A “hot” church would be busy purifying their lives with penitence, devotion, and emphasis on pure doctrine; they are following the exhortation of St. James to cleanse and purify their hearts so as to be exalted through their humility.¹¹ But a lukewarm church? They are simply present, going through the motions, doing absolutely nothing outside of making their congregation a social club.

The church in Laodicea got this “lukewarm” because they claimed great wealth. We must remember here that nowhere in the text is our Lord condemning *having* wealth; to the contrary, He is condemning *trusting* in wealth. The church says “I need nothing,” as though it were their great riches that brought them safety and joy; Christ responds with a statement that recalls Proverbs 11:28, “whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like a green leaf.” If a man expects all his good from his wealth then simply put that wealth is his god; such an idolater is not clothed in the

5 Revelation 1:5-6

6 Transliterated “Arché,” Strong's #746

7 <https://biblehub.com/greek/746.htm>

8 Transliterated “Archon,” Strong's #758

9 <https://biblehub.com/greek/758.htm>

10 Matthew 25:31-46

11 James 4:8-10

righteousness of Christ, nor does he possess the true riches of Heaven. In the eyes of our Lord he is, as Christ says, “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.”

Vs.18-19

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

The Laodicean congregation is not *at the moment* useful to Christ, but their lukewarm condition is not a death sentence. Lukewarm water may be heated up or cooled down, but the settled nature of a satisfied people renders them little more than plant food. Now is the time to rekindle their collective relationship with Him, because He still loves them despite their decrepit spiritual condition. Serving the Lord with renewed zeal is equivalent to buying gold refined by fire, as these works endure unto eternity as St. Paul says.¹² But to buy a white garment from Christ is *not* something achieved by our own works or gold; to the contrary, the payment is believing in Him, trusting in Him with the kind of faith that says we belong to Him.¹³ It is nothing less than to put off the old self and embrace the new, as is fitting for the priesthood of all believers to be clothed in salvation – the righteousness of Christ, not man.¹⁴

The last words in the nineteenth verse are consistent with the theme of discipline for believers found throughout the New Testament. God takes an active role in sanctification, not only in inspiring good works for each believer but also in reprovng them for sinful habits which must be corrected. Rather than some doctrine of “purgatory” being present as some state of being in the afterlife, God employs the Christian's *earthly* walk to purge them of sin via chastisement. In particular it is reminiscent of the exhortation found in Hebrews 12:

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reprovng by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?¹⁵

Vs.20

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

The reference to a *door* suggests immanence both in arrival and proximity. Christ says here that He is near, both to the time of His second Advent *and* near to whoever shall believe. To the first, more eschatological understanding, one finds a parable in St. Luke's gospel which mirrors the dynamic: “be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.”¹⁶ Those who are not ready are not cast out *per se* (that is reserved for the totally wicked within the Church), but most are disciplined at varying degrees of severity.¹⁷ So the Laodicean church is warned and encouraged concerning Judgment Day. Regarding proximity however, with the attendant offer of fellowship, one finds Christ promising in St. John's gospel, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”¹⁸ Christ is near in that His Return may happen at any time; yet to

12 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

13 Psalm 119:94

14 Psalm 132:9, Isaiah 61:10, Ephesians 4:17-24

15 Hebrews 12:5-7, which also cites Proverbs 3:11-12

16 Luke 12:36

17 Luke 12:35-48

18 John 14:23

each believer He is near to the heart such that all Christians may commune with Him in a positive fellowship.

Vs.21-22

The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

During Christ's earthly ministry, St. John once asked Him, alongside his brother St. James the Greater, if He would permit the two brothers to sit at His right hand and left once He asserted His glory. Christ's response at the time was to ask if they were prepared for martyrdom, but “to sit at My right hand or at My left is not Mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”¹⁹ Looking over that episode, one cannot escape the fact that at the time, He did not tell them who *had* been chosen to sit at His right hand. Here, He reveals to us that all who conquer – that is, those who endure in the faith until the end – they are the ones who shall be with Him in glory, receiving that special place of honor at His side and corulership in His Kingdom.

Once more we must emphasize the “already but not yet” aspect of eschatology. This promise is an “already” in that believers are truly united to Christ in Baptism,²⁰ and thus we are where He is – at the Right Hand of God the Father. This also factors into the Church's presence as the Right Hand Kingdom here on earth, wherein Christians administer the Kingdom in the present.²¹ However, it is “not yet” in that we do not yet experience the fullness of total victory which shall occur when He returns to judge the living and the dead.

19 Mark 10:35-45

20 Romans 6:1-4, Galatians 3:27

21 1 Peter 2:9, Revelation 20

Revelation Bible Study #13

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

Seven Churches Review

Each letter given to each church in Revelation 2 and 3 has value in and of itself. Any believer can read it, apply it, look for the commandable or lamentable behaviors of the “sample church” in the letter and discern whether the warnings or praise Christ gives them applies to *his* church. For example, a parishioner may read the letter to Ephesus, and see Christ commending their endurance while condemning their loss of devotion; from there he can ask whether his congregation is acting *like* Ephesus: are they zealous for good works and endurance, but lacking in their first love? If the description fits, he may suggest reforms be held at a congregational meeting, or meet with his pastor or Deacon to bring his concerns to light. If he wishes to go deeper, seeing this archetypal church's conditions repeated throughout Church history is a worthwhile fruit of his studies, demonstrating the perennial nature of the book of Revelation as a whole.

The understanding of the letters to the churches does not stop there, however. While there are depths to explore for each letter, there is also a *pattern* between all seven which must be addressed. Taken together, these seven letters establish a recurring structure which compounds, teaching the individual Christian what our Lord is emphasizing.

The structure of each letter is thus:

1. Opener: “To the angel of [church], write.”
2. Christ's self-introduction: “The words of Him who...”
3. Expression of Christ's familiarity: “I know your works...”
4. Specific message to the congregation: “But I have this against you/Behold/Do not fear”
5. Exhortation to hear: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”
6. Promise: “To the one who conquers...”

The opening line and the exhortation to hear are almost identical between all letters. Each of the self-introductions Christ gives refers back to the first chapter of Revelation, most notably in the description of Jesus as He first shows Himself to St. John. After the self-introduction, He demonstrates an intimate familiarity with the congregation He addresses, and here He typically gives praise for what the congregation is getting right (notably, this is not the case for Sardis and Laodicea).

For each congregation, the specific message is the “meat” of the letter, the most applicable part in the immediate context. Each letter's particular message is written with a chiasmic structure,¹ emphasizing a central specific point that summarizes His message to that congregation. Yet these messages will, at variance, be summarized in one of two exhortations: “repent” or “stay strong.” Those churches which have a key flaw which endangers their spiritual well-being are told to re-establish their relationship with Christ; those which are doing well are told to continue going.

1 For a primer on this, see here: <https://www.gotquestions.org/chiasm-chiastic.html>

Revelation 2:1-7²

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

2 “‘I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

4 But I have this against you,

that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen;

repent,

and do the works you did at first.

If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place,

unless you repent.

6 Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

Revelation 2:8-11

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

9 “‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer.

Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison,

that you may be tested,

and for ten days you will have tribulation.

Be faithful unto death,

and I will give you the crown of life.

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

Revelation 2:12-17

12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

13 “‘I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

14 But I have a few things against you:

you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam,

who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel,

so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.

15 So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

16 Therefore repent.

2 It is recommended that the Deacon listen to the audio of this lesson to get a firmer grasp on the chiasmic structures here for the sake of clarity.

If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'

Revelation 2:18-29

18 "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

19 "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

20 But I have this against you,

that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

21 I gave her time to repent,

but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality.

22 Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works,

23 and I will strike her children dead.

And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

24 But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say,

I do not lay on you any other burden.

25 Only hold fast what you have until I come.

26 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,

27 and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. 28 And I will give him the morning star.

29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

Revelation 3:1-6

1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

"I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

2 Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die,

for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.

3 Remember, then, what you received and heard.

Keep it, and repent.

If you will not wake up,

I will come like a thief,

and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

4 Yet you have still a few names in Sardis,

people who have not soiled their garments,

and they will walk with me in white,

for they are worthy.

5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Revelation 3:7-13

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

8 “I know your works.

Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.

I know that you have but little power,
and yet you have kept my word
and have not denied my name.

9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not,
but lie—

behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have
loved you.

10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance,
I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world,
to try those who dwell on the earth.

11 I am coming soon.

Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

12 The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Revelation 3:14-22

14 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

15 “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!

16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,
not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire,
so that you may be rich,
and white garments so that you may clothe yourself
and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen,
and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see.

**19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline,
so be zealous and repent.**

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,

I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Discernible patterns from structure:

Let us collect the messages of the letters according to their parts:

The greetings are all identical:

1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

8 “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

14 “And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

Christ's self-introductions teach us about Him. We learn about our Lord from this, and by reading them we understand more about His awareness and care for us.

‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

‘The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

The expressions of familiarity give us a deep sense of His watch over the churches. Since Revelation and it's letters are *Catholic*, or universal, they also point to the archetypal churches to whom these letters apply.

2 “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

13 “I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

19 “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

“I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

8 “I know your works.

15 “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!

We may summarize the central messages *between* the letters, taken together, with alternating commands that form a chiasm; Thyatira is in the center, on account of that congregation best representing the whole of the Church throughout history. Thyatira has a mix of faithful and unfaithful, orthodox and heretical, and thus receives mixed instructions which are settled when Christ returns for judgment. This also applies to each devout Christian, who on account of being *Simul Iustus et Peccator* (simultaneously just and sinner) shall have a general understanding of being faithful but afflicted by

sin; ultimately while we do our best to serve faithfully, it is only sanctification which can truly expunge our sinful nature. This is finally accomplished in the individual Christian at the Resurrection.

Ephesus – **repent** (return to first love)

Smyrna – *stay strong*

Pergamum – **repent** (discipline/cast out heretics)

Thyatira – **stay strong and** (to the fallen ones) **repent**

Sardis – **repent**

Philadelphia – *stay strong*

Laodicea – **Repent**

The exhortations to listen, all being identical, are couched in terms of the individual. This, like the promises made “to the one who conquers” teach us that the letters to the seven churches apply in the truest sense of universality. This is to say, what is said of a church can be said of an individual Christian. A man may be like Ephesus the same way that a church may be like Ephesus the same way an entire denomination may be like Ephesus.

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The promises made for “the one who conquers” (that is, the one who continues in the faith until the end) serve as a reminder and motivator for our continued perseverance. We are promised eternal life, a greater communion with God, and unending blessedness. These are *already* ours as Baptized believers in Christ; they are *not yet* in that what we now possess is lesser than what we shall have at the Last Day.

To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’

The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’

To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.’

26 The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,

27 and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. 28 And I will give him the morning star.

5 The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

12 The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

21 The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Addendum:

We also may notice a distinct number of *external threats* which have persisted from the transmission of these letters to the present day. They align with the great “cult mothers,” or mindsets which give rise to various heresies. The first is antinomianism, the second is judaizing, the third is gnosticism, and the fourth is materialism.³

Ephesus – antinomians (nicolaitans)

Smyrna – judaizers/jews (the synagogue of satan)

Pergamum – antinomians (nicolaitans)

Thyatira – antinomians/gnostics (carpocratians)

Sardis – spiritual lethargy/deadness (arising from good reputation)

Philadelphia – judaizers/jews (the synagogue of satan)

Laodicea – spiritual lethargy/deadness (arising from prosperity)

³ These will be the subject of a different series of study in the future.

Revelation Bible Study #14

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

Revelation 4:1-6a

1 After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” **2** At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. **3** And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. **4** Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. **5** From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, **6** and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

Introduction

One way of framing the beginning of Revelation 4 is that, having heard and transcribed the letters to the seven churches, now it is time for St. John's vision to truly begin. Perhaps, if we are being honest, people might frame it as the beginning of the “juicy” parts of the book, having finished with the “earthy” or “normal” messaging given to the seven churches. Nevertheless, we invite the reader to think of Revelation 4 and onwards as a *continuation* of what began in the first chapter.

In what begins as a book of *prophecy*,¹ Christ first exhorts St. John “Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.”² While the voice speaking to John from the door in heaven says “I will show you what must take place after this,” it is the same referent; what happens in St. John's vision is, on a certain level, *always* happening according to the perennial nature of the Apocalyptic genre. As we covered, there is plenty to be seen with the churches that occurs repeatedly throughout Church history; so too will we see plenty of events which match up with the vision moving forward from the fourth chapter.

But before we begin to discuss events and circumstances, St. John describes a *location*, namely the Throne Room of our Lord. This aspect of the vision will take a similar form to the instances of Old Testament prophets being granted a view of the Divine residence. By emphasizing the location with his description, St. John is placing the text firmly within the prophetic tradition. *Unlike* the previous visions, the Apostle includes details which harmonize with them, suggesting to the reader not only a familiarity with Moses' or Isaiah's or Zechariah's visions, but and incorporation which elevates the book of Revelation *above* them to some degree. This is not to say that St. John thinks of himself as a superior to the previous prophets, but rather that his *vision* is one which – in closing out the canon – represents the climax of the Canon.

Vs.1

After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard

1 Revelation 1:3

2 Revelation 1:19

speaking to me like a trumpet, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

The door which opens in the first verse is *above* St. John, being “in heaven.” This is to say, the sky: the door presented to him hovers above in plain sight, open to the spiritual reality which humanity is typically barred from seeing. The door is presented as being simply *there*, without telling the reader how St. John was to reach the height necessary to enter. We might speculate that it was an “out of body” experience, wherein the Apostle might see his own body laying on the ground as he floats upwards. It is not so easy for us to conclude this, for the previous instance of an Apostle being caught up in Heaven is St. Paul, who attests regarding the experience that he does not know if it was in the body or out of it.³

How was St. John to go up then? St. Paul was “caught up to the third heaven,” suggesting an involuntary elevation; God, we imagine, simply made St. Paul’s body or self float up to Paradise. But for St. John, the command from the trumpeted voice is for him to “come up.” This suggests that it is a vision, but *more* than a vision, for the onus is on the Apostle to actually go where he is beckoned and see things for himself. How shall he ascend? He never has the chance to answer that question for himself, as the next verse says he was “in the Spirit” shortly after hearing those words, and he was brought up. Yet he likely saw a way, the same ladder or flight of steps that the patriarch Jacob saw at Bethel which no man has ever climbed, wherein he declared “This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”⁴ This is implied by the command to ascend, and fits with the way in which this passage dwells on things revealed in the Old Testament. Since Christ attests in the letter to Philadelphia that He has the key of David⁵ as well as the key of death and hades,⁶ we can assume that this door was open by virtue of the *first* key – that is, one used for the Saints who belong to God’s Israel; the open door effectively declares St. John to be a Saint justified by His faith in Christ. Thus he does not have to climb to get through the door, for no man may enter Heaven by his works.

Vs.2-3

2 At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. **3** And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald.

Though St. John is commanded to ascend, he is taken up after having heard the exhortation. The reason for this jolting change is simple: he was commanded to do something impossible for him to accomplish, and was thus brought up by a gracious act of our Lord. The voice is “the first voice,” which is like a trumpet, meaning it is Christ speaking the command.⁷ Christ tells him to come up, and Christ is the One who *brings* him up. This is contrary to every imagined “ladder of divine ascent” schema of the monastics, who suppose that by their own works and virtue seeking that they can “climb” their way to Heaven. Contrary to this, Jesus *pulls* St. John up by an act of Grace.

This passage includes a direct description of God the Father Himself. Our Heavenly Father is spoken of as resembling “jasper and carnelian.” St. John’s jasper is understood to be clear or translucent with white or green tones,⁸ while carnelians have always been red. This is not necessarily a comment on the color of God, as though He had a particular skin color; it seems more that our Lord is depicted wearing a jasperlike robe similar to that which Christ was wearing in the first chapter, and the carnelian

3 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

4 Genesis 28:10-17

5 Revelation 3:7

6 Revelation 1:18

7 His voice is described as being like a trumpet in Revelation 1:10

8 Revelation 21:11

denote eyes like a “flame of fire” just as His Son has.⁹ In other words, our Heavenly Father has a similar *appearance* to Christ His Son, but the additional use of gemstones suggests a reflective, shining visage as holiness radiates out from Him. Though there is a similar visage, the use of gemstone imagery reflects the fact that St. John beholds the Father according to the Father's sole Divine Nature, while he beholds Christ according to Christ's human nature.

There are a number of objections to the possibility of St. John seeing the Father – which would render Revelation nothing more than a symbolic book that properly belongs to the “idealist” school of interpretation.¹⁰ Regarding the objection that no man may see God and live,¹¹ we must remember that this pronouncement made to Moses was *before* the Atonement, *before* the New Covenant; it is assumed here that the Apostle is permitted to see the Father on account of that New Covenant of which he is a beneficiary. Regarding the objection that God dwells in “unapproachable light” and having never been seen,¹² we note two things. First St. Paul made that statement before his own visionary experience,¹³ suggesting that up until *that point* no one had ever seen the Father; second, we simply assert that our Heavenly Father may at any time depart from the “unapproachable light” (while also still dwelling in it in a certain sense) to hold court in the Throne Room. The ways in which His Presences work, and the ways in which He chooses to reveal Himself, are up to Him. Here, He chooses to reveal Himself to St. John without destroying the Apostle – it is as simple as that.

Regarding the rainbow which comes from this radiance, St. John expects us to connect these two verses to Ezekiel's vision in the first chapter of his prophecy.¹⁴ But there is an indication that something has *changed* between Ezekiel's vision and St. John's, namely the rainbow which surrounds the Throne; Ezekiel comments on the brightness of the rainbow and its having the same appearance as an earthly rainbow, while St. John comments that now it takes the appearance of an *emerald*, entirely green. This is the first indication of a dynamic introduced in Revelation, that something has *changed* in Heaven. Previous experiences from the prophets are rendered *less applicable* in the imaginations of believers, who are now expected to picture what the Apostle describes rather than Ezekiel's or Zechariah's descriptions; it contributes to Revelation's *climactic* nature. Whereas Ezekiel saw the normal rainbow, a sign of God's covenant with mankind during Noah's day after the Flood,¹⁵ now there is a *different* rainbow; God is making all things *new*, including a change to the rainbow to signify a different Covenant which supercedes that which was given to Noah.¹⁶

Jasper, carnelian (or carbuncle), and emerald are all found together in one other place in Scripture, namely that of the breastplate on the ephod worn by the Aaronic high priest.¹⁷ It could well be that the high priest of Israel was instructed to wear such a breastplate as a reflection of Heavenly realities, but a greater parallel is found in the twenty-first chapter of Revelation wherein the walls of the New Jerusalem have twelve gemstones adorning them. Aaron wore a breastplate with an *eschatological* emphasis on it, not necessarily one which reflected the visage of God Himself.

Vs.4

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

9 Revelation 1:13-15

10 That is, the idealists see Revelation as being a general commentary about hope for believers, not an actual prophecy.

11 Exodus 33:20

12 1 Timothy 6:14-16

13 2 Corinthians is dated as being written up to 10 years after 1 Timothy.

14 Ezekiel 1:26-28

15 Genesis 9:8-17

16 Revelation 21:5, cf. Isaiah 65:17

17 Exodus 28:15-35

Twenty four thrones now surround the central Throne of our Lord. These almost certainly have the twelve patriarchs of Israel and the twelve Apostles seated upon them – with two changes to their original naming and numbering. We see a hint of it in the seventh chapter, which includes twelve thousand men sealed from “every tribe of the sons of Israel.”¹⁸ Looking over that list, Manasseh is shown having taken the place of Dan as a tribe, and the half-tribe of Ephraim is renamed “Joseph.” Similarly, Judas is not among the elders on the throned, having been replaced by Matthias.¹⁹ The tribe of Dan was the first tribe to apostatize, falling into idolatry;²⁰ the last time it is mentioned tribally (as opposed to the location *called* Dan) is when Hiram-abi – a man with *half* his heritage in Dan – is selected by Hiram, king of Tyre, to serve Solomon in the construction of the Temple.²¹ This is to say, there is no recognition for Dan, as the tribe was brought to nothing on account of its early adoption of idols. Judas, as we all remember, was replaced on account of his suicide after having betrayed Christ; he chose wrath rather than restoration, having no faith in the forgiveness freely offered by our Lord, and thus he was replaced. The twenty four elders are shown wearing *white* garments, like those promised to the one who conquers in the letter to Sardis;²² such would not be afforded to Dan or to Judas.²³

The twenty four elders are commonly understood to be the patriarchs and the Apostles on account of their historic numbering; the only real “twelves” highlighted in Scripture are these. Here is another *change* in Heaven though which contributes to Revelation's climactic tone, as no prophet had pronounced more than one throne in God's Throne Room! Yet this number, with twelve patriarchs and twelve Apostles, demonstrates a joining together of Old Testament and New Testament saints in one location, the continuation of Israel as a meeting between them in a *climactic* setting.

Vs.5-6a

5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, **6a** and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.

The lightning and thunder portrayed here recall the witness of Ezekiel in the first chapter of his book,²⁴ which itself reflects the cloud, thunder and lightning which accompanied the Lord when He arrived on Sinai to pronounce the Law to Israel.²⁵ When God is present for judgment and other matters of the Law, the experience is presented as noisy and bright, with clouds and smoke involved; here, St. John notes the noise and lightning but *not* the cloud nor smoke, as this is God's “home” so to speak. The Apostle is privileged to see everything in perfect clarity.

The seven torches, explained as the “seven spirits of God,” refers to the Holy Spirit. Though He is one Person, He reveals Himself in this way, as seven spirits, to demonstrate the totality of fulfillment of prophecy found in the Person and work of Christ Jesus. This is on account of the Holy Spirit being described as having a sevenfold ministry in Isaiah 11:1-5, which is in direct relation to Christ having the proper gifts for ministry according to His human nature:

1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

18 Revelation 7:4-8

19 Acts 1:15-26

20 Judges 18

21 2 Chronicles 2:11-16

22 Revelation 3:5

23 It may well be that the original son of Jacob, Dan himself, was saved; nonetheless, his descendants' absence from the list suggest that he is not permitted a throne.

24 Ezekiel 1:4, 1:13

25 Exodus 20:18-21

2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,
4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

The sea of glass is recognized from the Covenant ratification feast between God and the elders of Israel.²⁶ Ezekiel sees the glass pavement above the cherubim *twice*, first as God accompanies the Exiles, second as God's glory departs the Jerusalem Temple.²⁷ It is portrayed as having a blue or sapphire tint to it while remaining clear. Here in this passage it is revealed that the pavement or firmament is none other than the floor of God's Throne Room, from where He judges the world and other human populations; thus the vision is beginning to be set in a “courtroom” style event.

26 Exodus 24:9-11

27 Ezekiel 1:26, 10:1

Revelation Bible Study #15

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

Revelation 4:6b-11

6b And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: **7** the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. **8** And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

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

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

11 “Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.”

Introduction

St. John has described the Throne Room of God using language familiar to the Old Testament prophets. He describes a crystal floor, a central Throne, and One seated upon it who has the appearance of jasper and carnelian. His description is distinct though, reflecting changes in Heaven according to the institution of the New Covenant. As Revelation is the final book in the canon of Scripture, it is no accident that our Lord presented all of this to St. John in the way that He did; it is the climactic closing of the canon which supercedes previous prophetic visions.

While the vision is presented as climactic, the presence of the living creatures and their utterances leaves the reader befuddled. Who are they? Why are they there? Do they truly repeat the same thing eternally? What is their purpose? While there is a hard limit to angelology given the sparse details from Scripture as to their nature, we *can* reach an understanding of St. John's vision which magnifies the themes of Revelation. If one considers the purpose of angelic presences according to messages being sent, then the specifics of what is happening with their visage matter far less to our understanding of the text.

Vs.6b-8

6b And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: **7** the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. **8** And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,

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

The phrase “living creature” seems to be an approximation. St. John uses only one word,

ζῷα,¹² which is derived from the Greek word for “life.” At first we might be tempted to say the Apostle has no better term for them in the moment, and thus uses “living creature” as a placeholder, but it is actually the same word used for the four cherubim in Ezekiel:

“And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze.”³

In employing the same exact term, St. John is identifying these four as being the same creatures (or same type of creatures) that Ezekiel the prophet beheld during his inaugural vision. Like the Throne Room itself, something has *changed*. The living creatures, identified as cherubim which accompany the “whirling wheels,”⁴ are now mysteriously covered in eyes while their partners (the wheels) are absent. Ezekiel tells us that the spirit of the living creatures is “in” the wheels.⁵ This suggests that the two entities are actually *one*, and in the Throne Room the eyes of the wheels manifest on the bodies of the cherubim as they re-merge. This, plus the seeming absence of Seraphim in the Throne Room, leads us to a number of speculative conclusions:

1. The living creatures are actually the Seraphim, and Isaiah did not see their various faces on account of their wings covering them.
2. The Seraphim are absent for some mysterious reason
3. These are all the same creatures; the living creatures are the wheels are the seraphim.

The first option is *possible*, but then one would wonder why the four living creatures are described with language that properly belongs to the cherubim and wheels Ezekiel saw (having animal faces, eyes all around, etc.). The second option leaves one wondering what *happened* to the Seraphim; why would these special angels, whose vocation is endless praise, be found absent? The third option, while most bizarre, accounts for all three angelic beings; at some point the Seraphim became cherubim and wheels for Ezekiel's vision, but then reconstituted into single creatures with a different visage for St. John's visitation onward.

Whatever the case may be, more importantly we want to focus on the significance of the angels themselves, the *message* being sent by their presence. Here, we must tread even more carefully, lest our speculations about what the angels *mean* overstep the boundaries of proper exegesis. Here is what we know:

1. St. John's writing maintains a persistent theme of change in the Throne Room (the rainbow around the Father changing colors, the addition of the thrones for elders).
2. St. John's writing maintains a persistent theme of *union* in the presentation of the Throne Room, with the 24 elders (12 Patriarchs, 12 Apostles) showing a new unity between saints of Old and New Covenants.
3. There is a distinct change in the calls of praise from the living creatures, that they highlight that God “was and is and is to come,” instead of His general glory. This highlights the *apocalyptic* genre of Revelation, as it presents Eternal History to us.

1 Transliterated “Zoa,” Strong's #2226

2 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2226.htm>

3 Ezekiel 1:5-7, the word ζῷα being used in the Greek Old Testament.

4 Ezekiel 10:1-14

5 Ezekiel 1:20

If we understand these themes (change, union, and eternity), then we can presumably make some sense of the living creatures. Since there is a change in the Throne Room, there is a change in the angelic presentation; since there is unity between saints of the Old and New Covenants, we see the living creatures with unified characteristics of the Seraphim who praised God continually and the Cherubim who accompanied God in going with His people as they traveled in Exile. The Seraphim were living agents of mercy,⁶ while the cherubim were executors of God's will on earth.⁷ And as God brings St. John to this Apocalyptic vision, encompassing past and present and future, so too does he see four living creatures which seem to represent *all* previously revealed angels in the Old Testament. These four are living witnesses to the content of the message he is receiving, wherein the accomplishment of Law and Gospel – Cherub and Seraph – is about to occur throughout the rest of the book.

Law and Gospel among the Angels

Cherubim are presented as having a specific vocation. In Ezekiel's vision, a “chariot” motif is introduced which shows God traveling alongside the children of Judah as they go to Babylon for Exile; the message shortly thereafter to the prophet may be characterized as God saying to His people, “I'm not done with you yet.” Later, in Ezekiel 10, they accompany the cherubim as they remove God's presence from the Jerusalem Temple; the message there is “I *am* done with this Temple and the corrupt priesthood there.” The Cherubim are thus agents of God's judgment – His *Law* – carrying out the tasks that He sets out for them on earth utilizing the wheels. St. John seeing Cherub characteristics on the living creatures demonstrates that our Lord is about to hold *court* and pronounce guilt or innocence.

We also note that the Seraphim seen by Isaiah are seemingly absent in St. John's vision.⁸ Instead, it is now the *living creatures* which have six wings. These living creatures now chant “Holy, holy, holy” instead of the Seraphim, and their praise to God cites the Lord's eternity (“who was and is and is to come”) rather than His glory (“the whole earth is full of His glory”), but they are still proclaiming something *good* in the presence of St. John. One might expect, if only a guilty sentence were being proclaimed, that they would be shouting woes upon humanity during this time, but instead they worship. Note also in Isaiah's vision, that a Seraph approaches the prophet to proclaim mercy, that his sins have been atoned for. If the function of the Cherubim is to carry out matters of the Law, then the Seraphim proclaim and enact the Gospel; that their characteristics are found on the living creatures in front of St. John tells us that God shall be holding court, but there is an element of *mercy* also taking place.

Vs.9-11

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, **10** the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

11 “Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.”

Here the twenty-four elders give glory to our Heavenly Father on account of His chief role in Creation. In the next chapter, these same elders will praise Jesus for His chief role in Redemption. Later on, the saints will be recognized together in what appears to be praise for the Holy Spirit in His

6 Isaiah 6:5-7

7 Ezekiel 10

8 Isaiah 6:1-3

operations among them. This order reflects the Trinitarian formula given to us by Christ,⁹ and the recognition for chief works which will later be utilized by the Church to formulate the Apostles' Creed.

The living creatures give glory, and “whenever” this happens the elders follow suit, removing their crowns and praising our heavenly Father. By “whenever,” we can reasonably conclude that the Throne Room is not a monotony of continuous praise repeated endlessly; the “day and night” aspect of their praise from verse 8 suggests that the never ceasing praise is not second-by-second, or else the next chapter would not occur. The picture being painted for us is one in which an orderly liturgical life is demonstrated in the activities of the Church *even in Heaven*. In Church history, this format is copied into the “canonical hours” of regular worship: the “day and night” frequency contributes to the Laud morning service, while Vespers services are found in the evening. That there are seven canonical hours services,¹⁰ reflects the theme of completion, represented in the number seven throughout Revelation,

Notably, the glory of man is voluntarily removed when God's glory enters the picture. Since it is “whenever” the creatures praise God, presumably the elders put their crowns back on after the service of praise. By action this demonstrates the “Coram Deo/Coram Mundo” distinction. Coram Deo, meaning “before the face of God,” is that which is proper to interactions with our Lord; Coram Mundo, “before the face of the world” is that which is proper toward humanity and creation. Coram Deo we are justified by faith alone and we have no merits whatsoever before Him with our deeds: thus the elders remove their crowns and humbly praise our Lord. Coram Mundo we are justified by faith and works – that is, we are vindicated in our faith by our confessions and our deeds before our fellow man: thus the elders have their crowns back on their heads when facing the rest of the saints. This passage also adds much needed context to 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, in which St. Paul advocates for men to *not* have coverings on their heads while engaging in worship with our Lord; by removing their coverings, men put aside worldly honor and present themselves before God so that *His* is the glory entirely.

9 Matthew 28:19

10 From night time to end of day: Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, Nones, Vespers, and Compline.

Revelation Bible Study #16

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

Revelation 5:1

1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

Introduction

St. John has described the Throne Room and those within it. In essence, this moment is a unifying of Old and New Covenants, and a “courtroom” episode in which Law and Gospel shall be carried out to their fullest extent. Some shall be judged and destroyed, while others are preserved and saved. But nothing has *happened* yet in his vision, save some praises being offered by the living creatures and the twenty-four elders. Now the movement of the vision begins in earnest as Christ, presenting Himself in a unique way to accomplish a unique purpose. Before we go into that event though, we must first ask two crucial questions:

- Why does God hold the scroll the way that He does, in His right hand? [There is an addendum to the end of this study which shows the various meanings]
- What is the scroll's significance?

Vs.1

Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

The Right Hand

Our Heavenly Father holds a scroll in His *right hand*. Scripture utilizes the right and left often as a means of portraying decisions, as seen in the amicable separation between Abraham and Lot: “If you take the left hand, then I will go right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.”¹ It also demonstrates preferability in inheritances, as Jacob shows in placing his right hand on Ephraim's head.² Elsewhere the children of Israel are commanded to not make any decisions contrary to the Old Covenant strictures, using the phrase “to the right hand or to the left” as a phrase symbolic of the forbidden act.³ Those who maintained a straight path, not veering off into their own personal decisions away from what was commanded, are praised for their steadfastness using the same turn of phrase.⁴ The right hand of man is also connected with strength, as most people are right-handed.⁵

The Right Hand of God is presented as that which signifies His actions on earth, especially when He accomplishes judgment.⁶ The Psalmist praises God's Right Hand as that which points us to His “pleasures forevermore” as well as His Right Hand being a power of

1 Genesis 13:9, cf., see addendum for a more comprehensive list.

2 Genesis 48:14, 17

3 Deuteronomy 17:11, 28:13-14

4 E.g., Josiah is praised in 2 Chronicles 34:1-2

5 Job 40:14

6 Exodus 15:6, 15:12

salvation.⁷ In this sense, the right hand is symbolic for the *actions* of God upon human populations, whether it be for wrath or mercy. In the Mosaic Law, the priests were consecrated with blood places on their right side,⁸ and cleansings were performed on lepers emphasizing the right side;⁹ this is to say, those who administer the Law with all its strictures receive their office of Law according to the right hand side, yet *so do those to whom God shows mercy*. That He holds the scroll in His right hand communicates to us that this scroll has to do with *judgment*: God has made a decision, and this decision shall be enacted when the seals are opened.

The Scroll

Regarding the scroll, it is the decree which pronounces two things according to its two sides: condemnation against those who choose to continue in their rebellion against God, and salvation for those who trust in Christ. In Psalm 40, Christ declares “In the scroll of the book it is written of me” – and what is written of him consists of Law and Gospel: “Your Law is within my heart,” and “I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation.”¹⁰ It is for this reason that when Ezekiel sees a scroll written on both sides (but only reads one side), he perceives that it is full of “lamentation and mourning and woe” but says it tastes sweet when commanded to eat it;¹¹ for those who do not belong to God it is lamentation, but for the believer it is *sweet*, something they recognize as *good*. In situations like that of Zechariah, the scroll is applied to proclaim the Second Use of the Law – condemnation of sinners of any stripe.¹²

Biblical eschatology proclaims the “already but not yet” dynamic here as well. Daniel the prophet beholds it, seeing a scroll (or “book”) which is sealed until the end,¹³ just as the seven seals of the scroll in St. John's vision are present until Christ removes them. Much of Revelation reveals the events of the end. Yet when we remember the associations made between the scroll and the subject of Law and Gospel, we must recognize that its judgments are also a *present* reality for us. Revelation contains a great deal of prophecy concerning the damnation of the wicked, and all who do not believe in Christ; that sentence passed upon them is one which applies to them *now*, unless they repent. Conversely, those that continue in their faith are under the declaration of innocence and eternal life – so long as they believe. That there is an endpoint to the material world as we know it does not mean this prophecy does not apply to us in the here and now; the scroll is immanent, as Zechariah shows, but it is also far off, as St. John describes its final – and apocalyptic – opening.

ADDENDUM

The following “slides” are a collection of verses which demonstrate the different uses of the term “right hand,” beginning with its application to human decision.

7 Psalm 16:11, 20:6

8 Leviticus 8:24

9 Leviticus 14:14-17

10 Psalm 40:7-10

11 Ezekiel 2:8-3:3

12 Zechariah 5:1-4

13 Daniel 12:1-9

Revelation 5:1

1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

"RIGHT HAND OR THE LEFT"

1.

Genesis 13:8-9

8 Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left."

Genesis 24:47-49

47 Then I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?' She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms. 48 Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son. 49 Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left."

2.

Deuteronomy 17:18-20

18 "And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, 20 that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.

Deuteronomy 28:13-14

13 And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them, 14 and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

Joshua 1:7

Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

2 Samuel 2:19

And Asahel pursued Abner, and as he went, he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner.

2 Chronicles 34:2

And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

Revelation 5:1

1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

THE POWER OF THE RIGHT HAND

Exodus 15:6

**Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,
your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.**

Deuteronomy 33:1-2

1 This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the people of Israel before his death. 2 He said,

**“The Lord came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us;
he shone forth from Mount Paran; he came from the ten thousands of holy ones,
with flaming fire at his right hand.**

Psalms 21:8-9

8 Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you.

9 You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear.

The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath, and fire will consume them.

Psalms 45:4-5

4 In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness; let your right hand teach you awesome deeds!

**5 Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies;
the peoples fall under you.**

Psalms 74:10-11

10 How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?

11 Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them!

Psalms 110:1

The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

Lamentations 2:4

**He has bent his bow like an enemy, with his right hand set like a foe;
and he has killed all who were delightful in our eyes**

in the tent of the daughter of Zion; he has poured out his fury like fire.

Habakkuk 2:16

You will have your fill of shame instead of glory. Drink, yourself, and show your uncircumcision! The cup in the Lord's right hand will come around to you, and utter shame will come upon your glory!

Mark 14:62

And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

Revelation 5:1

I Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

THE SALVATION OF THE RIGHT HAND

Job 40:14

Then will I also acknowledge to you that your own right hand can save you.

Psalm 16:8

I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.

Psalm 16:11

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 17:7

Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand.

Psalm 18:35

You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great.

Psalm 20:6

Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand.

Psalm 60:5

That your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer us!

Psalm 63:8

My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

Psalm 118:15-16

Glad songs of salvation are in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the Lord does valiantly, the right hand of the Lord exalts, the right hand of the Lord does valiantly!"

Isaiah 41:10

fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 62:8

The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: "I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink your wine for which you have labored;

Revelation 5:1

1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

THE CONSECRATION OF THE RIGHT HAND

Exodus 29:19-21

19 "You shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, 20 and you shall kill the ram and take part of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet, and throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar. 21 Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons' garments with him. He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons' garments with him.

Leviticus 14:11-14

11 And the priest who cleanses him shall set the man who is to be cleansed and these things before the Lord, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. 12 And the priest shall take one of the male lambs and offer it for a guilt offering, along with the log of oil, and wave them for a wave offering before the Lord. 13 And he shall kill the lamb in the place where they kill the sin offering and the burnt offering, in the place of the sanctuary. For the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest; it is most holy. 14 The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and the priest shall put it on the lobe of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.

Revelation Bible Study #17

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

Revelation 5:1-5

1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals. **2** And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” **3** And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, **4** and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. **5** And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Introduction

St. John has told us he saw a scroll in the Right Hand of our Heavenly Father. We have identified it as a kind of written decree which declares Law and Gospel; it pronounces woe and destruction upon those who continue in their rebellion against God, but salvation and deliverance to those who belong to Christ. The scroll declares what God's Right Hand *does*, as described in the Old Testament. But now it is time to give a reason for this part of the Apostle's vision. Why is it there? What makes this appearance of the scroll different from its appearances in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah? Here, we see the importance of its opening as an eschatological, soteriological act by Christ the Son of David. Its being opened is the ultimate act of “already but not yet” seen in Revelation thus far. What it proclaims is a present sentence on those who are damned or saved, but its ultimate opening carries it out to the fullest extent.

Vs.2-4

And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” **3** And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, **4** and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

In Daniel's vision, the scroll is sealed “until the end.”¹ Here, St. John discovers that the “end” of which the prophet hears from the angel is predicated on someone being *worthy*. Until such time as a worthy one is procured, things shall carry on as they always have. The angel tells the prophet, “Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.” While knowledge certainly has increased, *morally* speaking very little changes; “Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves and make themselves white and be refined, but the wicked shall act wickedly. And none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand.” Men shall, until the end, either be wise enough to repent and be saved or continue in their rebellion until they are damned. This shall continue until the final day when the scroll is completely opened.

What makes someone worthy to open the seals? We make two assumptions here based on previous lessons: that this is the same scroll as that which Daniel and Zechariah and Ezekiel beheld, and that this scroll proclaims all that the Lord's right hand does – especially in matters of Law and Gospel. Firstly then, one who is worthy to open it must *never* have been under the sentence of the Law, which is death: “the wages of sin is death.”² When Zechariah encounters the

1 Daniel 12:1-13, referenced throughout this paragraph.

2 Romans 6:23, 2 Corinthians 3:6

scroll flying, he is informed that it acts as a curse that enacts judgement against all who steal and swear falsely by God's Name.³ No one who has sinned or is sinful may open it, negating humanity's role in enacting the end as Daniel was told. Because this scroll emphasizes Law *and* Gospel, the latter is part of the requirement as well; one who is worthy to open it is one to whom the Gospel applies without him being subject to the curse of the Law. Though the angel calling out with a loud voice is *mighty*, he makes no attempt at opening it himself; as he is not man, the Gospel does not apply to him - or any other angel for that matter.

The Apostle weeps when confronted with the insufficiency of both men and angels. He weeps on account of what the scroll remaining shut *means*, namely the maintenance of the status quo. Believers remain persecuted, the wicked remain prosperous on this earth, and the Body of Christ is subject to the winds and whims of constant change. So long as the scroll is sealed, believers are not yet delivered from their three enemies, the world and the flesh and the devil, as they have suffered under these three since ancient times. Recalling the promises Daniel hears when he sees the scroll, it means a delay of the time in which the saints receive everlasting life and in which evangelists shine “like the brightness of the sky above,” and a continuation of “the shattering of the power of the holy people.”⁴ In other words, evil persists and the Church is in it for the *long haul*.

Vs.5

5 And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

We do not know which elder encouraged St. John, whether he was one of the patriarchs or one of the Apostles. For all we know, this was St. John speaking to himself. Nevertheless, his encouragement is one which shall be fulfilled in the texts following this one. We must first ask why his comfort takes the form that it does, presenting Christ as the Lion and Root. After all, Christ enters the vision as a Lamb in the next verse.

The genealogy of Jesus Christ according to His human nature is established in Matthew 1 and Luke 3:23-38. Both genealogies feature a direct descent from King David, making Jesus the rightful heir to the throne of Israel. Yet here the Apostle is informed that it is not David who is the forefather of Christ, but it is Christ who is the *Root* of David.⁵ This is a direct reference to Isaiah's prophesy concerning the “shoot from the stump of Jesse,” who happens to *also* be the “root of Jesse.”⁶ By being *both*, the prophet and the elder who speaks to St. John are emphasizing that Christ is both from Jesse's (David's) line and also the originator of it. He pre-exists David by an eternity, to be sure, but the very reason for David's ascent to the throne of Israel is on account of the oracles of Jacob over his son Judah; the scepter of rule was placed in Judah's hands under David's line until Christ arrived.⁷

Jacob's prophecy also factors into the Lion and Root imagery. Though Jacob was not an intimidating man, he calls Judah a “lion's cub” in his oracle, and if there is a lion's cub there must be a “Lion” which has taken ownership, almost as adoption, over Judah. The elder encouraging St. John emphasizes Christ's pre-existent preeminence over Judah and the line of David to remind him that this was always part of the plan, and that from eternity past He has been preparing for the moment in which He shall open the scroll.

3 Zechariah 5:3

4 Daniel 12:3, 7.

5 Emphasized by our Lord Himself in Matthew 22:41-46

6 Isaiah 11:1-10

7 Genesis 49:8-12

Revelation Bible Study #18

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

Revelation 5:6-14

6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. **7** And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. **8** And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

9 And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”

11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, **12** saying with a loud voice,

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

13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Introduction

When the angel calls out for anyone who is worthy to open the great Scroll in our Heavenly Father's right hand, St. John is dismayed to find that no one was found who fit the prerequisites. He weeps knowing that so long as the scroll is shut the current state of affairs is in force, with the Church being in a state of persecution while the world runs roughshod over it. But an elder comforts him saying that the Lamb, the Lion of Judah, “has conquered.” It is in this moment that Christ arrives in the Throne Room to claim and open the great Scroll. Before He begins to open the seals, however, there is appropriate acclaim and praise given unto Him. We must be careful to note that the basis of their praise is not *solely* on the Atonement, for it is rather centered on His worthiness; the event is not a coronation of a new King based on His sacrifice, but the inauguration of His Kingdom based on His already having been worthy, but giving a *sign* by His death and Resurrection by which all men may see that He is worthy of all laud and acclaim.

Vs.6-7

6 And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. **7** And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

In the previous verses Christ is described as Root and Lion. Calling Him these emphasizes His eternal role in being the Anointed King who *precedes* and *proceeds* from David's line. Though these appellations are true, our Savior decides to present as the Lamb, calling to remembrance how St. John the Baptist referred to Him: "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."¹ The contrast in titles and presentation reminds the reader that the *Atonement* is the central part of the Gospel; Christ comes to the throne *as One slain*, having shed His blood for our sins. Let us make no mistake though, His being portrayed as a Lamb is symbolic of more than just sacrifice; this is in keeping with the prophetic style of Daniel of representing *kingdoms* and *rulers* as animals.

In Daniel 8, the prophet sees a vision of two animals: a ram and the goat which conquers it. Gabriel the angel explains to the prophet that the ram symbolizes the Medo-Persian empire, and the goat represents Greece; the horn of the goat is broken and four arise in its place, representing the four kingdoms which arose after Alexander the Great's death. The ram has two horns, representing the kings of Media and Persia, while the goat's singular horn represents Alexander. Both creatures obtain their kingdoms through violent contest, whereas the *Lamb* is presented as the most worthy Person by virtue of being *slain*. Instead of conquering humanity as Persia and Greece sought to do, Christ conquers death *for* humanity.

The "seven" motif is found in the visage of Christ as the Lamb. He has seven eyes and seven horns, and like the seven torches before the Throne² these are all the Holy Spirit. Whereas the ram and the goat in Daniel have two or one or four horns depending on the number of human rulers present (conspicuously totalling seven horns), Christ Himself has the Holy Spirit guiding and supervising the members of His kingdom. As "seven" is clearly presented as a complete and Divine number, the contrast is made between Christ's Kingdom and the kingdoms of men. Xerxes may hold some power for a while with his kingdom's two horns; Alexander had his day with his singular aggressive expansion; but *Christ's* Kingdom is complete and everlasting because the eternal God is its Ruler.

Vs.8-14

8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. **9** And they sang a new song, saying,

"Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth."

11 Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, **12** saying with a loud voice,

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might

1 John 1:29

2 Revelation 4:5

and honor and glory and blessing!”

13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

The Praise of the elders

Despite the influence from Daniel's writing dealing with kings and kingdoms, it would be insufficient to say that these praises constitute a coronation. Christ already *being* worthy, already being the Root of Jesse and Lion of Judah, means that Him approaching the Right Hand of God is something that He asserts unilaterally as an inauguration of something already prophesied. The seven horns form something of a crown being already placed on His head. That He is eternally preexistent and Divine is shown by the prayers of the saints being presented to Him and the harps being played in praise; the elders treat Jesus as God, proclaiming Him worthy and ultimately falling down to worship Him.

This worthiness is not *earned* in time by the Atonement, as though Christ was previously unworthy.³ Since the book of Revelation stands on the entirety of the rest of Scripture and obsessively cites nearly every book in the Canon, it would be preposterous to claim that Jesus earned this moment. There are many prophesies concerning Christ and many passages proclaiming His Divinity, rendering the adoptionist reading of this chapter untenable. It is better understood that the elders know His Divinity and infinite worth were already present, but they proclaim His death and Resurrection as the *signs* by which men know that He is the legitimate and worthy Savior. To place this in application, someone might ask us why they should worship Jesus and trust in Him to be their King; the reply we may give, as shown by the elders, is that Christ died for our sins and rose again. He is worthy of worship already, but He applies that worthiness to saving our souls.

Our Savior does not need to wait to be crowned, as He has already made a kingdom and a priesthood out of everyone who believes;⁴ nonetheless the elders proclaim that the sign of His worthiness is found in having “ransomed” humanity. The Greek term ἡγόρασας,⁵ translated “ransomed,” has a stronger connotation of redemption or purchase. It is not that humanity was being held captive by someone and must thereby be purchased back;⁷ it is more to say that humanity was *under a sentence of death*, and Christ paid for their release on the Cross. Since they have been purchased, their fate is changed from death to reigning on earth with Jesus, reinforcing the appearance of Christ as Lamb to be a *Kingdom* matter just as much as being about the Atonement.

The Praise of the Angels

One may note that the angels proclaim that Christ is worthy to *receive* power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory and blessing. This is in relation to His humanity. The elders – representing humanity – present prayers to Christ and treat Him as Deity, then beckon the angelic

3 Such a position of having “earned” His position or Godhood is called Adoptionism, a heresy which was in formulation during St. John's lifetime.

4 Seemingly a reference to 1 Peter 2:9. It is also possible that, if 1 Peter was written after St. John received his vision, that St. Peter wrote his Epistle while Revelation was still being written and included this verse after hearing the praise of the elders.

5 Transliterated “Egorasas,” Strong's #59

6 <https://biblehub.com/greek/59.htm>

7 This is commonly referred to as the “ransom theory of Atonement,” wherein Christ somehow paid the devil to obtain possession of humanity.

host by responsory proclamation. The angelic host then addresses the humanity of Christ as being worthy to receive all good things that a righteous earthly King deserves.

The Praise of Creation

The final praise given to Christ comes from “every creature in heaven and on earth.” This appears odd, given that when St. John received his vision there were relatively few Christians – and even today nonbelievers outnumber Christians by a ratio of about two to one. Why would every single creature praise Christ and proclaim His and the Father's glory when all nonbelievers hate God according to their unregenerate nature?

The first option, favored by some of the early Church Fathers, is that this verse reflects “apocatastasis,” or a general restoration of all creatures.⁸ This belief is a kind of “wishful thinking” doctrine which posits that damnation is a temporary and cleansing matter which punishes and corrects those who refuse to worship our Lord. In other words, apocatastasis is a kind of universalism which does not do away with the doctrine of hell per se, but nonetheless holds that every created being is ultimately redeemed. Of course, this doctrine is *wrong* in that it denies the eternal nature of damnation (which we will address when arriving at Revelation 21), despite having some correct aspects to it. Indeed, God will restore creation to its original goodness and even advance its qualities to be *better* than what it was at Eden, but this does not mean the damned will eventually be un-damned.

What then are we to make of St. John recounting that all creatures in heaven and on earth praise the Father and our Savior? While the text does not give a thorough explanation, we have a few satisfactory options:

1. This is a confirmation of St. Paul's apocalyptic statement in Philippians 2:10-11 that every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Christ is Lord. It speaks of the great Recognition, not a restoration.
2. The proclamation of praise, even in nonbelievers, is a subconscious one. The Law is written on the hearts of all men,⁹ but after Pentecost all men have a kind of *draw* to the Gospel, fulfilling Christ's prophecy that He would draw all men unto Himself.¹⁰ This is the doctrine of Prevenient Grace, by which men already know the Gospel to be true; whether they have *faith* in that Gospel is distinct from this knowledge, as the nonbeliever rebels against it continually until God brings them to that faith.¹¹
3. This proclamation is not including the nonbelievers, and what St. John hears may be a praise which occurs after the Final Judgment. Thus the damned are not in heaven or on earth, but in the lake of fire. Whether the text simply assumes that the reader will exclude the nonbelievers from their understanding, or if it is indeed a post-Resurrection praise, this option is the most likely: the non-Christian is simply excluded here.

8 For more detail: <https://www.gotquestions.org/apocatastasis.html>

9 Romans 2:15

10 John 12:32

11 Romans 1:18, Ephesians 2:1-6

Revelation Bible Study #19

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

Revelation 6:1-8

1 Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” **2** And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

3 When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” **4** And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

5 When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. **6** And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!”

7 When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” **8** And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

Introduction

Eschatological Hermeneutics

In this passage, Christ has begun opening the seals to the Great Scroll. This leads to the infamous “four horsemen of the Apocalypse” imagery; four men riding horses which together represent various aspects of socio—religio-political life. Here we must take great care to avoid the exegetical pitfalls that befell previous interpreters, who have at varying degrees embarrassed themselves by applying the text in inappropriate fashions.

There are four major schools of eschatological interpretation (and we ascribe to none of these):¹

-Historicism: “Some of this has happened”

Most of the events portrayed in Revelation have identifiable fulfillments in the past, and this will culminate in Christ's Return.

-Preterism: “All of this has happened”

Most or all of the events portrayed in Revelation were fulfilled in 70 A.D. The preterist either believes Christ's Return is the only matter left to be fulfilled, or already occurred symbolically in 70 A.D.

-Futurism: “None of this has happened yet”

Few or none of the events portrayed in Revelation have been fulfilled. Typically presents an eschatological “era” which does not last very long.

-Idealism: “None of this will ever happen”

None of the events portrayed in Revelation have any fulfillment, because the book of Revelation is nothing more than a symbolic portrayal of good versus evil.

As it concerns the Horsemen, we find conflicting ideas as to their identity and purpose:

-One historicist commenter may claim that the white rider represents Constantine winning lands

¹ Against the preterist/historicist/futurist/idealist views, we take a *typological* view of Revelation [explained briefly at the end]; this has happened, is happening, and will continue to happen until Christ returns.

and toleration for Christendom; another historicist might claim the white rider is a *false* white, and so conclude that the figure is muhammad, founder of islam.

- One preterist might claim that the conquering figure is Nero. Another might point to Titus, who conquered Jerusalem.
- One futurist might claim that the white rider may come as an antichrist figure taking over the world. Another might claim that the white rider is actually Christ.
- One idealist might say that the white rider is a symbol of the spread of Christianity. Another might say that it is a symbol of Christ conquering death.

This dizzying array of disagreements over the meaning of St. John's words is found in nearly every verse from Revelation 6:1 onward. The problem of interpreting this prophecy arises whenever we decide that it is up to *us* to identify the meaning of a particular image or event in Revelation by our own ingenuity. Each of the four positions (historicism, preterism, etc.) relies on speculation and human opinion in order to find its interpretation. In so doing, we forget that St. John's vision is predicated on the foundation of the rest of Scripture, and *Scripture interprets Scripture*. The exegete must do everything in his power to exhaust the Biblical matters of interpretation before speculating. The problem with the main four schools of eschatological hermeneutics is that they typically end up putting that speculation *first*, before discovering what the text says for itself.

Revelation teaches us how to read it. Christ says to St. John that the vision is for “the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this,”² telling the reader plainly that the book is apocalyptic in genre, having to do with the cosmic history of past, present and future. St. John tells us “blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear,”³ making it catholic in application; Revelation is *always* applicable. Further, the constant references to Old Testament texts, from quoting Isaiah in the letters to the churches to presenting readers with the living creatures, we also have a growing sense from St. John that his work is to be read by those with great familiarity with what has been previously revealed – this is especially important for those matters which have *changed* – i.e., the differently colored halo around God's throne, the different presentation of the living creatures, etc.

Reference: Zechariah's Riders

The first four seals bear a striking resemblance to the visions of the prophet Zechariah, namely the following two passages:

Zechariah 1:7-17

7 On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, saying,
8 “I saw in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in the glen, and behind him were red, sorrel, and white horses.” 9 Then I said, ‘What are these, my lord?’ The angel who talked with me said to me, ‘I will show you what they are.’ 10 So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered,
‘These are they whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth.’ 11 And they answered the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees, and said,
‘We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth remains at rest.’ 12 Then the angel of the LORD said, ‘O LORD of hosts, how long will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, against which you have been angry these seventy years?’ 13 And the LORD answered gracious and comforting

2 Revelation 1:19

3 Revelation 1:3

words to the angel who talked with me. **14** So the angel who talked with me said to me, ‘Cry out, Thus says the LORD of hosts: I am exceedingly jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion. **15** And I am exceedingly angry with the nations that are at ease; for while I was angry but a little, they furthered the disaster. **16** Therefore, thus says the LORD, I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy; my house shall be built in it, declares the LORD of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. **17** Cry out again, Thus says the LORD of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem.’”

Zechariah 6:1-8

1 Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains. And the mountains were mountains of bronze. **2** The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, **3** the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses—all of them strong. **4** Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, “What are these, my lord?” **5** And the angel answered and said to me,

“These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth. **6** The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go after them, and the dappled ones go toward the south country.” **7** When the strong horses came out, they were impatient to go and patrol the earth. And he said, “Go, patrol the earth.” So they patrolled the earth. **8** Then he cried to me, “Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my Spirit at rest in the north country.”

Zechariah's riders are spiritual beings, and they fit nicely into Revelation's theology of change. St. John notes in his description of the Throne Room a number of changes that have taken place. The living creatures which Ezekiel saw have a different presentation than they previously held, the rainbow around God's Throne is now a solid green, the Seraphim are seemingly absent, etc. It appears that the spiritual figures Zechariah sees (let us call them “riders”) also undergo some changes. The angel explains to Zechariah that the riders are something like patrolmen or sentries. When Christ opens the first four seals to the Scroll, they are sent out to either enact or pronounce the circumstances which comport with the final era; that is to say, these riders enforce the circumstances which continue until the Second Coming. Someone might object that the differences in horses (pale vs. sorrel, saddled riders vs. chariots, etc.) means that this is an untenable connection. To which we reply that the basic reference is enough to demonstrate a heavenly change, namely that there has been a reassignment and the addition of two *new* riders (death and hades). In Zechariah, God tasks riders to monitor the earth – twice; in Revelation, God tasks riders to announce and enforce the way things will go until Christ returns.

The Order of War?

A preterist interpretation exists which sidesteps the issues of catholicity and connections to the Old Testament, namely that these four seals are an order of events. The appearance of these four horsemen might involve seeing their appearances *in order* as matching that of the first Jewish War; Rome arrives as a conquering force, the Zealots take peace from Judea in their rebellion, the war causes great scarcity, and then there is a mass slaughter. This takes the riders out of the realm of social dynamics or historical factors, and places them as being harbingers of events already fulfilled.

This sounds logical, but it cannot be relegated to the events culminating in the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 A.D. for one simple reason. Nearly all wars in antiquity and up to the modern age have gone in this order. If the order of the riders describes a process, then it is a repeating one. The same “script” plays out in the Babylonian Exile, the Bar Kokhba revolt, in various Medieval wars, and the total wars of the twentieth century. The preterist who holds to this interpretation privileges the first

jewish war in his hermeneutic system solely because of its proximity to the writing of Revelation – thus damaging the book's self-proclaimed catholicity.

Vs.1-2

Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

Each of the four living creatures shouts for the arrival of a rider when a seal is opened. It is unknown which of them is calling (the lion, ox, man or eagle) or whether it matters. Nonetheless we may entertain a small amount of speculation here. Since the conquering rider is dignified and accomplished, perhaps this is where the lion is calling; we might think of the ox as a raging bull, thus suited for calling the peace-taking rider; the eagle, which scours the land for the meager amount it may eat, could be calling the economic rider; the human-presenting living creature may call forward death, since that is the lot of men since the Fall in Eden. Nonetheless, again these are just speculations.

The first rider is given a bow, or range of influence, and a wreath crown. The *στέφανος*,⁴⁵ translated “crown,” is that victory garland given to Olympic athletes and Roman military leaders or politicians upon attaining a great achievement. This is to say, the crown represents the “conquering” aspect of the rider, rather than a royal one. A preterist would point to the role of Titus and other Roman army figures who came to reconquer Judea after the initial revolt. On the other hand, one might note that the garland is given to him, apparently by a celestial being; this suggests that his role is a positive one, rather than the tragic reality of authority being given to pagans over the former holy land. This gives historicists the opportunity to point to alternative figures like Constantine or Clovis or Charlemagne as men who conquered lands for Christ. Yet other historicists have developed a “false light” characteristic to the white rider, since he is shown conquering, not evangelizing; they hold to the figure as a negative one, perhaps embodied by a Stalinesque or Napoleonic character in history. The futurist looks to the corruptions involved with such figures, and concludes that neither the historicist nor the preterist could be correct. Titus does not deserve honors from God for slaughtering people, and Constantine's political reasons for converting are not laudable such that he should be riding a white horse – as the color white suggests purity. The idealist would point to the white rider as being a symbol of the Gospel spreading throughout the world.

Vs.3-4

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword.

The red rider is given a sword, for his task is to enforce conflict. There shall be no peace. We must note that this is not relegated to *war*. It includes crime, riots, strife between individuals, and more: anything which may result in violence is under the purview of the red rider. The reader is reminded that Christ said plainly “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword,” and He explains it in terms of division: “For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.”⁶ For this reason, it should be noted that the key part of this rider is conflict caused by division – whether that is armed or not.

Nevertheless, this does not stop the standard positions from relegating their speculations to

4 Transliterated “stephanos,” Strong's #4735

5 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4735.htm>

6 Matthew 10:34-36

violence. The preterist points to the zealots and sicarii as parties which forced Judeans into the Jewish war; the historicist points to the bloodshed perpetrated by Muhammad, by Marxist leaders (especially tempting given the Marxists' affinity for the color *red*), further Jewish revolts or any other violent group. The futurist, assuming the white rider is a future figure, points to potential revolts against the Antichrist or (if he holds to chiliasm) against the earthly reign of Christ Himself. Meanwhile the idealist points to division between peoples on account of the march of the Gospel.

Vs.5-6

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!"

Typically the black rider is presented as representing economic crisis. A denarius was the common man's wages for a day's labor, while the amounts of wheat and barley shown are enough for one individual to survive. Thus the preterist points to famine during the siege of Jerusalem, the historicist looks to various economic troubles in the past, the futurist predicts a global economic collapse, and the idealist points to the troubles all believers experience. What appears to be missing is that subsistence living has been a perennial part of human existence! Christ tells the Apostles, "the poor you will always have with you,"⁷ so such difficult financial circumstances, globally speaking, have never truly changed.

Vs.7-8

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

Death and Hades are "new additions" to the crew of riders first shown in Zechariah. This suggests that as the riders are reassigned from scouting and sentry work, so too has death been repurposed. No longer is death *just* a consequence of the fall in Eden, but now it serves as a means of pushing the world closer to the return of Christ. This is to say, no death is senseless now. Note that this also means a certain being, called Death, is given this purview; while God says "I kill and I make alive" in Deuteronomy 32:39, we are not permitted to see our Lord as personally inflicting each instantiation of dying in all of history. To the contrary, St. John's vision frames the matter of death as one of subletting the duties of killing to a spiritual being who is eventually judged by damnation,⁸ with a sense of judgment for overreach. That God would give someone or something authority, only for them to misuse it or take things too far and end up being judged, is a persistent theme in the oracles pronounced on the nations in prophecy.⁹

The standard interpretations have a wealth of resources to draw from regarding the presence of Death and Hades. The preterist may point to mass slaughter after the city of Jerusalem was taken by the Romans. The historicist can point to plagues like the Bubonic plague or the Spanish flu. The futurist sees historical plagues and mass killing as precursors to "the big one" happening during the "end times." The idealist simply points to the presence of death in the life of the Church being a constant factor. None of these treat death as a real spiritual being having been given authority. They seem to forget that these riders are *real* entities in the heavenly realms, each one being given the authority to

7 Matthew 26:11

8 Revelation 21:14

9 Isaiah 10:1-19, Nahum pertaining to Assyria; Isaiah 47:5-9, Jeremiah 25:1-14, ch.50-51 concerning Babylon; Obadiah concerning Edom; a general condemnation of the nations along the lines of overreach is found in Zechariah 1.

assert these dynamics over the world.

The Typological View

For lack of a better term, our interpretive method is typological. The Old Testament gave types of Christ and of the Gospel; from David's threefold office to the Baptismal imagery of the Flood to Joseph suffering to save millions in the Egyptian famine, whoever is familiar with the Gospels can see themes concerning Christ typologically reflected in figures and events. Revelation's figures and events reflect typology *moving forward* instead of looking back. The reader is blessed to read Revelation and be informed as to how things will go for the Church as she awaits the Second Advent. This is to say that the events portrayed from the sixth chapter onward *have* happened, *are* happening, and *will happen again* until our Lord returns.

The preterist is correct to say that the White Rider is fulfilled by the Romans coming to reconquer Judea. He is incorrect if he believes that such is the only fulfillment, because the White Rider is a real spiritual being, with human beings typifying him by their actions; his presence is fulfilled with Titus, Constantine, Napoleon, and whichever conquerors come in the future. The Red Rider is fulfilled by any conflict-generating person or group, especially those which organize mass violence. The Black Rider reflects a perennial institution of poverty and economic distress in various parts of the world, being felt more at some times than others. And of course, as Death has been given this temporary authority from God before he is thrown into the lake of fire, mass death will always be occurring until Christ returns. Unlike the idealist position, however, our position is that these things which occur are *real fulfillments*, not just symbolic ideas and themes of the conditions the Church faces. In our reading, the Apostle receives the four dynamics which will be with the Church constantly.

Revelation Bible Study #20

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

Revelation 6:9-17

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. **10** They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” **11** Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, **13** and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. **14** The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. **15** Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, **16** calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, **17** for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

Introduction

The first four seals and their attendant horsemen cover broad social dynamics which the entire world will experience while awaiting Christ's return; conquest, conflict, poverty and death. As Christ opens each seal, more is revealed to St. John about the way things shall go. But as He approaches the fifth seal, what is revealed is more focused on the Church itself, namely in undergoing martyrdom. The sixth seal has more to do with a general sense of disaster which is enforced on humanity throughout the centuries, explained below.

The Fifth Seal

Vs.9

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

Though St. John is in the Throne Room of God, he mentions an altar in passing. This connects Revelation with the book of Hebrews, which teaches that the Tabernacle implements which Moses built were merely *copies* of the heavenly versions.¹ What the author of Hebrews describes concerning implements made without hands and Christ presenting Himself as the sole worthy Sacrifice for the salvation of humanity, we see in action with the Throne Room vision.

Curiously, there are martyrs under the altar. This suggests that their lives were given as an act of sacrifice. Not that God actively *made* them sacrifices or killed them, but they are made victims in the same fashion that Christ was – persecution and murder by nonbelievers. In the same way that Christ's death was actually a sacrifice for mankind despite being a murder, so too are these martyrs' deaths considered a sacrifice despite them being killed for their beliefs. The fruit of Christ's death on the cross was the forgiveness of sins; the fruit of the martyrs' deaths is the growth of the Church through their witness.

¹ Hebrews 9, esp.vs.23-28

Vs.10

They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

The martyrs cry out with a great complaint: they want justice to be done against those who killed them. One might find it odd that they do not ask God to effect penitence in the hearts of their killers, but we cannot forget that sorrow and suffering have not been abolished yet. From their viewpoint,² looking down from Heaven to earth, the martyrs see an increase in the bloodshed perpetrated on Christians by nonbelievers, and the fallout of their own executions. Though they are blessed to be in Heaven, they are still unhappy with the state of affairs on earth, and ask our Lord to enact vengeance – not only for the sake of justice, but also to *stop* the persecution.

That the martyrs *speak* means they are aware of where they are, who they are, and what has transpired in their earthly lives. It is not the same as the blood of Abel which called out on Abel's behalf,³ but they speak to our Lord directly. This runs counter to the notion of “soul sleep,” posited by various theologians, which is described as the dead entering into a dreamless sleep until the Resurrection. At least as far as the twenty four elders and all these martyrs are concerned, the soul in Heaven is very much aware of what is going on and able to communicate with our Lord. While the New Testament authors speak of believers “falling asleep” (they do not truly *die* the same way that nonbelievers do), but that does not preclude a dreamlike awareness of their residence in Heaven.

Vs.11

Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

The white robes are an internal reference to Revelation 3:4, which is itself in reference to Psalm 132:9, “Let your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy.” It is a reassurance that the martyrs are saved, and that our Lord shall not forsake them. That they were killed does not mean that God was displeased with them, nor is He indifferent to their plight; He *cares*, and He shows this compassion by bestowing on them a promise of eternal life.

Persecution of Christians has always been a part of the life of the Church. Why is that the case? Here, we find out that there is a certain amount of martyrs to be made, men and women and children, before the Eschaton happens. One gets the sense that this is to ensure that as many people as possible converted; if the Second Advent happened before 70 A.D., the flock of resurrected believers would be nil compared to the amount of saved Christians today. Thus, our Lord gives time for the growth of the Church, but also that the iniquities of anti-Christian persecutors to be “complete” in terms of the martyrs they kill. It is a similar turn of phrase to His proclamation to Abraham that “the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”⁴ The Romans and other pagans must receive a healthy *chance* to repent before they are judged.

The Sixth Seal

Vs.12-14

12 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, **13** and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. **14** The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

2 That saints in Heaven are witnesses of things here on earth is established in Hebrews 12:1

3 Genesis 4:10

4 Genesis 15:16

Despite sounding like dramatic cosmic happenings, we cannot forget that this passage (like all of Revelation) is predicated on the whole of Scripture. The sixth seal's opening includes language found in the prophets concerning the judgment of kingdoms. Isaiah 13 is a prime example, wherein the prophet speaks of the judgment against the Babylonian empire by means of the Medes, but employing dramatic cosmic imagery. Isaiah relates the oracle from God in which the heavens tremble, the sun and moon do not give their light, and the mountains produce a great tumult as our Lord gathers His army to destroy Babylon. However, we are not permitted to say that what St. John sees here is just symbolic. Indeed, great earthquakes *have* happened over the centuries, as have eclipses or bizarre celestial events like Haley's Comet being visible for long periods of time. But at the same time, kingdoms and empires have risen and fallen, often with the same kind of experience as Babylon's at its fall. The phenomena that St. John watches are portents and coincidentals with these political realities.

Vs.15-17

15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, **16** calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, **17** for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

Though there are real events which fulfill the matters spoken of as the sixth seal is opened, the tenor of these verses suggests a general awareness of judgment. Those who do not trust in Christ are wracked with dread over a sense of incoming doom (much in the same way today's “climate change” movement devotes itself to predictions of mass death or the way that some economists constantly make oracles of a coming depression). Meanwhile, even believers – who both love God and fear Him – are also naturally inclined to be anxious for or about His return. Remember that Moses, that great and faithful prophet, said “I tremble with fear” when confronted with God's Presence at Mt. Sinai; the most faithful Christians still have an understandable, healthy even, fear of our gracious Lord.⁵

Note that though they cry out that the great day of wrath has come, that does not mean that their words *cause* Judgment Day to arrive! They are saying this without the text proclaiming that they are correct, suggesting that it is an ongoing state of man rather than a singular future cry of fear. Wisdom speaks in Proverbs 8:36, saying “all who hate me love death.” It is no wonder that the residents of the earth beg for nature to claim them. Certainly for some this is a suicidal impulse; they would prefer to die than face the true Wisdom of our heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶ For others it is an impulse of the wicked to flee, as Solomon says,⁷ *even if Judgment Day has not arrived*. Since the Gospel rang out, there has been a sense in which every generation believes itself to be the last, and this rings true whether we are speaking of believers or heathen. The Church has had theologians from every generation proclaiming impending Judgment, most recently with the “four blood moons” hysteria from some “Christian Zionist” groups. While it is possible that at any point these proclaimers may accidentally be correct (for no one truly knows the date except our Lord), their instinct demonstrates the general call and draw enacted by the Atonement:⁸ everyone, whether in rebellion or submission to the Gospel, understands deep down that Christ is the only way.

5 Hebrews 12:18-24

6 1 Corinthians 1:24

7 Proverbs 28:1

8 John 12:32

Revelation Bible Study #21

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

Revelation 7:1-8

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. **2** Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, **3** saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” **4** And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

5 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed,
12,000 from the tribe of Reuben,
12,000 from the tribe of Gad,
6 12,000 from the tribe of Asher,
12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali,
12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,
7 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon,
12,000 from the tribe of Levi,
12,000 from the tribe of Issachar,
8 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun,
12,000 from the tribe of Joseph,
12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

Introduction

After the opening of the fifth seal, a great deal of time is spent discussing matters of the fates of the saints. We have seen the address of the martyrs under the altar, that our Lord extends a promise of everlasting life to them and has them patiently wait for justice. But now it is time for addressing two more groups, namely the *Old Covenant* saints (ancient Israel) and the rest of those believers who conquer by the blood of Christ. Despite the seemingly large number, for indeed what St. John saw was a large crowd, proportionately speaking the number of sealed Israelites shows the reality of the remnant from the Old Covenant era.

Vs.1

1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree.

This is a continuation of the opening of the sixth seal, which began in the previous chapter with cosmological descriptions of the fall of kingdoms, here summarized as “four winds.” The phrase is found in the prophets, often to describe the scattering of kingdoms as inflicted by God;¹ Daniel uses it to describe the rise and dispersion of the world empires, especially the Greek empire;² Zechariah uses it as a term of scattering from which the children of Judah are to return.³ That angels would then be tasked with holding back the “four winds” introduces a contrast. It is as though St. John is seeing a certain group *protected* from the calamitous events of the sixth seal, a group to whom the great judgments do not apply. The “wrath of the Lamb”⁴ which the whole world fears shall not be inflicted on the following peoples. The signs in heaven and on earth are *still occurring* though, so this holding

1 Jeremiah 49:34-39

2 Daniel 7:2, 8:8, 11:4

3 Zechariah 2:6-7

4 Revelation 6:16

back is simultaneous with it.

Vs.2-3

2 Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, 3 saying, “Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.”

Ironically, Christ removing the sixth seal from the Great Scroll results in seals being placed on people. And who is sealed? The servants of God, sealed for deliverance from the wrath of the Almighty. That there are 144,000 sealed in the fourth verse does not preclude that others will be sealed as well, for the servant of God – the *believer* – is kept safe from the ultimate expression of wrath, eternal damnation. Thus this sealing necessarily applies to more than just 144,000 individuals. Being most certainly a seal of salvation.⁵ It is a kind of mark to which the later “mark of the beast” will serve as a foil. The former, the seal of God, denotes salvation; the latter, truly a seal of the devil, denotes damnation. Yet here it is one with a distinct recall to the “frontlets” between the eyes that Moses writes about after giving Israel the Greatest Commandment.⁶ That they are sealed on their foreheads in like manner suggests that the tribal list following is *most* applicable to the saints who lived under the Old Covenant (the New Testament era saints are featured in the latter half of the chapter). Though there are myriads and myriads sealed with the Holy Spirit, the focus is turned on *this* portion of them, ancient Israel.

Vs.4-8

4 And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

5 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed,

12,000 from the tribe of Reuben,

12,000 from the tribe of Gad,

6 12,000 from the tribe of Asher,

12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali,

12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,

7 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon,

12,000 from the tribe of Levi,

12,000 from the tribe of Issachar,

8 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun,

12,000 from the tribe of Joseph,

12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

The number of the sealed is not meant to be taken literally, as this entire passage is symbolic in its presentation. There are not only four directions in which the wind blows, after all, despite the first verse numbering them that way. The number 144,000 is thus an important one, but not for its specific enumeration. Much ink has been wasted claiming that “ten is a perfect number, twelve is the number of tribes, $10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 12 = 12,000$, therefore it is a symbolic number of all saints.” This is a doubtful understanding of it. To the contrary, the number 144,000 has a connotation of *smallness*, rather than the great mass of all Christians, and *equality* of all the tribes despite some honors being placed previously.

First, some necessary exclusions regarding their identity.

- This cannot mean all Old Testament saints put together, as the tribal list by definition excludes the pre-Mosaic saints such as Abraham, Job or Noah.

5 Ephesians 1:13-14

6 Deuteronomy 6:4-9

- It is extremely unlikely that they are *merely* symbolic, or else the twelve listed tribes are numbering nonexistent people to whom a very real act of protection (the sealing) would apply; to say that God is symbolically sealing symbolic people is to render this passage meaningless. It is better to call them *emblematic*, being real persons with significance attached to their presence in the Throne Room.
- Since the ten Northern tribes were all but extinct by the first century A.D., the distribution of 12,000 per tribe cannot mean that these are contemporary Israelites to St. John, or even the Israelites who lived during the intertestamental period.
- While this group is similar to the 144,000 from Revelation 14:1-5, they are not likely to be the same people; the 12,000 from each tribe is *sealed* on their foreheads, while the later 144,000 have the Name of Christ and the Father *written* on their foreheads – a key distinction which will be explored when we arrive at that text.
- This group, given the masculine grammatical structure of “those having been numbered” in the Greek, suggests that they are all male. St. John broadly replicates the census practice shown in the Old Testament historical books, which counted men only.
- Finally, we must exclude the notion of this being “the elect,” or the passage having anything at all to do with predestination in the calvinist sense. Even if the calvinist conception of election were true (it's not), that particular doctrine has to do with people decreed preserved from damnation by a decree made in eternity past; in St. John's vision, this group is sealed while already existing as men!

Thus, our best option for this group is that they are ancient Israelites, namely those Israelites who lived between the time of the Exodus and the time of the Northern Exile.⁷ Women and children are not included in the number, but that does not mean women and children are *excluded* from the protection God is giving the men sealed. But speaking of exclusion, since the sealed ones are protected from the judgment on all mankind, those members of the twelve tribes who were *not* sealed are not thus protected. That St. John does not see *all* members of Gad, Levi, etc., so sealed reflects the history of apostasy found in the Old Testament.

There were twelve tribes of Israel, which at the time of the Exodus numbered six hundred thousand – not counting women and children.⁸ If the text is framed such that *only* an approximate 144,000 men were sealed for salvation, then by the Exodus numbers alone the proportions are one in every four men saved. These ten tribes, however, lasted some 724 years between the Exodus and the Northern Exile,⁹ making for a far greater total population of the un-sealed. To say that only 144,000 were sealed for salvation during this time is to say that the proportion of the saved to the unsaved is extremely small.

The number may be an approximation, or the members of the tribal list may be representatives of larger families: the text does not demand that we see it as exact. The point is that they are a tiny fraction of the overall population of Israelites to ever live during the period in which they existed as distinct peoples. The presence of these men emblematically demonstrates that fact. This ought not surprise us, as the Old Testament prophets *constantly* railed against the apostasy of their countrymen. Yet their presence in St. John's vision reminds us that during that period there was always a faithful *remnant* which stayed true to our Lord. It is a verification of St. Paul's characterization of both the Old Testament and the first century state of the Jews:

God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and

⁷ That is, when Assyria wiped out the ten Northern Tribes and had them mixed with various populations, causing the ethnogenesis of the Samaritan peoples.

⁸ Exodus 12:37

⁹ The most accurate approximations for the date of the Exodus is 1446 B.C., and the Northern Exile occurred in 722 B.C.

they seek my life.” But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.¹⁰

Two glaring omissions are found in this tribe list: Ephraim and Dan. Dan's absence is understandable, given that they were the first to completely apostatize from the faith.¹¹ Ephraim, though, bears the distinction of leading the other tribes into syncretistic apostasy through Jeroboam, son of Nebat; from the moment he was given the ten Northern tribes, he introduced worship of golden calves, built false temples, enforced a different liturgical calendar and brought the people to polytheism.¹² Though there were certainly members of these tribes who were saved by direct devotion or felicitous inconsistency, *collectively* speaking they do not receive the honor of having remnants as listed here.

Also we must note that the order of the tribes is not according to standard lineage. Reuben was Jacob's firstborn, but Judah is first on the list here, most likely on account of Christ hailing from Judah according to His humanity. Levi was third, but his place is eighth on St. John's list; this may be a subtle reminder that the priesthood is no longer exclusively relegated to that tribe. The priesthood is now for all believers.¹³ Benjamin, the smallest of the twelve tribes, is nonetheless still allotted 12,000 saints just as the other tribes are; though it is last on the list, care is still afforded to them. So although in their earthly existence there were hierarchies, inequalities and distinctions, each tribe receiving the same inheritance of sealed saints suggests a new equality bestowed on them in the hereafter. That Judah is placed first on the list does not result in that tribe receiving *more* than 12,000; their position becomes something like “first among equals” given the distinction of having had the Davidic line, the Temple, Christ hailing from their line, etc.

10 Romans 11:2-5

11 Recounted in Judges 17-18

12 1 Kings 12:25-33

13 1 Peter 2:9

Revelation Bible Study #22

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

Revelation 7:9-17

9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” **11** And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, **12** saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” **14** I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

15 “Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Introduction

After seeing a group representing the saints of the Old Covenant, St. John turns his gaze away only to find himself beholding a massive crowd, a veritable *flood* of New Covenant saints. This passage is a climactic moment which reveals to the first century Church (and indeed, all Christians even to this day) that they are *not alone*. It is almost as though he is adding to the scope of the “cloud of witnesses” which the author of Hebrews introduces,¹ showing the reader that they have an extended Church family, the true nation of Israel, which shall never again be subject to persecution, exile, or death.

Vs.9

9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

A great mass of humanity, in unison, begins another service of praise. As of 2011, there are approximately two billion Christians currently living, or about one third of all human beings.² One might say that not all of them are valid believers, and perhaps only a small minority of them are saved – let us, for a moment, assume that this is true. If only one percent of all living Christians are saved, that is a total of twenty million saints whom St. John sees in the Throne Room, and that is only

¹ Hebrews 12:1-3

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>

counting today's numbers. When considering that the Gospel has been proclaimed in its fullness for two thousand years now, the number of believers becomes staggering.

This great gathering appears at first to contradict Christ's words in Matthew 7:14. Christ says "the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." Later on, He says "many are called, but few are chosen."³ To see so many saints in Heaven after being told that few will be saved leads to a seeming disconnect. However, Christ says this to men *before* He goes to the Cross and inaugurates the New Covenant, by which the countless multitude St. John sees are all saved. Once the Atonement was worked and Christ rose from the dead and the Holy Spirit began His special work at Pentecost, the way of salvation became as simple as this: all who believe and are Baptized shall be saved.⁴

Note here that the multitude is "from every nation." Every race, ethnicity, culture, language, etc., has among their members people who hold to the Gospel and are thus saved. Ontologically speaking, they remain as according to their earthly race and sex: men remain men, women remain women, Europeans remain European, Asians remain Asians, Africans remain Africans, etc., with apparent visual appearance to match. While this passage is not *about* the preservation of immutable inherited characteristics, it *is* an important aspect of the encouragement St. John is passing on to the Church. Christ instructed the Apostles to preach the Gospel to all creation;⁵ that there is an innumerable mass of believers with identifiable markers of race and sex demonstrates to the Apostle (and to us) that this mission – the Great Commission – will be successful. Apologetically speaking, the history of the Gospel's spread gives believers today a great deal of comfort, in that the prophecy spoken of here has by and large been fulfilled.

Vs.11-12

11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, **12** saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

The doxology offered here mirrors that of the praises given in the fifth chapter.⁶ This further suggests a liturgical life in Heaven, by which the same praises are offered unto God at various times. Only here, in this climactic moment, the angels lift up their voices *after* humanity offers praise. St. Paul has stated that we – that is, the Church – shall judge angels,⁷ such that we are going to be their governors. Scriptural instances of angelic interactions with humans generally results in great fear on the part of mortal men, who in turn hear "be not afraid." In the Throne Room, however, human are shown with great confidence around angels, to the point of being the callers in liturgy and angels playing the role of responsor.

This ought not cause the believer to become arrogant over angels, as the circumstances shown in the vision are not of *this* world. The author of Hebrews cites Psalm 104:4 to demonstrate the superiority of Christ, but in so doing he defines them in terms of their function:

"Of the angels He says,

'He makes His angels winds,
and His ministers a flame of fire.'⁸

This is to say, according to the parallelism presented, angels are ministers under the authority of our Lord, who tasks them with assisting humanity. This means that here on earth whenever an angel

3 Matthew 22:14

4 Mark 16:16

5 Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:18-20

6 Revelation 5:9-14

7 1 Corinthians 6:3

8 Hebrews 1:7

pronounces something (typically a command from God), we are right to heed what they say – though we must still test them.⁹ But following St. John's theme of changes in heaven, his vision shows us in a state where we are *unafraid* in the presence of angels, and demonstrating a liturgical priority over them.

Vs.13-14

13 Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” **14** I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

The people in this scene are all saints who have gone to Heaven – that is, all saints except those who will still be here on earth when Christ returns. The elder explains that they have washed their robes in the Blood of Christ, thus being covered by His righteousness; no human being ends up in Heaven any other way.

What is the great tribulation? It is synonymous with the Millennium and the “great apostasy,” both of which serve to describe overarching dynamics in the Church era (Pentecost to the Second Advent) as we experience it. A full preterist may point to some historic persecution that occurred before 70 A.D., or perhaps the Decian persecution. But this interpretation fails for the simple reason that, during the time in which the Apostle writes, there were *not* saints from every single race as he describes! A futurist interpretation – positing some seven year future mass killing of Christians – also runs into difficulties. The futurist must give an account for the previous mention of the martyrs under the altar,¹⁰ as well as the presence of martyrs numbered and listed in Revelation 14. But the fact of the matter is, the Church is *always*, in one place or another, dealing with persecution from hostile nonbelievers.

Vs.15-17

15 “Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.
16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.
17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

The whole passage, from the ninth verse to the seventeenth, depicts a great reversal of the earthly experience of the Church. They have a home with Christ, who leads them perfectly and gently, as opposed to the Exile they are in under the leadership of sinful men. They are given honor by being in the Lord's presence in His Royal Court, whereas during the Great Tribulation their reputation is constantly held in low esteem by the world. There is no pain, thirst, hunger or sorrow, contrasted with the presence suffering here on earth. Christ shows this great future to St. John as a means of promising the Church that one day her difficulties will be over.

We must be careful to note that the reversal is not the *only* thing being depicted here. St. John is not engaged in some burst of wishful thinking, or promising nothing more than an end to bad things. The Body of Christ receives a real promise here of an actual life: that includes doing things. The passage shows believers engaged in morning and evening worship services, departing the Throne Room to go back to Paradise where the springs are. Here is depicted a kind of daily life which

⁹ 1 John 4:1-3

¹⁰ Revelation 6:9-10

preserves the unique personhood of believers, as opposed to the stereotype of Heaven as being a sort of pleasurable stasis, “soul sleep,” or merely sitting waiting for the Resurrection. The vision shows believers retaining their humanity because it was them as human beings whom Christ came to save.

Revelation Bible Study #23

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

Revelation 8:1-5

1 When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. **2** Then I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. **3** And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, **4** and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel. **5** Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Introduction

After seeing so many saints lifted up, both of the 144,000 Old Covenant saints and the innumerable New Covenant saints, a first time reader might be surprised that there is more to read in Revelation. St. John's vision of the Throne Room ends in that climactic way, but it would not make sense if the seventh seal on the Great Scroll was left unopened. Revelation 8:1-5 serves as a transitional passage to “reset” the depictions of Apocalypse. After this moment, angels shall let loose great blasts from seven trumpets which both proclaim and enforce the will of God upon mankind; further on there is yet another regarding “seven bowls” which ends similarly.

These broad passages (seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls) re-examine matters from different perspectives and focuses. The way in which cosmic history (or the “apocalyptic genre”) functions throughout St. John's book is in an apparent set of cycles. The seven seals are opened on the Great Scroll, but when the seventh is opened there is a period of silence; from there the seven trumpets are sounded, but the seventh includes a proclamation which eventually ushers in seven *bowls*. Because St. John wrote Revelation to be a truly *catholic* work, this is not him saying that history will repeat itself over and over in some linear fashion moving forward. After all, there shall not be more than one Last Day, despite Judgment Day being featured in different places throughout Revelation. But as the catholicity of the book means it applies to all Christians at all times, these cycles of seven (and the punctuated, distinct seventh of each – scroll, trumpet, bowl) describe things that have happened, are happening, and will happen.¹ It is not necessarily that seven is an important number by itself, but rather the *repetition* of the number which suggests catholicity of history as much as catholicity of application.

Vs.1

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

The previous seals in the Great Scroll presented dramatic realities for St. John, from the four horsemen to the three groups of saints² to all manner of catastrophe visiting the earth. Here, one must count the proceeding trumpet blasts and other events as a *part* of the seventh seal rather than leaving it at the silence alone. In other words, the end of this “cycle of seven” ushers in the next, connecting them and reinforcing Revelation's universal application. Nonetheless, the specificity from the Apostle that it was quiet for half an hour serves as an emphasis point: the silence *insists* upon itself as a significant aspect of the things to come.

Theologically speaking, silence from God is not considered a *good* thing. The prophets and

¹ Revelation 1:19

² Martyrs, Old Covenant Saints, and New Covenant Saints.

Psalmists *want* God to speak or make noise,³ for that means He is active in judgment against wickedness and in delivering the righteous. Silence is often understood to be synonymous with *death* or *negligence*, as the Psalmist writes “if the Lord had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.”⁴ David writes, “To You, O Lord, I call; my Rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if You be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit.”⁵ Jeremiah the prophet passes on an oracle of judgment against Judah: “thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will silence in this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.”⁶

Following the way in which the prophets understood silence, this verse suggests that as the seventh seal is opened there is a period in which it *feels* like God is absent, quiet, or has abandoned His people. The Apostle noting the time is a sign that this is a temporary arrangement, a short one even, before God asserts His presence once more. Despite this happening only *once* in Heaven, on earth we observe the silence as something that *has* happened, *is* happening, and *will* happen again before Christ returns. Writers in the intertestamental period noted that there was no prophet in the land, a period of four hundred or so years before Christ incarnated.⁷ The twentieth and early twenty-first centuries saw the “rise of the nones” (religiously non-affiliated) and atheism on account of an apparent lack of supernatural occurrences. In the “micro” scale, many of us Christians have noticed what is commonly called the “dark night of the soul,” in which it feels as though our prayers are falling on deaf ears. Thankfully, all such periods are relatively short: though on earth they last months, years, or even four centuries, in Heaven they are but thirty minutes.

Vs.2

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

The seven angels standing before God are not mentioned in the Throne Room vision. It could be that they are the angels to the seven churches from the second and third chapters. It could also be that they were simply there, being unmentioned. While the “seven spirits of God” are mentioned in the fourth chapter and described as *torches*, we have demonstrated those torches represent a “sevenfold Spirit” in reference to the Third Person of the Trinity; they are distinct from these seven angels. Nonetheless these seven angels are likely *attendants* who work for the Holy Spirit directly, hence their use of trumpets. A trumpet is a tool of proclamation, whether for use in a battlefield or in the use in announcing a royal arrival. Christ teaches us that the Holy Spirit Himself has a ministry of proclamation, both in proclaiming the Gospel and proclaiming judgment against wickedness.⁸ Shown here in the Throne Room, the angels serving the Holy Spirit are preparing to do the latter.

Vs.3-4

3 And another angel came and stood at the altar with a golden censer, and he was given much incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne, 4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, rose before God from the hand of the angel.

Here the silence is explained further. The only other time incense is used in connection with prayer is Psalm 141:2, in which the Psalmist says “Let my prayer be counted as incense before You, and this lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!” All other discussion of incense in Scripture is

3 Psalm 50, 83

4 Psalm 94:17

5 Psalm 28:1

6 Jeremiah 16:9

7 1 Maccabees 4:46, 9:27, 14:41)

8 John 16:7-11

regarding its ceremonial use or misuse. It is intended to be a regular part of worship and offering under the Mosaic Law.⁹ Here, the prayers of the saints are given *with* incense before the Lord, meaning that their petitions have value to Him. During those thirty minutes of silence, the scent of incense wafting through the Throne Room suggests that God is receiving the prayers of the saints. God is silent for this time, but He is *listening* to the cries of His people.

Vs.5

5 Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

After the fullness of silence has been completed, it is time to act. The angel approaches the altar in the Throne Room to fill his censer with fire, suggesting that the incense had been fully consumed; the time for merely hearing prayers is over. The “thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning” mean that there is a *return* to the previous Divine activity; St. John noticed “flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder” when he first arrived at the Throne Room.¹⁰ The noise, which assures the reader of God's activity, resumes in such a fashion that tells us His silence was not the norm. God does not remain silent, as His normal *modus operandi* is to *act* on behalf of His people. Note that Isaiah's oracle concerning the siege of Jerusalem includes similar language:

But the multitude of your foreign foes shall be like small dust,
and the multitude of the ruthless like passing chaff.
And in an instant, suddenly,
you will be visited by the LORD of hosts
with thunder and with earthquake and great noise,
with whirlwind and tempest, and the flame of a devouring fire.
And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel,
all that fight against her and her stronghold and distress her,
shall be like a dream, a vision of the night.
As when a hungry man dreams, and behold, he is eating,
and awakes with his hunger not satisfied,
or as when a thirsty man dreams, and behold, he is drinking,
and awakes faint, with his thirst not quenched,
so shall the multitude of all the nations be
that fight against Mount Zion.¹¹

For God to be silent is for mankind to wither and die. In the face of His silence, the enemies of the Church act more freely and boldly persecute believers. When the censer is thrown down, God begins making the noise of judgment and deliverance once more.

The censer being thrown to the earth at first appears to be an act of aggression by the angel, as though the fire was an attack on the wicked. Such reading is sympathetic to the futurist and preterist positions, wherein either a future judgment of mankind or the past judgment on Jerusalem during the first Jewish war is observed. However, such an interpretation presumes upon fire always resulting in destruction. We should prefer a deeper understanding.

The Holy Spirit was already depicted as a sevenfold spirit manifesting through seven torches in the fourth chapter of Revelation. Fire is thus a symbol not only for destruction, but more importantly it represents God Himself. God is associated with fire from the moment Moses met God through the

9 Exodus 30:1-10

10 Revelation 4:5

11 Isaiah 29:5-8

burning bush to his pronouncement that “the Lord your God is a consuming fire,”¹² to the tongues of fire resting on the Apostles at Pentecost.¹³ If fire is mentioned in theological language, it is likely to do with God's immediate presence. The angel throwing *fire* down to earth is more likely to do with the day of Pentecost and various revivals than it is with judgment and wrath.

Not only does fire come down to earth, but a *censer* as well. The same censer which the angel used to bring prayers before God is now on earth; the ministry of mediation between God and man is now superfluous, as God now asserts a special presence with humanity. Previously, much of the *Coram Deo* affairs were managed by angels and select men; prophets like Daniel and Zechariah receive their oracles through angels, and angels are tasked with mediating the Old Covenant,¹⁴ and both priest and prophet were utilized as go-betweens for the messages God had for ancient Israel. Though men could always pray to God directly, only the priesthood was given the ministry of absolution in the Mosaic code, and only they could offer incense; only angels could bring forward prayers and messages. After this moment, as the censer is brought down to where man is, the priesthood becomes universal,¹⁵ permitting that all believers' prayers are now counted as incense before our Lord. There is no further need for sacerdotal intervention or angelic delivery; all believers have the right to pray for one another, and to pray to God with Him being the immediate audience.

12 Deuteronomy 4:24, 9:3, repeated in Hebrews 12:29

13 Acts 2:1-4

14 Acts 7:53, Galatians 3:19,

15 1 Peter 2:9

Revelation Bible Study #24

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

Revelation 8:6-13

6 Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. **9** A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. **11** The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”

Introduction

St. John observed a dreadful silence for half an hour in Heaven, as the smoke of incense began to rise in God's Throne Room – and prayers with it. For those quiet minutes, God was receiving and hearing the desperate pleas of the Church as she underwent persecution, poverty, violence, and even the normal tragedies that befall life here on earth. The silence may appear short in Heaven, but on earth it encapsulates all of the times men have been tempted to despair under the belief that God was absent. When an angel approaches with the censer full of incense and prayers though, the time for hearing runs out: now it is time to *act*. Thus begins a cycle of seven trumpets as a consequence of the seventh seal being taken away, and the impact that their noise makes on the mortal realm.

If silence from God is typically understood as a *bad* thing, then the return to the peals of thunder and lightning and earthquakes is a return to God's normal activities. But to blow a trumpet is to make *noise*, meaning distinct, real actions on the part of the heavenly host on behalf of the Church. The trumpets are not *doing* or *causing* the events that come after each sounding, but rather *announcing* what God is doing for the sake of His people – which will look like a repetition of a previous deliverance, the Exodus.

Hermeneutic notes: The Problem of Preterism

The passage introduces a “one third” pattern observed across the first four trumpets. For the preterist persuasion, there is a commonly held belief that the Roman army invaded Judea around the time of the feast of trumpets, and that their warfare was “scorched earth” in nature. Thus they conclude

that the “earth” in this text is in reference to the “earth” as אֶרֶץ.¹² That is, the term translated “earth” can also be understood as a *region*, and the Old Testament prophets often employed it that way to speak of the promised land. In the preterist interpretation of Revelation, since either the vast majority of the book (if not all of it) is fulfilled by 70 A.D., this trumpet (and indeed all that afflict “one third” of the “earth”) must be localized to the region of Judea, or else it is a false prophecy. Thus, one third of Judea has to have been burned, one third of its waters made bitter by bodies dumped in the Jordan, etc., in order to sound reasonable.

Let us suppose for a moment though that the preterist is successful in his venture to demonstrate that these trumpets portended something directly applicable to the first Jewish war. If true, then St. John is indeed writing about events that could be *applied* to that particular period in history, but it cannot be said that his prophecy is *relegated* to it. The same circumstances described in the first four trumpets have been repeated so often that one could argue their fulfillment being found in the first World War, the emergence of the Black Plague, or any other number of eras in history. Rather than claiming the preterist is wrong *per se*, however, it is more important to say that his view is too restrictive. In Revelation, what is observed occurring in Heaven may have multiple fulfillments on Earth; as Revelation is a truly *Catholic* work concerned with the what has happened, is happening and shall happen again, we ought not be surprised to find the events played out more than once. One finds difficulty consistently applying a hermeneutic of single fulfillment, given the re-emergence of “grass” at the fifth trumpet's sounding,³ or the previous slaughter of one fourth of the earth's inhabitants by Death the pale horse rider.⁴ Both the preterist and the futurist, who posit a linear and hard-prophecy way of understanding these oracles, would also have great difficulty in *keeping* them at a pre-70 A.D. fulfillment or at some point in the future; simply put, too many events line up with each trumpet for interpreting them in such a restricted fashion.

Vs.6-7

6 Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

The first trumpet precedes an amalgamation of two Old Testament plagues. First, the hail recalls the hail rained on Egypt during the time of the Exodus;⁵ second, the *fire* which is thrown down from Heaven is reminiscent of the fire rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah;⁶ The resulting destruction wipes out one third of the earth and trees, as well as all grass in those areas. Scenes like this are shown repeated throughout history, any time a military utilizes “scorched earth” strategy, destroying land and woods and cattle. Examples of this are found in Sherman's March during the American Civil War, or Vlad Tepes creating forests of felled trees and dead bodies during the Wallachian-Ottoman Wars.

It is no coincidence that this occurs just after an angel throws fire down along with a censer for burning incense. The fires seen above the Apostles at Pentecost were for *believers*: these fires, mixed with blood and hail, are reserved for the destruction of the wicked. That the fire of wrath follows the fires of sanctification is consistent with Christ's proclamation that He came not to bring peace, but a sword;⁷ the Gospel rings out, the nonbelievers persecute the Church, and now there is an alternate

1 Transliterated “Ha-Aretz,” or “the earth.”

2 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/776.htm>

3 Revelation 9:4

4 Revelation 6:7-8

5 Exodus 9:22-24

6 Genesis 19:23-25

7 Matthew 10:34-39

proclamation of judgment.

The further parallel with the Exodus is also important to note here, as prior to Moses's commission the children of Israel did not have access to the Word – or any way to truly relate to our Lord. Instead, under their bondage they could only cry out for anyone at all to help;⁸ they had to be *reintroduced* to our Lord as Moses brought the proclamation of deliverance.⁹ Upon Pentecost, deliverance from bondage to the old covenant is proclaimed and the newly formed believers learn to trust in our Lord; just as Pharaoh was not keen to let the Israelites go, neither were the pharisees keen to permit the Christians to flourish. Judgment is later rained down on Egypt and then Judea, and after this the pattern continues with any governing force that attempts to quell Christianity. Ultimately, the deliverance promised to believers is a deliverance from bondage to sin, death and the devil; as the devil plays out his role in trying to stop believers from obtaining that freedom, he and his dark kingdom are judged.

Vs.8-9

8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. **9** A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The second angel's trumpet refers back to and re-enacts the Nile's waters turning to blood in Pharaoh's presence.¹⁰ Unlike the Exodus plagues though, here a burning mountain (perhaps St. John's description of a comet) is used instead of Moses's staff. Though mountains are occasionally shown in intertestamental literature as a spiritual place wherein nephilim, watchers, angels, etc., dwell, Scripture does not countenance such doctrines. To the contrary, it is likely nothing more than St. John noticing the celestial things happening which destroy places, like the fall of meteors, comets, etc.

Vs.10-11

10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. **11** The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

Wormwood is associated with bitterness and poison in the Old Testament, from the bitterness caused by the immoral woman to the poison of unjust economic practices.¹¹ In Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah speaks of wormwood as an affliction brought about by the Lord.¹² Since St. John's writing is placed among the prophets,¹³ and the star named Wormwood is shown falling out of *heaven*, it is almost certainly a Heaven-sent bitterness and plague afflicting one third of rivers, waters, etc.

Traditionally some have interpreted this as a fall of an angel, particularly lucifer as he was cast out of Heaven. Stars are often used as symbols for angelic beings after all, and there is no reason why an angelic being might “fall” outside of rebellion against God. But this is unlikely, since the Apostle will speak of the devil more directly as “the dragon” in Revelation 12; why use a different symbolic name like Wormwood? It is *more* likely that this angel is actually a servant of God, given the use of wormwood plants in repelling and destroying insects. Wormwood was considered a kind of ancient pesticide, especially in use against internal parasites. Poetically, it appears that the Apostle speaks of an angelic minister being sent to make the lives of parasitic individuals miserable, bitter, and dangerous.

8 Exodus 2:23-25

9 Exodus 3:13-17

10 Exodus 7:19-21

11 Proverbs 3:3-4, Amos 5:6-7, 6:12

12 Lamentations 3:13-15

13 Revelation 1:3

Vs.12-13

12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”

The fourth trumpet recalls the plague of darkness, the penultimate plague before the Passover which destroyed the firstborn of all the sons of Egypt. Notably, it is the announcement of this plague which prompts Moses to proclaim to Pharaoh, “I will not see your face again.”¹⁴ That meeting was the final warning given to Pharaoh, and the darkness preceded the worst of the plagues. So too here do we see that the darkness St. John sees comes before the latter trumpets, which the voice of an eagle proclaims as woe.

The eagle is likely the fourth living creature, which is described as having a form like an eagle in flight.¹⁵ He pronounces three woes (one for each remaining trumpet), and proclaims that the impact of their sounding shall affect “those who dwell on the earth” quite disastrously. Here the interpreter must ask whether this “earth” is a mere region or the entirety of the material realm. The Greek may be used to describe either option.¹⁶ Preterists, of course, prefer the localized regional interpretation, as it fits with Christ's command that those in Judea flee to the mountains when the abomination of desolation appears.¹⁷ Futurists (and some historicists) prefer the notion that it is the entirety of the earth, as such events as these have not occurred globally yet. Our preferred position is that these events have happened and *will* happen again until Christ returns. There is a reason for every empire which opposes Christianity falling at some point or another, and usually in drastic fashion. The woes pronounced on the earth apply not only to the unfaithful, unbelieving residents of Judea, but also on anyone who follows their script of persecuting the Church – ultimately culminating in these woes being pronounced on the devil and his kingdom.

14 Exodus 10:21-29

15 Revelation 4:9

16 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1093.htm>

17 Matthew 24:15-28

Revelation Bible Study #25

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

Revelation 9:1-12

1 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. **2** He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. **3** Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. **4** They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. **5** They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. **6** And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

7 In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, **8** their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; **9** they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. **10** They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. **11** They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.

12 The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

Introduction

The end of the eighth chapter includes an eagle crying out “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!”¹ These three “woes” are comprised of the final three trumpets to be blown; they are much more impactful than the first four, having a more dramatic description and more time devoted to their explanation. As regards the fifth trumpet, a great deal of confusion is found in the details concerning the “locusts” and their master Abaddon. Accordingly, we address them carefully and in great detail.

Vs.1-2

1 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. **2** He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.

The star which falls from heaven to earth is likely the same as the Abaddon figure from the eleventh verse. Note that the previous star which falls to earth, Wormwood,² is there as a cleansing figure; wormwood was used as an antiparasitic, so employing that “star” in the act of cleansing ports and commerce overseas is a sensible interpretation. The sun and air are darkened by the act of opening the lid after the star is given authority to open it; this hearkens back to Christ's description of Hades, in

1 Revelation 8:13

2 Revelation 8:11

which the unrighteous dead are in a prolonged state of burning until Judgment Day.³ While there is a chasm affixed between the righteous and unrighteous dead, access to the unrighteous is not a mere matter of crossing the chasm, but of being granted *access* to the pit wherein such nefarious figures are trapped.

It is for this reason that the star which falls is not likely to be a demon. The pit to which he is given access is spoken of in 2 Peter and Jude as one in which various fallen angels are chained up;⁴ why, if this is truly a demonic figure, is he not chained up himself? And why exactly would God employ a demon to accomplish such a task as punishing the wicked, when historically He has been more than willing to carry out Justice by His own power or the use of good angels? It is more likely that this figure, Abaddon, is a faithful servant – or else Christ would *never* have lent the key to hades to him!⁵

Vs.3-6

3 Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. **4** They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. **5** They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. **6** And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

The locusts come to torment the nonbelievers in something of a last-ditch effort to bring them to repentance. Locusts were used in similar fashion to exhort Pharaoh to repentance as well, just before the Exodus.⁶ Similarly, God employs locusts to bring the Israelites *themselves* to repentance in Joel.⁷ Unlike Exodus and Joel, however, food sources are left untouched and nobody *dies* as a result of this locust plague. Instead, the “power of scorpions” is given to them, such that the people are afflicted with sores and sting-wounds; they are effectively empowered to place nonbelievers in the same misery as Job, who wished for death but did not receive it during his darker times.⁸ Locusts are associated with desolation, but the earth is left untouched: they are inflicting a *feeling* of desolation, a *personal* desolation inflicting them.

Every believer is expected to undergo something characterized by various theologians and commentators as “the dark night of the soul.” We shall invariably go through a period in which there is “silence” from God – paralleling the thirty minutes of silence in Heaven when the seventh seal is opened. In some sense this may be to *test* us or to purify us as part of the sanctification process, but at the opposite end of it the suffering which we endured shall be as a fleeting memory. The nonbeliever, on the other hand, is not exempt from the “Job treatment,” only their pain shall be for the purpose of driving them to repentance. Despite appearances suggesting that the wicked are always happy and prosperous,⁹ *no one* gets away with sin. Examples of this can be found historically, from the imposition of venereal diseases on sexual degenerates to the broken families found among the rich and the famous to any other number of disastrous things that afflict the world. For believers, this is a corrective and sanctifying dynamic in their lives; for nonbelievers, the locust's sting is a taste of the damnation to come if they do not repent.

3 Luke 16:19-31

4 2 Peter 2:4, Jude vs.6

5 Revelation 1:18

6 Exodus 10:12-20

7 Joel 1:13-16

8 Job 6:6-10

9 Psalm 73 especially describes this phenomenon of outward prosperity for the wicked.

Vs.7-10

7 In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, 8 their hair like women's hair, and their teeth like lions' teeth; 9 they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. 10 They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails.

The appearance of the locusts represents the various vectors by which they attack the world – that is, the second enemy of the Church, or nonbelieving humanity acting collectively. They are prepared for battle because they are indeed going to war, frustrating the attempts of mankind to make this earth heaven for itself. These spiritual beings wear crowns, representing the political operations that make men miserable, like a king misusing his eminent dominion and destroying an impenitent farmer's land rights. Their female-presenting hair represents the potential of any woman to destroy a man's life through accusations, gossip, or infidelity. Relational damage is assured. Finally, of course warfare harms both the direct and indirect casualties inflicted by organized violence; a man may lose a leg after being shelled in the trenches, a family might not receive the head of household who dies, etc.

The locust may sting through his tail, but it is not a deadly poison. Abaddon actively restrains the locusts from killing as perhaps they normally would. Nonetheless, the suffering they inflict upon the nonbelieving world lasts, peculiarly, for five months. The number is not accidental:

One day in the ancient world was considered twelve hours.¹⁰¹¹

One month is 30 days.¹²

Five months, or 150 days, contain 1,800 hours.

1800 divided by 2 is 900

This is to say, while the believer suffers half an hour of silence from God as part of his trials here on earth, the nonbeliever undergoes 900 times as much. On the one hand, this is their just desserts; they are in a state of mortal sin, and deserve punishment from God in this life as much as in the next. Yet it is also a form of mercy, as this extended period gives them *ample* time to repent of their wickedness and heed the warnings of the Law. This is God's longsuffering patience on display, just as He had given the Amorites four hundred years to repent of their abominations.¹³

Vs.11-12

11 They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon. 12 The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

“Abaddon” quiet literally means “destruction,” and Apollyon means “destroyer.” This has led many an exegete to claim that this is the devil or some other demonic figure tormenting nonbelievers. However, in the Old Testament there is precedent to see Abaddon as a *servant* of God. The book of Job mentions Abaddon three times, the first two of which are pairing it with death.¹⁴ The third instance speaks of abaddon as a destruction which results from fire.¹⁵ The Psalmist and Solomon also, likely inspired by their reading of Job, pair Abaddon with something, namely Sheol.¹⁶ Abaddon appears at first blush to be a *place*, but St. John disabuses the readers of that notion by proclaiming him to be the angel holding charge over the bottomless pit. In other words, he is unlikely to be a devil, as he

10 The first century reckoning of time was divided into twelve hours of the day and four “watches” of the night.

11 <https://www.agapebiblestudy.com/charts/jewishtimedivision.htm>

12 According to the Mosaic lunisolar calendar, that is.

13 Genesis 15:12-16

14 Job 26:6, 28:22

15 Job 31:12

16 Psalm 88:11, Proverbs 15:11, 27:20

performs a specific *task* by God's ordaining him to such duties. For this reason, we see Death and Hades thrown into the lake of fire at Judgment Day, but *not* Abaddon.¹⁷

There is a possible further connection here to the “destroyer” from the Exodus,¹⁸ especially because that figure accompanies the Lord during the Passover destruction of the Egyptian firstborn. Given the different etymology of the term though (the word for “the destroyer” in Exodus is הַמַּשְׁחִית,¹⁹²⁰ not “Abaddon”), the comparison is stronger moreso in terms of circumstance. St. John has related to us that each trumpet blast thus far is related to the Exodus plagues; why *wouldn't* there be a parallel to the angel of death which took away Pharaoh's child? Yet since Christ died for *all* men, and wishes that all be saved, Abaddon's task is no longer mere killing to send people into the abyss, but instead he serves to torment them in the hopes that they shall come to their senses and cease resisting the Gospel.

17 Revelation 20:14

18 Exodus 12:23

19 Transliterated hammasit, Strong's #7483

20 <https://www.biblehub.com/hebrew/7843.htm>

Revelation Bible Study #26

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

Revelation 9:13-21

13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, **14** saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” **15** So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. **16** The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. **17** And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. **18** By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. **19** For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, **21** nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

Introduction

The penultimate trumpet blast is followed by oddly vague descriptions of its consequences. The vision blends references to the Mosaic sacrificial system, the warlike oracles of the prophets, and continued descriptions of celestial beings charged with attacking the enemies of God. Frankly, all of this makes it incredibly difficult to interpret with any amount of certainty. Yet while all of this may confuse the reader, the last two verses of the passage highlight the *point* of the sixth trumpet (and indeed, all seven of them); the exhortation to repentance which rings louder and louder in the ears of obstinate mankind.

Vs.13-15

13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, **14** saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” **15** So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

When the sixth trumpet is blown, a voice comes from the altar's horns. That there were four horns to the altar reflects the four angels, each of which is presumably facing each cardinal direction. Note, however, that the voice coming from the horns demands a release of angels who were prepared to *slaughter*. This is in direct distinction from the purpose of the *earthly* altar which the Israelites were told to use, wherein the Aaronic priesthood poured blood *on* it as part of making sin offerings and enacting the Day of Atonement.¹ In other words, that St. John notes this voice going out of the Heavenly altar's horns means that there is a dire reversal occurring in the Throne Room. The earthly altar's horns were utilized to make peace between God and man; the Heavenly altar's horns are here

¹ Leviticus 4:13-21, 16:15-19

used for sounding judgment against men who have not received the peace offered to them by Christ's sacrifice. One must understand that this is a matter of justice, as previously it has been revealed that underneath the altar are martyrs, who have cried out for vengeance against those who spilled their blood; this is the fulfillment of God's promise to them.²

The death toll from this army approaches one third of humanity. Previously, one fourth of humanity was killed by Death as he rode his pale horse – not counting of course the other innumerable deaths caused by the white rider's conquest, the red rider's warfare, and the scarcity brought with the black rider.³ Simply adding the proportions of humanity killed by the four angels and the pale rider, one oddly comes to seven twelfths of the population being victimized (7/12). While it does appear that the numbers seven and twelve are very significant to St. John's vision, we cannot speculate on whether these are imported into the “body count” between the two killing portions of both seal and trumpet.

The specifics of the numbers do not matter so much as the origins of the ones performing the action. There are four angels who were “bound” to the river Euphrates. Note that St. John consciously refers to it as the “great river Euphrates;” this is the same wording found in:

-The promise God gives to Abraham concerning his descendants' reception of the land.⁴

-Moses's command for the children of Israel to enter Canaan and *take it*.⁵

-God's commission message to Joshua to begin the conquest of Canaan.⁶

The promise of land for God's people and rest from their oppression comes simultaneously with a threat of destruction for all the nonbelievers there; after the children of Israel are granted an Exodus from Egypt, they are commanded to wipe out the Canaanites. Given the striking parallels between the seven trumpets and the Exodus, the passage is most likely a continuation thereof and reflecting the conquest of “Canaan” as the *world*, only this time the wrath poured out on pagans is *not* performed by flawed and sinful believers, but by angels who have stood prepared to enact this vengeance for millennia. The conquest of Canaan was a *type* which foreshadowed this moment. They ought not be reckoned to be evil spirits, for they are not bound in the abyss,⁷ but bound in the sense of *standing by* like soldiers on night watch to fulfill the command given them.

Vs.16-19

16 The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. **17** And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. **18** By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. **19** For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

St. John notes a “number of mounted troops,” numbering at two hundred million. They are mounted on “horses” which curiously have the faces of lions. This should not surprise us, as the spiritual locusts had the faces of men, which correlates to one of the living creatures; that there is a lion-faced spiritual creature which acts as a steed for spiritual warriors *also* correlates with that living creature with the visage of a lion.⁸ That the eagle called out regarding the latter three trumpets⁹ corresponds with the eagle-visaged living creature as well. In other words, given the correlation

2 Revelation 6:9-11

3 Revelation 6:1-8

4 Genesis 15:18

5 Deuteronomy 1:1-8

6 Joshua 1:1-5

7 2 Peter 2:4, Jude vs.6

8 Revelation 4:6-8

9 Revelation 8:13

between the living creatures and these spiritual beings, as well as the sapphire of their armor matching the sapphire descriptions of Heaven,¹⁰ we can only conclude that this is an angelic army carrying out our Lord's judgment – not, as some commentaries presume, a demonic horde.

They are indeed creatures tasked with judgment from God directly. The only other place in which fire, smoke and sulfur are used to kill people is with the judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah.¹¹ Ezekiel gives an oracle in which this is a fate promised to the people of Gog as well.¹² Whereas the previous trumpet gave nonbelievers five months to repent upon experiencing the same torments as Job, these creatures kill them directly. They have been given enough chances, and still not repented, that they are overthrown and slain in the same fashion as Sodom, Gomorrah, and Gog, representing a persistent, willful wickedness.

Vs.20-21

20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, **21** nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The main passage presents some difficulties to us: whence comes the army of two hundred million? Why did St. John not mention them earlier? Are the bound angels necessarily *good* angels who have stood by awaiting to fulfill the promise given to Abraham in a different way? Or are they demonic figures which exist solely to harm and deceive nonbelievers? If the latter is the option, why would God give authority to such creatures to kill people for whom Christ died? Such questions are extremely difficult to navigate.

Nonetheless, St. John does not leave us in the interpretive wilderness. Those who do not die from the plagues of smoke and fire and sulfur are *still obstinate* in their resistance to the message of the Holy Spirit. They actively prefer their idols and their sins, as most of humanity has since the fall in Eden. With these two verses we see the *point*. Much like the escalation of the plagues in Egypt before the Exodus, the trumpets represent an increasing intensity in the punishments of God rained down on humanity – with the express intent of giving them the chance, like Pharaoh, to cease persecuting God's people and to believe in the Gospel.

We must note here that St. John gives us two reasons for the judgment on rebellious humanity. The first is their idolatry. They actively prefer to worship idols rather than the true God, whether these be the more metaphoric idols of money and pleasure, or the literal primitive carvings by which men previously attempted to contact false deities. False belief is not an innocent mistake in the eyes of God, as men are held accountable and even killed because of it. Yet this is not the only cause for judgment against a man; their *sins* are counted against them. Because they are not covered by the Blood of our Lord Jesus, they are held accountable for their wicked deeds done here on earth, from violence to blasphemy to sexual degeneracy. On account of their idolatry, they trust in that which does not save, and thus they presume that they do not need to repent of the sins that they commit. Even if they *were* to repent and turn to their false gods for forgiveness from these deeds, because those idols neither see nor hear, they cannot help spare the wicked from their fate. St. John relates here that salvation is found *only* in Christ Jesus.

10 Exodus 24:10, Ezekiel 1:26, 10:1

11 Genesis 19:23-28

12 Ezekiel 38:21-23

Revelation Bible Study #27

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

Revelation 10

1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. **2** He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, **3** and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. **4** And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down.” **5** And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven **6** and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, **7** but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, “Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” **9** So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, “Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.” **10** And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. **11** And I was told, “You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”

Introduction

Revelation is full of mysteries which call out for our investigation. Our Lord does not tell us all the details concerning the exact identity of Abaddon or the 200 million lion-faced steeds which slaughter the wicked in the previous chapter. The details in the seven churches are sparse in some matters, like the identity of the “jezebel” figure that plagued Thyatira's congregation.¹ With the various mysteries found in the book and St. John's heavy use of symbolic language, one might be tempted toward ignoring it or shrugging off the details; this would be incorrect, for we are encouraged to claim the blessing of the prophecy, finding the way to “keep what is written in it”² through diligent study. Nonetheless, there are mysteries which even the Apostle is unable to speak on, such that he is even prohibited from doing so in the tenth chapter. Here he calls certain matters to our attention, but does not permit us to look deeper. Yet still, we must do our best to find out *why* this is the case with the details we are permitted to discover, on account of the blessing promised.

Vs.1-4

1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. **2** He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, **3** and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. **4** And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not

¹ Revelation 2:20

² Revelation 1:3

write it down.”

The Angel

An angel descends from Heaven to earth, and St. John is made to accompany him. The angel described here is *mighty*, suggesting that his place in the angelic hierarchy is a high one, if not the highest. He is clothed in a cloud, with a bright face, a rainbow held above him, and pillars of fire for legs; these are all descriptions of matters relating directly to God, especially in the Pentateuch. God goes before the Israelites in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night after they depart Egypt.³ The rainbow is placed in the sky after the Flood as a sign of God's Covenant.⁴ Like our Heavenly Father, he is depicted holding a scroll, but like Christ he is associated with a lion (at least as far as his voice is concerned).⁵

We must ask whether or not this angel is actually God taking this distinct form. Our Heavenly Father was already described in the 4th chapter, and He is at this point in the vision holding court in His throne away from His typical “unapproachable light.”⁶ The Holy Spirit, who is shown to be the seven torches and potentially the seven thunders, is not likely to be represented here (despite the Holy Spirit being most often depicted as the Proclaimer).⁷ We are left with one option: *if* this figure is a member of the Godhead, then he is actually Christ, and at some point in the vision He departed the Throne Room and came down from Heaven, taking the Great Scroll with Him. His description here as an “angel” would be in line with the Christophanies of the Old Testament, in which our Savior is called “the Angel of the Lord.”⁸ This is the first possible identification.

The second option is that the angel is just that – an angel. If this figure is *not* a member of the Godhead, then he is a high ranking angelic being who represents God's actions throughout the Old Testament. Perhaps this being is a manifestation of the lion-faced living creature from the 4th chapter, since that creature has a lion's voice and a clearly honorable rank given his location. The case for him being *merely* an angel could be built upon his swearing by God in the fifth verse as though God were separate from himself, and in the Apostle maintaining that he is an angel. If this were “The Angel of the Lord” in reference to Christ, we should expect St. John, who builds his book on the foundation of the Old Testament, to use similar phrasing. Further, as this text is connected with Daniel's book and has to do with the end of all things, it could be that this is Michael the archangel, prince over Israel, who indeed arises to serve our Lord at the end of days.⁹

Which is it? Is the angel actually Christ coming down from Heaven to pronounce an immanent end? Or is the angel an archangel tasked with fulfilling prophecy? We shall not know until we are in Paradise. The more important matter is that the angel makes an authoritative *proclamation*, which shall be fulfilled just as every other promise of God has been fulfilled – from the promise of the Exodus to the entry into Canaan to the return of the Exiles, etc.

The Sealed Proclamation

When the “seven thunders” make a proclamation, St. John is about to record it but is forbidden from doing so. He is told to “seal up” the proclamation, leaving it unspoken. This mirrors two places in Daniel's book of prophecy. First, Daniel is told to seal up the prophecies concerning the 2300 “evenings

3 Exodus 13:21-22

4 Genesis 9:12-17

5 Revelation 5:1-5

6 1 Timothy 6:16

7 John 16:7-10

8 Genesis 22:10-12, Exodus 3:2-6, Judges 2:1-2, and a grand multiplicity of places.

9 Daniel 12:1

and mornings” before restoration of Jerusalem's sanctuary.¹⁰ Second, regarding the “time of the end,” wherein the aforementioned Michael shall arise to proclaim deliverance.¹¹ In both cases, the prophet is told the reason for the command to seal the prophecies; their fulfillments are far off in the future from the vantage point wherein he writes (6th Century BC), rendering them less immediately pertinent to his first audience, the exiles of Judah. St. John, however, is simply told to seal it. This could mean that the motivation is the same, as all three passages which contain this phrase have much to do with the restoration of God's people and the imposition of Divine Justice; as it has been two thousand years since Christ ascended into Heaven, the fulfillment of the promises concerning the End were far off for St. John's first century audience the same way that Daniel's sealed prophecies were for the children of Judah.

Vs.5-7

5 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven **6** and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, **7** but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

The angel proclaims that there will be “no more delay.” Since presumably he is speaking of the return of Christ and Judgment Day, the translation of this phrase may be concerning to some readers. In what sense would the Second Advent be delayed? Not at all, actually. The word *Χρόνος*,¹²¹³ translated as “delay,” may only be so rendered by implication: its strictest definition is that of an arc of time. Five minutes is a definite *Χρόνος*; a month is a *Χρόνος*. The angel proclaims here that there shall be no more period of time, effectively saying (in the English vernacular) “Time's Up.”

He refers to the mystery of God being fulfilled. This is to say, the *secret* of God shall be completed in it's purpose once the seventh trumpet is sounded. Whether or not it shall be fully *revealed* is not said here. God has announced something of great consequence to the prophets, something which is not in our purview to know. It is likely that this secret was proclaimed by the seven thunders, and it is thus sealed. Little is said about the mystery afterward, and the consequences of the seventh trumpet are sparse in detail.¹⁴ We shall cover it more in detail when we reach the eleventh chapter, but when seventh trumpet is blown, a proclamation is made, praise is offered, and the Heavenly Temple is opened. St. John sees the Ark, and that is all that is told of this moment – similar to the half hour of silence at the seventh seal's opening.¹⁵ It *appears* anticlimactic, but with the sealing of the seven thunders' proclamation it becomes clear to the reader that we are not given the right to know just yet.

Vs.8-11

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, “Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” **9** So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, “Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.” **10** And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. **11** And I was told, “You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”

These verses reflect the commission given to Ezekiel the prophet, who eats a sweet-tasting

10 Daniel 8, esp. vs.13-14 and vs.26

11 Daniel 12:4

12 Transliterated “Chronos,” Strong's #5550

13 <https://biblehub.com/greek/5550.htm>

14 Revelation 11:15-19

15 Revelation 8:1-4

scroll but experiences a bitterness of heart.¹⁶ Ezekiel is given a commission by God to speak to the children of Israel, bearing oracles of warning and condemnation. Though St. John has already been given a commission to write Revelation,¹⁷ this act of *re*-commissioning hints at an imminent repetition of the “cycle of sevens” to occur, only with a different focus on geopolitical and ecclesiastical realities.

The sweetness of the scroll aligns with the good that its writing shall bring unto all believers. Its bitterness comes with the attendant judgment against all who oppose our Lord. Just as the Great Scroll is (in our estimation) the establishment of Law and Gospel upon all humanity, the Apostle experiences both realities as he is commissioned once more to proclaim it unto the nations.

16 Ezekiel 3:1-21

17 Revelation 1:19

Revelation Bible Study #28

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

Revelation 11:1-14

1 Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, **2** but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. **3** And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. **5** And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. **6** They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. **7** And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, **8** and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. **9** For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, **10** and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. **11** But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. **12** Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. **13** And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

Introduction

When St. John speaks with the angel who stood on land and sea, he is recommissioned for the task of a prophet and told that he must “again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages.”¹ This series of prophecies oddly begins as *part* of the aftermath of the sixth trumpet, and localized in Judea – particularly Jerusalem. Here, before we see the seventh trumpet blown and its heralding of a new era, we see a particular judgment on the city where Christ was crucified and the guilty party. To establish this, two mysterious witnesses are called to testify against them.

Vs.1-3

1 Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, “Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, **2** but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. **3** And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

To measure the Temple and to measure Jerusalem is understood to be a *good* thing in the Old Testament. Ezekiel's vision of a heavenly Temple begins with seeing an angelic figure holding a

¹ Revelation 10:11

measuring rod much like the one given to St. John.² Zechariah receives a vision of Jerusalem's measurements as a reassurance that the influence of the Church would one day surpass his ability to estimate.³ But the Apostle here is told to measure not only the Temple, but *also* the people worshipping there – meaning that their character is being scrutinized in the same way that the building is. For three and a half years, the inhabitants of Jerusalem will be given a prolonged opportunity to hear the Gospel and repent of their hard-hearted refusal to believe.

1260 days is 42 months is 3.5 years. Historically, this aligns roughly with the period between the beginning of the first Jewish war (April/May of 66 A.D.) to the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem (September 70 A.D.). The war lasted for three and a half years after the Temple was destroyed, with the end of the siege of Masada in 74 A.D. This *could* be understood as being a fulfilled prophecy that is isolated to these events, one which Christ had given before regarding the “times of the Gentiles.”⁴ So the preterist understanding of the text would necessitate that this prophecy is complete.

But a problem with the full preterist understanding though is that it leads to issues concerning the two witnesses. If they are presented as two Godly men who witness to the truth and are taken up to Heaven, that would necessitate them being believers in Christ. But no such martyrs are recorded in the history of the Jewish war, whether from Josephus or any other historian. Various figures have been proposed by those positing a human interpretation, but none of them were believers!⁵ If the preterist tries to claim earlier martyrs like St. Stephen or St. James the Lesser, this runs afoul of their timeline as they insist it all occurs during the first Jewish war; St. Stephen and St. James were martyred thirty or more years prior to the outbreak of the war.

Thus it is incredibly unlikely that these are two *historic* figures, leaving us two choices; either they are unknown future persons who have not begun witnessing yet (the futurist perspective), or they are symbolic of something greater happening in Jerusalem in St. John's day. The former option is just as unlikely as the preterist option. It would necessitate a third temple being erected and used for daily use by a revived Jewish priesthood during a period in which Gentiles control the landmass of Judea once more, and for God to reinstitute the office of prophecy according to its Old Testament understanding. While this is certainly *possible*, the current site of the Jerusalem Temple in Jerusalem is home to the “Dome of the Rock,” having become an Islamic devotional site; if the Israelis recapture this site, it is highly unlikely that the Muslims of the world would permit it to continue at all – not without a globe-spanning total war of annihilation happening first. In other words, in order for the futurist position to be correct, Islam would have to go extinct and Jewish control of Israel would have to be ceded to Gentiles.

Vs.4-6

4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. **5** And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. **6** They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire.

*The Identity of the Two Witnesses*⁷

2 Ezekiel 40:1-4

3 Zechariah 2:1-5

4 Luke 20:21-24

5 As an example, Maarschalk proposes Ananus and Jesus ben Gamaliel, both being high priests, as the most likely candidates – despite neither being Christians.

6 <https://adammaarschalk.com/2017/02/04/the-two-witnesses-killed-by-the-beast-revelation-113-13/>

7 Admittedly, since we are dealing with symbolic numbers and/or time periods here, this is a bit speculative, but this section is our case itself.

The two witnesses are spoken of in Zechariah's prophecy, identified there as Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor of Judea.⁸ Unlike those two however, who represent the left and right hand Kingdoms of our Lord,⁹ the witnesses St. John sees speak the Word of the Lord and *represent* it as well. The fire which comes from their mouths represents the damnation of nonbelievers who, going against the Word of the Lord, find themselves burning as a result – by the *standard* given by the Law.

The witnesses repeat the prophetic signs of the Old Testament, namely those of Moses and Elijah. Elijah predicted and prayed for a drought in judgment against the Israelites who had broken the Covenant with our Lord.¹⁰ God used Moses to turn the waters of the Nile to blood.¹¹ This tells us that they are not individual *people* per se, but symbolic representatives of the two things that witnessed the most against the Israelites: the Law and the Prophets. The phrase “the Law and the Prophets” is often used in the New Testament as a catch-all term for the Old Testament.¹² Moses, being the Lawgiver to Israel, represents the Law. Elijah, who bore witness to apostate Northern Israel, represents the “Covenant Prosecutor” role of all the Old Testament prophets. In the mind of a first century Jew, Elijah was treated as the chief of prophets; he never died, and thus was expected to maintain his role as leader of the school of prophets. His prominence is demonstrated in the way that Jews often compared Christ to Elijah during His earthly ministry.¹³ Both men, Moses and Elijah, appear at the Transfiguration as witnesses to the true identity and work of Jesus.¹⁴

If the two witnesses are the Law and the Prophets, represented here by Moses and Elijah, then this gives us perspective regarding the mysterious “1260 days.” Yes, 1260 days is half of seven years, but it is *more* likely that it uses the term “day” as “year” in similar fashion to Daniel's “70 weeks” prophecy – in which a “week” is understood as seven years.¹⁵ 1260 years, going backwards from the beginning of the first Jewish war in 66 A.D., leads us to 1194 B.C. That is when the office of prophet began to re-emerge in Israel.¹⁶ From that year on, Israel was judged not according to the standard of Law only, but the Law and the *Prophets*. They bore witness together against the actions of Israel and Judah consistently.

Vs.7-14

7 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, 8 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. 9 For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, 10 and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. 11 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here!” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13 And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

8 Zechariah 3-4

9 The left hand Kingdom being civic power (Zerubbabel), the right hand Kingdom being the Church (Joshua).

10 1 Kings 17:1-7, James 5:17-18, Deuteronomy 28:20-24

11 Exodus 7:14-24

12 Matthew 7:2, 11:13, 22:40, Luke 16:16, 24:44, John 1:45, Acts 13:15, 24:14, 28:23, Romans 3:21

13 Matthew 16:14, Mark 6:15,

14 Mark 7:2-13

15 Daniel 9

16 The first individual shown to hold the prophetic office after Joshua's passing, was Deborah, who began to operate against Jabin during this time. Judges 4-5.

14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

The two witnesses are killed in Jerusalem, which is called Sodom and Egypt on account of its inhabitants' practicing degenerate sin and idolatry. The beast which slays them is satan, who tempts men toward degenerate sin and idolatry. Of course, since God typically works through means, the devil who wishes to supplant Him does so as well; the beast does not kill the witnesses *alone*, preferring to do it through the inhabitants of Jerusalem; Scripture attests that they were already effectively children of the devil through their love of murder and deception, so the greater responsibility for murdering Christ rests on their shoulders.¹⁷

When Christ was crucified, those who murdered Him were *also* figuratively “killing” the Law and the Prophets. We must recall that St. John calls our Savior the Logos, or Word, in His Gospel;¹⁸ Christ is the “New Prophet” predicted by Moses and the One who spoke the Law at Sinai.¹⁹ The author of Hebrews speaks of how Christ replaced the school of the prophets and instituted a new Covenant which replaces the Law.²⁰ As He is the Divine Logos, He *gives* the Word of God to people, being the One who commissioned Moses and Elijah in the first place. To crucify Him then is to attack that which comes from Him, to kill Moses and Elijah. The Law and Prophets may have been killed, but because the Word of the Lord remains forever,²¹ these must be taken up to Heaven where they remain vindicated. During the period of their “death,” the inhabitants of Jerusalem did not see fit to bury them *because they thought they were obeying them*. Pharisaic interpretations of the Law led to a false obedience to it, and intertestamental literature demonstrates that the same malinterpretations were being perpetrated on the writings of the prophets; they thought they were doing service to God when they killed Jesus and persecuted the Church, but in reality they were serving the devil, sin and idolatry.

This means that the “killing” of Moses and Elijah is the undoing of the Law and the Prophets on account of the crucifixion of Christ Jesus by the devil's servants. They remain “dead” for three and a half days, a total of seven days between the two of them, so as to demonstrate that a completion of the telos of the Old Covenant had occurred. The Gospel became the modus operandi and worldview of Christians, while the false Law and false Prophets continued to rule over the Jewish religious sphere; the Law and the Prophets were not witnessing against *anybody* until the disciples of Christ began witnessing to nonbelieving Jews en masse, causing a great deal of consternation and fear.

Seven thousand perish in the resultant social upheavals, likely to be the remnant of believers who remained in Judea and were martyred by their countrymen; St. Paul refers to this remnant of Jewish Christians using language in reference to our Lord's proclamation to Elijah: “I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to baal.”²² As St. John's language contains *countless* references to the prophets and a contextually close reference to Elijah (vs.6), he is probably using the “seven thousand” number in the same way St. Paul does. Thus, after the abrogation of the Old Covenant by the New, and the martyring of the believing seven-thousand remnant, fear falls upon the population for the impending seventh trumpet.

17 John 8:39-44, 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

18 John 1:1

19 Deuteronomy 18:15-18, Jude vs.5

20 Hebrews 1:1-4, 8:1-13

21 1 Peter 1:25, Isaiah 40:8

22 1 Kings 19:18, Romans 11:4

Revelation Bible Study #29

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

Revelation 11:15-19

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” **16** And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, **17** saying,

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

18 The nations raged,
but your wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name,
both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

Introduction

The text of this passage denotes the end of days – or an end to an *era*, more properly speaking. Curiously, a feature of St. John's book is that the vision *restarts* often so as to provide a fresh view of the timeline he is describing. When the seven seals were being opened, the dynamics which impact humanity until Christ's Return are described; with the seven trumpets, God shows us what He will be doing during this time as regards judgment and woe against nonbelievers, both globally and applying specifically to the Judeans. But for both the seals and trumpets, the seventh portends something which speaks of finality *and* something typologically applicable to all times before Judgment Day.

Vs.15

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

The end of the vision (before its reset) tells us *what* shall happen, but does not tell us *how* or any of the specifics. All we are to know is that Christ shall return, and when He returns there shall be an eternal reign over what was once known as “the world.” Believers may be itching to hear more details, but they will be disappointed if they are expecting to hear names, imagine faces, or have such description as to be able to smell and hear what the Second Advent is going to be like. Nonetheless, they *are* encouraged in hearing that there is a great victory in it.

The trumpets up until this point have had great parallels to the Exodus and the conquest of Canaan. This is no different. The walls of Jericho fell on the seventh day after the children of Israel marched around the city seven times *and the priests blew their trumpets*.¹ It is after this that the walls

¹ Joshua 6:15-21

collapse, and the men of Jericho fall to the invading Israelites. In other words, this passage relates to us that when the final trumpet is blown, God shall accomplish a great victory by which the territory controlled by the devil (the world) is made to belong to God and the saints. It also lets us know that, while this the seventh trumpet *points* to the final day, it has typological echoes going forward from the Crucifixion onward. If at any time a region that was once pagan becomes Christian, it is a sign that the Kingdom of God has come to that area and begun to rule over it as the proclamation says.

Vs.16-18

16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, **17** saying,

“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and who was,
for you have taken your great power
and begun to reign.
18 The nations raged,
but your wrath came,
and the time for the dead to be judged,
and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints,
and those who fear your name,
both small and great,
and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

The proclamation of praise by the elders appears at first blush to be about the end of all things. Those of the futurist persuasion thus typically reserve its fulfillment for the Second Advent; they have a good point, as the full preterist cannot point to a moment at 70 A.D. in which the “destroyers of the earth” were destroyed. Yet it is not so simple that we may restrict it to a single future event. The text parallels the pronouncements that Christ made upon His post-Resurrection appearances. He began to reign after He returned to life, saying “All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me.”² The saints are indeed promised great things, as He proclaims “whoever believes and is Baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”³ The dead are also judged, as indeed the status of the saints *was* changed after the Atonement, as Christ “went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison.”⁴

This is not to say that the praise of the elders has no *ultimate* fulfillment. Indeed, there will come a time in which Christ returns, and the *point* of the typological instantiation is to show believers that this will happen. In the Old Testament, types were used as a means by which the saints could see that Christ's first Advent and Passion were to happen. Adam is a type of Christ, as he receives his bride Eve through his side being opened – just as Jesus receives *His* Bride, the Church, as His blood is poured out by a Roman spear wound. Moses and Samson and Samuel all have miraculous births and were selected by God to deliver His people, foreshadowing that Christ would come to deliver all who will believe in Him. A type shall not be a *perfect* one-for-one to the prophesied event (or else the type would just be the fulfillment), but the main themes introduced by prophetic text reassure the believer that God will do as He promised.

Here, with the proclamation of the elders at the seventh trumpet, we find that not only the Resurrection, but also every mass conversion in history is a type of the Return to come. Clovis bringing the Frankish nation to belief, Constantine making Christianity the state religion of Rome, etc., these all point to the Second Advent when the seventh trumpet is finally blown. As with Adam, Joseph, Moses,

2 Matthew 28:18

3 Mark 16:16

4 1 Peter 3:18-20

Samson, etc., these types are not perfect in their prophetic representation, but they connect with the prophecy where it matters. The nation no longer rages, souls are saved, and men both small and great fear the Name of the Lord.

Vs.19

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

The Temple in Heaven is opened, by which we ought to understand that it is *revealed*. Men shall be able to see it from earth. It is shown here that the Ark of the Covenant, which God had last mentioned as something of the past,⁵ is also in Heaven. This is because an earthly Temple is no longer needed: the veil was torn which barred men from God's sanctifying Presence,⁶ and Christ has taken the place of the Mercy Seat.⁷ Like, the Law and the Prophets, the Ark has fulfilled its purpose and it thus returned to our Lord's Temple in Heaven. Yet the presence which the Ark signifies is still here, available to all who are baptized and *become* Arks of the Covenant by drinking the New Covenant of Christ's Blood in the Eucharist.⁸

The presence of thunder and lightning, with various kinds of loud noises, is a proper part of the Throne Room and a sign of God being active in His interactions with the world.⁹ When the seventh seal is opened, there are peals of thunder, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.¹⁰ The same phenomena are observed here in the eleventh chapter as the final trumpet is blown, and later on when the seventh bowl of God's wrath is poured out, yet once more we see the same.¹¹ For St. John, noise and spectacular phenomena like lightning represent God's *movement*, of *action*; it is there as an encouragement for the believer, despite the fear that these phenomena typically invoke within the observer.

One may notice that St. John tells us *that* this happens, but does not identify *what* exactly comes from the event. Readers often have a difficult time with the mystery. Nonetheless, what we *are* told here gives us something to go off of regarding the Judgment Day event, namely that of presence. The Ark of the Covenant had a mercy seat, by which the children of Israel made supplication for forgiveness on the Day of Atonement. It represented a special presence from our Lord which the individual believer enjoys from the moment of his Baptism onward, being thus united to Christ who *is* the new Mercy Seat. The End thus includes such a change, but moreso than the individual Christian experiences in his earthly life; this is to say, God shall be unmistakably *with* us in a new, yet familiar way when Christ returns.

5 Jeremiah 3:14-18

6 Matthew 27:51-54

7 Hebrews 9:5, Romans 3:25 – both “mercy seat” and “propitiation” are translated from the same word, *hilasterion*, Strong's #2435

8 Luke 22:20, 1 Corinthians 11:25

9 Revelation 4:5

10 Revelation 8:5

11 Revelation 16:17-18

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,⁸⁹ 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 worshipping the beast itself. This worship is *unwitting*, as many of them believe they are worshipping 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 worshipping anything at all. Nonetheless, they *are* worshipping, 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 christ. 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

Revelation Bible Study #38

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

Revelation 15:1-8

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. **3** And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!

4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

5 After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, **6** and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. **7** And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, **8** and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

Introduction

St. John has completed a cycle of prophecy which began in the twelfth chapter and ended at the end of the fourteenth. Now begins the final “cycle of seven” with the seven plagues unleashed by seven angels. Unlike the seals or trumpets or “beast” arcs though, here St. John is more explicit with the connections between his vision and the book of Exodus. As always, the Apostle expects his reader to be familiar with, even steeped in, the Old Testament in order to understand the full context of the vision.

Vs.1

1 Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

St. John introduces the vision by giving the reader the same hermeneutic rule as the previous vision.¹ Whoever would understand the arc which starts here and continues into the nineteenth chapter must recognize that the language is *symbolic*. The seven plagues are full of metaphor, allegory and alluding to previous passages. For this reason, the seven angels are brought up *before* they arrive in the vision; St. John is summarizing the matter for us before going into detail on what he saw. The seven

¹ Revelation 12:1

plagues are the representation of God's actions before the final judgment is enacted.

We might ask why Revelation has these signs to begin with. The reader may ask, “why doesn't God simply tell us directly what shall happen?” This is a legitimate question. In the Old Testament, God often gives direct, concrete prophecies to His people, whether it be predicting the rise of the Babylonians to make Judah answer for their sins,² or even informing Abraham that his descendants will be afflicted for four hundred years but be granted a prosperous exit.³ Why then does St. John's vision include such obtuse language, symbolism and references? The answer is simple, but must be repeated: “Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.”⁴ The Apostle has been given only one single event with which we may rely on clear words for interpreting: the return of Christ. Everything else that he writes about concerns that which *has* happened, *is* happening, and *will* happen again. In other words, he writes a forward-looking typology for world history before Christ's Return.

David and Joseph and Adam and Joshua and Israel's judges and many others are presented as *types* of Christ. Certain events in their lives are meant to parallel (and thus prophesy) the Messiah's Incarnation (e.g., Samson and Isaac's miraculous births),⁵ life (e.g., David's prophetic and kingly ministry), death (Joseph suffering that many may live),⁶ and even Resurrection and ascent to Heaven (Elijah's ascent).⁷ This also applies to the Levitical Law in many ways. Each *type* is a foreshadowing of the *antitype*, Christ, who fulfilled all of the types' foreshadowing. There are too many to number from Scripture in this document. What Revelation is doing is providing the antitypes *first*, in the form of the vision, which are then fulfilled multiple times throughout history – albeit, like the types of Christ, nor fulfilling the antitype completely. Adam was a type of Christ, but he did not rise again from the dead on the third day; David was a type, but he did not forgive anyone's sins; the list goes on. The final battles of the first Jewish war from 70 A.D. is a *type* of the battle of Armageddon; so too was Antietam, as was Kursk. Various famines are expected from the black horse rider, and dozens of plagues fulfill the pale horse rider's mission.⁸ but none of those types which after-shadow the antitypes of the riders necessarily take out all of the food or destroy a quarter of all humanity.

Yet while St. John tells us how things will go in history through these antitypes, it is nonetheless still a prophecy which has a *terminating point*, namely the Return of our Lord Jesus. The Apostle notes “with them the wrath of God is finished.” When the seventh seal is opened, the seventh trumpet blown, the seventh bowl poured out, the text points to the End of all things⁹ as the cycles and types are finished. Judgment Day will be upon the world, and all things are made right as Christ takes His rightful place as Ruler over all things.

Vs.2-4

2 And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. 3 And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,

2 Habakkuk 1:5-11

3 Genesis 15:13-14

4 Revelation 1:19

5 Genesis 17:15-19, 21:1, Judges 13

6 Genesis 50:19-20

7 2 Kings 2:1-12

8 Revelation 6:5-8

9 Revelation 8:1-5, 11:15, 16:17

O King of the nations!
4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

The vision begins by the sea of glass, which comprises the floor of the Throne Room,¹⁰ changing its color to reflect the carnelian appearance of the One who is seated on the Throne.¹¹ This is likely a representation of God being “on the move” so to speak; the same way that noise symbolizes Him taking action, the Throne Room being saturated with a red hue tells the reader that He is about to exercise His authority with the seven angels and their plagues. The saints, “those who had conquered the beast,” are shown separate from this sea to demonstrate that though they stood firm in proclaiming the Word,¹² the ultimate judgment and defeat against the beast and those who worship it is accomplished by God alone.

The sea of glass is also turned red, or “mingled with fire,” because that makes it a *red sea*. It was at the Red Sea that God overthrew the Egyptian army by separating and then crashing the waters upon them.¹³ The saints being on the side of the sea of glass paints a mental picture which parallels the Israelites having freshly been delivered from Pharaoh and his chariots. Thus they sing what St. John calls the “Song of Moses,” though it is also called the song of the Lamb, suggesting that the specific words are Christ's modification of Moses' original poetry.¹⁴ The saints sing of God's deliverance as Moses did, but instead of Moses's proclamation of fear seizing Philistia and the Canaanites,¹⁵ now *all* nations worship God and sing the same song. Nonetheless the parallel is still striking; just as the Israelites stood by the Red Sea and celebrated deliverance from Pharaoh, so too do all the saints stand by the Red Sea (of glass, made red by fire) and celebrate their deliverance from sin, death and the devil.

Vs.5-8

5 After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. 7 And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, 8 and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

St. John has spoken of a Temple in Heaven.¹⁶ Here we witness that a tent – or more properly Tabernacle – is also present. The author of Hebrews wrote about such a Tabernacle as well,¹⁷ one in which Christ our High Priest ministers to His saints. While the ark of the covenant resides in the *Temple*,¹⁸ Christ Himself goes to the heavenly Tabernacle to *be* our New Covenant. He has spoken of His blood as the New Covenant;¹⁹ it is from this place that He ministers, likely also the place from which we receive His Body and Blood when taking the Sacrament.

The seven angels are dressed in the same kind of clothing that Christ was seen wearing when

10 Revelation 4:6

11 Revelation 4:3

12 Revelation 12:11

13 Exodus 14

14 Exodus 15:1-18

15 Exodus 15:14-16

16 Revelation 11:19, 14:15

17 Hebrews 8:1-7

18 Revelation 11:19

19 Luke 22:20

He met St. John at Patmos.²⁰ They come out of the heavenly Tabernacle, through which Christ fulfills His priestly office, wearing this as a sign of a priestly service. The bowls given are most likely then the heavenly bowls, the copies of which were used for drink offerings – wine to be poured upon the altar during sacrifice.²¹ Since martyrdom and the shedding of the blood of saints had already been compared to the drink offering, with St. Paul saying “I am already being poured out as a drink offering,”²² what is presented here is a *reversal*. The world engages in drink offerings of blood:²³ now it is time for the pain inflicted on the saints to be brought upon them, with exponential increase. It is for this reason that the angels are shown pouring a drink offerings, for in the Old Testament the children of Israel did so with *wine*, which St. John has already told us represents God's wrath against sin and sinner. This means the entirety of the seven bowl will be spent discussing God's direct action of wrath against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

20 Revelation 1:13

21 Exodus 25:29, Numbers 15:4-5

22 Philippians 2:17, 2 Timothy 4:6

23 Psalm 16:4

Revelation Bible Study #39

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

Revelation 16:1-7

1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

2 So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

3 The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

4 The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,
for you brought these judgments.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink.
It is what they deserve!”

7 And I heard the altar saying,

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

Introduction

Seven angels have appeared from the Tabernacle in Heaven to pour out drink offerings of wrath for God. Since St. John has already told us that this is a *sign* vision like the previous one,¹ we must be careful to trace the meaning of the signs, especially in their clear references to the Exodus. With the plagues being poured out, the message is not one of Divine catharsis – or more simply put, anger for its own sake – but rather an outpouring of Divine wrath for the sake of deliverance. The Church, being the true Israel, has been simultaneously in a position of wilderness wandering *and* bondage to an oppressive world system. Now, as St. John has emphasized before in the vision of the trumpets,² it is time to afflict the new Egypt so as to bring God's people home.

Vs.1

1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

The drink offering in ancient Israel consisted of wine,³ which in Revelation is presented as a symbol of God's wrath; this outpouring was predicted in the fourteenth chapter.⁴ Since it is a precursor to the damnation of the wicked under the final judgment, these bowls represent *earthly* plagues and devastation, not something in the hereafter. Much of the plagues resemble the destruction rained down on the earth during the seven trumpets, meaning this is a *recapitulation* of that same prophetic cycle. Thus, from the moment of Pentecost to the day Christ returns, these plagues are a recurring reality on

1 Revelation 15:1

2 The Trumpets (esp. Revelation 8:6-13) retain heavy imagery of the Exodus, albeit with less emphasis on the event itself.

3 Numbers 15:10

4 Revelation 14:10

the godless.

The angels come from the Tabernacle in Heaven,⁵ but the voice calls from the heavenly Temple. This interaction demonstrates the unique role of each edifice within the Heavenly realm. On earth, the Temple replaced the Tabernacle for means of sacerdotal labor, with God approving the transition by the appearance of a cloud of glory.⁶ In Heaven though, the Tabernacle serves a sacerdotal role for the sake of the saints, while the Temple which has the Ark of the Covenant appears to be the Throne Room proper of our Lord.

The bowls are poured out, as stated above, as a *drink* offering. But a drink offering was typically done as part of a larger offering with a specific purpose, namely “to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering or at your appointed feasts.”⁷ The eternal destruction of the damned in the lake of fire constituted the *burnt offering* portion of the sacrifice. Since the vision of the bowls ends with Judgment Day, this means that their purpose is to represent the fulfillment of God's promises made to the Church – that He shall deliver us and bring us to the Resurrection, eternal life and blessedness. Note, however, that God is not making an offering in the sense that He would be making an offering to some other deity! Rather, since the angels are the ones making the offering, it is they who are bringing about this fulfillment of God's promise, thus making the offering *to* the One who promised.

Vs.2

2 So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

The sixth plague inflicted upon Egypt before the Exodus was boils. This applies to nonbelievers only, those who have accepted the mark – that is, continuous, stubborn, lifelong refusal to believe in Christ. Like the Israelites who were unaffected by this plague, Christians are not subject to it. Note the *effect* of the plague of boils, namely that “the magicians could not stand before Moses.”⁸ It is also the first time in which *God* hardens Pharaoh's heart instead of Pharaoh hardening his own heart. In other words, with the first bowl being poured out, those who take the mark are hardened, being given over to their debased desires; they have made their choice, and cannot turn back. Thus while there may not be physical boils inflicted on the nonbelievers, the vision portrays the way that Christianity comes to outshine the false religions of the world, such that they cannot stand against the faith when held up to scrutiny. St. John is not predicting a particular affliction (lest we assume that any man with a boil is damned), but rather he sees the representation of those who were given up to the lusts of their defiled hearts.⁹

Vs.3-7

3 The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

4 The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. **5** And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

“Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,
for you brought these judgments.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,

5 Revelation 15:5

6 1 Kings 8:1-11

7 Numbers 15:3

8 Exodus 9:8-12

9 Romans 1:24-32

and you have given them blood to drink.
It is what they deserve!”

7 And I heard the altar saying,
“Yes, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are your judgments!”

The first plague inflicted upon Egypt was the waters turned into blood.¹⁰ Not only that, but the waters of *the Nile*, which formed a central part of religion for the Egyptians who relied on it for irrigation. For every plague with which our Lord afflicted the Egyptians, He was condemning one of their false gods – especially, but not restricted to, the Passover.¹¹ While they did not worship the Nile itself per se, they saw it as the source of all their good, making it *functionally* a deity. As Luther says, “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and to which we are to take refuge in all distress, so that to have a God is nothing else than to trust and believe Him from the whole heart; as I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol.”¹²

If the false religions of the world are judged by the first bowl's pouring such that their leadership – or “magicians” cannot stand before Christ – the second and third represent the judgment against man's revealed preferences in worship, just as God condemned the waters of the Nile. That which men are shown to worship by their deeds, acquisitions, and habits shall fail them, in accordance with the second angel's warning in the fourteenth chapter – that Babylon would fall, and nothing man trusts in beside God shall stand.¹³

One might note that the ordering of the plagues is different between Exodus and Revelation. This is of course intentional. The plague of boils rendered the Egyptian magicians incapable of standing before Moses; prior to that, there were able to re-create some of the plagues, namely turning water into blood. The implication is that none of the false beliefs will be able to do what God accomplishes through the Church. This is why there are *two* bowls which turn water into blood. False religions and false teachers, being unable to do what God is doing, fall before the Church; this allows the faith (and the condemnation of false religion) to spread far beyond just “the sea” and into every river and spring of water.

The “angel in charge of the waters,” that is, the angel carrying the third bowl, notes in his praise the reversal which God is accomplishing in this moment of wrath. The entire world system is condemned as the Church's proclamation goes throughout all lands. This message mirrors that of Obadiah's oracle, which reads:

For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations.
As you have done, it shall be done to you;
your deeds shall return on your own head.
For as you have drunk on my holy mountain,
so all the nations shall drink continually;
they shall drink and swallow,
and shall be as though they had never been.
But in Mount Zion there shall be those who escape,
and it shall be holy,
and the house of Jacob shall possess their own possessions.
The house of Jacob shall be a fire,
and the house of Joseph a flame,
and the house of Esau stubble;
they shall burn them and consume them,

10 Exodus 7:14-25

11 Exodus 12:12

12 Large Catechism: <https://bookofconcord.org/large-catechism/ten-commandments/#lc-i-0002>

13 Revelation 14:8

and there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau,
for the LORD has spoken.¹⁴

The prophet mightily declares that the nations shall suffer the same as they did to God's people, with the exception of those who escape by going to Mount Zion. The result will be the house of Esau burning. Likewise, the world shall be judged; first by the condemnation of all its belief systems, then by the destruction of nonbelievers entirely. Only those who escape to the *heavenly* Mount Zion will be safe, having converted to the true faith. Those who do not shall burn. This running theme of reversal for the sake of justice, but with an exception made for those who repent, is perennial in Scripture. Ezekiel notes the same dynamic when giving an oracle from the Lord concerning the house of Israel, that they shall have a new heart – but those who do not shall have “their deeds upon their own heads.”¹⁵ In other words, as the angel says, “It is what they deserve!” The world has attacked Christianity by insulting its dogmas and killings its saints; now it is time for the world's belief systems to be destroyed and at the end for its largest adherents, those who take the mark, to be sent off to burn. They shall be “martyrs” in a sense, in that they witness to the horrors of their wicked, evil, ugly cause.

The altar itself (or perhaps the *true* and holy martyrs under it)¹⁶ proclaims that God's judgments are true and just. This is to say, the actions that God is commanding have their root in His being, but also in Christ who *is* the Truth.¹⁷ All of God's judgments are already righteous – but they add that His judgments are *true* and just, amounting to a proclamation that our Lord does this on behalf of Christ and His Church.

14 Obadiah 1:15-18

15 Ezekiel 11:14-21

16 Revelation 6:9

17 John 14:6

Revelation Bible Study #40

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

Revelation 16:8-16

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. **9** They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish **11** and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. **13** And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. **14** For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. **15** (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”) **16** And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Introduction

The first three bowls of wrath which were poured out had a clear connection with the Exodus, being identical with some of the plagues which were inflicted on the Egyptians. The next three take something of a departure from this theme so as to emphasize the stiff-necked nature of humanity and the dramatic turn which history takes upon itself. The Apostle's point is that the nonbelievers shall not repent, nor even *care* to repent, until it is too late. This central message, repeated in the preceding bowls before discussion of Armageddon, is the key to understanding the message.

Vs.8-9

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. **9** They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

The seventh plague on Egypt was hail and fire falling from the sky.¹ Since the damned are under a sentence of *burning* for their refusal to believe, no hail is provided with the fourth bowl's plague. Only fire remains as a precursor to their ultimate fate in the lake of fire. But when the hail and fire pelted Egypt, Pharaoh had a moment of clarity by which he granted the Israelites a departure; it was only short while before he changed his mind and hardened his heart once more. Unlike Pharaoh, the people scorched by this plague respond immediately by cursing the Name of God all the more, making them *worse* than Egypt's ruler.

We ought not be surprised by the ugly reaction of the world to this plague. There is a kind of earthly logic being portrayed here, understandable despite its illegitimacy. If a policeman warns a thief that he must stop stealing, even if the thief is not stealing anything of his the message is clear and true; nonetheless, if the policeman who warned the thief then strikes the thief with a baton, the thief will perceive the policeman to be an *enemy*. So it is with the nonbelievers. They hear the warnings from God that come from the Church and the angels, but do not perceive that this world belongs to God and

¹ Exodus 9: 13-35

has God's Law imposed on it. To them, the plagues and suffering which are inflicted on them do not mean that they are called to repentance; instead they simply perceive God to be a *bully* that hurts them for no discernible reason. A man might be caught in a prostitution sting, end up in jail, and in the end he is likely to curse the judge and the law because he “wasn't hurting anyone;” so it is with the nonbelieving world, which despises God because they disbelieve any sort of accountability to Him.

Vs.10-11

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish **11** and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

The ninth plague inflicted on Egypt was darkness, while the Israelites had light.² Here, the darkness is inflicted on the beast which comes from the water, the world system that is here presented as a “new Egypt” the way the Church is the new Israel. Thus it is the same people being inflicted who were inflicted with the boils – their religious leaders being unable to stand before the truth. Now they are inflicted with a kind of spiritual darkness that brings about great confusion, while the Church is spared from this affliction. After all, Solomon remarks that the wise man “has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness;”³ only now, on account of this plague, the nonbeliever is shown to be the fool – but not only shown, also *made* foolish since their illegitimate religions provide them with nothing!

Vs.12-16

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. **13** And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. **14** For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. **15** (“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!”) **16** And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

The Battle of Armageddon is easily misunderstood, for it is easy to perceive it as a single future event just before Judgment Day. Let us not forget that St. John is still discussing a matter of *signs*,⁴ keeping us from seeing it in either a preterist or futurist view if we want to maintain hermeneutic consistency. This is especially important since the Apostle spends so little time discussing it that virtually no details are given regarding any such battle – because none is shown happening in the text!

The Euphrates is likely connected to an earlier prophecy which speaks of angels bound there until they are released to slaughter a third of mankind.⁵ There too it is referred to as the “great river Euphrates,” connecting it to the promises given to Abraham and the conquest of Canaan.⁶ This connects the passage typologically to the *conquest* of Canaan, which means that the kings from the east are gathered, possibly not for battle but for conversion. They come before the deceptive frogs are unleashed, suggesting many from the East convert (which historically has been the case at least in terms of the Near East).

The arrival of frogs recalls the second plague before the Exodus,⁷ only this time they are made

2 Exodus 10:21-29

3 Ecclesiastes 2:14

4 Revelation 15:1

5 Revelation 9:13-15

6 Genesis 15:18, Joshua 1:1-5

7 Exodus 8:1-15

to come from the devil, world, and false teachers. The spiritual landscape of the nonbelievers is depicted as being so decrepit that they produce their *own* plagues with which to further afflict themselves. This is seemingly in response to the way being made for the “kings of the east” to be brought to the land of conquest; a historicist reading of the text would point to the rise of arch-heresies like islam as an example of disbelief being shored up in the Near East. Nevertheless, such things have happened multiple times in history, especially in the East – as with the various ruinations of Christian movements in China and Japan. These deceptive spirits lead astray masses of people and turn them against God, hence being brought *together*.

One must be careful to note that these kings and nations are assembled for the *purpose* of battle. St. John is not saying that one *actually occurs*. While indeed there is a longstanding *conflict* between the hellbound and the saints, the Day of the Lord seems to interrupt what *would* be a true global total war as depicted in futurist literature. We can tell as much because Christ interjects that He comes *as a thief in the night*, which pre-empts any possibility of an event by which people can point and say “this is the definitive sign of the End.” Christ is concurring with St. Paul's characterization of the Parousia,⁸ which is in harmony with His own previous characterization of it as sudden and unexpected.⁹ If anything, the Armageddon narrative is best understood as the battle *that will not be*, since men will be proclaiming peace and safety before Christ returns for Judgment.

The Hebrew phrase translated “Armageddon” is pronounced (by virtue of the Koine apostrophe mark) “Har Megiddon.” With “har” meaning mountain¹⁰ and “megiddo” meaning a gathering,¹¹ quite literally translates to “Mount of Assembly.”¹² Since the only mountain mentioned in Revelation thus far is the Heavenly mount Zion, this suggests that all of humanity is gathered and prepared for what will become Judgment Day. The passages which follow describe it as such, with a final, glorious defeat of evil.

8 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

9 Matthew 24:36-44

10 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/2022.htm>

11 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4023.htm>

12 <https://biblehub.com/greek/717.htm>

Revelation Bible Study #41

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

Revelation 16:17-21

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” **18** And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. **19** The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. **20** And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. **21** And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

Introduction

The Four Cardinal Views

It is time for a bit of review. There are four cardinal interpretive viewpoints for understanding Revelation and its eschatology – the doctrine of Last Things. Futurism states that the events of the book which take place after the letters to the seven churches are mostly to take place in the future. Historicism takes the broad arc of history and finds various fulfillments of oracles from the book throughout history (e.g., the destruction of the harlot being the fall of Rome). Preterism holds that by 70 A.D. either most or all prophecies in Revelation were fulfilled; partial preterists generally hold that the only matter left is for Christ to return, while full preterists hold that there is no unfulfilled prophecy in Scripture. Idealists describe Revelation as a largely *thematic* work, holding that St. John's vision was recorded for the encouragement and admonition of the saints through description of cosmic battles between good and evil.

For this study series, the position taken is a “mix” between the historicist and idealist schools called the typological view; it is the belief that St. John's vision gave cosmic antitypes for later multiple fulfillments in historical types. Revelation is typological prophecy that looks *back* to the antitypes given in the text, whereas the Old Testament gives types which look *forward* to the arrival of Christ. In this way, the Christian is equipped to know how things will go throughout history as the Church waits for the *Return* of Christ to judge the living and the dead.

Two Hermeneutic Rules

In addition to these four cardinal views (and the fifth which this study series embraces), there are two main methods of understanding the flow of writing in Revelation. The first is, for lack of a better term, sequentialism: it is the belief that everything St. John writes down is a sequence of chronological events. Sequentialism posits that the effects of the seven seals come before the effects of the seven trumpets, and that all of these happen one event after the other on earth just as they do in Heaven. The second hermeneutic method is Recapitulation theory, which this series concurs with. Recapitulation theory is the belief that St. John repeats his vision – or *recapitulates* – the events he sees as told in prophetic cycles, each describing history from different points of view. Though they are sequential in Heaven, time in Heaven works differently than it does on Earth; thus, while the vision is shown to be chronological in terms of seals and trumpets and bowls, they are really describing the same

time frame of the Church era.

For the four cardinal interpretations, each adherent chooses one of those two methods. There are historicists who hold to sequentialism, there are historicists who hold to recapitulation, and the same could be said for the other viewpoints. Because this study series embraces the typological view, recapitulation is the sensible hermeneutic for understanding Revelation in a coherent way. The time frame, the Church era, is the arc of history between Christ's Ascension and Second Advent in which the typological fulfillments of the antitypes given in the vision may play out. For instance, when we speak of the “mark of the beast,” the dynamics given in the text are demonstrated in the ash markings necessary to buy and sell in the Roman agora, but they are *also* seen in the practice of “vaccine passes” which various governments demanded people have so they could shop. Neither of these is a *complete* fulfillment of the mark, but both of them point to its ultimate meaning as lifelong reprobate disbelief in the Gospel. Because it is partially fulfilled over multiple eras in history, a sequentialist understanding would rob Revelation and its fulfillments of meaning.

The final bowl's pouring recapitulates the moment when the final seal is opened on the great Scroll and when the final trumpet is blown; these are the same event described from different points of view. Then the seventh seal is opened, silence is observed in Heaven followed by “peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.”¹ When the seventh trumpet is blown, a cry of victory is sounded and the Ark of the Covenant is seen just before “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.”² In uniform description, the seventh bowl's pouring involves the same anomalous weather phenomena, hail, and noise. In each of these instances, a sense of *finality* is observed. All of them describe what things shall be like right before Christ's Return.

The distinction with *this* prophetic cycle is that the Apostle goes beyond the seventh matter to continue the narrative. After the seventh seal, a new prophetic cycle was begun; after the seventh trumpet, a description of cosmic history from the Incarnation to Judgment Day was given; now, it is time to show the major players and major events that happen after the events of the seventh bowl/trumpet/seal. After this passage, a discussion on “Mystery Babylon” and her fall ensues.

Vs.17-18

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” **18** And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake.

“It is done” as a phrase cannot be separated from St. John's previous statement that with these seven bowls the wrath of God is “finished,” or completed in its purposes. Everything that occurs after this bowl is poured is a function of the final moment of wrath before the earth is reaped in the Final Judgment. One must note St. John's descriptive language; he *hears* the voice coming from the Throne, but does not see the One speaking the declaration. This tells us that unlike the previous prophetic cycles, he is speaking from the “ground level” of seeing matters on earth. It is *still* a sign vision,³ but is nonetheless one which appears to be pertinent or relatable to the human experience.

The phrase “It is done” appears reminiscent of Christ's words on the Cross, “It is finished.”⁴ This, accompanied by the weather phenomena of lightning and thunder, may lead some to draw a connection between this passage and the Crucifixion – which also saw a great deal of supernatural weather patterns.⁵ Such might *seem* to be the connection, tempting us toward a preterist interpretation

1 Revelation 8:1-5

2 Revelation 11:15-19

3 Revelation 15:1

4 John 19:30

5 Matthew 27:51-54

of all the prophetic cycles, but we must be careful. Indeed, lightning and thunder and loud noises are a sign in Revelation of God's activity, and at the Crucifixion there was certainly Divine activity occurring; nonetheless, care must be placed to examine the language being used lest we draw inferences that are not intended by the author. St. John recorded Christ saying Τετέλεσται,⁶⁷ which connotes *completion of a purpose*. The Divine pronouncement from the Throne, however, says Γέγονεν,⁸⁹ which fundamentally means *to occur*. In other words, at the Crucifixion the declaration was made that Christ had fulfilled His Messianic purpose, namely winning the redemption of all through His Blood; from the Throne, St. John hears that an event has finally come to pass. That there are weather anomalies to both events means they are *related* in that the same Savior who died on the Cross is about to *return* by the time this seventh bowl is fully poured.

Vs.19

19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath.

Commentaries are split as to whether the “great city” is in reference to Babylon proper (that is, the actual city), Rome¹⁰ or Jerusalem. The first possible answer has its support in Babylon being mentioned directly in the latter half of this verse. It is also discussed in greater detail in the next chapter as “Mystery Babylon.” But such an interpretation is ultimately confused, as the “great city” is differentiated from the “cities of the nations” that are also falling: since “nations” is most often used regarding Gentile races, why would Babylon merely be split instead of falling with the rest of them? But the exegete may reply that the specific fate of Babylon is saved for the last – to which we reply “correct,” because Babylon is – for a time at least – Jerusalem.

The Apostle is not afraid to get specific regarding what he is speaking of: he does not mention this city as “code” so that only people who are “in the know” will understand it. In Revelation 11, St. John refers to Jerusalem as Sodom and Egypt.¹¹ Sodom is the symbolic home of degenerate sin, and Egypt is the symbolic home of paganism; Jerusalem had become both. Babylon is described throughout the Old Testament as being the home of both of these as well. By describing Jerusalem by the names of these three cities he is spending a great deal more time *condemning* them than trying to keep the nonbelievers from understanding.

The split into three parts is a reference to Zechariah's prophecy concerning Jerusalem.¹² Before Christ returns, the prophet says, there are three specific splits in the city; first, half of the population is separated off into exile, then when Christ stands on the Mount of Olives the city itself is split in twain. As Zechariah is speaking in symbolic terms, it is likely in reference first to the sequential destruction of the Old Covenant, leaving the Christians and the nonbelieving Jews to separate from each other. But here St. John writes about a separate threefold split in *contrast*, with the split in the city being for the purpose of its judgment. Babylon is to be destroyed, but first she must be divided out to separate the damned of the past, the who are damned on Judgment Day, and those who are Saints. Given how few are to be saved in the first place, one must imagine this “third slice” being small indeed.

Vs.20-21

6 Transliterated “Tetelestai,” Strong's #5055

7 <https://biblehub.com/greek/5055.htm>

8 Transliterated “Genonen,” Strong's #1096

9 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1096.htm>

10 We will address the notion of Babylon being a “code word” for Rome in the next lesson.

11 Revelation 11:8

12 Zechariah 14

20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. **21** And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

Earlier, when describing the sixth seal's opening, St. John said that he saw “every mountain and island was removed from its place,” and hail coming from the sky.¹³ Since this has already occurred by the time we come to the seventh bowl, there are no mountains to be seen and the “drift” of islands is reverse to continue their disappearance. In other words, the changes which begin to happen in the cosmos are made so dire that they cannot be undone. Whether a physical set of hundred-pound hailstones falls or not is inconsequential. It is a second reference to the seventh plague on Egypt, hail mixed with fire.¹⁴ Unlike the first reference made to it (the fourth bowl), this hail is not a warning to people. Instead, the great weight of the hailstones means such destruction being inflicted on the earth that there is no possibility of mankind recovering. It is the final message that men should turn to the faith and repent; St. John informs us that, sadly, they refuse. Thus destruction comes.

13 Revelation 6:13-14

14 Exodus 9:13-35

Revelation Bible Study #42

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

Revelation 17

1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, **2** with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.” **3** And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. **4** The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. **5** And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.” **6** And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. **7** But the angel said to me, “Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. **8** The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come. **9** This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; **10** they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. **11** As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. **12** And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. **13** These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. **14** They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

15 And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. **16** And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, **17** for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. **18** And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

Introduction

The seventeenth chapter of Revelation is so dense and interconnected that it makes little sense to break it down to smaller pieces. From the first verse to the eighteenth, the Apostle is given a fever-pitch prophecy concerning an entity that *would* arise after his day, one which he could not identify but assumes that his future readers would. Here one must be careful to identify the exact nature of the woman before giving a firm declaration as to what she *is*, lest the exegete be proven a fool. The clear witness of Scripture is that she is a *religious* figure, but one which exists as a mockery of the true Church. Accordingly, St. John is given an antitype which prefigures all successive false churches and heretical movements. It is correct for Luther to call the Papist church the whore of Babylon;¹ it is *also*

¹ https://godrules.net/library/luther/NEW1luther_b5.htm

correct for Christians today to recognize *other* sects which fit the mold, such as the mormon “church,” the liberal bodies, and so forth.

Vs.1-2

1 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, **2** with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality, and with the wine of whose sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk.”

Now that the wrath of God has been poured out with the bowl plagues, it is time to show St. John one of the main targets of said wrath. He shows him a prostitute, someone who fornicates for financial compensation; in other words, she is someone who makes a living by performing the *marital act* without actually being married. Though she acts like a bride for a night, she has no covenant nor blessing from God for what she does. She is mercenary and scheming in her function. Like any skilled or pretty prostitute, she has high-end customers (both political and among the Church), but here she is shown to be lucrative with “wine” as well. This is to say, the figure which St. John sees has ugly dealings with high ranking political figures, but at the same time is – with those same figures – passing something along to the common man, like a prostitute who sells wine.

The prostitute is seated on *many waters*. This, along with the beast she rides, is a clear indication that she engages in a relationship to the world. The thirteenth chapter of Revelation shows two beasts: one from the water and one from the earth. The waters represent the world, and the beast which arises from it the world system – the second enemy of the Church. The earth represents the Christians, and the beast which comes from it is a false prophet who represents *all* false teachers who attempt to subvert Christianity.² By saying that the “dwellers on earth” get drunk by this prostitute, St. John is telling us that the Church will be deeply corrupted even to her theologians and bishops – but still stand. It was not very different in his own day, as the “Jezebel” figure from the church in Thyatira was doing all of these things!³

Vs3-6a

3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. **4** The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality. **5** And on her forehead was written a name of mystery: “Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations.” **6** And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

The woman is in the wilderness, which is the same place the Church (represented by Mary, but not identified *as* Mary) was taken to deliver her from the dragon. This leaves us with one of two possibilities. First, we may believe that this is more or less the same figure.⁴ Whereas she was placed in the wilderness for safety and sanctification, something has inspired the woman, the Church, to follow after earthly lusts and materialism, all the expensive clothing and riches that show an institution becoming opulent. Her cup full of abominations would mean being a distributor of false teachings and heretical practices, namely practices common among pagans. Though the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church,⁵ this does not mean that the gates of hell shall not be present with her. In this conception, the woman represents a Church that is under the authority of these gates but not defeated

2 Revelation 16:13

3 Revelation 2:18-23

4 Revelation 12:1-5

5 Matthew 16:16-18

by them.

Another perspective would be that this is a *false* figure, or a pretender. The prostitute wants people to *think* that she is the true Church and so resides in the wilderness. Perhaps she is a particular group of churches whose lampstands have been removed,⁶ yet still saw themselves as being in full communion with our Lord and thus continued on in growing their doctrines the way the Nicolaitans did. Such an imagination of this figure is plausible, though unlikely, so long as the origin point of the wilderness points to the *apostasy* of the prostitute being her state before dining on the blood of the saints.

The prostitute is called Babylon, denoting a relation to the city which was prophesied in the previous chapter to be split in three.⁷ Here, however, we are restricted from associating the woman with the pagan city of Rome, which most modern historicist exegetes believe to be the true meaning. They point to a false goddess called “Roma” whose statues adorned many Roman cities and provinces, even marking the cities of Asia Minor,⁸ but this does not comport with the description of Babylon being in the *wilderness*, along with the clear connection St. John makes to the Israelite wandering in the wilderness in the twelfth chapter.

The modern exegete may point to the pagan character of Rome which was in the forefront of many Christians' minds, but such a point is invalid. It is most certainly true that the Roman empire was full of idolatry, sorcery, fornication, greed, and persecution; but on the other hand, the same is true about *everywhere else* in St. John's day. St. Thomas was martyred in Tamil Nadu, India by militant hindus; St. Matthew was murdered by African pagans; Philip and Bartholomew were martyred by Greeks. Everywhere outside of Roman territory, and even outside of Roman influence had the same problems with sin, albeit perhaps with differing levels of openness. The typifying mark of the harlot is that she is drunk on the blood of saints, meaning that she gains profit and pleasure from their death; one must remember that when the true Church grows, so does the false and corrupted church.

Vs.6b-8

When I saw her, I marveled greatly. **7** But the angel said to me, “Why do you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. **8** The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

St. John *marvels* at this figure. If the woman represented Rome, he would not be surprised in the slightest given the wickedness of Rome in his day. But to see a figure which *should be* holy dwelling in the wilderness and dining on the blood of saints – that is, joining in the persecution of believers – is the source of his consternation. The angel asks why he marvels, expecting that he should *know* about this dynamic. Indeed, if the Church is Israel, then the Church is expected to *act* like Israel, a nation described in terms of harlotry all over the Old Testament, with only a remnant that stay faithful.^{9,10}

The beast which St. John sees, the reconstituted world system, at one point existed and shall exist again, but does not currently in St. John's day. In a time when Rome was very much in power, this could not possibly apply to that empire; if it were, the angel would say that the beast was, is and shall be. It is rather a united nonbelieving humanity, which at one point was so under the rulership of nimrod

6 Revelation 2:4-5

7 Revelation 16:19

8 <https://www.bestphesustours.com/blog/the-temple-of-dea-roma-and-divus-julius-caesar-in-ephesus.html>

9 Ezekiel 16, Isaiah 1:21-23, Jeremiah 2:20-25

10 1 Kings 19:18

the founder of Babel;¹¹ once the Church is established, the devil calls forth a new dynamic in the world system so as to bring about violent persecution against the Church. But St. John already saw that in his previous vision, when he saw the beast arise from the sea; the implication here is that the harlot arises *with* the beast, having a symbiotic relationship of sorts. In the first century, the harlot was not though she was previously, and she would arise again. Before Christ's first Advent, the harlot was Israel; in the early years of the Church – the new Israel – believers did not have to contend with nearly as much corruption, especially as the current Babylon (Jerusalem) fell; but then, as the world “beast” system arises, so does the harlot nature of the Church.

Historically this has taken many forms. Christians hiding from persecution found themselves isolated in desert communities with gnostic cultists who slowly influenced orthodox doctrine – introducing asceticism, iconodulism,¹² and doctrines which forbade marriage. St. Paul warned believers against it,¹³ but the persecution of the beast against Christians led to all sorts of syncretistic additions to the faith. The influence of hermeticism added doctrines of theosis, the cult of the saints, the “treasury of merit,” and so forth. The pagan veneration of Caesar as Pontifex was transplanted onto the papacy. This is also to say nothing of the effect that later judaizers like the author of the Shepherd of Hermas had on the Church's soteriology. Simply put, the Church has never defeated false teachings so much as she has absorbed and accommodated them; as the beast rises, the harlot rises with it.

This means that unfortunately the harlot is well-represented by the Roman and Eastern churches – but lest any denomination get a large head over it, it does not *stop* there. Protestant churches are not immune to this matter, from the crass Enlightenment rationalism that took over much of the Church of England to the deism and judaizing influence which plague American churches, or the extreme leftism that besets Methodism today. All of these groups have sought favor with and “fornicated” with the ruling authorities, even as recently as the current year.¹⁴ A historicist is likely to see the harlot as a single institution which fulfills prophecy by virtue of existing: The Roman church is an easy target. But in the modern era, with as many denominations being taken over by non-Christian syncretism, it is plain to see that the fulfillment of the harlot prophecy is one of *typology*, with various corrupted bodies matching the harlot as antitype. It is for this reason she is called the mother of harlots, not the sole harlot to which the Christian may look for a vision of “bad church.” Those whose names are written in the Book of Life do better in regards to diligence than merely thinking “rome bad!”

Vs.9-14

9 This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; **10** they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. **11** As for the beast that was and is not, it is an eighth but it belongs to the seven, and it goes to destruction. **12** And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. **13** These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. **14** They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.”

“This calls for a mind with wisdom.” By this, the Apostle invites us to think deeply about what he is saying, for it is not obvious what his riddle means. It was well known by the time St. John wrote Revelation that the city of Rome stood amid seven hills, and had a series of emperors (or “kings”) replacing one another in rapid succession. The *easy* interpretation, which requires no wisdom whatsoever, would be that St. John was afraid to say the word “Rome” for some inexplicable reason,

11 Genesis 10:6-14, 11:1-9

12 Yes, the practice of venerating icons comes from gnosticism, per Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, 1.25.6

13 Colossians 2:18-25

14 <https://apnews.com/article/usaaid-christian-nonprofits-funding-freeze-bbb000ea0e232765db1280c093301a8a>

and that he used a pitifully easily decoded description to avoid being executed....while in exile on Patmos. This cannot be correct, especially as the angel informs St. John that it “was and is not,” meaning that the beast is not a present reality for the Apostle.

While this passage is difficult to understand by design, it is not insurmountable. St. John has already told us this is a sign vision,¹⁵ so this is not a mere game of name-swapping or geographical reference. Rome had seven hills, but so does Jerusalem, so does New York, and a whole host of other locations.¹⁶ So many locales all over the world have “seven mountains” that the beast on which the harlot rides is *everywhere*. The number of kings as well is instructive: seven kings for seven heads, an eighth king representing the beast itself, and ten kings for ten horns; this adds up to eighteen, or 6+6+6, an oblique reference to the number of the beast. All eighteen receive authority for an hour to rule together, and they all have one mind, namely to oppose Christ.

The Lamb shall conquer all of these figures, hence their short rule, harlot and beast and kings alike. Despite their wars against Him and their near-endless attempts at snuffing out the light of the Gospel, Christ *shall* return, and all of these shall fall forevermore, never to rise again. Those who belong to Him, refusing to go along with the wicked doctrines of the world or to cooperate with the harlot who befriends the world, they are called and chosen and faithful, meaning that their endurance receives praise from our Lord, who chooses them on account of their faith.

Vs.15-18

15 And the angel said to me, “The waters that you saw, where the prostitute is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. **16** And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, **17** for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. **18** And the woman that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

The waters are the world from which the beast arises, a secular creation from a secular people. For this reason, and the expansive list of “seven hills” and 6/6/6 motif, the harlot as a city, or capitol, is a *shifting* reality. There may be an individual location on which the harlot rests – in St. John's day that was Jerusalem, discussed in the previous chapter – but it does not stay there on account of the destruction which inevitably follows. The harlot city Babylon is destroyed multiple times in history, and always shifts locations after each time this passage is typologically fulfilled. Wherever Christians congregate, there are rulers over them or “kings of the earth.” Most of them will be captive to the harlot and her political machinations, for the harlot is the apostate Church masquerading as a faithful one.

Constantinople was sacked and destroyed multiple times, despite being the ostensible head of eastern Christianity. So was the city of Rome. So was London, so was Washington D.C., and so many others. The reason for this is that the harlot fornicates with kings and spreads wine to normal believer (having dealings with corrupt political rulers and passing false teachings to the laity), but she suffers from the same thing that she wants: appearing Christian. The beast from the sea was designed by the devil to hate Christians and persecute them. Christ said that the world would always hate Christians after all,¹⁷ so the harlot looking Christian to deceive believers means that she deceives the world system as well – and ends up being persecuted and attacked over it. This is the cycle which has been observed over the centuries: a church body starts, expands, becomes corrupt, has dealings with the state, and gets persecuted. So it has been, so it shall be until Christ returns.

15 Revelation 15:1

16 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_claimed_to_be_built_on_seven_hills

17 John 15:18-25

Revelation Bible Study #43

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

Revelation 18

1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. **2** And he called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
She has become a dwelling place for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

3 For all nations have drunk
the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,
and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;

5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.

6 Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

7 As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,

‘I sit as a queen,
I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.’

8 For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

9 And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. **10** They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

“Alas! Alas! You great city,
you mighty city, Babylon!
For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, **12** cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, **13** cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

14 “The fruit for which your soul longed
has gone from you,
and all your delicacies and your splendors
are lost to you,
never to be found again!”

15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

16 “Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold,
with jewels, and with pearls!

17 For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.”

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off **18** and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

“What city was like the great city?”

19 And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

“Alas, alas, for the great city
where all who had ships at sea
grew rich by her wealth!

For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven,
and you saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgment for you against her!”

21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

“So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,
and will be found no more;

22 and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,
and a craftsman of any craft
will be found in you no more,
and the sound of the mill
will be heard in you no more,

23 and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more,
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,

for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth.”

Introduction

The identification of mystery Babylon is one of the most important tasks for understanding the book of Revelation as a unified whole. The preterist seeks to establish it as Jerusalem *only* or as Jerusalem and Rome in a kind of dual spiritual/political sense. The historicist seeks to establish Babylon as either the Roman empire (RC view) or as the Catholic Church (historic Protestantism). Idealists look to the figure as a sort of bugaboo against corruption. Futurists look at the signs of a new Babylon entity arising in the near future. Some schools may mix and match their understanding of this figure or that, but the way in which one sees Babylon will have deep consequences for their reading of the rest of the book – and review of prior passages.

But having already identified Babylon as a sort of spiritual entity, a kind of “seat of power” in the last chapter, for apostate religious institutions. This is to say, mystery Babylon is the antitype for *any* fallen group or organization that is *supposed* to be faithful to God. The first type looking back to this antitype is Jerusalem, but then this goes out further into apostate Christian organizations which are seduced by heresies and worldliness. Although St. John points to an ultimate fulfillment in this chapter, one in which there shall be no more “babylons,” God gives the same exhortation for all believers for all times in which this apostate entity or phenomenon: *get out!*

Vs.1-3

1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was made bright with his glory. 2 And he called out with a mighty voice,

“Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
She has become a dwelling place for demons,
a haunt for every unclean spirit,
a haunt for every unclean bird,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable beast.

3 For all nations have drunk
the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality,
and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her,
and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”

St. John sees an angel whose image brings forth glory. In all likelihood this is that same angel whose face was “like the sun” in the tenth chapter, holding a small scroll for the Apostle to eat.¹ That angel's appearance, from his legs being pillars of fire to his body being wrapped in cloud, recalls the things Israelites saw during the time of the Exodus. This “Exodus Angel” has a sensible place in the passage, given the fourth verse's exhortation to “come out of” Babylon.

Note the present tense in the second verse. Babylon *has* fallen, a present reality in St. John's day; further, “fallen” is not an adjective but a *verb*, particularly in the aorist indicative active. This is to say, the event of falling has occurred. It is chiefly Jerusalem to which the angel refers: St. John wrote this *before* Jerusalem's destruction in 70 A.D., it might surprise later readers to hear that this was already the case. But one must understand though that the author is not speaking of a city being *destroyed* physically per sé.

The angel says that Babylon “has become” a place for demons, unclean spirits, and that which is detestable. In other words, it is a city full of evil: evil people, evil spirits, evil deeds. This is what the angel means by having fallen. Before Jerusalem fell *physically* to Roman swords, she fell *spiritually*. When the inhabitants of Jerusalem rejected Christ and had Him crucified, their religious observances became *false* overnight. The sacrifices were no longer valid offerings made according to the Mosaic system, but rather profane acts of idol worship; thus nothing offered there could be considered clean,

1 Revelation 10:1-8

and whatever spirit the priests were praying to was not God. We must recall that St. John had said previously, “No one who denies the Son has the Father;”² and so in Jerusalem *none of the prayers and offerings* were truly made unto our Lord. Whereas the city was home to the Temple and to the religious authorities (who once fought great battles on behalf of the true faith, e.g. the Maccabean Revolt), now it has departed from that status to become something abominable.

Before any Church body became an apostate Babylon figure like the Roman church, the Old Covenant (represented by Jerusalem with its temple and priest system) fulfilled the antitype of mystery Babylon. By having Christ crucified, the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem committed a grave form of spiritual harlotry which had earlier been seen during the days of the Old Testament prophets.³ Just as the apostate Israelites of the Old Testament had established ties to pagan nations, so too did their descendants do so after the Resurrection of Christ – mostly for the purposes of persecuting believers. In fact, one can observe this behavior in Acts, wherein various Jewish groups followed St. Paul around, trying to get him killed.⁴

The “merchants” motif in this chapter is something which establishes the worldly nature of apostate bodies, starting with Jerusalem. It is starkly observed when Christ overturns the tables of money-changers in the Temple,⁵ and merchants were a constant presence on account of the sacrificial system. Since Jerusalem had a local economy based on religious pilgrimage,⁶ and relied on military protection by the Romans, it was truly a multicultural secular operation for victimizing believers. The angel, in bringing up a merchant motif, emphasizes the aspect of greed and soulless materialism present in the system.

Of course, it does not *stay* localized in Jerusalem. As discussed previously, Babylon is an antitype that is fulfilled multiple times in history, *starting* with Jerusalem but repeating with many church bodies that are (or were) ostensibly Christian; the political and merchant problem is common to all of them. The papacy sold indulgences; the eastern churches turned towards cesaro-papism, or the Church being ruled by the state; most modern denominational bodies have fed at the financial trough of the American government.⁸ This is not to say that *any* involvement with trade or the state is a sign of apostasy: it is rather the replacement of the Church's mission with these matters that makes it so deadly.

Vs.4-8

4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,

“Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;

5 for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.

6 Pay her back as she herself has paid back others,
and repay her double for her deeds;
mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

7 As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,
so give her a like measure of torment and mourning,
since in her heart she says,
'I sit as a queen,

2 1 John 2:23

3 Especially discussed in Ezekiel 16

4 This is keenly observed in Lystra, Acts 14:19-23

5 Mark 11:15-19

6 <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/commerce-and-the-temple-in-first-century-jerusalem/>

7 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305440313002410>

8 <https://apnews.com/article/usa-aid-christian-nonprofits-funding-freeze-bbb000ea0e232765db1280c093301a8a>

I am no widow,
and mourning I shall never see.’
8 For this reason her plagues will come in a single day,
death and mourning and famine,
and she will be burned up with fire;
for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

The voice coming from heaven is the voice of God, who beckons His people the Church to depart from Babylon. In the first century, this meant Christians departing Jerusalem for Pella (one of the cities of the Decapolis) before the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem.⁹ During the Arian controversy, it meant departing from churches taken over by heretics. During the Reformation it meant departing the church of Rome. During any situation in which the Christian is faced with his church body departing the faith, he should rather depart the church body and seek another which has not apostatized. Such bodies are slated for judgment and destruction on account of their acts of betrayal against our Lord; to stay in them, even if one is a believer, is to sign up for suffering with them, to say nothing of being tempted to be like them. God's exhortation to faithful believers in these situations is clear: schism now and avoid the rush.

Note here that the harlot speaks in an arrogant manner. There is a *reason* why she would trust in something which makes her feel a false sense of security. For the inhabitants of Jerusalem, it was an idolatrous faith in heritage from Abraham.¹¹ For later types which fulfill the Babylon antitype, this is observed in various similar beliefs, typically the notion that something external to God forces God's hand; with Rome and Orthodoxy this is found in the absurd doctrines of ecclesial infallibility. Modern liberal denominations are oddly more honest, since their false confidence is predicated on state power and funding. All of these bodies share in common their addiction to luxury, money, and afflicting the saints.

God promises to inflict plague on the Babylon figure in a single day, not to destroy it in a single day. For Jerusalem, this would be the immediacy of dire conditions after the Roman siege of Jerusalem began. It is *after* the fall of the city in the spiritual sense that physical conditions begin to reflect the inner religious life. The institution abandoned God first, then found – too late – that God abandoned the institution in turn.

Vs.9-10

9 And the kings of the earth, who committed sexual immorality and lived in luxury with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning. **10** They will stand far off, in fear of her torment, and say,

“Alas! Alas! You great city,
you mighty city, Babylon!
For in a single hour your judgment has come.”

St. John has established a “beast from the earth” which he has called a false prophet.¹² For the Apostle, the waters represent the broader non-believing world while the earth represents the domain of God's people – the Church. The “kings of the earth” then are not royalty in the political sense, but religious figures. For the destruction of the city of Jerusalem this would certainly include those pharisaic and sadducitic leaders in the Sanhedrin, men who had not only participated in the rejection of Christ but also led others to this rejection. As the Church centralized ecclesiastical authority over time, fulfillment of this passage moved on to the popes, archbishops, metropolitans, bishops, and other rulers over the Church.

⁹ Related by Eusebius in his *Church History* III.5.3

¹⁰ <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm>

¹¹ Matthew 3:7-10, John 8:39-41

¹² Revelation 13:11-18, 16:13

Vs.11-18

11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her, since no one buys their cargo anymore, **12** cargo of gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, all kinds of scented wood, all kinds of articles of ivory, all kinds of articles of costly wood, bronze, iron and marble, **13** cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, oil, fine flour, wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and slaves, that is, human souls.

14 “The fruit for which your soul longed
has gone from you,
and all your delicacies and your splendors
are lost to you,
never to be found again!”

15 The merchants of these wares, who gained wealth from her, will stand far off, in fear of her torment, weeping and mourning aloud,

16 “Alas, alas, for the great city
that was clothed in fine linen,
in purple and scarlet,
adorned with gold,
with jewels, and with pearls!

17 For in a single hour all this wealth has been laid waste.”

And all shipmasters and seafaring men, sailors and all whose trade is on the sea, stood far off **18** and cried out as they saw the smoke of her burning,

“What city was like the great city?”

All that the merchants mourn over concerns ecclesiastical supplies and the trappings of royalty. Christ condemns the pharisees for their opulence, overemphasis on monetary matters, and habitual use of religious matters to enslave people.¹³ The vision St. John receives points out the other interested party, namely the merchant class that became rich off of the pharisaic system. Every tapestry bought by the authorities had a weaver to make it, a transporter to ship it, a sales contact to bring the sale to a close. Religion had become big business, and in order for it to continue on there must be enslaved believers to *fund* it by their offerings. St. John's vision portrays the religious landscape as one which is cynical, hollow and manipulative, and its destruction renders the merchants poorer.

The Roman church and the eastern churches are the greatest modern manifestation of this vision, with their massive cathedrals inlaid with countless amounts of gold, ivory, silver, and iron. Their monasteries keep and tend animals while their clergy are dressed in expensive vestments during the mass. Both of them, according to their soteriologies, enslave human souls to the endless hamster wheel of works based salvation while offering them no true assurance of Heaven. Yet the Protestant side of things is not guiltless either, as the “prosperity gospel” teachers have shown; they too have presented an enslavement to the people watching and funding them through their finance-based theologies. A poor widow feeling compelled to give Jim Baker a “seed offering,” thinking that she is purchasing blessing from God, is only barely different from a Catholic layman paying real money to avoid purgatory. Meanwhile, other Protestant branches have found *other* means of harming souls, especially in obeying the dicta of the state and “higher education” systems in exchange for funding; the Episcopalian, Wesleyan, and most Lutheran institutions have done this in a crassly secular move, adopting worldly doctrines for the sake of maintaining large cathedrals, expensive universities, and more. Their judgment is immanent.

¹³ Matthew 23

Vs.19-20

19 And they threw dust on their heads as they wept and mourned, crying out,

“Alas, alas, for the great city
where all who had ships at sea
grew rich by her wealth!
For in a single hour she has been laid waste.

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven,
and you saints and apostles and prophets,
for God has given judgment for you against her!”

These two verses further solidify the nearly coterminous relationship between Babylon and Israel. The geographical location of Israel was ideal for trade, leading to frequent visits from merchants and foreign dignitaries. Whoever controlled the land of Canaan controlled critical routing for trade and military operations. Yet Israel (typified by Jerusalem) also had a history of killing the prophets, as Christ says.¹⁴ That the *apostles* and prophets are told to rejoice at this justice means that the same body which is responsible for slaying the prophets has also slain Apostles, one of whom was slain by Herod at the behest of the same authorities who had Christ crucified.¹⁵ There is no point by which this group may say they “used to” kill the messengers sent to them, for as Christ witnesses they built tombs for the men their fathers slayed.¹⁶ When St. Stephen accuses them of carrying on this ugly tradition, they stone him to death.¹⁷

We must be careful to make this distinction, that Babylon is not a singular geographical entity which is destroyed in the first century – or ever fully destroyed before Christ’s return. One may notice that the 70 A.D. destruction of Jerusalem did not stop the propagation of pharisaism: if anything, it *strengthened* it, since other competing denominations of judaism were extinguished in the act.. Similarly, the various times in which Rome was sacked by invading armies during the height of the papacy did not destroy Roman Catholicism, and nor did the destruction of Constantinople end Eastern Orthodoxy. These groups find greater entrenchment in their own defeat, for the persistence of their beliefs in spite of the burning of cities is counted as some sort of blessing. The next verses illustrate why this is the case.

Vs.21-24

21 Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,

“So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,
and will be found no more;

22 and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,
and a craftsman of any craft
will be found in you no more,
and the sound of the mill
will be heard in you no more,

23 and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more,
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,

for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.

14 Matthew 23:37

15 Acts 12:1-3

16 Matthew 23:30

17 Acts 7:51-60

24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth.”

Christ says that anyone who would harm one of the little children – that is, both believers and children – would be better off having a millstone tied around their neck and being thrown into the sea than what will ultimately happen to them.¹⁸ Earlier the angel proclaimed Babylon *is* fallen; now a mighty angel proclaims that Babylon *will* be thrown down. It is for this reason we can safely conclude that the event happens more than once; as we said, it is not a single place. If the preterists were correct, then there would only be one “fall” event in 70 A.D. that somehow compounds itself. On the other hand, if the futurists are correct, then a Babylon figure would have to arise, fall, recover, then be destroyed all over again. The historicist position ends up rephrasing our typological view anyway. But the greater point is that the angel's future prophecy is a promise that there will be a day in which the Babylon entity and phenomenon will never happen again – she will be “no more.” In other words, St. John gives us a crucial aspect to eschatology here: though the types refer back to their visionary antitypes *many* times before the Return of Christ, indeed there *is* an end-point promised here. The repetition of fulfilled prophecy in the Church era does not go on in perpetuity.

The twenty-third verse is a crucial reference for understanding spiritual divorce. Christ threatened the church in Ephesus with lampstand removal;¹⁹ Christ is also the Bridegroom and the Church is understood to be His Bride. Those church bodies who, like earthly Jerusalem, abandon loyalty to God and begin serving the world and devil will find themselves completely destroyed at the End. But first, on account of the Exodus that God is working among true believers, they will be hollowed out, leaving no true Christians dwelling among them. Thus, not one believer will be lost on that fateful Day, when Babylon is once and for all completely eradicated.

18 Matthew 18:6

19 Revelation 2:5

Revelation Bible Study #44

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

Revelation 19:1-10

1 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

2 for his judgments are true and just;

for he has judged the great prostitute

who corrupted the earth with her immorality,

and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

3 Once more they cried out,

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” **5** And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
small and great.”

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his Bride has made herself ready;

8 it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” **10** Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Introduction

This passage represents a sort of transition between two distinct points of view. On the one hand St. John has described for us the fall of mystery babylon, an antitype which finds its first manifestation (or typological fulfillment) in the first century city of Jerusalem. But he also pointed out that there would be an *ultimate* fall of Babylon, after which there shall be no more of the corruption and apostasy dynamic that we observe throughout history. The language of the saints and elders in this passage is spoken from the perspective of those on the other side of that ultimate fulfillment, but with consequences which ring true for believers today. But for believers reading in this age, this passage marks the beginning of emphasis being placed on the “already but not yet” dynamic of the Kingdom of God. Believers are true beneficiaries of eternal life as promised in the Gospel, but awaiting the full expression which shall be a reality for them when Christ returns.

Vs.1-2

1 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
2 for his judgments are true and just;
for he has judged the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth with her immorality,
and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

St. John hears a proclamation of praise which brings to mind the same praises sung by the living creatures, elders, and saints in the liturgical service of the Throne Room.¹ The praise offered tells us about the importance of the ultimate fall of babylon. The matters for which the saints and angels praise our Lord are found in Creation, Redemption, and the character of God entirely; the fall of babylon is placed in a similar vein of significance, meriting the same kind of organized praise.

The reason for this is self-evident and explained by the saints. The prostitute brought immorality and martyrdom into the world, perverting the institutions which were supposed to be *for* believers and comprised *of* believers. But the harlot, representing the sin and apostasy within the Body of Christ, has been such a persistent problem that the souls of millions were lost and the reputation of the Church was tarnished. Their cry of praise is simultaneously a cry of relief that this shall no longer happen. Justice has been served against the false church, beginning with the end of the false judaic temple system in Jerusalem, and continuing against other church bodies – eventually Rome and Constantinople and the cults joining it in the judgment.

Vs.3-5

3 Once more they cried out,

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.”

4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” 5 And from the throne came a voice saying,

“Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
small and great.”

To speak of smoke going up forever is to use the language which speaks of damnation. This

1 Revelation 4:9-11, 5:8-10, 5:11-13, 7:9-12

means the first entity to be damned in the lake of fire forever is the harlot. Before the dragon, false prophet, or beast from the sea, it is the spiritual corrupter who goes first into everlasting punishment. This might be surprising to some, but it is consistent with the course of judgment throughout Scripture. St. Peter says that judgment begins at the household of God, while the fate of those outside is decidedly worse.² We must not forget that Judah was judged by God and sent into Exile before the pagan Babylonian empire was destroyed; before that, the northern Israelites were taken into captivity long before the Assyrians who took them. Before even then, the children of Israel were assailed by non-believing pagan nations as punishment from God during the era of the Judges, also before any of those nations were destroyed during the Davidic reign. So too shall our Lord, both in the recurrence of typological fulfillment and the Final Judgment, destroy the false teachers, subversives, false churches, and more. *Then* judgment commences on the devil and those fully in league with him.

This of course has not happened yet, at least not in the sense of total destruction. Yet the elders and living creatures exhort all of God's servants, all *God fearers*, to praise our Lord. We are told here by the residents of Heaven to praise God for something that He *will* do, and is currently working at accomplishing. The believer is to take it as a present reality, or an already, that the harlot which would persecute him cannot harm his soul or bring him to perdition; the consequence of the “not yet” is something which affects the believer now and into eternity.

Vs.6-8

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.
7 Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
8 it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

The voice heard by the Apostle being like many waters is reminiscent of the 144,000 from the fourteenth chapter, but also that of Christ's voice when He first appears at Patmos.³ The connection is likely intentional, as the saints in heaven have undergone the final aspect of sanctification – that is, being completely reconstituted in the image of Jesus that their voices together sound like His. This connection between Christ and His people reinforces the celebratory liturgical declaration they make, for the saints are together considered the Bride of Christ.

The Bride stands in contrast to the harlot from the previous chapters. Both had their time in the wilderness,⁴ but ended up becoming markedly distinct in terms of what they did and became. The harlot, representing apostate churches and institutions, allies herself with the unbelieving world and participates in persecution against true saints. Meanwhile, the Bride has been enduring the wilderness and persecution, adorning herself with good deeds. The apostate church, like ancient Israel of old, becomes like the nations while claiming her identity has not changed; the true Church seeks validation from God alone, and thus serves our Lord in earnestness and faith. So the Bride is the invisible Church...and also a city. Later, in the twenty-first chapter, St. John will describe the New Jerusalem as

² 1 Peter 4:17-19

³ Revelation 14:1-2, 1:15

⁴ Revelation 12:1-5, 17:3-4

the Bride, a city which comes down from Heaven for all believers to dwell in; but here, we see the same “already but not yet” dynamic, in that the “already” Jerusalem is the congregation of believers here on earth, while the “not yet” Jerusalem is that ultimate dwelling place being prepared for the Resurrection. Amid the crop of scholars debating whether the new Jerusalem is a place or a people, the Biblical answer is “yes” in different ways.

Vs.9-10

9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.” **10** Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

All of humanity has been invited to the marriage supper, but not all receive the invitation. Here St. John refers to the parable of the wedding feast which Christ spoke to the pharisees, and the parable of the banquet.⁵ In the parables, Christ speaks of a wedding feast or banquet wherein the initial guests have refused their invitations; in response, the poor and disabled are invited instead of those first guests; when this is shown not to be enough, the servants are instructed to invite everyone they come across. The message of the parable is such that whosoever hears the Gospel and its well-meant earnest offer of salvation is given the invitation, while those who rejected it (especially jews in the first century) are rejected for their refusal to attend. Thus, whosoever receives the invitation is counted as blessed. By implication, those who have not heard the Gospel have not received the invitation and are thus not blessed; there are some who have refused it entirely and are thus cursed. Those who never hear the Gospel would refuse it anyway.

St. John bows after hearing “These are the true words of God.” Perhaps he bowed because he mistook the angel as declaring himself to be divine. After all, he was the one speaking these “true words of God.” But the Apostle is also bowing because of the formulation presented in those words. “These are the true words of God” is equivalent to the Old Testament prophetic formula, “Thus Saith the Lord.” It appears that the Apostle believes now is the *time* to bow, having been given an oracle which would satisfy the readers of his books. But Revelation is not finished yet, having not yet completely shown the message from our Lord yet. In a word, it is not *about Jesus enough yet*.

The angel rightly tells him to worship God alone. But over the course of this, he explains that he is a fellow servant with St. John and all who believe in the Gospel. Here, St. John adds a clause which enlightens us concerning all hermeneutics: the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus, meaning the entire Bible is *about* Jesus. To speak on behalf of God is to prophesy. Therefore, all of the inspired writings in the Old and New Testaments, are prophecy in the strictest sense; every last inspired word penned by prophet, Apostle and others shall therefore be centered on the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus on behalf of His salvific mission. The subsequent chapters demonstrate this message unfolding even further.

5 Matthew 22:1-14, Luke 14:15-24

Revelation Bible Study #45

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

Revelation 19:11-16

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. **12** His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. **13** He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. **14** And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. **15** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. **16** On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Introduction

St. John has begun to point to the ultimate fulfillment of history, the Return of Christ. This great Second Advent, like the Kingdom of God itself, is both a present and future reality for the believer. At this point in Revelation, an “already but not yet” interpretive dynamic overtakes the predominantly typological understanding of the previous chapters. The events of the seals, trumpets and bowls represent things which have happened, are happening and will happen once more; here, however, the Apostle brings up final matters that benefit believers *now*.

Christ has promised to return one day to enact the Final Judgment, which includes destroying all of the wicked before the general Resurrection and judgment of all mankind.¹ This event is to take place after the Church has completed her evangelistic efforts to their greatest possible extent.² Yet the believer must also recognize that the Return is a present reality for them. The origin of the “already but not yet” is found in Heaven being outside of the normal understanding of time, and all the saints in glory are shown in the Throne Room as a present reality when St. John sees them.³ This means that every individual Christian, being united to Christ in their Baptism and thus being where Christ is,⁴ is simultaneously here on earth *and* in the Throne Room watching the events of St. John's vision unfold – including the Second Advent. While our bodies and conscious minds are present on earth, the substance of our spiritual self is in Heaven. It is a similar dynamic to when Christ walked the earth by His human nature, during which time He was simultaneously *everywhere* according to His Divine nature. As to the specific mechanics of this, we must confess that it is both a reality and a mystery, similar in ineffability to the doctrines of the Trinity and the Hypostatic Union.

Accompanying this mystery is this short passage which discusses Christ's titles, nature, and glory before going into the Second Advent proper. It functions as a kind of re-introduction for Jesus. First He is shown in a glorified state that reminds St. John of the Transfiguration;⁵ then Jesus is

1 Matthew 24

2 Acts 1:6-11

3 Revelation 7:9-10

4 Romans 6:1-4, Mark 16:19, Luke 22:69, Acts 2:33, Romans 8:34, Hebrews 1:3, 10:12, 12:2, 1 Peter 3:22

5 Revelation 1:9-16

presented as the worthy Lamb who was slain;⁶ *now* however it is time to introduce Christ in the third time as the Word, the conquering King, and He who was once known as “The angel of the Lord.” In a word, more fully telling us Who He is.

Vs.11-13

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. **12** His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. **13** He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

The White Horse

St. John sees Christ appear on a white horse to conduct warfare, in a similar fashion to the rider who arrives after the first seal on the Great Scroll is opened.⁷ This does not mean that Christ *is* the rider from the first seal. Christ is shown here with more crowns and with a sword instead of a bow; it is more likely that the white rider pointed to Christ's Return by representing the spread of Christianity. Whereas Jesus showed Himself first in priestly garb at Patmos, then as the slain Lamb, now He appears as a great Conqueror who comes to be *faithful and true* to His promise. Now is the time for the problem of evil to be solved once and for all.

The Secret Name

Christ has a “secret name” that is not so secret. That name is the sacred Name of God (typically represented by the Tetragrammaton, or יהוה) pointing to Christ's former activities as the “Angel of the Lord.” When Moses receives instructions from our Lord concerning various laws, God includes a promise about the conquest of Canaan:

*Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for **My Name is in him**. But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.*⁸

The angel of the Lord has the power to forgive the sins of men or withhold forgiveness, just as Christ demonstrates in His earthly ministry.⁹ God's Name is in him, just as it is with Christ. And the angel of the Lord goes with God's people to engage in conquest against God's enemies, just as Christ is portrayed doing at His Return. Zechariah even *calls* them the same Being.¹⁰ The two are clearly the same figure; whenever one reads about “The Angel of the Lord” in the Old Testament, it is a reference to the pre-incarnate Christ.

The Word

St. John also calls our Savior the Word of God. This is in keeping with his identification of Christ as the Logos, or Word, in his Gospel.¹¹ Typically commentaries will compare St. John's use of the term with that of ancient Greek and Stoic philosophers (especially the Presocratic thinker Heraclitus, concluding that the Apostle concurred with their presuppositions and only modified the idea to match Christ's identity.¹² Thus the presuppositions of these philosophies are unfortunately imported into the term when St. John clearly did not intend to do so.

6 Revelation 5:6-10

7 Revelation 6:1-2

8 Exodus 23:20-22

9 Mark 2:1-12

10 Zechariah 12:8

11 John 1:1-14

12 <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09328a.htm>

The standard line of thinking is that, somehow, the Apostle got his hands on Greek pagan philosophical concepts and decided “yes, this is correct.” He then decided to utilize that language to describe Jesus's functions according to His Divinity as the Second Person of the Trinity. How exactly a fisherman from Galilee was supposed to become a scholar of Greek thought is difficult to countenance. It is far more likely that St. John uses the term Logos in reference to the Old Testament practice of referring to the Word as a *Divine Person*. Moses records the Word appearing to Abraham in a vision;¹³ laws in Numbers refer to the Word as someone whose commandment could be broken;¹⁴ 1 Samuel records a period of time in which the Word was rare, and that meant “there was no frequent vision,”¹⁵ but then the Word of the Lord *appears* at Shiloh to Samuel;¹⁶ Nathan condemns David for doing evil in the sight of the Word of the Lord.¹⁷ While there are certainly times in which the term “The Word of the Lord” is used in reference to oracles or mere messages,¹⁸ there is a consistent sense in which an individual appears to men *with that title*, and He happens to be Divine.

The significance of this title in light of Christ's Return is immeasurable. St. John says that Christ is the mighty warrior King, in whom is God's Name with full sanction to conduct conquest on behalf of His people. But over the course of this passage He is also called the Word, signifying that He comes to humanity once more for the open communication with men that once happened in Old Testament times. While men have certainly had their encounters with the supernatural at various and sundry places in the Church era, for the past two thousand years it has not been the case that people *expect* to speak with the Word of God face to face as they once did.

This is *not* to say that Christ has been absent from the Church all this time. After all, Christ told the Apostles (and through them all the Church) “I am with you always, to the end of the age.”¹⁹ St. John himself wrote that Christ arriving in the flesh is a true confession.²⁰ The *already* aspect of Christ's Return is found in the matter of the Real Presence in the Eucharist, in the indwelling of God with believers, and in union with Christ through Baptism; the *not yet* is found in our waiting for His reinstating of dwelling among men as He did during His earthly ministry and in the era of the prophets.

Vs.14-16

14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. **15** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. **16** On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Here our Lord confirms the prophecy of Enoch as related in the Book of Jude. Jude, quoting from Enoch, states:

*“Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His holy ones, to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.”*²¹

Christ's army is arrayed in the deeds of the saints,²² and their riding white horses demonstrates their being remade fully in His image. They conquer with Him, for they have been made like Him. Since St.

13 Genesis 15:1-5

14 Numbers 15:29-31

15 1 Samuel 3:1-10

16 1 Samuel 3:21

17 2 Samuel 12:9

18 E.g., 1 Kings 12:24

19 Matthew 28:20

20 1 John 4:2. St. John writes using the perfect participle ἐληλυθότα for “having come.”

21 Jude vs.14-15

22 Revelation 19:8b

John has related many promises of future co-rulership between Christ and the Saints (with Christ taking preeminence of course), this includes being part of the conquest the same way that the Israelites followed Joshua into the Promised Land.

While this passage is a recapitulation of and expansion on the previous vision of Judgment Day,²³ the emphasis here is on Judgment Day as it actually is, namely that of a true and material conquest of the world by Jesus Himself, completing the picture first given by Joshua's entrance into the Promised Land. The Conquest of Canaan is a type of the Second Advent, at least in connection to the final moments before the final judgment. One key difference remains though, in that while the Israelites did the fight for Joshua, when Jesus returns He will do the fighting for the Church. The sword which comes from His mouth, the Word,²⁴ shall slay His enemies without the accompanying armies of Heaven even having to fight. Not only in conquest, but also in terms of punishment; because He has already experienced the wrath of God at the Cross (and thus wearing a cloak dipped in His own Blood), Christ is the One who treads the winepress of wrath, not the believers. While Revelation promises co-rulership with Christ at the Resurrection, He still has authority over all things.

It also appears that Jesus has a tattoo on His leg. The Apostle sees the name written on Christ's thigh because Jesus has girded His loins for the battle. The title "King of kings and Lord of lords" shows total authority in Heaven and on Earth. It is also a title which had been pronounced in its full form first by St. Paul, so this is a confirmation that the Church had taken up a legitimate *nom de guerre*.²⁵ Everything in the universe will belong to Jesus. The latter title, "Lord of lords," is translated from *Kyrios*, a title often given to God. It would not be illegitimate to translate it as "God of gods," a title given to the true God a number of times in the Old Testament.²⁶ This is, of course, a present reality as well. St. John has already spoken of Christ as being the ruler of the princes on earth, and Christ has declared His authority in Heaven as well as earth.²⁷ But the *not yet* is found in the complete revealing of His Divine authority and power, and for Him to assert it against all rebels both in the physical and spiritual realms.

23 Revelation 14:14-20

24 Hebrews 4:12

25 1 Timothy 6:15

26 Deuteronomy 10:17, Psalm 136:2, Daniel 2:47, Daniel 11:36

27 Revelation 1:5, Matthew 28:18

Revelation Bible Study #46

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

Revelation 19:17-21

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, “Come, gather for the great supper of God, **18** to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.” **19** And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. **20** And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. **21** And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

Introduction

In what can only be described as the most brutal passage in Revelation, St. John describes the total slaughter of all nonbelievers upon the Return of Christ. It is certainly an act of justice carried out against those who have rebelled against God and persecuted the Church, but there is a lingering question of *why* this even must happen. The reader is left to contend with imagery that puts the standard narratives of the Parousia into question. Truly, Christ shall return just as He and the angels¹ and the Apostles all promised, but this shall not be a single instantaneous *moment* after which all men are judged. There are tasks which our Lord chooses to perform beforehand, in accordance with this text and His own teaching on the matter.

Vs.17-19

17 Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, “Come, gather for the great supper of God, **18** to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great.” **19** And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.

As Christ returns, riding on a white horse, an angel stands in the sun, that is, being directly in front of it in the sky. The effect of this would be to cast a large shadow over the earth as he pronounces a terrible fate for all nonbelievers. Whether an angel shall manifest with a visible body or if this is a symbolic sign is beside the point; the larger point he's making is that judgment shall cover the entire earth. As the shadow of the angel blocks out the sun, the light of salvation is blocked off from all who refused to believe in the first place. It is for this reason that the birds of the air are called to devour the carcasses of every category of human being – that is to say, it is not *part* of unbelieving humanity that is being judged, but *all* of it. Here, the already-but-not-yet dynamic is present, albeit with a distinct application for nonbelievers; for them, every single death is deserved, a punishment from God which foreshadows the ultimate mass-killing which shall take place.

¹ Acts 1:10-11

That the birds of the air are called to eat the carrion of nonbelieving humanity is reminiscent of the judgment against Gog and Magog spoken to Ezekiel the prophet.² Gog and Magog are the world system and false religions, hence their utter destruction here. This same defeat is recounted in the next chapter of Revelation,³ and the attempt at war spoken of here is previously referenced in the seventeenth chapter,⁴ wherein the beast on which the harlot Babylon sits is equated to the beast from the sea. Gog, simply put, is the world system which *constantly* wars against Christ. But here, St. John repeats the judgment given regarding both figures; they shall die, and birds shall devour their flesh. Regarding their muster and march for war, it is true that the world system *always* gathers people together to war against Christ and His Church; whether there shall be a moment in which they gather in the sense of a military muster is yet to be seen.

Vs.20-21

20 And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. **21** And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.

As previously spoken in this study series, the beast from the sea is the world system, the false prophet represents all false teachers, and the mark is persistent refusal to believe in the Gospel. For the beast and the false prophet to be *captured* then is equivalent to a halting of their operations. This is to say, the first order of business when Christ returns is a dismantling of all the machinery of persecution, false beliefs, and the self-idolatrous nature of man. Christ, Who is the truth,⁵ is effectively shown throwing lies into the lake of fire. In the material world, one may observe a great undoing; the halls of civic power being demolished in every country, false religious literature going up in smoke, etc. Mormon halls of worship will disappear, as will the encampments of anti-Christian militias like Boko Haram or ISIS.

Then all nonbelievers shall be reaped for judgment, just as previously promised.⁶ It will be the single largest mass-death event in history. This raises the question: why kill everyone that doesn't believe, if they are already to be judged? We have been conditioned, by way of oversimplification in catechesis, to suppose that when Christ returns, everyone will be merely *gathered* together, both the living and the dead, for judgment. This is *true*, but the killing is part of that judgment. In the parable of the minas,⁷ Christ specifically speaks thus concerning His enemies: "as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slaughter them before me." Before there is damnation, there is killing.

The promise of not experiencing death upon Christ's Return is reserved solely for believers. St. Paul teaches that what is commonly called the "Rapture" is shorthand for the resurrection of the living;⁸ since they have no need to have their bodies brought *back* to life, those Christians who witness the Parousia shall be immediately changed to the eternal state in their bodies. For everyone else, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment."⁹ Believers undergo this death first upon their Baptism, as St. Paul explains,¹⁰ and according to the promise of Christ they shall never die after.¹¹

2 Ezekiel 39:17-19

3 Revelation 20:7-10

4 Revelation 17:14

5 John 14:6

6 Revelation 14:19-20

7 Luke 19:11-27

8 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:50-55

9 Hebrews 9:27

10 Romans 6:1-4

11 John 11:25

Shedding the mortal coil, being “killed,” etc., does not result in the same experience for a Christian as it does for a non-Christian. But for the nonbelievers, those who are alive during the time of the Return shall be slaughtered. They are not exempt from the curse upon mankind after the Fall in Eden, but shall have their turn experiencing the destruction of the body, the separation of the soul from it, and (given the announcement of judgment) a deep sense of dread.

The sword which comes from Christ's mouth is His Word, which is sharper than any two-edged sword.¹² Here, it is used offensively, for by Christ's pronouncements He gives out the sentence of death for all who defy Him. Though this may seem shocking to the reader, one must recognize that it is deserved on account of the death which *all* sin merits. But to those who do not wish to see this happen, especially to their loved ones, the Apostolic witness is “how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”¹³ It may well be that our Lord has given us this passage so as to motivate us to further complete the Church's Great Commission of bringing the Gospel to all humanity.

12 Hebrews 4:12

13 Romans 10:15

Revelation Bible Study #47

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

Revelation 20:1-6

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. **2** And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, **3** and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. **5** The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. **6** Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

Introduction

We now arrive at the most controversial passage in all the Book of Revelation, from which countless debates have arisen. The topic of discussion, the Millennium, is not so much the *cause* of the debate. The arguments arise from this passage's nature as a kind of Rorschach test by which the reader's hermeneutics and priorities are revealed. What someone says about this “thousand years” demonstrates how they have been interpreting the rest of Revelation.

The cardinal viewpoints on the Millennium are thus:

- Pre-millennialism: Christ shall return to earth for the purposes of setting up an earthly, world spanning, thousand year kingdom and then He will enact Judgment Day. The Millennium has not occurred yet.
- Amillennialism: The Millennium is symbolic shorthand for the Church Era, spanning the time between Pentecost and the Second Advent. When Christ returns, it shall be for Judgment Day.
- Post-millennialism: The Millennium is the Church (or God acting through the Church) enacting a world-spanning golden age (of uncertain length) wherein most people are Christians. Then Christ returns for Judgment Day.

There are two more positions which have arisen in the past two centuries as well:

- “non-millennialism.” the position of most full preterists, wherein the millennium lasted between Christ's Resurrection and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. This position is also known as “the forty year millennium.”
- Dispensational Premillennialism: Christ shall return to earth for the purposes of setting up an earthly, world spanning, thousand year kingdom and then He will enact Judgment Day. During this Millennium, the world will live under a renewed dispensation of Temple worship and Torah observance, effectively making the entire world live under Old Covenant precepts and Jewish observance (since God will give Jewish people authority over all humanity).

Careful examination of the text and its juxtaposition with the rest of Revelation ultimately vindicates the Amillennialist position as the only doctrinally sound interpretation of this passage. This is especially true when considering the other texts in Scripture which address eschatology. The bulk of this lesson will be oriented toward demonstrating this fact. However, briefly the other positions may be refuted thus:¹

- Pre-millennialism and dispensational pre-millennialism both insist on a physical thousand years as the only valid interpretation of this text, despite St. John speaking with symbolic language throughout Revelation as a whole. This is an inconsistent hermeneutic and thus invalid. In addition to this, the dispensational position denies the complete abrogation of the Old Covenant as discussed in Hebrews, as doing so is the only way he can hold to a Jewish-dominated millennium.
- Post-millennialism denies St. John's message that the Millennium is inaugurated by Christ and His angels, positing instead that the Church's efforts do this. The frustration of all Church efforts throughout history, the two thousand years of failure to enact such a golden age as the Post-millennialist promises, also constitutes empiric evidence that their position is unlikely.
- Non-millennialism claims that the Church was in this Millennial state for forty years, in which the saints did not co-rule with Christ in any capacity. The nature of these four decades denies any sort of empowerment for Christians or binding of the devil, making it flatly contradictory to the text as St. John writes it.

Vs.1-3

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. **2** And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, **3** and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

The phrase “then I saw” means that the previous capitulation of this vision has restarted; we have seen a vision of Christ's Return, now it is time to “rewind the clock” so to speak and talk about the timeline leading up to the Parousia. The angel who holds the key to the pit is Abaddon, who was given the key to the abyss during the cycle of trumpets.² When he opens the pit up the first time, he calls forth an army of spiritual “locusts” who frustrate the operations of unbelieving mankind. The reader must decide if the abyss is opened a *second* time, or whether this is St. John describing the same event. If Abaddon releases the army of spiritual locusts at the same time as he binds the devil, then this would tell us that the devil's binding prevents him from preventing the activity of the locusts, who are present to scourge men and push them toward repentance.

Of note here, the dragon is identified as Satan, the devil *and* the “ancient serpent.” The word “devil” is a translation of *diabolos*, which means “slanderer,”³ while the word “Satan” means “adversary” or “accuser.”⁴ There is only one ancient serpent who is shown slandering, namely the serpent in the Garden of Eden who slandered God in order to deceive Eve.⁵ The title is given to him based on his being dubbed the “father of lies” by our Lord in St. John's Gospel.⁶ For Abaddon to bind him is to take away his ability to deceive the races of man, by which he previously ruled them; Christ

1 Of course, entire books could be written refuting these positions, but for brevity's sake this shall suffice. We ought to focus on what is *true* more than what is false for the purpose of this study.

2 Revelation 9:1-11

3 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1228.htm>

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4567.htm>

5 Genesis 3:1-7

6 John 8:44

comments that the devil, called “the ruler of this world,” is cast away by the work of the Atonement.⁷

It is no coincidence that Gentiles began to truly worship the real God only after the Atonement. Though there was a Jewish diaspora throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, and though they were known for occasional proselytizing, it was only after Christ spoke the Great Commission and later told the Apostles “you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”⁸ that true conversions began en masse. Since “the ruler of this world” was bound from the Atonement onward, and that binding is portrayed here in relation to his deceptive ways, the Millennium may safely be identified as a symbolic period of time spanning the whole of the Church era before Christ's Return.

We must remember St. John's pivot to the *already-but-not-yet* dynamic. The Christian can say that the devil is already defeated, in that the devil can no longer use deception to prevent people from converting. However, his binding shows a *not yet*, because his defeat is not final until Judgment Day. The release of Satan, by which men may be deceived for a while, is done for the sake of judging him in a worse fashion than he is currently undergoing; this is to say, he must be let out of the bottomless pit before he is thrown into the lake of fire.

Vs.4

4 Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

There are twenty-four thrones inhabited by normal men in Heaven, sat upon by the twenty-four elders.⁹ Being the twelve patriarchs of Israel and the twelve Apostles, these indeed were given authority to judge. The patriarchs received authority to judge their descendants, passed down from tribal head to tribal head; the Apostles received the office of the keys.¹⁰ This dynamic of judgment continues for the martyrs and whosoever does not reject the Gospel. In other words, the “already” dynamic is demonstrated by the saints co-ruling with our Lord via the universal priesthood. The “not yet” is for those awaiting their time to go to Heaven.

The phrase “they came to life” is an editorial translation of a single word, ἔζησαν.^{11,12} The literal translation is “they lived,” although the translators took note of the aorist tense in order to see a sort of resurrection dynamic. The clause is better rendered in the less restrictive “They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.” This is a superior reading of the text on account of the Apostles having received the office of judgment *during their lifetimes*, and the instructions given to leaders of the Church in 1 Timothy, 1 Peter, and more; whether someone is alive here on earth or alive in the Throne Room of Heaven, they are co-reigning with Christ. This especially counts regarding ruling the Church with Him.

Vs.5-6

5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. **6** Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.

7 John 12:31, 16:11

8 Acts 1:8

9 Revelation 4:4

10 John 20:19-22

11 Transliterated “ezesan,” Strong's #2198

12 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2198.htm>

The “rest of the dead” are those who are not saved. St. John brings them up in distinction with *this* group, which enjoys the first resurrection. A believer sheds his mortal coil and goes off into the Throne Room to enjoy Paradise with his fellow Christians; a nonbeliever goes into hades (or Sheol).

Whoever belongs to Jesus already has the first resurrection, for Christ calls Himself the Resurrection.¹³ They have already died in their Baptism,¹⁴ and thus the death of their body does no harm to them and nor does it render them truly *dead*. For nonbelievers, the second resurrection is harmful, taking them out of the torpor of hades and bringing them back for the sake of judgment.¹⁵ The co-rulership with Christ that believers enjoy *now*, both in Heaven and on earth, prefigures their reign with Him in the New Heavens and New Earth; the torments and confusion of nonbelievers, both here and in hades, prefigures their ultimate destination of torment and confusion in the lake of fire. “Already but not yet” dynamics impact both groups.

13 John 11:25

14 Romans 6:1-4

15 John 5:29

Revelation Bible Study #48

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

Revelation 20:7-15

7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison **8** and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. **9** And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, **10** and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. **12** And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. **13** And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. **14** Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. **15** And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Introduction

Lutheranism is known for its Law/Gospel distinction. These are the two “voices” of Scripture, wherein one's spiritual state determines much of the application of the text. The First Commandment, “you shall have no other gods before Me,” condemns the unjustified while guiding the saved; these are the voice of the Law to nonbelievers and believers. The Law warns humanity, condemns the damned, and leads the saved. The Gospel presents the good news of God's blessings to all believers and their justification by faith in Christ, who was crucified for our sins. When a nonbeliever reads Gospel texts, he receives the offer of salvation; when a believer reads them, he receives assurance of salvation.

The majority of Scriptural content is geared toward the voice of the Law. Adam and Eve fall in Eden, mankind is drowned in the Flood, Egyptian idolatry is condemned with the Exodus, the Israelites have their painful wilderness wanderings. The conquest of Canaan punishes the paganism of the nations, but it is followed by the Israelites' apostasy during the period of the Judges. During the period of the kings of Israel and Judah few monarchs are found to be faithful, terminating in the Assyrian Captivity and the Babylonian Exile. Even after some of the Exiles are returned to the promised land, their worship is halfhearted and their conduct is condemned by the prophets. The Old Testament screams the Law to its readers as it recounts the abysmal record of human failure from Eden to Judea.

The remainder of Revelation's twentieth chapter features the last gasp of human depravity, as unbelieving mankind follows the devil's call and organizes under a new wave of deceit. This results in the mass death spoken of in the nineteenth chapter, wherein Christ slaughters all who rebel against Him. *Then*, we see the final telos of the Second Use of the Law: damnation. This passage provides insight into the fate of the damned, but must be read carefully. At the Great White Throne, the final Judgment is pronounced upon all nonbelievers, leading to the rest of Revelation speaking almost exclusively Gospel matters to the reader thereafter.

Vs.7-9

7 And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. 9 And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them,

For the duration of the Church era, the devil is bound in a pit – this is to say, he no longer has the ability to prevent people from hearing and believing in the Gospel.¹ But when it is time for him to face the ultimate judgment of eternal conscious torment, he must be released from his abode. Naturally, when he is unbound he will do what he was doing beforehand; deceiving the nations and using them against God's people. Here St. John provides more perspective on his previous vision of this event, wherein he saw “the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against Him who was sitting on the horse and against His army.”²

Here, St. John more explicitly connects his vision to Ezekiel's prophecy. The previous proclamation that the birds of the air would gorge themselves on the flesh of nonbelievers was a *hint* at it, utilizing the same language as Ezekiel's oracle.³ Now the Apostle explicitly defines Gog and Magog as the “nations that are at the four corners of the earth,” meaning *all* nonbelieving humanity. In the latter days, the devil will successfully deceive nonbelievers into a kind of militancy against the Christian faith, and they will follow his lead on the matter.

This ought not be interpreted *physically*, as though the militaries of the world will attempt to march on Jerusalem (though that may happen some day, it is unconnected to this passage). This is especially untenable since St. John does not utilize terms for Gog and Magog that would suggest mere *states* or *countries*, but *nations*. He speaks of all humanity as understood in terms of the races of man. The Apostle is saying that every unregenerate man and woman of all ages, already predisposed to resist the Gospel, will become even more actively hostile to it. If this were interpreted as a physical matter, and all the unregenerate were gathered for battle, we would be faced with absurdities like hospice patients being wheeled around next to the able-bodied faithless, or extremely overweight individuals struggling to march with normal soldiers. It is more hermeneutically sound to understand that the “beloved city” is the *Church* on earth, and Christians everywhere shall experience worse persecution.⁴

This brief era of worsened conditions for Christians is ended with the death of all nonbelievers. Previously, St. John wrote that Christ kills them with the sword which emerges from His mouth.⁵ This is of course symbolic for the power of His Word, with the sentence of death being pronounced on those who bear the mark of the beast. Here the killing is portrayed as fire coming from heaven, reminiscent of Elijah calling fire down from heaven to kill soldiers sent by Ahaziah the king.⁶ In a demonstration of His Deity, our Lord Jesus will destroy *all* of His enemies by simply pronouncing it, whether this demonstration manifests in physical fire or nonbelievers simply drop dead. Also, like the moment when Elijah called down fire during the contest with the prophets of baal,⁷ this moment will extinguish false religion, only this time it will be abolished in its entirety as opposed to the temporary reprieve from apostasy as established by Jezebel and Ahab. The reader must thus expect for there to be a time (perhaps this very time) in which nonbelievers are mobilized; Christ will end it before the devil's dream of renewed mass-nightmare persecution can truly begin.

1 Revelation 20:3

2 Revelation 19:19

3 Ezekiel 39:17-19

4 Unless of course they already *are*. The current circumstances worldwide suggest that we may be living in that “short time” in which the devil roams free before Christ's Return.

5 Revelation 19:21

6 2 Kings 1

7 1 Kings 18

Vs.10

10 and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Before any one else is thrown in the lake of fire, the devil and the beast and false prophet are cast there without so much as a trial. Their guilt is so self-evident that there is no need for them to have so much as a moment in “court.” One may note that demons appear absent from the text; in fact they are present. St. John assumes that we have already read the Synoptic Gospels, wherein our Lord Jesus says that the fires were prepared for satan and the demons together.⁸ Since the judgment on the Great White Throne occurs *after* this moment, no human has gone to the lake of fire yet. When St. John says “the beast and the false prophet,” this is thus a shorthand for the demonic powers that were behind the world system and false religions (especially heresies).

The exact nature of the lake of fire is a mystery. The word “lake” here is translated from λίμνην,⁹ which typically depicts a pond or other small body of water. It is an odd choice of words, considering that so many shall be damned. Thus we are invited to ask how so many shall be there. If the lake of fire is supposed to be understood in a physical manner, it does not need to be very large to fit all of the damned. To illustrate, let us use a familiar lake to St. John,¹¹ the Sea of Galilee. This particular lake is approximately one cubic mile (or four cubic kilometers) in total volume; one cubic mile is 147,197,952,000 cubic feet.¹² With room to spare, one cubic mile could fit all 8 billion humans living on earth. If the Population Reference Bureau is to be believed, one hundred and seventeen billion humans have lived since the dawn of time, requiring a lake of fire that is no less than ten cubic miles.¹³¹⁴ Again, if St. John wants us to see his language as physical in nature, this is a reasonable volume for fitting all of the damned.

Yet to say that the lake of fire is being described physically in this fashion is to introduce an inconsistent hermeneutic. The Apostle has given us so much symbolism that it would be absurd to portray damnation as the *only* matter about which he wrote in an entirely plain fashion. The word translated as “lake” has a cognate word, λιμὴν,¹⁵¹⁶ which means *harbor*. This is an important distinction on account of *Christ's* descriptions of hell, which includes men being capable of communication despite their suffering.¹⁷ Whether there is a literal lake of fire or not, there is most certainly a *harbor* upon which the damned are “dropped off,” being unable to cross back into Paradise. Here, they receive the just reward for their wickedness. For the devil, the beast and the false prophet (which again is a rephrasing of “the devil and his angels”), this involves constant, unending torment. For the rest of the damned, however, instead of being packed into lava like a can of infernal sardines, there is graduated punishment.

Vs.11-13

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. **12** And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books

8 Matthew 25:41

9 Transliterated “limnen,” Strong's #3041

10 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3041.htm>

11 The Apostle was of course a fisherman in Galilee before being called to ministry.

12 For more absurd calculations:

https://andreafarmer.weebly.com/uploads/4/5/0/1/45015697/how_many_bodies_can_fit_ppt.pdf

13 <https://www.prb.org/articles/how-many-people-have-ever-lived-on-earth/>

14 The statistics of this study are **not** accurate, since the Earth is only six thousand years old. Nonetheless, these numbers do illustrate the overall point.

15 Transliterated “limnein,” Strong's #3040

16 <https://biblehub.com/greek/3040.htm>

17 Luke 16:19-31

were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. **13** And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

“Then I saw,” that is, St. John is emphasizing this pericope as a vision connected to the previous one. While the text assumes a general resurrection of all who have shed their mortal coil, this judgment is for nonbelievers *only*. Early on, St. John has recounted previously that the souls of believers are in the Throne Room, periodically engaging in liturgy with the twenty four elders and the living creatures.¹⁸ Whosoever belongs to Christ is not judged here, for they are already *very much* alive to God,¹⁹ and thus not counted among those who are dead. When the book of life is opened, it recounts those who are saved by virtue of believing and being Baptized, which is the sole litmus test Christ gives for salvation.²⁰ Everyone *else* is judged according to their deeds, by which the intensity of their eternal punishment is determined.

There is a sort of judgment in which the believers partake, but it is separate from this moment on account of believers being *alive* to God. Christ says that when He returns, He will separate the “sheep” (believers) from the “goats” (the damned); the sheep are rewarded for their good deeds without their sins being counted against them, while the goats are condemned for their sins without their good deeds being counted in their favor.²¹ This tells us that the damned are subject to progressive punishment, and it is only the extent of their wickedness which determines their fate: there is no ameliorating the “nice” atheist’s damnation simply because he was “nice.”

Vs.14-15

14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. **15** And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Here any form of “full preterist” interpretation is rendered invalid. When Christ returns, death and the abode of the dead will no longer be a facet of reality for those who belong to Jesus. On the other hand, they will be a constant presence among the damned – hence the rich man shown being in “hades” in Luke 16 despite his damnation being evidently after the Final Judgment. That said, this “second death,” wherein the first death and hades are still present, must be understood in the context of what death truly *is*. Death is a separation; the body becomes separated from the soul. Unregenerate men are dead to God, being separate from fellowship with Him but animated as He offers them salvation throughout their earthly lives. The second death is the state of being separated more deeply from God, being placed apart from any further opportunity of receiving salvation, fellowship, or communication.

One thing to note though is that in a certain sense God still *provides* for the damned. Damnation is not the kind of suffering which renders a mortal’s mind non-functional, lest God self-condemn His own justice; if they are being tormented without knowing why they are tormented, then God would essentially be tormenting children or the mentally disabled. Their reason and memory are preserved. Since the bodies of the damned are required for whichever *tactile* aspect of their torments, this also requires continued bodily integrity. Awareness, reason, and bodily integrity are all things which are contingent; they cannot be preserved by the rational agent without a Preserver who serves as the bedrock reason for their existence. Since God first gave them the blessings of consciousness and reason and physical bodies during their earthly lives, it is important to note that He *preserves* these things actively in the damned. While some commentaries would prefer annihilation, such would be *worse* than the eternal torment posited by St. John – which for some is more painful an experience than for others.

¹⁸ Revelation 7:9-17

¹⁹ Romans 6:11. We cannot stress enough the importance of letting the Scriptures define such terms as “alive” and “dead!”

²⁰ Mark 16:16

²¹ Matthew 25:31-46

Revelation Bible Study #49

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

Revelation 21:1-8

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." **6** And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. **7** The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. **8** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

Introduction

After Judgment Day, believers will enjoy eternal blessedness in the New Heavens and New earth. Here the interpreter must have the same level of careful attention as is necessary in speaking on the matter of damnation, as St. John continues to employ symbolic language as he has for the entirety of Revelation. Nonetheless, despite the heavy use of symbolic language, he speaks in this way to *establish* the fact of the Resurrection and eternal life as a guaranteed future event. He is relating his vision in a fashion conducive to *encouraging* believers that their ultimate victory is assured.

Vs.1

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

The Apostle does not mean here that the earth shall be annihilated completely. For that matter, neither shall the heavens, as though all of creation is to be undone. Remember, St. John expects us to be students of the entirety of Scripture at this point. We are reminded that God has made a covenant with Abraham so that his offspring (those who share his faith) shall ultimately retain possession of the Promised Land forever;¹ there is also a *cosmic* covenant which ensures that the cycle of day and night shall go on uninterrupted continually.² If God were to erase the current heavens and earth from existence entirely in some lovecraftian cosmic undoing, He would be going against His own Word on the matter.

But there *will* be a new heaven and a new earth in the sense of a new and enduring set of *conditions* for the universe. The same phrase was used in Isaiah's dual prophecy, told to the ancient children of Judah concerning both the immanent restoration of Jerusalem and the final judgment to come (Isaiah had a habit of weaving together prophecies that were close to being fulfilled and

1 Genesis 13:15, Romans 4:16

2 Jeremiah 33:19

prophecies that were to be fulfilled much later).³ To say there will be a new heavens and earth is to say that the old operations and circumstances are to be replaced; things change so radically that the old “world” becomes alien to the new man's understanding.

Similar discussion is found elsewhere in Scripture. St. Peter refers to the antediluvian period as its own world which was destroyed by the Great Flood.⁴ We cannot relate to the antediluvian “world,” let alone know much anything *about* it. Almost all writing from the era is either obliterated, fragmented or undecipherable to archaeologists. In terms of the artifacts discovered from the time, very little can be learned without a great deal of speculation; while a paleontologist might find an arrowhead somewhere in the South American jungle, there is nothing which tells us whether it was used for hunting or warfare. Cave art is determined to be religious in nature or just artistic based on the whims of opinion. To Noah and his descendants, they were truly living in a *new earth*. St. John relates that the same shall be the case for the New earth when we live in it.

Vs.2-4

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

The New Jerusalem is the seat of the Throne Room wherein St. John began to see his vision in Heaven. It shall be made to exist both physically and spiritually in simultaneous fashion. Though there is truly a place being prepared for all believers, and Christ is preparing it for us.⁵ Here though the Apostle begins to discuss what that place *means* for us in terms of spiritual benefit and the new reality in which we shall live.

Being Omnipresent, God has always been with man in the sense of having a presence. After all, as the Creed states the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life: He provides us with every breath we take. But here God declares that there will be a *change* in the means of His presence with men. Currently, the presence of God is mediated through several different means, because to see Him without any “filter” results in our death. Our Lord told Moses “man shall not see Me and live.”⁶ Under the Old Covenant, His Presence was mediated by the embodied Christ speaking to men as “the Angel of the Lord” and “the Word of the Lord,”⁷ or by a presence of fire and smoke.⁸ Now, our Lord's Presence is “filtered” chiefly by means of Word and Sacrament.⁹ Here, our Lord declares that after the Resurrection, He will be with us with an *unmediated* Presence, meaning that we will be able to see Him face to face without the risk of dying.

This unmediated or unfiltered Presence shall lack the risk of death precisely because death shall be abolished, both in the physical and spiritual senses. There shall be no more sin in the hearts and flesh of the regenerate, thus doing away with reasons for physical death being imposed in the first place.¹⁰ Mortality was inflicted on us precisely because being immortal would have necessitated damnation for sinners. The former things have passed away indeed!

3 Isaiah 65:17-25

4 2 Peter 3:1-7, esp.vs.6

5 John 14:1-3

6 Exodus 33:20

7 Genesis 15:1, 1 Samuel 3:21, Judges 2:1-2. There are countless other examples, as discussed earlier.

8 Exodus 19:18-20

9 Romans 6:1-5, Matthew 26:26-28

10 Genesis 3:17-24

When God promises to make all things new, He means it. The same way we cannot relate to the Antediluvian world, we are unable to fully comprehend what life under the new Heavens and new earth shall be like. Revelation has given us some *hints*, certainly, but without the problems of mortality, conflict, or moral transgression the settled rhythm of human life shall be vastly disrupted by this change. Today men must eat, drink, sleep and breathe lest they die; in the Resurrection, there may be cases of men living thousands of years without doing any of that. Christians receive the Sacraments today for the forgiveness of their sins, being central to our religious life; with God quite literally being *visible* to us and no sin to mitigate, what shall characterize our worship? While the post-Flood era marked great changes, nothing shall compare to the change in the human experience that shall occur when Christ Returns. However, here God encourages us by saying that it shall be unspeakably *good*.

Vs.6-8

6 And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. **7** The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. **8** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

From the Throne, God pronounces Himself to be Alpha and Omega, which Christ will later say of Himself. Thus the doctrine of Christ's Divinity is stated in strong terms, and the unity between the Father and the Son is emphasized. After all, here the Father is re-stating the promises given to the “one who conquers” in the seven letters.¹¹ Note here that salvation by Grace Alone is also emphasized, as eternal life from the “spring of the water of life” is without payment – that is, it is not purchased by the believer in *any* sense, whether by works or by money. Thus we come to a different understanding of what it means to *conquer* in the seventh verse. To conquer is not necessarily about what one *does* so much as it is about remaining in the faith despite pressure to depart it.

This promise of eternal life being without cost is especially comforting for believers given the list of those who shall be damned in the eighth verse. It ought not be seen as a list of sins that, if one commits them, renders one damned forever – otherwise, we find ourselves all damned. God is not contradicting what He has said through the likes of Isaiah who said that man's righteous deed are like a “polluted garment,”¹² or St. Paul who describes even Christians as unable to fully extinguish sin.¹³ If St. John is discussing sins committed in general or particular inclinations of the heart, we would all be damned. After all, the Apostle relates God saying that all liars are damned, but according to Jeremiah we are *all* liars in our hearts.¹⁴

Thankfully the list does not damn everyone; to the contrary, it is relegated to those who have either never believed in the Gospel or have abandoned the Christian faith.

-The cowardly are those who abandon Christ in the face of persecution.

-The faithless are all who refuse to believe in the first place.

-The detestable (that is, ἐβδελυγμένοις,¹⁵¹⁶ with a connotation of inner idolatry) harbor a *secret* faithlessness as they worship *secret* idols.

-The murderers are those who according to Hebrews “trample underfoot the Son of God” by their

11 Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5, 3:12, 3:21

12 Isaiah 64:6

13 Romans 7:14-20

14 Jeremiah 17:9

15 Transliterated “ebdelygmenois,” Strong's #948

16 <https://biblehub.com/greek/948.htm>

apostasy.¹⁷

-The sexually immoral are those who abandon God or refuse the faith for pleasure's sake. Scripture ties this particular sin with *rebellion*.¹⁸

-Sorcerors and idolaters choose to openly worship other gods in rebellion against the true God.

-St. John has defined liars previously as whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ.¹⁹

In other words, the list condemns all circumstances and motivations for leaving, refusing, or avoiding the Gospel altogether. God condemns those who *do not believe* as all being *without excuse*. An apostate cannot claim that he should be saved on account of his reason for abandoning God being fear. A sorcerer cannot claim that he believed in Christ while he mixed his “potions” and appealed to demons to brew them. No man has any escape clause by which he may declare his innocence: all who refuse Christ for any reason shall be damned, and all who embrace Christ with faith in Him Alone shall be saved.

17 Hebrews 10:29

18 2 Peter 2:9-10

19 1 John 2:22

Revelation Bible Study #50

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

Revelation 21:9-27

9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” **10** And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, **11** having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. **12** It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— **13** on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. **14** And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

15 And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. **16** The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. **17** He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. **18** The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. **19** The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, **20** the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. **21** And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. **23** And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. **24** By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, **25** and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. **26** They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. **27** But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Introduction

This point in Revelation presents reality for believers after the Eschaton has taken place. It is a picture of what life *looks like* for Christians after the Final Judgment has been enacted. Since it is a physical resurrection, there must be a place for Christians to dwell. Thus St. John describes the New Jerusalem, not as an ideal place but as a real one; it is the city which Abraham searched for, “whose designer and builder is God.”¹ While the climax of history is presented here in some detail, not all is given. To the contrary, the passage raises more questions than it answers, but assures us that the outcome is *good*.

Though the New Jerusalem is a reality for believers in the future, like other core eschatological matters it also applies to us in the *present*. The “already but not yet” dynamic continues on regarding the circumstances of eternity. Much of the things said about the city are couched in symbolic language which refers back to the present circumstances of salvation. While this has led those of the Roman Catholic and preterist schools to presume that it is just a symbol for the Church or a heavenly abode, it is truly meant to encourage the reader regarding both the future *and* the present.

1 Hebrews 11:10

Vs.9-11

9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

The hermeneutic of the passage is introduced by the presence of the plague-bearing angel. In the fifteenth chapter, St. John saw the angels bearing the seven bowls as a *sign*,² suggesting deeply symbolic language. That said, the ninth verse affirms that the angels with the bowls were not mirages or sock-puppets; the sign of the bowls was a real occurrence in Heaven, the consequences of which are truly felt here on earth despite their symbolic descriptions. We are thus to understand the New Jerusalem in the same light, as St. John's vision will use veiled language to point to a concrete future reality.

The angel takes St. John to a *mountain* to see the New Jerusalem descend from Heaven. This connects the book of Revelation to Ezekiel's vision of a new Temple.³ More importantly, the imagery recalls that of *dominion*. It invites the reader to compare the Apostle's experience and vision to the temptation in the wilderness, wherein the devil took Jesus to a high mountain, showed Him the kingdoms of the world, and offered to give them to Him in exchange for apostasy.⁴ Christ refused the offer, and now we see why. The Apostle is taken to this mountain, and it is high enough to see and describe a city which is one thousand and four hundred miles across: being able to see this place, and then seeing the City descend, tells us that what shall arrive is greater than any kingdom on earth has ever been. Christ refused the devil's offer not only on moral terms, but because the Kingdom He is to receive is of infinitely more value.

The city itself possesses God's Glory, which is consistent with God's pronouncement in the preceding verses “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.”⁵ Just as the face of Moses shone after prolonged contact with our Lord,⁶ so too will the City possess a radiant quality to it which matches both the Jasper-like appearance of God⁷ and the clear sapphire architecture of Heaven.⁸ With the special Divine Presence and its descent from the sky, what is portrayed is quite literally Heaven on Earth.

Vs.12-14

12 It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— 13 on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Ezekiel's vision of a Temple included a Jerusalem with twelve gates on its walls. Each gate was named after one of the patriarchs of Israel.⁹ St. John reiterates this detail, but adds that the twelve *foundations* are named after the twelve Apostles. This suggests to us that, while the Old Testament saints and their lives are by no means forgotten, the Apostles have an equal (if not greater) prominence to their twelve forebears. Since evil and death have been abolished, the function of the wall and its gates (which are always open anyway) is not defensive, but rather celebratory; the wall and its

2 Revelation 15:1

3 Ezekiel 40-48

4 Matthew 4:8-10

5 Revelation 21:3

6 Exodus 34:29

7 Revelation 4:3

8 Exodus 24:10

9 Ezekiel 48:30-34

foundations adorn the outside of the City with great honor given to the saints who did the greatest part in working for God's Kingdom before Judgment Day.

Vs.15-21

15 And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. **16** The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. **17** He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. **18** The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. **19** The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, **20** the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. **21** And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

The measurements negate the question of whether the Apostle is having the same vision as Ezekiel. St. John's vision of the city is simply too large for the Jerusalem that Ezekiel saw, which had a circumference of 18,000 cubits (about five miles). This portrays the ideal Old Covenant spiritual reality¹⁰ being dwarfed by the New Covenant. This is compounded by the foundations (which represent the Apostles) having the gemstones of the tribes of Israel – previously a feature of the ephod worn by the high priest,¹¹ now shown in the Apostolic foundations of the Church. While the harlot, mystery babylon (at the time the old Jerusalem), was also adorned with jewels and gold,¹² the City is adorned as a *Bride*, making all of the majesty sanctified instead of sinfully opulent.

Furthermore, the description of the City not only dwarfs the Old Covenant, it also overshadows the original desires of collective mankind just after the Flood. The height of the New Jerusalem is equal to its width and length. At 1400 miles, this means that its height is above earth's atmosphere. Man attempted at Babel to build a structure that would have reached the heavens, but God confused their languages to prevent its completion.¹³ With the New Jerusalem, God accomplishes what mankind could not, and it is those who trusted in Him who enjoy residence in the sky-reaching City, not those who trusted in the world.

Yet while all of these measurements and details are *teaching* us something, they are not intended to be entirely figurative. St. John equates an “angel's cubit” to that of a man, informing his readers that at least the normal species of angels is roughly the same size as a human being. If the New Jerusalem was *merely* a symbol for the Church, the Apostle would have no need to specify its dimensions by these measurements. To the contrary the City itself is very real even in a physical sense, only its construction positively *preaches* to believers as they walk its hallowed halls.

Vs.22-26

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. **23** And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. **24** By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, **25** and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. **26** They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. **27** But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Since the reader is assumed to be familiar with Ezekiel's prophecy, the pronouncement that there will be no Temple is *explosive* in its effect. In the first century, especially before the first Jewish

¹⁰ Whether Ezekiel's Temple is a heavenly reality or merely a portrayal of an ideal is unclear.

¹¹ Exodus 28:15-21

¹² Revelation 17:4

¹³ Genesis 11:1-9

war, the Second Temple was the center of Jewish life. For this massive structure to be absent from Eternity – and not only that, but the Heavenly Temple furnishings as well – is to posit a change which even Christians today cannot understand. It would be like saying there shall be no Church buildings, no denominations, and no more Baptisms... which appears to be a true saying. Just as the Temple is unneeded in terms of a spiritual intermediary, so too shall there be no need of modern, Church era intermediary edifices like church buildings. Christ Himself shall be present at all times, being our Light by which we walk.

There are less clear matters here though. How exactly are there nations living outside of the City bringing their glory into it? If the City is saturated by God's Glory, how can anything else be brought into it? Various exegetes have connected these verses to Isaiah 60, in which a similar promise of nations bringing offers and glory to God's people is made,¹⁴ but that presupposes that a certain class of people is *subservient* to the residents, and who generally do not live in New Jerusalem. If the Apostle is saying that Isaiah's oracle is fulfilled here entirely, this would also mean that, per Isaiah 60:22 there is also a mode of reproduction for believers. One might reply that it is symbolic language, but the insistence on parallel angelic and human measurements in the fifteenth verse demonstrates that it is *more* than mere parabolic writing.

The best option for the exegete regarding these mysteries is to take them as St. John's way of saying that the believer's life will be *active*. We shall not be in a state of eternal contemplation, but rather we shall be moving, exploring, having fraternal relationships with other believers (at least), eating, drinking, doing things that were formerly considered work but are now effortless, and enjoying a deeper communion with God. This is on account of the “already but not yet” dynamic at play here. Christians do things now: they shall do things and live actively then as well. Christians may worship our Lord and reach out to Him regardless of any Temple edifice, just as at the Resurrection He and Christ shall be our Temple. Just as Christians have a firmer foundation in the writings of the Apostles, so too shall they have a firmer (literal) foundation with the City, decorated with the names of the Twelve. Thus St. John posits an active eternity wherein all the good that this world had to offer is still present, but *perfected*, including the messages which the Church receives from the Word.

14 Isaiah 60:1-22

Revelation Bible Study #51

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

Revelation 22:1-5

1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb **2** through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. **3** No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. **4** They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. **5** And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Introduction

In the previous chapter, St. John presented us with the details he saw pertaining to the New Jerusalem. While its descent onto the New Earth presents an eternal home for all believers, the Apostle is showing us more than a mere location wherein God and man live. The city's dimensions and features show our Lord accomplishing that which mankind could not during the Tower of Babel incident. New Jerusalem reaches into the heavens, while Babel's edifice was left unfinished; New Jerusalem has men from all nations dwelling therein forever, while mankind was *scattered* at Babel; all believers dwelling in the heavenly City shall understand God and one another, while at Babel confusion of tongues was introduced. In a word, God shall *undo* the curse with this new City, and introduce the blessed estate that man had sought all along.

As we reach the final chapter of Revelation, we note that God does not stop there. He is portrayed after the Eschaton to be *busy* with projects that further rectify the dour history of man. The works of the devil and world and flesh are destroyed in Judgment Day, the earth is made new as it is cleansed in fire, and man is brought to new heights (literally) in the New Jerusalem. For the last Divine action portrayed in Revelation, we are treated to a view of the New Eden *within* the City, by which men understand that the Fall is undone entirely. Thus the reader is invited to see an undoing of all misfortune and evil having been completed in that moment.

Vs.1-2

1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb **2** through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

St. John describes a reconstructed Eden in the middle of the New Jerusalem. Originally the Garden had four rivers flowing out from it,¹ yet here only the “river of the water of life” is present. This water of life is called so because it flows from the throne of the Author of Life, making it thus a manifestation of the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son – and without Whom life would be an impossibility. As the Holy Spirit has been portrayed at various times as a dove, seven torches, eyes, etc., here He is fulfilling His own previous epithet as the “rivers of living water” from St. John's Gospel.² As the Father and Son are shown sitting on the same throne, and the Holy Spirit

1 Genesis 2:10-14

2 John 7:37-39

proceeds out from them, all three Persons of the Trinity are present for redeemed mankind to interact with.

The tree of life is present as well, humanity having formerly been barred from enjoying its benefits.³ Though only one tree is mentioned, it is on both sides of the river, suggesting that the tree has bent through the weight of its twelve fruits and lurches across the water. Though the number twelve is typically related to the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve Apostles, here it is a means of suggesting superabundance. After all, it is the leaves, not the fruit, which are used for healing the nations. As mankind will have eternal life by virtue of being in God's gracious Presence at all times, and as the believers are already promised to eat of the tree,⁴ the use of the leaves is a means of establishing that the races of mankind shall have their reconstitution in the most beneficial ways *collectively* (though the Apostle does not explain this in detail).

The “Already but Not Yet” dynamic is quite apparent here. The Cross on which Jesus was crucified is well noted by the ancient theologians to be a kind of tree of life, because it is by His crucifixion upon it that we have our eternal life in the first place. Believers receive Christ in the Eucharist as the fruit of that tree, and benefit further in life by partaking. In Baptism, by water and the Word we are brought to eternal life as well, especially in being united to Christ. Insofar as the Christian receives the Sacraments and trusts in Jesus for their salvation, these are ever-present realities for each believer. But as none of us have yet actually eaten of a fruit which bestows an eternal existence and we have not drank from the river of life physically, this remains in the realm of “not yet” as well. Nevertheless, as the tree of life in New Jerusalem continues to be utilized among the nations, and as the river of life continues to flow, eternal life is shown to be a process into which men grow (much like sanctification for believers in this earth); it is not a “one and done” sort of reality, but a continued and enduring period of growth for all believers. After the Resurrection man remains mutable but only insofar as he may improve, growing in holiness and good character.

Vs.3-4

3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. **4** They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads

The absence of accursed things means that there shall be no more curse present upon the earth. All of the damned have been placed in the fires of hell, by which their presence is no longer in consideration for the Church. The saints who have had to endure the accursed presence of the damned during their earthly travails will find that for eternity they enjoy a constant presence of our Lord instead. Where there was persecution, now there is life. Where there was loneliness, now there is communion. While they shall certainly be able to see God's actual Face, here it is also connected to the Old Testament connotation of *blessing*. Whenever God sets His Face *against* someone, they are harmed.⁵ Whenever God *hides* His Face from a people, they are dismayed.⁶ But for the saints, seeing God's face will be a sign of blessing along the lines of the Aaronic Benediction, wherein the blessed is told that God makes His face *shine* on them for peace and good rather than terror and judgment.⁷ Our foreheads having His Name as a mark solidifies and guarantees this blessing, as we shall completely and fully belong to Him.

Here also it is revealed that frequent worship will be a feature of the New Earth. Yet here we must confess that there is a great deal of mystery. Though much of Revelation forms the shape and

3 Genesis 3:22-24

4 Revelation 2:7

5 Leviticus 17:10, 20:6, Jeremiah 21:10

6 Deuteronomy 31:16-18, Psalm 27:9

7 Numbers 6:22-27

means by which the most prominent liturgies in Church history were formed, this does not mean that our worship will take the same shape as they do now. After all, with God's Presence, we shall not have a need for the Scriptures as a direct impartation of wisdom, conversion, and knowledge. For that matter, the sacerdotal aspect of worship will be rendered unnecessary as well; why would people who have gone into this glory have any need for receiving absolution? Truly, there shall be praises offered by the saints, but in the kind of intimate communion each believer will have with God, one hesitates to think that separate "thanksgiving" services are necessary. And yet, we shall worship Him in the New Jerusalem.

Vs.5

5 And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

The center of all history is the Cross. History began when God said "let there be light," ending the indefinite period in which darkness was "over the face of the deep."⁸ Replacing this period of darkness is a new eternity in which darkness is nowhere to be found. The text itself contrasts the blessed ending with the dark beginning, suggesting that we are not to understand this verse symbolically. In the New Jerusalem at the very least, the saturation of all things with the special presence of our Lord means that light will be a constant in the eternal lives of the saints.

Though this is the last historical act of God that we see in Scripture, it does not mean that nothing shall happen afterwards. The saints are said here to *reign* with Christ, and if they are to reign then they are to reign over something. While it is yet to be shown what that looks like in practical terms, the Christian in eternity shall be a busy individual, helping to administer the final state of reality which will endure forever.

Revelation Bible Study #52

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

Revelation 22:6-21

6 And he said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.”

7 “And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, **9** but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

10 And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. **11** Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

12 “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. **13** I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. **15** Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

17 The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, **19** and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

20 He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Introduction

These are the final words of the Book of Revelation. The vision is complete, and St. John is presumably writing the end of the work while having returned to Patmos. There is a sense of finality to the text, wherein the Apostle is aware that only one prophecy is left to be fulfilled in the strictest sense – thus closing the canon of Scripture. Throughout the book, he was given a form of typology that moves forward from the day he writes Revelation until Judgment Day. The antitypes are given in the vision and are fulfilled by their types multiple times in history: the beast from the earth, for instance, is an antitype which has found hundreds or thousands of fulfillments in the various heretics that came and went throughout Church history. Yet the firmer prophecy, the Return of Christ, is one which shall only be fulfilled *once* at the end of days.

Here lays a supposed problem for many a believer. St. John and the angels speaking with him

present the Second Advent as though it were near *in time* to when Revelation was first penned. Naturally, we may feel some angst at wondering how exactly Christ's Return was "near" two thousand years ago. Thankfully, the sense of the text is not one which portrays the Parousia as near to St. John *in time*, but rather as a sudden event which shall catch the world off-guard. Thus the urgency is placed on the hearts of men such that, not knowing when the end of days shall be, they must prepare accordingly by seeking the mercies of God.

Vs.6-7

6 And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."

7 "And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

The angel speaking tells St. John that the message he has received (including the vision) is trustworthy and true. This hearkens back to Christ being referred to as "faithful and true" in the letters to the churches, and bearing that phrase as a title upon His Return.¹ The callback to the beginning is no accident, especially as the Apostle used the same phrasing about what "must soon take place" in the very first verse of Revelation.² The sixth verse serves then as a bookend to the opening words, telling us that the vision is complete. All that comes after this is a contextualization for the reader, the important takeaways for them to hold onto for the times ahead.

"God of spirits" language is found in only two other places in Scripture, both of which are in the book of Numbers. The first is during the contention between the sons of Korah and Moses, in which Moses and Aaron ask whether God shall destroy all of Israel on account of Korah. Our Lord replies that He shall not, instead instructing the children of Israel to depart from the Korah family (who is then summarily swallowed by the earth and burned to death).³ The second mention is when leadership over Israel is passed from Moses to Joshua – whose name in Greek is Iesous, or Jesus.⁴ Given that the book of Revelation is about Jesus returning to shepherd His people into the true promised land (the new heavens and new earth), and *simultaneously* about the judgment which shall come upon the wicked, this turn of phrase is not an accident. Here, however, the difference in title is made, from Moses' "God of the spirits of all flesh" to St. John's "God of the spirits of the prophets;" our Lord makes this alteration to emphasize the prophetic nature of the vision and St. John's fellowship with the Old Testament prophets themselves.

Christ says through the angel, "behold, I am coming soon." The specific word used is *ταχύ*,⁵⁶ which does not denote a length of time but rather a *pace*. There will be an immediacy to the Parousia which will fulfill St. Paul's description of it as being like a "thief in the night."⁷ This is to say, on account of the *nature* of His Return one ought to hold all the more dearly to the Gospel and the promise of eternal life.

Vs.8-9

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, 9 but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

1 Revelation 3:14, 19:11

2 Revelation 1:1

3 Numbers 16:20-35

4 Numbers 27:15-18

5 Transliterated "Tachu," Strong's #5035

6 <https://biblehub.com/greek/5035.htm>

7 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

Some have been confused by the angel's statement. It appears in the seventh verse as though the angel is the one pronouncing himself to be the one “coming soon.” St. John was confused too, as he bowed to the angel as though he were Christ. This is likely because the angels who carried the bowls of plagues wore sashes of gold just like Jesus did when He first appeared to St. John at Patmos.⁸ Since one of the angels who carried one of the bowls is the one speaking to him,⁹ it is likely that the Apostle made this mistake on account of the similar priestly clothing, the shining glory which obscured their faces, and the difficulty he had in parsing out voices. He makes the same mistake earlier when encountering the angel who speaks about the marriage supper of the Lamb.¹⁰

The confusion over this verse (and a few that are similar to it) has led some to make erroneous conclusions, namely that Jesus *is* an angel – and they often deny His Deity on account of this incident. However, the text clearly shows that they are distinct, especially when considering that Christ clears the matter up in the next three verses. Nonetheless, this is an important moment for our understanding of the Apostle's experience. That he writes of this embarrassing moment confirms to us that it was a *real* vision as opposed to some poetic fiction. He truly did suffer from a kind of panicked brain-fog symptom on account of the vision itself. Coming to in Patmos, he sees a figure who looks approximately like our Lord and bows to him, not realizing yet that the vision is over and he must wait to see our Lord again.

Vs.10-15

10 And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. **11** Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy.”

12 “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. **13** I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. **15** Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

The language concerning sealing is in contrast to that of Daniel. Daniel is told multiple times that he must shut up and seal the words of the vision and books, on account of their being far off from his own contemporary situation.¹¹ For St. John's vision however, the period is near in which the antitypes which he has observed will begin their typological fulfillment: the earth is about to enter the Church Era in its fullest expression, wherein the things shown to the Apostle will happen again and again until Christ's return. It is for this reason in the tenth verse that the angel uses the word *καιρός*,¹²¹³ which denotes an *epoch* just as often as it denotes a point in history. That the angel says this *καιρός* is *ἐγγύς*,¹⁴¹⁵ which may be translated as “near” but is so on account of the pressing nature of the matter.

Jesus, speaking through the angel, speaks not of His Return as near but as *sudden*. Using the word *ταχύ* once more, He reinforces the sense of a sudden and destructive Second Advent which shall not be expected by the world at large. So, blessed are those who listen to the Gospel and wash their robes in Christ's righteousness, seeking to be justified by Him and obedient. They will have eternal life per the process of re-creation discussed in the previous passages. Those who care not for the Christian faith (described here by the sins they commit) shall not be permitted this blessedness. Christ, declaring

8 Revelation 1:13, 15:6

9 Revelation 21:9

10 Revelation 19:9-10

11 Daniel 8:26, 12:4, 12:9

12 Transliterated “Kairos,” Strong's 2540

13 <https://biblehub.com/greek/2540.htm>

14 Transliterated “Eggus,” pronounced “Engus,” Strong's #1451

15 <https://biblehub.com/greek/1451.htm>

Himself to be Divine by way of the “first and the last” title,¹⁶ asserts His Godhood as the merit by which He shall judge humanity. Everyone shall be repaid in some sense: the saints will be blessed according to their good deeds and not punished for their sins, the damned shall be punished according to their sins and not blessed for their good deeds. The Church, in the meantime, must “let” people do as they will, not exercising worldly power to force the filthy to be pure or anything like that (such matters are a problem for the State, not the Bride); only the Church must continue to proclaim the message that may result in the repentance of the wicked.

Vs.16-17

16 “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

17 The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

Here Christ clarifies further that He was speaking through the angel when St. John arrived back at Patmos. Once more, He also asserts His office in terms of His humanity. As touches on His Divinity, He is the Alpha and the Omega; as it pertains to His humanity, He is the proper heir of the Davidic throne over God's people and the true star under which all creation must bow. It is for this reason that the Holy Spirit, speaking through the prayers of the saints (that is, the Bride), puts forward the earnest request of the Church: that Christ shall return. St. John exhorts us to do the same. Because Christ is our God, our King, our Redeemer, and the Morning Star living within our hearts,¹⁷ our highest good is actualized when He returns to the earth to assert His rule and make all things new.

Vs.18-21

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, **19** and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

20 He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

On the positive side, St. John has exhorted us all to pray for Christ's Return. On the negative formulation, all are forewarned to never add to nor take away from the words of Revelation. Previously, Solomon recorded the words of a sage named Agur, who told it rightly that to add to what God says is to incur rebuke as a deceiver.¹⁸ This is not to be understood in a granular textual fashion; if a scribe misspells a word in his copy of Revelation, that scribe is not going to hell for such an offense. It is closer to a “common sense” understanding of the matter: God's *Message* is not to be added to nor reduced, for the only reason one would have for doing these things is to deceive people. With the nineteenth verse, the Apostle declares the canon closed, the “the book of this prophecy,” Revelation itself, is to be understood as the climactic pinnacle of Scripture. No doctrine may be added to the Word, which has been proclaimed to be all-sufficient for doctrine and morals.

All that is left for believers now is to pray for our Lord's Return, continue in the faith and in His grace, seeking to please Him with our lives.

Come, Lord Jesus.

16 Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, 48:12. In Revelation 1:8 and 21:5-6, God the Father calls Himself the Alpha and the Omega.

17 2 Peter 1:19

18 Proverbs 30:5-6