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# Revelation

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|  |    |
|--|----|
| Revelation 1: Introduction...                              | 1  |
| 1.0 Author and Date...                                     | 1  |
| 1.1 Tradition: John the apostle in the late 1st Century... | 1  |
| 1.2 Often Challenged on Authorship and Date...             | 1  |
| 1.3 Historical Background...                               | 2  |
| 2.0 Genre...   | 2  |
| 2.1 Gospel...  | 2  |
| 2.2 Letter...  | 2  |
| 2.3 Apocalypse...  | 3  |
| 3.0 Background of Symbolic Visions...                      | 4  |
| 3.1 Genesis...   | 4  |
| 3.2 Isaiah's Commissioning Vision (Isaiah 6)...            | 4  |
| 3.3 Ezekiel & Zechariah...                                 | 4  |
| 3.4 Daniel...  | 4  |
| 3.5 Cultic Writings...                                     | 4  |
| 4.0 Interpretations of the Bulk of the Visions...          | 5  |
| 4.1 Futurist...  | 5  |
| 4.2 Historicist...   | 5  |
| 4.3 Preterist...   | 5  |
| 4.4 Idealist...  | 5  |
| 4.5 Literary Critical (Skeptical)...                       | 5  |
| 4.6 Some Thoughts about Hermeneutics...                    | 5  |
| 5.0 Interpretation of the Millennium...                    | 6  |
| 5.1 Hyper-preterist...                                     | 6  |
| 5.2 Premillennial...                                       | 6  |
| 5.3 Postmillennial...                                      | 6  |
| 5.4 Amillennial...   | 7  |
| 5.5 Who's Right?...  | 7  |
| 6.0 Revelation 1...  | 7  |
| 6.1 Prologue (Rev 1:1-3)...                                | 7  |
| 6.2 Greetings and Doxology (Rev 1:4-8)...                  | 7  |
| 6.3 Introduction of the Vision (Rev 1:9-11)...             | 8  |
| 6.4 Seven Lampstands and Son of Man (Rev 1:12-16)...       | 8  |
| 6.5 John Commissioned (Rev 1:17-20)...                     | 8  |
| Revelation 2-3: Letters to the Seven Churches...           | 11 |
| 1.0 The Seven Churches...                                  | 11 |

---

---

|     |                               |    |
|-----|-------------------------------|----|
| 2.0 | The Letters...                | 12 |
| 2.1 | Structure...                  | 12 |
| 2.2 | Ephesus...                    | 12 |
| 2.3 | Smyrna...                     | 12 |
| 2.4 | Pergamum...                   | 13 |
| 2.5 | Thyatira...                   | 13 |
| 2.6 | Sardis...                     | 14 |
| 2.7 | Philadelphia...               | 14 |
| 2.8 | Laodicea...                   | 14 |
| 3.0 | Historicist Interpretation... | 15 |

## Revelation 4-5: Theophany and the Sealed Scroll... 17

|     |  |    |
|-----|--|----|
| 1.0 | Structure of the Book...                         | 17 |
| 1.1 | High Level Structure...                          | 17 |
| 1.2 | Chapters 4-11...                                 | 17 |
| 2.0 | Relationship of Revelation 4-5 to Ezekiel 1-2... | 18 |
| 2.1 | Survey of Ezekiel 1-2...                         | 18 |
| 2.2 | Survey of Revelation 4-5...                      | 19 |
| 2.3 | Literary Criticism...                            | 19 |
| 3.0 | God...   | 19 |
| 3.1 | Theophany...                                     | 19 |
| 3.2 | Doxologies...                                    | 20 |
| 4.0 | The Scroll and the Lamb/Lion...                  | 20 |
| 5.0 | Interpretive Issues...                           | 21 |

## Revelation 6-7: The Scroll Unsealed... 23

|     |   |    |
|-----|---|----|
| 1.0 | Overview of the Interpretive Schools...                             | 23 |
| 1.1 | Historicist...  | 23 |
| 1.2 | Preterist...  | 23 |
| 1.3 | Futurist...   | 24 |
| 1.4 | Idealist...   | 24 |
| 2.0 | First through Fourth Seal: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse...24 |    |
| 2.1 | The White Horse and Rider: Christ or Antichrist?...                 | 24 |
| 2.2 | The Horsemen as Representing History in General...                  | 25 |
| 3.0 | Fifth Seal: The Altar of Martyrs...                                 | 26 |

---

---

|     |   |           |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 4.0 | The Sixth Seal: Cosmological Signs...             | 27        |
| 5.0 | The Interludes...                                 | 27        |
| 6.0 | The Seventh Seal: Silence and the Trumpets...     | 28        |
| 7.0 | Sovereignty of God...                             | 28        |
|     | <b>Revelation 8-11: The Seven Trumpets...</b>     | <b>29</b> |
| 1.0 | Overview of the Interpretive Schools...           | 29        |
| 1.1 | Historicist...                                    | 29        |
| 1.2 | Preterist...                                      | 29        |
| 1.3 | Futurist...                                       | 30        |
| 1.4 | Idealist...                                       | 30        |
| 2.0 | The First Four Trumpets...                        | 30        |
| 3.0 | The Fifth Trumpet...                              | 31        |
| 4.0 | The Sixth Trumpet...                              | 32        |
| 5.0 | Summary of the Fifth and Sixth Trumpets...        | 33        |
| 6.0 | First Interlude: The Little Book...               | 33        |
| 7.0 | Second Interlude: The Two Witnesses...            | 34        |
| 8.0 | The Seventh Seal...                               | 36        |
| 9.0 | Questions to Ponder...                            | 37        |
|     | <b>Revelation 12: Woman, Child, and Dragon...</b> | <b>39</b> |
| 1.0 | Protevangelion...                                 | 39        |
| 2.0 | The Woman, Child, and Dragon...                   | 39        |
| 3.0 | The War in Heaven...                              | 40        |
| 4.0 | The War on Earth and Sea...                       | 41        |
| 5.0 | The Meta-narrative...                             | 41        |
| 6.0 | Other Interpretations...                          | 42        |
| 6.1 | Historicist...                                    | 42        |
| 6.2 | Preterist...                                      | 42        |
| 6.3 | Futurist...                                       | 43        |
| 7.0 | Road Map...                                       | 44        |

---

|   |   |           |
|---|---|-----------|
| 7.1   | The Letters (Rev 1-3)...                          | 44        |
| 7.2   | The Unsealing of the Book (Rev 4-11)...           | 44        |
| 7.3   | Women, Beasts, and Judgment (Rev 12-22)...        | 45        |
| <b>Revelation 13: The Two Beasts...</b>       |   | <b>47</b> |
| 1.0   | Background From Daniel...                         | 47        |
| 2.0   | Beast with Seven Heads and Ten Horns (13:1-10)... | 48        |
| 2.1   | Appearance (13:1-2)...                            | 48        |
| 2.2   | Wounded Head (13:3-4)...                          | 48        |
| 2.3   | Blasphemy and Authority (13:5-8)...               | 48        |
| 2.4   | Providence (13:9-10)...                           | 48        |
| 3.0   | Beast with Two Horns (13:11-18)...                | 49        |
| 3.1   | Appearance (13:11)...                             | 49        |
| 3.2   | Authority (13:12)...                              | 49        |
| 3.3   | Signs (13:13-15)...                               | 49        |
| 3.4   | The Mark of the Beast — 666 (13:16-18)...         | 49        |
| 4.0   | Other Interpretations...                          | 50        |
| 4.1   | Historicist...                                    | 50        |
| 4.2   | Preterist...                                      | 51        |
| 4.3   | Futurist...                                       | 51        |
| <b>Revelation 14: The Great Commission...</b> |   | <b>53</b> |
| 1.0   | Introduction...                                   | 53        |
| 2.0   | The Lamb with the 144,000 (14:1-5)...             | 53        |
| 3.0   | Three Angels...                                   | 54        |
| 3.1   | The Eternal Gospel (14:6-7)...                    | 54        |
| 3.2   | Fall of Babylon (14:8)...                         | 54        |
| 3.3   | Judgment (14:9-12)...                             | 55        |
| 4.0   | A Voice of Blessing (14:13)...                    | 55        |
| 5.0   | The Harvests...                                   | 56        |
| 5.1   | Use of the “Harvest” Metaphor by Jesus...         | 56        |
| 5.2   | Reaping by the Son of Man (14:14-16)...           | 56        |
| 5.3   | Harvest of the Grapes (14:17-20)...               | 57        |
| 6.0   | Summary...  | 57        |
| 7.0   | Other Interpretations...                          | 58        |

---

|  |  |           |
|--|--|-----------|
| 7.1  | Historicist...   | 58        |
| 7.2  | Preterist...   | 58        |
| 7.3  | Futurist...  | 58        |
| 7.4  | Idealist...  | 58        |
| <b>Revelation 15-16: The Seven Bowls of Wrath...</b> |  | <b>61</b> |
| 1.0  | The Heavenly Scene...                                      | 61        |
| 2.0  | The Bowls of God's Wrath Compared to the Trumpets...       | 62        |
| 3.0  | Armageddon...  | 63        |
| 4.0  | Other Interpretations...                                   | 63        |
| 4.1  | Historicist...   | 63        |
| 4.2  | Preterist...   | 63        |
| 4.3  | Futurist...  | 64        |
| <b>Revelation 17-18: The Whore of Babylon...</b>     |  | <b>65</b> |
| 1.0  | Who or What is the Whore of Babylon?...                    | 65        |
| 2.0  | The Whore of Babylon...                                    | 66        |
| 2.1  | The Whore Introduced (Rev 17:1-6)...                       | 66        |
| 2.2  | The Beast Interpreted (Rev 17:7-14)...                     | 66        |
| 2.3  | The Whore in the Hands of the Beast (Rev 17:15-18)...      | 67        |
| 3.0  | The Destruction of Babylon...                              | 67        |
| 3.1  | Fallen is Babylon (18:1-3)...                              | 67        |
| 3.2  | Come Out (18:4-8)...                                       | 67        |
| 3.3  | The Grief of the Kings and Merchants (18:9-20)...          | 68        |
| 3.4  | Destruction Symbolized by an Angel (18:21-24)...           | 68        |
| <b>Revelation 19-20: The Millennium...</b>           |  | <b>69</b> |
| 1.0  | Definitions...   | 69        |
| 2.0  | Literary Structure...                                      | 70        |
| 3.0  | Celebrations in Heaven...                                  | 71        |
| 3.1  | The Destruction of Babylon (Rev 19:1-5)...                 | 71        |
| 3.2  | Wedding Celebration of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-10)...           | 71        |
| 4.0  | Defeat of the Beast and False Prophet<br>(Rev 19:11-21)... | 71        |

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---

|   |  |    |
|---|--|----|
| 5.0   | Defeat of the Dragon (Rev 20:1-10)...              | 72 |
| 5.1   | Satan Bound (20:1-3)...                            | 72 |
| 5.2   | The First Resurrection and Second Death(20:4-6)... | 73 |
| 5.3   | Satan Cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:7-10)...  | 75 |
| 5.4   | Amillennialism...                                  | 76 |
| 5.5   | Postmillennialism...                               | 80 |
| 5.6   | Premillennialism...                                | 80 |
| 6.0   | Sorting Through the Confusion...                   | 81 |
| 7.0   | White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15)...            | 82 |
| 8.0   | Isaiah...  | 82 |
| 8.1   | Isaiah 2:1-5...                                    | 82 |
| 8.2   | Isaiah 65:16-25...                                 | 83 |
| <b>Revelation 21-22: The New Heaven and New Earth... 85</b> |  |    |
| 1.0   | The New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21:1-8)...       | 85 |
| 2.0   | New Jerusalem (Rev 21:9-22:5)...                   | 86 |
| 3.0   | Epilog (Rev 22:6-20)...                            | 87 |
| <b>Epilog... 89</b>   |  |    |
| 1.0   | An Block Diagram of Revelation...                  | 89 |
| 2.0   | Interpretive Issues...                             | 90 |
| 2.1   | The Letters...                                     | 90 |
| 2.2   | The Seals and Trumpets...                          | 90 |
| 2.3   | The Beasts...                                      | 91 |
| 2.4   | Eternity...  | 91 |
| <b>Bibliography... 93</b>                                   |  |    |
| 1.0   | Bible Translations...                              | 93 |
| 2.0   | Books...   | 93 |
| 3.0   | Journal Articles...                                | 94 |
| 4.0   | Other...   | 95 |
| <b>Index... 1</b>   |  |    |



# Revelation 1: Introduction

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**Introduce the Biblical, Cultural, Historical,  
and Literary Context of the book of  
Revelation**

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## 1.0 Author and Date

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### 1.1 Tradition: John the apostle in the late 1st Century

See Justin Martyr [d. 165], Clement of Alexandria [d. c. 220], Hippolytus [d. c. 236], Origen [d. c. 254] for authorship and Irenaeus [185] for the date.<sup>1</sup> The author identifies himself simply as “John”.

### 1.2 Often Challenged on Authorship and Date

#### 1.2.1 Authorship

The Greek of Revelation is much less refined and grammatical than that of Gospel and Letters of John. It is unlikely that the same individual was solely responsible for both. The text of Revelation only identifies its author as “John”, without specifying which one. If John the apostle wrote both, then perhaps Revelation is in his own writing style while the Gospels and Letters were filtered through an amanuensis (compare with John 21:24-25 which refers to John in the third person). Since John was in exile on Patmos when he wrote Revelation, it would be likely that he would be cut off from such assistance.

#### 1.2.2 Date

Some interpreters argue for a pre-70 AD date (before the destruction of Jerusalem). This is not based on any tradition or explicit claims of the text, but on the presupposition that the text is predictive of the events surrounding 70 AD, the so-called preterist<sup>2</sup> interpretation. We will see in our study that this approach is very unlikely to be correct.

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1. pp. 404, 406, Johnson, *Expositors Bible Commentary*

2. From, preterit, or past tense

### **1.2.3 Conclusion**

For the purposes of this study, we will assume that John the Apostle wrote Revelation near the end of the first century.

### **1.3 Historical Background**

After the close of Acts, Rome burned in AD 64. Nero found a convenient scapegoat in the Christians (it has been alleged that Nero burned Rome himself). The remainder of the decade saw Rome in civil war, and the Jewish War culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70.

The break between Judaism and Christianity is generally considered to be complete after that (compare with Paul teaching in the synagogues; around AD 90, the Jews formulated curses against heresy, including Christianity, at Jamnia). Toward the end of the century, Emperor Domitian is reputed to have persecuted Christians, although the extent of that persecution is debated. It was Domitian who Irenaeus says exiled John to Patmos (the text of Revelation is somewhat ambiguous on this point saying only “I ... was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony about Jesus” [Rev 1:9, NET]).

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## **2.0 Genre**

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Revelation is of mixed genre.

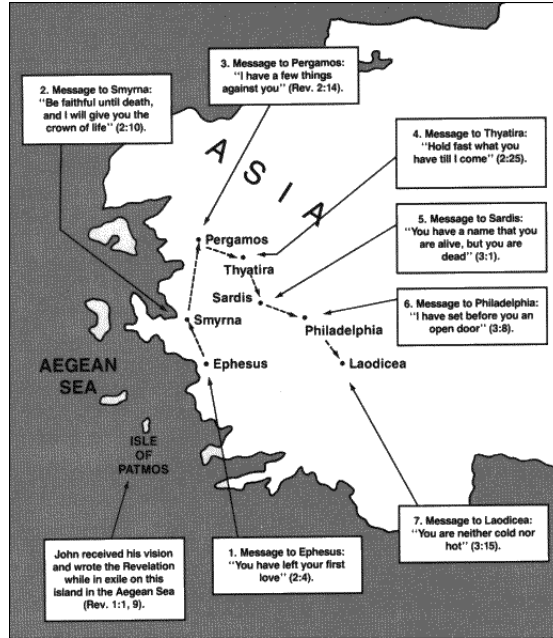
### **2.1 Gospel**

Rev. 1:1-3 opens somewhat like a Gospel. Compare “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” with “This is the record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ” [Mt 1:1] or “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ” [Mk 1:1]. In a very real sense, Revelation is a recounting of the Gospel story: see Rev. 12:1-5 especially, which is only a thinly veiled telling of the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus. Revelation also shares with Luke and Acts having an introduction like a letter, identifying sender and recipient but subsequent to chapter 3, like Luke and Acts, does not address the recipients directly again.

### **2.2 Letter**

After the prologue, Rev 1:1-3, that refers to John in the third person, John speaks in the first person. He opens the book as though it were a letter although the bulk of the book (chapters 4-22) are not in the form of a letter. This is not surprising as John is isolated on Patmos from his home community. If were in Asia, it would seem a little silly to write a letter to people he sees every day.

Chapters 2-3 are short messages addressed to seven different churches, addressed in the sequence one would follow moving from church to church, making the passage a sort of circular letter.<sup>1</sup>



### 2.3 Apocalypse

After chapter 3, John does not address the recipients again, nor does the book close with the greetings typical of a letter. These chapters, the bulk of Revelation, are what is often called an apocalypse. The word tends to be used in many senses, which can be rather confusing.

- The Greek word *apocalupsis* means revelation, what is revealed, disclosure<sup>2</sup>.
- When applied to Biblical, cultic, and other religious literature, it refers to a particular mode of revelation: symbolic dream or vision accompanied by partial interpretation.
- Because apocalyptic literature often involves judgements and destruction, it is often applied to catastrophic events such as the Mt. St. Helen eruption, Hurricanes, and especially global cataclysm, such as nuclear war or runaway greenhouse effects.
- Often used to refer specifically to end-of-the-world type events (parousia, asteroid collision, etc.).

For the purposes of these studies, apocalypse will be used to refer to the mode of revelation without any particular implication about the content. The content will be allowed to speak for itself.

1. Map from Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1996). *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps & charts : Old and New Testaments*. (Rev. and updated ed.).

2. Swansen, *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages: Greek*

The apocalyptic form was a popular one in cultic literature. In its cultic form, apocalypses were written in the name of a great hero of the past. Thus we have Apocalypses of Enoch, the Sibyls, Shem, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, Ezra, Baruch, Abraham, Adam, Elijah, and Daniel.<sup>1</sup> Revelation contrasts with these in a very stark manner. John addresses his audience as himself. He is well known to his audience, and so doesn't even bother to identify himself as more than "John" (a rather common name of the time). Whereas the cult leaders had to pass off their apocalypse as some recently discovered ancient text, John claims his as his own. One should be very cautious about using the non-canonical apocalypses, therefore, in trying to understand the imagery and circumstances of Revelation.

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### **3.0 Background of Symbolic Visions**

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I highly recommend that you read some of the following passages for Biblical background of the symbolic visions in Revelation. We will refer back to many of these as we work our way through the book.

#### **3.1 Genesis**

The Joseph stories have several dream...interpretation passages.

- Gen 37:5-10 - visions of sheaths of grain; sun, moon, stars
- Gen 40:5-23 - visions of butler and baker
- Gen 41:1-37 - pharaoh's visions of ears of grain and cattle

#### **3.2 Isaiah's Commissioning Vision (Isaiah 6)**

#### **3.3 Ezekiel & Zechariah**

#### **3.4 Daniel**

- Dan 2 - Nebuchadnezzar's dream
- Dan 7 - Four Beasts
- Dan 8 - Ram and Goat
- Dan 11-12 - Battles of Kings

#### **3.5 Cultic Writings**

Apocalypse was a favorite form of various early cults. Enoch was popular in the Dead Sea Scrolls. See "Apocalypse" on page 3 above where this was already discussed.

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1. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature & Testaments*.

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## 4.0 Interpretations of the Bulk of the Visions

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Here I will just overview the basic vocabulary. How these various interpretations play out will be sketched in more detail when we cover the relevant passages. Interpretations of the millennium is orthogonal to these schemes and will be discussed in the next section.

### 4.1 Futurist

Everything after chapter 3 is a prediction of the events surrounding the end times (usually, the 7 years prior to the inauguration of the Millennium -- called the tribulation). This includes, but is not limited to Dispensationalism.

### 4.2 Historicist

Everything, including chapters 2 and 3, are predictions of events throughout history, especially of the church age. This was the approach of the reformers.

### 4.3 Preterist

Everything after chapter 3, but before the last few chapters, predict events surrounding the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Some see events surrounding the Jewish revolt of AD 135, or even the fall of Rome. The difference between Historicist and Preterist is one of degree: how wide a period of history is specifically covered.

Some extreme “hyper-preterists” (also called full preterists) even include the final chapters of Revelation that nearly all other interpreters believe refer to the end times. This heretical view also denies physical resurrection since the passages everyone else takes as referring to the resurrection must be spiritualized to refer to events in AD 70.

### 4.4 Idealist

The bulk of the material between chapters 3 and the clearly eschatological chapters do not refer to specific historical events, but to general principles (or ideals). The images are often described as spiritual images.

### 4.5 Literary Critical (Skeptical)

This approach treats Revelation and the cultic apocalypses as a single kind. John is regarded as either creating the work out of whole cloth, or plagiarizing from others who had done so themselves. This is the view of those who do not regard the Bible as scripture, and won't be discussed in as great detail as the other approaches.

### 4.6 Some Thoughts about Hermeneutics

The problem with all these approaches is the tendency to decide on one, then try to force-fit every passage into that mold. Rather, I think we need to use these labels descriptively, rather than prescriptively, and let each passage and image speak for itself first, acknowledging the tension when it seems two passages suggest differing interpretations.

On the whole, my opinion about the interpretation of Revelation would be described as Idealist, although the other orthodox views<sup>1</sup> make valid points that Idealists are sometimes reluctant to admit. Historicists are often right to see parallels between history and Revelation's images. This is not to say that the Revelation passages are predicting those events particularly, but expressing spiritual truths that play out throughout history. An analogy would be: Ben Franklin was not prophesying about "Honest Abe" Lincoln when he said "Honesty is the best policy", but Abraham Lincoln can be said to have illustrated the statement's truth.

What was said about Historicist interpretation is also true of Preterist interpretation. Moreover, since the events of AD 70 were in the recent past for John and his readers, we may well see references to those events, not as predictions of those events, but as those events being archetypes of spiritual principles that will play out throughout history.

Even if one of the futurist, historicist, or preterist interpretation is "the" correct one, the idealist has truth to contribute because those specific events, whether in history or end times, illustrate spiritual truths that have application throughout history.

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## **5.0 Interpretation of the Millennium**

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To a degree, interpretation of the millennium in Revelation is independent of the interpretation of the rest of Revelation. One can find nearly all combinations of interpretations. The basic terms will be defined here, but will be discussed in more detail when we reach the relevant passages.

### **5.1 Hyper-preterist**

This heretical view spiritualizes the resurrection and regards all prophecy in the Bible as already fulfilled by 70 AD. See <http://www.jeff-jackson.com/new/religion/eschatology/PhysicalResurrection.html> for a discussion of the Biblical doctrine of resurrection in contrast to the full preterist view.

### **5.2 Premillennial**

Christ will return before the millennium, and reign on earth for 1000 years. Dispensationalism is a modern form of this, but other variations existed as early as the 2nd century (e.g., Justin Martyr). Dispensationalism of one form or another is most common in modern evangelical Protestant churches.

### **5.3 Postmillennial**

Christ will return after the millennium. The millennium is either the whole church age, ending with the world being more or less converted to Christianity, or a future "silver" age (in contrast to the eternal state being the "golden" age) during which the world is more or less converted to Christianity. The latter is my view. This has some popularity in Reformed circles, often combined with "partial" preterism. It was the view of the Puritans.

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1. The full preterist and literary critical approaches are well beyond the pale of orthodox.

#### 5.4 Amillennial

The millennium is the whole church age, but there is no general conversion to Christianity of the whole world (a pessimistic amillennialism, in contrast to some forms of post-millennialism sometimes called optimistic amillennialism). This is the interpretation most common in Reformed (combined with idealistic interpretation) and Roman Catholic (combined with idealistic or “partial” preterist) circles.

#### 5.5 Who’s Right?

Albertus Pieters wrote:

None of these schools of interpretation can claim any monopoly on scholarship or faith. Each group numbers many fine scholars and devout Christian believers. Therefore complete certainty in regard to the interpretation of the Apocalypse is not to be had. It is our duty to do the best we can, to study the various systems and accept the view that seems to us right, but always with a certain amount of reservation and of respect for the opinions of others.<sup>1</sup>

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### 6.0 Revelation 1

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#### 6.1 Prologue (Rev 1:1-3)

**John.** John is referred to in the third person: a sort of “publisher’s forward”.

**Blessed is the one who reads... blessed are those who hear.** In the culture of the time most Christians would be functionally illiterate. The contrast in number reflects the service of the time: one reads (aloud), everyone else hears.

#### 6.2 Greetings and Doxology (Rev 1:4-8)

**From John.** Opening like a letter. Compares to Paul’s letters. Addressed to seven churches. The number seven is very prominent in the book. “Grace and peace” is Paul’s customary greeting too: it combines the common Greek greeting (*charis*) with the common Semitic greeting (*shalom*).

**He who is ... Seven spirits ... Jesus Christ.** Revelation is the most explicitly trinitarian book in the New Testament. Like Paul, John cites the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (though Paul usually focuses on the Father and Son (“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!” Rom 1:7). “The seven spirits” -- no where else in Scripture, except Revelation, is the Holy Spirit described this way. In Revelation, “seven” is a highly symbolic number (of completeness or perfection). Some such symbolic sense is surely meant here.

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1. *The Lamb, the Woman and the Dragon*, p. 42, quoted in Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views*.

**Clouds.** Rev 1:7 (Look! He is [coming]<sup>1</sup> with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him,  
and all the tribes on the earth will mourn because of him.  
This will certainly come to pass! Amen.)

Verse 7 has allusions to Dan 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10. In Daniel, the one “like a son of man” is coming to God on the throne in heaven on clouds, not returning to Earth. Jesus interprets this in Mt 26:64 when he tells the priests: “But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.” That is, it is fulfilled on the church’s very continued existence. Similarly, Zechariah 12:10 reads, “I will pour out upon the kingship of David and the population of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look to me, the one they have pierced. They will lament for him as one laments for an only son, and there will be a bitter cry for him like the bitter cry for a firstborn.” That is, the mourning is not because of judgment, but because of a pouring out of grace, which happened when Christ was crucified and raised from the dead. The majority of interpreters, however, see a reference to the parousia here, but I just can’t justify that from scripture.

**Alpha and Omega.** God identifies himself as Alpha and Omega (A and Z, so to speak). Jesus also will make claim to be the first and the last.

**The one who is.** This is probably a play on the meaning of YHWH or “I am” (Ex 3:14-15).

### 6.3 Introduction of the Vision (Rev 1:9-11)

**Tribulation.** “Persescution” [Rev 1:9] is the same word translated “tribulation” elsewhere. This is overlooked by dispensationalists, who see the tribulation as the seven year period before the second coming. Note the kingdom is also shared already: the kingdom of God is a present reality now.

### 6.4 Seven Lampstands and Son of Man (Rev 1:12-16)

**Son of man.** This alludes to Dan 7:13 again. It was Jesus’ usual self-identification. His clothing may be high priestly (Exo 28:4). The hair alludes back to Daniel’s description of God (Dan 7:9). The firey eyes and metallic feet allude to the mysterious figure in Dan 10:5-6). Stars are associated with angels (Job 38:7) and with those who lead people to righteousness (Dan 12:3).

### 6.5 John Commissioned (Rev 1:17-20)

**First and Last.** Jesus makes claim to Diety: first and last, compare with Alpha and Omega. He also presents the basic Gospel core: I was dead... I am alive -- forever”.

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1. NET has “returning” here, but “coming” which most translations have, is more accurate.



**The Commission.** John was commissioned to write “what you saw, what is, and what will be after these things.”, that is, all history from the incarnation of Christ to the eschatology (John’s lifetime -- “what you saw” -- and forward). This is the problem with Futurist and Preterist views in that they focus too exclusively on the end times and the first century.

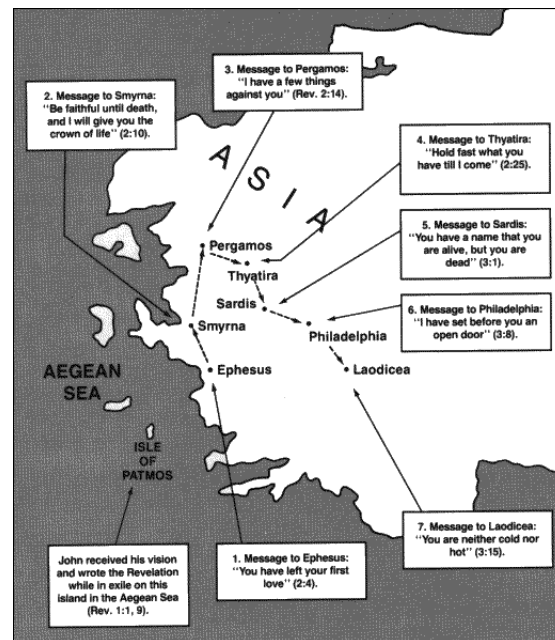


# Revelation 2-3: Letters to the Seven Churches

Jesus directs John to write letters to seven churches in Asia before beginning the apocalypse proper.

## 1.0 The Seven Churches

Located in the Roman Province of Asia (modern western Turkey). The order of the cities follows the path one would use to visit them all.<sup>1</sup>



1. Map from Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1996). *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps & charts : Old and New Testaments*. (Rev. and updated ed.).

## 2.0 The Letters

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### 2.1 Structure

Each letter has a common structure:

- Address
- Description of Christ
- Blame and/or Praise
- Threat and/or Admonition
- Exhortation and Promise<sup>1</sup>

### 2.2 Ephesus

One should go through the outline above for each church. Beyond that, I'm just going to make notes about what I find to be the more interesting points. While it would be interesting to go through this phrase by phrase (and I encourage you to do so on your own), we need to maintain a reasonable pace.

**Ephesus.** Capital of the Province of Asia.

**Angels.** Why would John be addressing spiritual beings? “Who are the angels? There is no totally satisfactory answer to this question.”<sup>2</sup> The Greek word can also mean “messenger” (Luke 7:24; 9:52; James 2:25). My opinion is that the text makes much more sense if it is taken to indicate a human, perhaps a preacher (hence, a messenger from God). Most commentaries would probably disagree, but then struggle to make sense of what that would mean.

**Nicolaitans.** “The Nicolaitans were a sect (sometimes associated with Nicolaus, one of the seven original deacons in the church in Jerusalem according to Acts 6:5) that apparently taught that Christians could engage in immoral behavior with impunity.”<sup>3</sup>

The identification with that Nicolaus is probably nothing more than a guess.

### 2.3 Smyrna

**Tribulation.** Tribulation (distress, etc.) is something suffered in 95 AD: not an eschatological tribulation.

**“Those who call themselves Jews and really are not, but are a synagogue of Satan”.** This could be either Judaizing Christians like Paul struggled with, or post-Jamnia ethnic Jews in conflict with the Christians. (Around AD 90, the Jews formulated curses against heretics and Christians at Jamnia).

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1. List is adapted from NAB footnotes

2. Johnson. p. 430. *Expositor's Bible Commentary* Vol 12.

3. NET note Rev 2:6

**Ten days.** I would suggest that time references like this are intended to be symbolic in Revelation, this one as a way of stating a relative short period of time. This will be returned to later, so I will not dwell on it here.

**Second death.** A metaphorical way of referring to damnation. It is used here in such a way that presupposes the readers would already be familiar with the metaphor.

## 2.4 Pergamum

**Satan's Throne.** Perhaps the white marble altar erected and dedicated to Zeus by Eumenes II (197-160 BC).<sup>1</sup>

**Teaching of Balaam.** They were probably not looking to Balaam himself as their spiritual leader, but following the same sort of teaching. This particular teaching is distinct from the Nicolaitans (v. 15).

**Which thing I Hate.** This phrase was copied from the description of the teaching of the Nicolaitans in Rev 2:6. It is not found in the earlier manuscripts. In modern translations, it is found only in the NKJV. KJV-only zealots often point to "omissions" like this in modern translations as evidence that they are corrupt: covering over God's hate for the Nicolaitan's practices. If that were the intent of modern translators, they needed to delete it from Rev 2:6 well. None do. Such "missing phrases" are nearly always redundant like this.

**If not, I will come quickly.** Here, Jesus' coming does not appear to be eschatological. Compare with similar phrases in the letters to the other churches.

## 2.5 Thyatira

**Jezebel.** The name is a reference to Jezebel in the Old Testament, who introduced pagan practices to Israel (1 Kings 16:31; 18:1-5; 19:1-3; 21:5-24<sup>2</sup>). Jezebel was probably not her actual name.

**Her Children.** This probably means her followers, not those she has literally given birth to.

**Morning Star.** This is rather enigmatic. The commentaries make some guesses. An important hermeneutic principle is that it is not necessary to come up with a good sounding meaning for every idiom, figure of speech, and symbol in Revelation. It is better to leave such mysteries open rather than force fit everything into some interpretive scheme. Whatever is meant, it is clearly meant to be something good.

**Hear What the Spirit Says.** This is very trinitarian. The Spirit is identified with Christ who as already been identified with God.

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1. NAB

2. NET

## 2.6 Sardis

**Like a Thief.** This suggests the unexpectedness their judgment. Compare What Jesus said in Mt 24:42-44.

**White Clothing.** Colors are significant in Revelation. In general, white symbolizes purity and sinlessness in the Bible (Isaiah 1:18). In the opening chapters of Revelation, God's hair is white as wool or snow (Rev 1:14), a white stone is a reward for the one who conquers (Rev 2:17), white clothing is worn because "they are worthy" or because they conquer/overcome (Rev 3:4-5). It's a symbol worth paying attention to, especially when we come to the seven seals in a few weeks.

**I will never erase his name.** On first blush this seems to suggest the possibility of a name being erased. However, we could think of the act of erasing as a symbolic act representing the reprobate, without suggesting there was a salvation that was had, then lost. Moreover, the focus is on the elect, not the reprobate, so we should be extra cautious about over-interpreting the symbolism.

## 2.7 Philadelphia

**Key of David.** A symbol of the authority of the Davidic king. See Isaiah 22:20-25. Verse 22 is virtually quoted here.

**A Pillar in the Temple of my God.** The temple is a symbolic temple, not an eschatological building in Jerusalem (a person is a pillar). See other discussions of the temple on <http://www.jeff-jackson.com>.

**The New Jerusalem.** The descent of New Jerusalem from the heavens occurs in Rev 21:10ff. The reference here seems to presuppose the readers already knew about this. It is likely that the first century church had teaching regarding this directly from the apostles even before the book of Revelation, though Revelation is the only scripture that happens to tell us today about it.

## 2.8 Laodicea

This letter plays off several cultural items specific to Laodicea.

**Cold nor Hot.** Water from the hot springs of Hierapolis were tepid by the time they reached Laodicea.

**White Clothing.** Laodicea was well known for its glossy black wool.

**Eye Salve.** Laodicea was also famous for "Phrygian powder", an eye ointment.

### 3.0 Historicist Interpretation

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The Reformers and early Dispensationalists believed that the letters to the seven churches were not literal letters to the seven churches in Asia of AD 95, but to churches of seven different periods of church history.

- Ephesus: the apostolic church AD 30-100
- Smyrna: the persecuted church AD 100-313
- Pergamos: the compromised church AD 313-500
- Thyatira: the papal church AD 500-1500
- Sardis: the reformation church AD 1500-1700
- Philadelphia: the missionary church AD 1700-present
- Laodicea: the liberal church of the present<sup>1</sup>

We may criticize this approach on several points:

- The correspondences are easily forced: there's nothing that stands out as being unambiguously about the church of a particular age.
- There are churches like each of the seven in every age.
- Genre-wise, they are letters, not apocalypses, and so the natural reading would be that they are addressed to who they claim to be addressed to.
- If the letters were not truly addressed to the addressees and their actual situations, then they would have been offensive: consider if I wrote a letter addressed to you and published it in the newspaper accusing you of serious sins, but then claimed it was just a symbol for some future person a thousand years from now.
- The cultural references, especially in the letter to Laodicea, make more sense for that specific historical time and place.
- There is no explicit description of who the Nicolaitans were, implying that they were a well-known problem in the churches addressed, and thus citing them by name was sufficient.

Now, this is not to say the Reformers were totally off base. They were not wrong to see papal Rome reflected in the condemnations of the church of Thyatira, nor were they wrong to see themselves as “a few individuals in Sardis who have not stained their clothes”. The diversity of the seven churches insures that every church of every age will see some of themselves in one or more of them. Mick Welton outlined his lesson with eight points: the seven churches and “You”.

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1. *Revelation: Four Views*





# Revelation 4-5: Theophany and the Sealed Scroll

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Now we begin the Apocalypse proper. It begins with a glorious vision of God in Heaven.

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## 1.0 Structure of the Book

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### 1.1 High Level Structure

We've identified some high level structure in the book already. Chapters 1-3 are letters addressed to specific churches while chapters 4-22 are the apocalypse proper. In the apocalypse, the churches are not addressed using the form of a letter. Twenty-two chapters is a substantially sized book, so it is prudent to identify more easily processed and digested sections. Chapter 12 forms a significant division. We'll deal with that when we get there. For now, we'll deal with chapters 4-11 as a unit.

### 1.2 Chapters 4-11

We may outline this section thusly:

#### 1.2.1 Chapter 4 -- Theophany

#### 1.2.2 Chapter 5 -- The Sealed Book and the Lamb

#### 1.2.3 Chapter 6-8:1 -- The Seven Seals Opened

- 6:1-2 -- Seal 1: White Horse
- 6:3-4 -- Seal 2: Red Horse
- 6:5-6 -- Seal 3: Black Horse
- 6:7-8 -- Seal 4: Pale Horse
- 6:9-11 -- Seal 5: Altar
- 6:12-19 -- Seal 6: Earthquake

- 7:1-8 -- 144,000 Sealed
- 7:9-17 -- Great Multitude of Every Nation
- 8:1 -- Seal 7: Silence

### 1.2.4 Chapter 8:2-11:19 -- The Seven Trumpets Blown

- 8:7 -- Trumpet 1: Hail and Fire
- 8:8-9 -- Trumpet 2: Great Mountain
- 8:10-11 -- Trumpet 3: Wormwood
- 8:12 -- Trumpet 4: Darkness
- 8:13 -- Woe Woe Woe
- 9:1-12 -- Trumpet 5: Locusts for 5 Months
- 9:13-21 -- Trumpet 6: Three Plagues
- 10:1-11 -- Little Scroll
- 11:1-14 -- Two Witnesses for 1260 Days
- 11:15-19 -- Trumpet 7: Kingdom of our Lord

### 1.2.5 Discussion

The two sequences of seven (seals and trumpets) share a distinct pattern. The first four and last three are distinct groupings within each, and there are two interludes between six and seven. Although we have a clear break after chapter 11, chapters 4-11 have many common symbols and references.

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## 2.0 Relationship of Revelation 4-5 to Ezekiel 1-2

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### 2.1 Survey of Ezekiel 1-2

Read through the following passages from Ezekiel 1-2:

- Ezekiel 1:1-11
- Ezekiel 1:22-31
- Ezekiel 2:1-2
- Ezekiel 2:9-10

We may highlight a number of phrases:

- Ezekiel 1:2 - “the heavens opened”
- Ezekiel 1:4 - “I watched ... flashing fire ... glowing substance”
- Ezekiel 1:5 - “four living creatures”
- Ezekiel 1:6 - “Each had four faces and four wings”
- Ezekiel 1:10 - “face of a man ... a lion ... an ox ... an eagle”
- Ezekiel 1:22 - “a platform [dome], glittering awesomely like ice stretched out over their heads”

- Ezekiel 1:23 - “a throne made of sapphire... on the throne ... a man”
- Ezekiel 1:25 - “a voice”
- Ezekiel 1:28 - “light all around him was like a rainbow”
- Ezekiel 2:2 - “a wind [spirit] came into me”
- Ezekiel 2:9 - “a written scroll”
- Ezekiel 2:10 - “He unrolled it ... it had writing on the front and back ... lamentation, mourning and woe”

## **2.2 Survey of Revelation 4-5**

Now we may look at revelation 4-5 and see many parallels as well as distinct contrasts.

- Revelation 4:1 - “I looked” cf. Ezekiel 1:4; “a door standing open in heaven” cf. Ezekiel 1:1; “the first voice” cf. Ezekiel 1:25
- Revelation 4:2 - “in the Spirit” cf. Ezekiel 2:2; “a throne ... someone seated on it” cf. Ezekiel 1:23
- Revelation 4:3 - “jasper ... carnelian ... emerald” cf. Ezekiel 1:23
- Revelation 4:5 - “flashes of lightning ... flaming torches” cf. Ezekiel 1:4
- Revelation 4:6 - “Sea of glass, like crystal” cf. Ezekiel 1:22; “four living creatures” cf. Ezekiel 1:5
- Revelation 4:7 - “a lion .. an ox ... a man’s ... an eagle flying” cf. Ezekiel 1:10
- Revelation 4:8 - “six wings” cf. Ezekiel 1:6, Isaiah 6:2
- Revelation 5:1 - “a scroll” cf. Ezekiel 2:9; “written on the front and back” cf. Ezekiel 2:10
- Revelation 5:4 - “no one ... was able to open the scroll” cf. Ezekiel 2:10

## **2.3 Literary Criticism**

The skeptic would assume that John is inventing his account of a vision (i.e., that it is a work of fiction) and has borrowed heavily from Ezekiel to do so. To those congenial to such a view, the parallels might even seem as evidence of same. While the two accounts are written by two separate persons, Ezekiel and John, over six centuries apart, it is the same God who “scripted” both visions. The subtle, and not so subtle, differences between the two scenes reminds us that the visions are not simple literal views of objective reality, but symbolic representations. While there may well be four living creatures in front of God’s throne, their actual appearance (if that is even a meaningful term for spiritual beings!) is not likely to be like either of these two descriptions. We have evidence of neither literary borrowing nor contradiction here.

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## **3.0 God**

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### **3.1 Theophany**

Theophany is from the Greek for “appearance of god”. Anchor Bible Dictionary defines it as “the self-disclosure of God”. Such appearances display through visual and/

or auditory symbols something of the attributes of God, usually focusing on his awesome power. The chief Canaanite gods, such as Baal, were usually storm gods. It is thus especially significant when Yahweh is accompanied by weather phenomena in the Old Testament as it underscores that he is the one in control

### **3.2 Doxologies**

Accompanying the theophany in Revelation is a crescendo of five doxologies. An ever increasing number of beings praise God:

- Revelation 4:8 - four living creatures praise him in the third person
- Revelation 4:11 - twenty-four elders praise him directly in the second person
- Revelation 5:9-10 - both the living creatures and the twenty-four elders praise him directly in the second person
- Revelation 5:12 - the angels praise him in the third person
- Revelation 5:13 - all creatures in creation praise him in the third person

We see many attributes of God praised:

- Holiness
- Power
- Eternal Existence
- Worthiness of Glory, Honor, and Power
- Creator
- Will
- Worthiness to open the seals
- Sacrifice
- Elector
- Worth of Power, Wealth, Wisdom, Might, Honor, Glory, Praise
- Dominion

### **4.0 The Scroll and the Lamb/Lion**

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The scroll parallels the scroll in Ezekiel. Each has writing on both sides and reveals “lamentation, mourning, and woe” (Ezekiel 2:10, cf. Revelation 8:13). A significant contrast though is its being opened. In Ezekiel 2:10, it is unrolled immediately; “He unrolled it before me”. In Revelation, it seemingly can’t be opened. “But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or look into it” [Revelation 5:3].

I would suggest that it is because the scroll reveals more than just woe. Not to get ahead of ourselves here, but see the interlude between the sixth and seventh seals and the seventh trumpet. There is grace revealed in the opening of the scroll, and that could only be brought about by the justification brought about by the sacrifice of the Christ.

You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals  
because you were killed,  
and at the cost of your own blood you have purchased for God  
persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation.  
You have appointed them as a kingdom and priests to serve our God,  
and they will reign on the earth. [ Revelation 5:9b-10 ]

“New” songs (Revelation 5:9a) in the Old Testament are usually in celebration of God intervening in the world, especially in a “fresh and exciting way”.<sup>1</sup> They are always praise songs (doxologies).

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## 5.0 Interpretive Issues

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Issues raised by the various interpretive schemes intrude little in this passage. This part of the visions describes the circumstances under which John is to receive the rest of the vision, and so is rooted in John’s present time. Dispensationalists tend to identify the twenty-four elders as the resurrected church, but that is just one of at least a dozen other speculations about their identity.

Such speculation is not particularly fruitful as there is no concrete evidence of their identity. We should simply accept that they are there for purpose of proclaiming God’s praise. Since we find twelve and its multiples associated with God-ordained organization (twelve tribes, twelve governors, twelve apostles, twenty-four groups of twelve musicians in the temple, etc.) their number may express something of God’s government and sovereignty.

Another hint at trinitarianism appears at Revelation 5:8 where the living creatures and twenty-four elders fall down before the lamb in what appears to be an act of worship.

Revelation 5:10 suggested a millennial interpretation: “You have appointed them as a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” What is the timeframe of the church’s reigning? As translated by nearly all translations, it is future tense “they will reign”. Postmillennialists would identify this as a future millennium when most of the earth has been converted to Christianity. Premillennialists would identify it as a future millennium inaugurated by the return of Jesus. Amillennialists must spiritualize the meaning of “reign” to mean “a spiritual reign over their own spirits (no longer as slaves of sin) in the spiritual kingdom at the present time”.<sup>2</sup> The problem with this is the use of future tense suggests something that is not yet so. Unfortunately, the textual evidence is actually split between future and present tense.

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1. Psalms 33, 40, 95, 98, 144, 149, Isaiah 42:10. See NET notes on “new song” as well.

2. On Rev 5:10 in *Revelation: Four Views*.



# Revelation 6-7: The Scroll Unsealed

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**We will overview the interpretive schools of thought regarding the meaning of the seals, and examine some debates in more detail.**

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## 1.0 Overview of the Interpretive Schools<sup>1</sup>

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### 1.1 Historicist

The visions accompanying the seals represent events beginning with the reign of Domitian (d. AD 96) and tracing the decline of the empire through the fourth and fifth centuries when the Goths and Vandals invaded. In this scheme, the first seal, the white horse that conquers, represents the “five good emperors” of AD 96-180 that expanded Rome by Conquest; The second seal, the red horse that brings war, represents the period of civil war in Rome in AD 180-286; and so on through the silence of the seventh seal, a half hour of silence, which represents the interval between Constantine’s victory over Licinius in AD 324 and the invasion of Alaric in AD 395.

### 1.2 Preterist

The seals represent the war with Rome in AD 66-70 and the deprivations that accompanied that. The 144,000 sealed are the Christian Jews who escaped Jerusalem before it fell.

Some historicists actually follow the Preterist view this far, and see later parts of the vision advancing through the decline of Rome. Therein lies the weakness of these schools. The symbols in the visions are interpreted so broadly so as to make them fit the presupposition that the same hermeneutical principle could make them fit most any time period.

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1. Summarized from Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views*.

### 1.3 Futurist

The seals represent the beginning of the 7-year tribulation at the end of the world. The white horse and rider of the first seal in particular are the appearance of the antichrist at the beginning of the seven-year great tribulation. The 144,000 are generally taken to be ethnic Jews converted during the tribulation.

### 1.4 Idealist

The seals represent principals of God's dealing with the world, and not specific events. In essence, this view (which is the one I will expand on below) takes the criticism of the historicist and preterist school above to the logical conclusion that the symbols are in fact about the whole time period rather than specific events in the time period.

## 2.0 First through Fourth Seal: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

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### 2.1 The White Horse and Rider: Christ or Antichrist?

The range of interpretation of the first seal (the white horse and its rider) is an exercise in extremes. The historical interpretation, as early as Irenaeus in the second century, was that they represent Christ and the Gospel. A more modern view, popular especially with dispensationalists, but also found in some reformed commentaries, is that the conqueror is the antichrist, the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Since there is no passage anywhere that says the white horse and its rider of the first seal is one or the other, we must decide on the meaning through logical deduction (assuming we can decide at all). To this end, we will examine the text of Revelation for facts from which we can deduce conclusions.

First, the symbols God uses in Revelation show something of the true nature of the thing symbolized, whether it is Christ as a lamb, or Satan as a beast.

Second, white, not only in Revelation, but in all of scripture, symbolizes purity. We may list the occurrences in Revelation here:

- 1:14 - of the hair of the "one like a son of man";
- 3:4 - of the (figurative) clothing of the men of Sardis whose deeds are not dead;
- 3:5 - of the (figurative) clothing of those who conquer, whose name will never be erased from the book of life;
- 3:18 - of the (figurative) clothing that the men of Laodicea are advised to buy from one like a son of man;
- 4:4 - of the clothing of the 24 elders around the throne;
- 6:11 - of the robe given to the souls under the altar;
- 7:9-14 - of the robes of the multitude before the throne;
- 14:14 - of the cloud the one like a son of man is seated on;



- 19:11-14 - of the horse the Messiah is riding on, and of the clothing and horses of the armies of heaven;
- 20:11 - the throne of God

Given this, it would seem the first horseman is representing something pure that will conquer. Further, in the seven letters, it is the elect who conquer. In the theophany, it is the Lion of the tribe of Judah who conquered. In chapter 12, Satan is conquered by the blood of the Lamb, etc.

To be fair, the beast is also said to conquer the saints temporarily. The arguments for the white horse and rider being antichrist go something like this<sup>1</sup>:

- the parallelism with the other horses suggests it being part of a sequence of calamities (but, we will see these represent not a series of events, let alone calamities, but the situation of man in the church age)S
- Christ is already represented by the lamb in this vision (but, the Holy Spirit is represented by both the seven flames in 4:5 and the seven eyes of the Lamb in 5:6; these are symbolic visions, and thus not bound by the conventions of physical reality);
- parallelism with the Olivet Discourse (Mt 24, Lk 21, Mk 13) line up the white horse with false christs (but, the parallelism isn't as strong as suggested<sup>2</sup>, and I've elsewhere argued that the Olivet Discourse is specifically about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, and so has little bearing on this passage unless one argues for a preterist interpretation);
- there are differences between this white horse and the one in Rev 19:11 that is Christ (but, there are differences between 19:11 that and the Lamb in chapter 5, yet both are Christ as well; they're symbols after all).

On the whole, I think we must side with the traditional interpretation that the white horse conquering must represent either Christ, the Gospel, or the elect conquering. Since the elect conquer by the blood of Christ with the Gospel, the distinction is effectively moot.

## 2.2 The Horsemen as Representing History in General

Read Revelation 6:1-8. What characters are introduced, what roles do they play, and what events are predicted? That was a trick question. Four characters and their roles are given, but precious little is said about specific events.

The first seal brings a white horse whose rider has the role of conqueror. As discussed above, if the rider is not Christ himself, then it is something like the Gospel personified. The Gospel advances, conquering by the double edged sword that comes from Christ's

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1. See David J. MacLeod. "The Four Horsemen Of Apocalypse". *Emmaus Journal Volume 1*. Winter 1991.
  2. Mt 24:5 is lined up with the white horse, but they mislead, not conquer. Wars, rumours of war, famines, plagues and earthquakes are grouped together in Mt 24:6-7 || Lk 21:10-11, but rumors, famine, and disease are a normal part of any war; there is nothing remarkable about this clustering, which is the point of the idealist interpretation. Also, the horsemen symbology says nothing about earthquakes.

mouth (Rev. 1:16 and the references to conquering in the seven letters) throughout the Church Age.

The second seal brings a red horse. Where white symbolizes purity, red symbolizes evil in Revelation. We'll see this use of red later in Revelation with the beasts.<sup>1</sup> The rider is a satanic force who agitates people to kill one another. Every generation has seen warfare. There is nothing exceptional about this in history.

The third seal brings a black horse. It's rider brings subsistence living. A day's wages barely pays for the food an individual or family needs in a day. But regardless of the severity of famine conditions, the rich have all the oil and wine they could want! Compare this with the complaints of Job (Job 21:7 *ff*) and of Solomon (Ecc 7:15). The 20th century western standard of living has been an blip on the screen of history. Even today, in Africa, Asia, South America, etc., this seal reflects the standard of living of most of the world's population<sup>2</sup>. There is nothing exceptional about this seal in history.

The fourth seal brings a horse with a sickly pallor (pale green). It's rider is Death and Hades. They kill a fourth of the earth with sword, famine, disease, and wild animals. In most of history, as in many parts of the world today, people did not live to their 80's and die of old age very often. The stark view of death by violence presented by this seal is the normal, not an exceptional, course of history.

An interesting parallel to this passage is Zechariah 6:1-7, where red, black, white, and dappled horses are seen in a vision and described by an angel as "the four spirits [or winds] of heaven that have been presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth".

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### **3.0 Fifth Seal: The Altar of Martyrs**

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With the fifth seal we are introduced to the martyrs. Their martyrdom is symbolized by their being in an altar. Because of this clear symbolism, we shouldn't necessarily pull from this any particular details about what the intermediate state<sup>3</sup> is like. That isn't the point of this passage.

John is looking at the altar in a particular point in time, presumably his own. Many of the elect, including Old Testament saints, had been martyred in the past, and more would be in the future. Thus even though the scene is rooted in a point in time, it tells us something about the whole age - there will be martyrdom - and that there will be a particular number, determined by God, that will be martyred before the end.

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1. Though the blood of Christ is red, it is always associated with washing clothes white!
  2. For that matter, the inner city of New Orleans too, as we have learned.
  3. The state of the soul between death and the resurrection.

## 4.0 The Sixth Seal: Cosmological Signs

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Cosmological signs like this occur in a number of passages in the Bible. They never signal literal cosmological upheaval or eschatological cataclysm. In Isaiah 13:10, 13, they apply to the destruction of Babylon to happen in Isaiah's time. In Isaiah 34:4, they apply to Edom of Isaiah's day. In the Olivet Discourse, Mk 13:24-27, they apply to Jerusalem of AD 70.<sup>1</sup> Similar language is found in Amos 8:8-9; Isaiah 50:2-3; Joel 2:10, 30-31.

If there is anything recent events<sup>2</sup> should remind us of, it is that catastrophes happen regularly in this age. So again, this seal seems to represent the normal course of history under God's providence.

## 5.0 The Interludes

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Between the sixth and seventh seals, John sees two mini-visions. There is a similar sort of interlude between the following sixth and seventh trumpets, unifying chapters 4-11 structurally.

In the first mini-vision, 7:1-8, John sees 12,000 of each of twelve tribes of Israel, 144,000, sealed. In the second mini-vision, John sees an huge crowd, "made up of persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language" worshiping God and the Lamb. That the huge crowd are the redeemed can scarcely be denied as this language was already used of them in the doxology of 5:9-10. The weakness of the Historicist and Preterist views here is the convolutions that must be done to force fit this passage into their schemes. They are described as having come out of "the great tribulation". If they are in fact all the redeemed (and the language suggest such), then that tribulation is not just some final seven year period, but each individuals life experience in this world. See Revelation 1:9; 2:9, 10, and 22 for uses of the word to describe the then current situation.

The interpretation of the 144,000 is much more difficult. We can dismiss out of hand cultic interpretations such as the Jehovah Witnesses, who believe only 144,000 will go to heaven (the great crowd is before the throne in heaven after all!). The number itself is almost certainly symbolic rather than literal. A common suggestion is that they also represent the church. It is true that the church is identified with true Israel, especially by Paul. In context though, there seems to be a distinction between the 144,000 and the great crowd. One suggestion for understanding a distinction is that the 144,000 is the church militant, the church present on earth at any given time, and the great crowd is the church triumphant, all the elect from all the ages present in heaven with Christ.<sup>3</sup> The weakness of this is there is nothing in the passage to suggest there is a "moving window" of 144,000.

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1. See my study notes on Isaiah 13-14 and on the Olivet Discourse.

2. The tsunami in the Indian Ocean and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.

3. This is Mick Welton's view.

For my understanding, I look forward to chapter 12 where we have a woman clothed with the sun, moon, and twelve stars who seems to represent Israel. She gives birth to a child who is clearly Jesus the Messiah. Then, after Satan is cast out of heaven to the earth, he first pursues the woman, then makes war on “the rest of her children”, which would seem to be the Gentile church. I therefore think the 144,000 from Israel are ethnic Jews, but, not Jews saved in the tribulation like dispensationalists would have it, but the Jews who gave birth to the Messiah, that is, the Old Testament saints, while the great crowd is the gentile church that sprang from them.

An apologetics issue in this passage is the list of twelve tribes. Many a skeptic has pointed out that it is “wrong”. It omits the tribes of Dan and Ephraim. The twelve tribes were originally descendants of each of the twelve sons of Jacob (aka Israel). But Jacob declared of Joseph’s sons “Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine just as Reuben and Simeon are” (Gen 48:5). This would technically make 13 tribes. But, when the land was divided, Levi did not receive an inheritance of land (Dt 18:1-5). They did not “count” as part of the twelve, maintaining the convention of twelve tribes. Later, when Israel split, it was in the tribes of Dan and Ephraim that golden calves were set up for the Israelites to worship. Their omission from the list in Revelation is symbolic that this is faithful Israel, and not rebellious Israel.<sup>1</sup> To maintain the convention of twelve tribes, Levi is included in the twelve again, and Joseph is listed instead of his son Ephraim. The significance of the choice of tribal names is the symbolism, and not genetic or political realities.

The sealing itself is reminiscent of Ezekiel 9 where angels put a mark on the foreheads of “the men who moan and groan over all the abominations practiced in [Jerusalem]”. Then angels are told to “strike people down ... But do not touch anyone who has the mark.” The situation in Ezekiel is the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC by the Babylonians. The sealing is symbolic of the fact that God has always preserved a remnant of his people who are faithful to him (compare with Elisha’s experience in 1 Kings 19:18).

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## **6.0 The Seventh Seal: Silence and the Trumpets**

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The seventh seal takes us into chapter 8-11. With it there is silence in heaven followed by the seven trumpets. We will discuss this in the next lesson or two.

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## **7.0 Sovereignty of God**

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Regardless of which interpretive school one takes regarding the events depicted in the visions accompanying the opening of the seven seals, the central theme that comes through is the Sovereignty of God. These events do not happen out of God’s control, but are already scripted in the scroll long before they occur.

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1. There is a tradition often cited that the antichrist would come from the tribe of Dan, but it is quite an unsubstantiated leap to claim such a belief has anything to do with Dan’s omission here, especially since it is paired with Ephraim’s omission.

# Revelation 8-11: The Seven Trumpets

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**The Seven Trumpets sound after the seventh seal is opened. We'll break this section into two lessons, looking at the first six seals one week, then the two interludes and the seventh seal the following week.**

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## 1.0 Overview of the Interpretive Schools<sup>1</sup>

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### 1.1 Historicist

The first four trumpets are the invasions of Rome by Goths, Vandals and Huns from AD 408 to 476 when the Western Empire came to an end. The fifth trumpet is the rise of Islam and the invasions of the Saracens. The sixth trumpet is the rise of the Turks (the Ottoman empire), ending with the fall of the Byzantine Empire. The first interlude, the angel with the little book, represents the invention of the printing press and the greater availability of the Bible. The second interlude represents the period of the papacy between its rise and the reformation. The two witnesses are groups such as the Waldensians who opposed the papacy before the reformation. The seventh trumpet brings us to the eschaton (end-time).

On the details, the Historicist view spawns many speculations. For example, the mountain that crashes into the sea in the second trumpet is seen as symbolizing the Vandals under king Genseric, the leader or leaders of heretics, or the city of Rome. The great star of the third trumpet is speculated to symbolize either Attila the Hun, Pelagius, or Arius.

### 1.2 Preterist

The trumpets represent the ever increasing deprivation of those trapped in Jerusalem by the Romans. The three and one half years represents either Nero's persecution or the siege of Jerusalem. The two witnesses are either two men in Jerusalem warning the

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1. Summarized from Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views*.

Jews before AD 70 (such as James and Peter) or symbolize the witnesses of the old covenant or the priestly and civil heads of the Jews or some such.

### 1.3 Futurist

The trumpets represent events in the seven-year tribulation preceding the eschaton. The three and one half years are a literal portion of the tribulation and the two witnesses two prophets who will appear then.

Many futurists try to take these visions literally as most of the descriptions are not so remarkable as to be unthinkable in that way. On the other hand, in a book of visions full of symbolic representations, it seems a strange hermeneutic to try and take these simply literally, and in fact some futurists do read symbolism of one sort or another into them. For example, Gaebelien takes the green things to represent economic prosperity. Hal Lindsey takes to whole section to represent a nuclear war.

Speculations about the mountain-like object include a revived Roman Empire, spiritual Babylon, a meteor, a satellite, and a nuclear bomb. Speculations about the darkness include pollution and nuclear warfare. The wild range of such speculations should convince one of the futility of the effort.

### 1.4 Idealist

The trumpets represent the tribulation the church experiences throughout the church age, a period of time represented by the three and one half years. The two witnesses represent the witness of the church.

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## 2.0 The First Four Trumpets

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The first four trumpets (Revelation 8:1-12) are set off from the remaining ones by Revelation 8:13. This parallels the seals, where the first four seals are set off from the remaining ones. Accompanying the blowing of the trumpets are visions of calamities that resemble in many ways the ten plagues on Egypt in Exodus.

The first four trumpets all detail things happening to the four divisions of the material

TABLE 1.

Exodus-Trumpets Parallels

| Exodus                     | Revelation  |
|----------------------------|---|
| 7:14-24 Water into Blood   | 8:7 Hail and Fire mixed with Blood                  |
| 7:25-8:15 Frogs            | 8:8-9 Sea became blood                              |
| 8:16-19 Gnats              | 8:10-11 Rivers and springs become wormwood (bitter) |
| 8:20-32 Flies              | 8:12 Sun, moon, stars darkened                      |
| 9:1-7 Disease              | 9:3 Locusts   |
| 9:8-12 Boils               | 9:19 Plagues from horses' tails                     |
| 9:13-35 Hail               |   |
| 10:1-20 Locusts            |   |
| 10:21-29 Darkness          |   |
| 11:1-10 Death of Firstborn |   |

world commonly seen in ancient cosmologies: land, sea, fresh water, and sky. Each effects a third of that realm. This fraction is an echo of Ezekiel 5. Such parallels strongly suggest that we are not looking at eschatological calamities here. Nor is the scale to be seen as worldwide. Think of John's perspective here. He's seeing these things happen from a perspective that lets him see the details he's mentioning. This is not a "satellite view" of the world (even if he is in heaven).

In the seven letters, Jesus threatened coming in judgment if they did not repent. "Look! I am throwing her onto a bed of violent illness, and those who commit adultery with her into terrible suffering, unless they repent of her deeds. Therefore, I will strike her followers with a deadly disease, and then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts" [Rev 2:22-23a]. These trumpets are representative of the catastrophes that happen throughout the church age that God purposes for good. We are seeing the trumpets fulfilled multiple times in the southeast United States with all the severe hurricanes that have been striking. And they have been being so for the last two thousand years.

### 3.0 The Fifth Trumpet

The fifth trumpet is set off from the previous four in two ways. First, it is introduced as the first of three woes. Second, it afflicts man directly instead of aspects of man's world (Rev. 9:4).

If there is any question about the visions accompanying the trumpets being symbolic, this vision should put those doubts to bed. A star fallen from heaven to earth (Satan, perhaps) opens the abyss and releases a plague of locusts. Although this is reminiscent of the plague of locusts in Egypt, these locusts are quite different.

There description is unlike anything that occurs in the natural world and is replete with symbolism. They are:

- like horses equipped for battle and,
- with crowns on their heads,
- faces of men,
- hair like women,
- teeth like lions,
- iron breastplates,
- wings that sound like horse-drawn chariots, and
- tails like scorpion stingers.

All these are symbols of power and strength. The period of their time of terror is five months. This number was probably selected because it is the normal life span of locusts rather than representing a literal five month period in history. It serves to signify that “this too will pass”. Their power is only for a limited time.

The references to the abyss and the angel of the abyss indicate that these locusts are of a demonic nature. We will meet these demonic forces in the world in later chapters.

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### 4.0 The Sixth Trumpet

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With the sixth trumpet, four angels are released from the Euphrates, and with a vast army, they kill one third of all mankind. The symbolism of a threat from that region is striking to the milieu. Rome’s only real external threat of the time was the Parthian Empire, and the Euphrates River was the border between them. In the fifth trumpet, the iron breastplates may echo the bright armor of the Parthians, and the ability to wound with their tails echoes the Parthian tactic of shooting two volleys of arrows: one on charge and another on withdraw. The vast, even hyperbolically huge, army described here would reflect the Roman fears of the Parthians, whose empire was second only to the Roman’s in size.<sup>1</sup> Rome thought of the Parthians in the same way as the United States thought of the Soviet Union during the Cold War or al Qaeda today.

That said, the fifth and sixth trumpets are not actually about the Parthians. Not only did the Parthians not conquer Rome, but the fantastic symbolism suggests these echoes are being used as an archetype (a symbolic idea) for what is intended.

We have great violence represented here. A third of humanity is killed by three plagues represented by fire, smoke, and sulfur that comes out of their mouths. Like the double edge sword that comes out of Jesus’ mouth represents the teachings of Jesus, it would seem likely that these plagues would also represent teachings, but of a more sinister kind. They are also represented by colors: red, dark blue, and yellow, which resemble the colors of the later three horses of the seals (red, black, and sickly pale green). They contrast with white, which represents purity. Red later will be used to symbolize Satan himself (the red dragon).

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1. “Parthians” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*.



The suffering of humanity is the consequence of the false teaching and of their actions that result from it. Yet the refuse to learn their lesson from it (Rev 9:20-21).

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## 5.0 Summary of the Fifth and Sixth Trumpets

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The fifth and sixth trumpets describe Satanic influence in the world. The locusts of the fifth trumpet and the army of the sixth trumpet suggest Satan and his minions, both demonic and human. The remarkable thing here is the statement that they are prepared “for this hour, day, month, and year”. They are part of God’s plan and providence. What specific hour, day, month, and year meant here will be discussed in a later lesson.

I have asserted much here without really building a strong case for it. That case is coming. When we cover chapter 12, a lot of pieces will come together. Once we understand the less ambiguous symbolism in that chapter, I believe the Idealist<sup>1</sup> view presented here will make a lot more sense. While I would like to have dealt with chapters 8-11 all together, it is too much to cover in one lesson, plus I want to keep in sync with Mick Welton covering the same material. So, you’ll just have to wait two weeks for the climatic conclusion.

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## 6.0 First Interlude: The Little Book

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In chapter five, we saw that the sealed scroll echoed the scroll in Ezekiel 2. In Ezekiel 3, Ezekiel is told to eat the scroll and it is described as tasting sweet (Ezekiel 3:3). Here in Revelation 10, an angel descends with an open scroll that John is commanded to eat and it too is described as tasting sweet (though bitter in the stomach). The continuation of the allusion to Ezekiel strongly suggests the recently unsealed scroll and this scroll are the same scroll, although the text does not explicitly say so.

The act of eating the scroll is a symbolic commissioning to prophecy.

He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you see in front of you —eat this scroll— and then go and speak to the house of Israel.” [ Eze 3:1 ]

Words of prophecy are symbolically given to John to speak. Given that the bulk of the vision of the seals and trumpets is already over, and (judging from Rev. 10:4) already written down, this commissioning must be for an additional prophecy. In fact Revelation 10:11 says

Then they told me: “You must prophesy *again* about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.” [ emphasis added ]

It would appear then that this vision is a commissioning to deliver the message of Revelation chapter 12-22, which, we will see, is a recapitulation of chapters 4-11.

There is some speculation that the “powerful angel” here is Christ as he is accompanied by some symbols one ordinarily associates with Jesus or God, like the rainbow, the

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1. Also called Spiritualist, but that word can be misleading as it can also mean occultist.

cloud, etc. However it would be highly unusual, even jarring, for Christ to be referred to as an angel (contrast with Hebrews 1:3-4, 13-14). The symbols probably are meant to indicate that the angel is acting on God's behalf. Revelation 19:10 shows us we must be very careful about such identifications.

The seven thunders were evidently meant for John's ears only as he is forbidden to write them. That he appears to be recording the vision as he receives it, is also a fascinating tidbit. The vision is not happening during sleep, but in a wakeful state.

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## 7.0 Second Interlude: The Two Witnesses

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At the time John is writing, the Temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed some 25 years earlier. Dispensationalists, and presumably most other futurists, see in this chapter the idea that a new temple will be constructed. This only works if the forty-two months (aka 1,260 days) are a literal period. The fact that a stylized calendar using round numbers of 30 days per month and 360 days per year is used here and in other passages in Revelation might suggest something other than literal days, months, and years are in mind.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 12, in fact, will indicate that this three and one half year period represents a much longer time period: the entire church age, nearly 2000 years and counting so far. Now given this as a presupposition (for now), there are great ramifications for the understanding of the text of this passage. The two witnesses *cannot* be two literal individuals.

Now what witness have we had through the ages? What witness is Satan trying to kill even in our time? Here's some hints:

Lk 11:49 For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,'...

Eph 2:20 ... because you have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.<sup>2</sup>

2 Pe 3:2 I want you to recall both the predictions foretold by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

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1. The Essenes used a 364 day year, that is exactly 52 weeks, which caused the holy days to always fall on the same day of the week from year to year. The normal Jewish calendar was a 354 day year, with occasional additional months to bring it in sync with the 365.2440 solar year.
  2. Many interpreters see this pairing meaning New Testament prophets, but the same pairing in 2 Peter 3:2, quoted next, clearly indicates a merism encompassing the writers of the Old and New Testaments.

Re 18:20 (Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has pronounced judgment against her on your behalf!)

Further, since literal temple has not existed all these centuries either, the temple too must represent something else. We find the clue for this after one of the above passages.

Eph 2:21 In him the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 2:22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

In short, the temple is the church, and the witnesses are the scriptures of the old and new testaments (the prophets and the apostles). See my web site for additional studies on the temple.

Many interpreters would see the church militant as being symbolized by the two witnesses, the pairing being an echo when Jesus sent out disciples to teach (Lk 10:1-2). The witnesses are called two Olive trees. When Paul used this metaphor in Romans 11:17-24, Israel was the cultivated Olive Tree and the Gentiles wild Olive shoots that are grafted into Israel. Thus only one of the trees is the church, so Paul's usage would seem to be somewhat different. To the extent that both the Jews and the Gentiles are witnesses, it is through the Old and the New Testaments. The two witnesses are also called lampstands. This symbol was used of the individual congregations that John was addressing in Revelation 1:20, but surely more than two congregations are meant if this is the meaning of the symbol here.

Although the best hermeneutic for identifying symbols is to see how they are used elsewhere in scripture, in this case it doesn't seem to lead us to a definitive conclusion. At any rate, the difference between the two understandings is fairly subtle. If the Gospel itself is being fought against, it is the church that suffers persecution. This would seem to be the point of the image of the outer courtyard of the temple (i.e., the church) being trampled on for forty-two months.

Verse 7 refers to "the beast that comes up from the abyss". We have not as of yet encountered this beast in Revelation. If the Book of Revelation was the original reader's only knowledge of this beast, then this "out of the blue" reference would be rather perplexing. However, Revelation did not spring out of a theological vacuum. At the very least, they would have had familiarity with the four beasts of Daniel. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians make it clear he had eschatological teachings he had taught that went beyond what was in the letters. The original readers had an easier time understanding Revelation because they had had the eye-witness testimony of the Apostles that went beyond what comes down to us in scripture. In this case, the image of "the beast that comes up from the abyss" was probably an already familiar one for them.

Why would three and a half years (forty-two months or 1,260 days) be chosen as the symbol for the church age? Recall that Revelation also calls this a period of tribulation, a fact reflected in the symbolism in the visions accompanying the opening of the seals and the blowing of the trumpets. The period is one that has recurred several times during Israel's history. The drought in Elijah's time was three and one half years (Luke 4:25, James 5:17). The Sieges of Samaria (2 Kings 18:10) by the Assyrians, and Jerus-

alem (2 Kings 25:1-2) by the Babylonians were about three years. More importantly, and recently, the desecration of Jerusalem by Antiochus IV lasted three and a half years (1 Macc 1:20, 29; 4:52) as did Rome's siege of Jerusalem. Nero's persecution of Christians a generation earlier had also lasted about three and one-half years. Three and one-half years therefore became an archetype for the history of tribulation that extends through the whole church age.

There are allusions to the Elijah and Moses stories here:

- Revelation 11:5 — compare 2 Kings 1:9-15 (Note the symbolic significance of the fire coming from the mouth in the Revelation passage)
- Revelation 11:6a — 1 Kings 17:1
- Revelation 11:6b — Exodus 7-11 (compare with the trumpets as well)

But these are not literal events being described (although their archetypes are literal events). These are symbolic representations of the power of the Gospel and of its prophetic origin.

Resurrection was used symbolically in Ezekiel 37, the vision of the valley of dry bones. In this vision, Ezekiel sees a valley full of dry bones. Flesh returns to the bones and the bodies come to life. This represents the restoration of the people to their land (as explained by Ezekiel 37:11-12), and not literal resurrection.<sup>1</sup> Likewise here, the witness of the apostles and prophets is “resurrected” after their temporary defeat. In Revelation 9:21, we are told that men did not repent of their evil. Here, in a picture that is a negative image of another Elijah episode, they do repent!

In 1 Kings 19:18, God tells Elijah that He still had seven thousand followers who had not worshipped Baal. They were a remnant that had been preserved. Here in Revelation 11:13, seven thousand are destroyed rather than reserved, and the balance gave glory to God!

These symbols are open to several different specific interpretations within the Millennial frameworks. I don't think at this point in Revelation that it is possible to exegete a resolution to the Millennial question. It is rather easy, on the other hand, to read into them (eisegete) presuppositions. At this point, we should just focus on the “pan-millennial” implications: everything will “pan out” according to God's plan in the end.

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## 8.0 The Seventh Seal

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The proclamation of verse 15, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever”, is a rather provocative statement. However, it's interpretation is no easy matter. Preterists say it means only that Christianity became a world religion. This is interpretation rather forced, and is a result of *a priori* adoption of Preterism as a hermeneutic. Most other interpreters see this as bringing us to the end of the age.

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1. Although, the concept is presupposed.

There is a sense in which Christ reigns now. The Kingdom of God was always something within reach in Christ's teaching. The amillennialist sees the resurrection of the saints in the "kingdom of the world" *becoming* the "kingdom of our Lord". Millennialists (pre- and post-) would see the inauguration of the millennium. Either way, Christ's reign is "for ever and ever" after that.

Verses 16-18 give us hint of the eschatological judgment. It does not describe it. It is given thanks for and praised by the worship of the twenty-four elders. The visions we have encountered up to this time were of the actions of "those who destroy the earth", and hence were of events throughout history. Now we come to the "end game" of history.

Verse 19 emphasizes that the temple in view is in heaven, and so is not a literal "brick-and-mortar" building in Jerusalem. It is representative of the resurrected church.

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## 9.0 Questions to Ponder<sup>1</sup>

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- How do the visions of the seals and trumpets help us understand the world in which we live? (Mt 24:6-8)
- What role do demons have in the world?
- How should God be praised and thanked?
- What is our role in conveying the witness of the Apostles and Prophets?
- What is the world's response to the witness of the Apostles and Prophets?
- Is God absent or present in times of hardship? How?

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1. I've borrowed freely from Mick and Drew's notes from the High School study for this section.

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**Questions to Ponder**

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# Revelation 12: Woman, Child, and Dragon

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**This chapter is the keystone to understanding Revelation. In it, that Revelation is a broad view of the tribulation of the whole church age, represented by three and one-half years, can be demonstrated exegetically.**

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## 1.0 Protevangelion

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*Ge 3:15 And I will put hostility between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring; her offspring will attack your head, and you will attack her offspring's heel.*

Genesis 3:15 is referred to as the “protevangelion” or “proto-gospel”. It tells of the conflict between Satan and Eve’s “seed” (offspring). Revelation 12 also tells this story. It is the story of Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection. Since it is so key to understanding Revelation, we shall go through this chapter verse by verse in more detail than we have been doing.

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## 2.0 The Woman, Child, and Dragon

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**Rev. 12:1.** *a woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon under her feet, and her on her head was a crown of twelve stars* A echo of Joseph’s dream occurs here. In Genesis 37:9, he has a vision of the sun, moon, and 11 stars bowing down to him. They represented his father, mother, and brothers. Here, this symbol is adapted to represent Israel.

**Rev. 12:2.** *pregnant ... in labor pains* She’s about to give birth to her offspring. Many commentators think this refers specifically to the Jews under Roman oppression.

**Rev. 12:3.** *in heaven ... a red dragon* Dramatically, the dragon is not identified right away. We have encountered the symbolism of the color red there in the context of war and killing. He is Satan of course (Rev. 12:9).

**Rev. 12:4.** *swept away a third of the stars* This probably represents “his angels” (Rev. 12:8-9). *the dragon stood before the woman ... so that he might devour her child* He is planning to “attack her offspring’s heel” as described in the Protevangelion.

**Rev. 12:5.** *the woman gave birth to a son ... who is going to rule over all the nations with an iron rod* The identity of the son should be rather obvious. The description of the son is an allusion to Psalm 2:9. Revelation 19:15 also says this of Christ. Now given the identity of the son, one might be tempted at this point to identify the woman with just Mary rather than Israel (or rather elect Israel). We will see why this isn’t the correct below. *Her child was suddenly caught up to God and to his throne.* Revelation’s telling of the Gospel story skips from the incarnation directly to the resurrection. See Hebrews 8:1 — “Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We have such a high priest, one who *sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,...*”.

Now that we’ve identified the child, we can see that Satan’s first attack on the child was the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem by Herod. Reread verse 4 in this light.

**Rev. 12:6.** *she fled into the wilderness ... so she could be taken care of for 1,260 days.* This is symbolic. There was no literal three and one-half years beginning with the resurrection during which events like these took place. This is faithful Israel being “in the wilderness”, in tribulation, through out the church age. In the context of AD 30, this would have been the Jewish Church. We’ll see how the Gentiles fit into this below. The 40 years wondering in the wilderness is central to the Jewish religion, and would also have been a significant image to the Jewish church even in John’s day because they had fled Jerusalem before its fall.<sup>1</sup>

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### 3.0 The War in Heaven

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**Rev. 12:7-9.** The vision now turns its attention to events in heaven. Until this time, Satan had access to heaven. See Job 1-2 and Zechariah 3. Here Satan and his angles battle Michael<sup>2</sup> and his angels (presumably the third of the stars his tail swept away in verse 4) and are cast down to the earth “so there was no longer any place left in heaven for him and his angels”.

**Rev. 12:10-12.** This song of rejoicing says that “the overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony”. Compare this to what Jesus said when the 72 disciples he sent out to preach returned — “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning” [ Lk 10:18 ]. There, the battle began, and was completed in Jesus’ resurrection and the preaching (testimony) of the word. Compare verse 12 with the sounding of the trumpets (“woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has come down to you!”).

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1. According to Eusebius

2. Some interpreters identify Michael with Jesus Christ. This is speculative in the extreme.



#### 4.0 The War on Earth and Sea

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**Rev. 12:13-16.** The dragon, cast from heaven now persecutes the woman. But she is protected for “a time, [two] times, and half a time” — three and a half years, forty two months, 1,260 days.

**Rev. 12:17.** Now, here’s they key to understanding the identity of the women. The woman has other children: those who keep God’s commandments and hold to the testimony about Jesus. The symbolism of verse 1 had already suggested that the woman was Israel. Here we see the Jewish church “giving birth” to the Gentile church “her other children”. The period of their tribulation is not a literal 1,260 days beginning in the spring of AD 30, but the entire time of Church history that Satan is making war on the woman and her children.

**Rev. 12:18.** This verse segues us into the next vision. The manuscripts differ on whether it is the dragon or John (“I”) who stands at the seashore. It makes little or no difference to the interpretation of the texts however, as it merely serves to shift our focus to the next scene.

#### 5.0 The Meta-narrative

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Salvation history is a narrative thread that runs from ethnic Israel in Old Testament times to “persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation” [ Rev 5:9, 7:9 ] before the throne of God. We’ve seen this expressed several ways in Revelation and the rest of the New Testament. In the interludes of the Seals, we saw 144,000 Israelites sealed before the tribulation began (Rev. 7:3) followed by an uncountable multitude (presumably after the resurrection) before the throne in heaven. We see this in the two witnesses being the Apostles and the Prophets: the testimony of the New and the Old Testaments. We see this in the woman being Israel and her children being the Gentile church. This later metaphor is similar to Paul’s where Israel is the cultivated olive tree. Those who are not faithful are cut off (like Ephraim and Dan are omitted from the list of twelve tribes in Revelation) and the Gentiles are grafted in.

We may lay out the time-line surrounding the three and a half years with this table:

**TABLE 1.**

The Three and a Half Years

| Rev 11   | Rev 12:1-6                    | Rev 12:7-17   | Rev 13  |
|--|-------------------------------|---|---|
|  | Messiah<br><i>Rev: 12:1-5</i> | Fall of Satan<br><i>Rev 12:7-12</i>   |   |
|  | Woman Protected for ...       |   |   |
| Courtyard<br>trampled<br>42 months;<br>Two Wit-<br>nesses for<br>1,260 Days<br><i>Rev 11:2-3</i> | 1,260 Days<br><i>Rev 12:6</i> | Time, Times,<br>Half a Time<br><i>Rev 12:13-16</i><br><br>Rest of Her<br>Children<br><i>Rev 12:17</i> | Beast Has<br>Ruling<br>Authority<br>for 42<br>Months<br><i>Rev 13:5</i> |

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## 6.0 Other Interpretations

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As clear as the interpretation of this chapter seems to be, there are other interpretations. I believe we will see that these are the result of eisegesis. That is, the assumption of particular interpretation schools have been decided *a priori*, which results in the need to force fit everything into those frameworks.

### 6.1 Historicist

Since the seventh trumpet of brings us up to the Eschaton, the remainder of the book must logically be recapitulating some earlier history. In spite of the rather clear reference to the incarnation of chapter 12, the historicist presuppositions dictate this must refer to a later point in time. This is because for them the 42 months (aka 1,260 days) represents 1,260 years during which the church is oppressed by the papacy, roughly 254 to 1514 AD, although many other beginning and end dates have been suggested.

For Historicist, the woman represents the true church. Her nearing birth represents the potential and promise of growth. The Dragon is imperial Rome. The child being caught up to heaven represents the enthronement of Constantine, who ended the persecutions. We could go on, but a moments reflection will show the ad hoc nature of these assignments. It seems especially strange that Constantine's enthronement would be represent by the child being with God and His throne, since the historicists also regard that as the beginning of the corruption of the church that led to the papacy.

### 6.2 Preterist

The ease with which both Preterists and Historicists assign the same visions to various historical events is their great weakness. After chapter 12, the Preterists split into two camps, further multiplying the number of interpretations. Some Preterists see these chapters as continuing to deal with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 from another perspective, identifying Babylon with Jerusalem. Others identify Babylon with Rome.

For chapter 12 itself, Preterists generally interpret the woman, dragon, and child in line with the Idealist view discussed above. For the three and a half years though, they skip to the Jewish war. They regard the woman fleeing to the desert as representing the Jewish church fleeing Jerusalem before the city fell as warned to do by Jesus and recorded by the church historian Eusebius. Actually, this isn't too far off the mark. The Jewish war is one of the archetypes that the three and a half years as a symbol is based on. The woman fleeing into the desert is certainly an echo of the Jewish Christians fleeing Jerusalem.

### 6.3 Futurist

Futurists have many interpretations of this passage. Some would see the woman representing the professing church while the child represents the true overcoming church. There are a number of cultic interpretations broadly in the futurist camp as well. For example, Christian Scientists identify the woman as their founder.

The majority however would, like the Idealists and Preterists, identify the woman with Israel and the Child with Christ. Some would see the third of the stars representing the fallen angels, but others, anxious to skip to the seven-year tribulation see them as political powers brought under Satan's control.

The 1,260 days are generally viewed as the second half of the tribulation. This means the passage invisibly skips from the ascension to the end times. In fact, a troubling principle of dispensationalism in general is the idea that prophetic scripture skips over the church age entirely. They regard the time that we are in to be a dispensation about which the Bible says nothing about. That alone should make it suspect. The dating of the fall of Satan from heaven seems to strange too, given Jesus' statement Luke 10:18 discussed above.

Dispensationalists often make some fantastic and specific speculations about some of the symbols. For example, regarding the woman being given "two wings of a giant eagle so that she could fly out into the wilderness" Hal Lindsey writes:

Some kind of massive airlift will rapidly transport these fleeing Jews across the rugged terrain to their place of protection. Since the eagle is the national symbol of the United States, it's possible that the airlift will be made available by aircraft from the U. S. Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup>

This symbolism is actually based on the poetic images used in Exodus 19:4 and Deuteronomy 32:11-12, which many, more sober, dispensationalists point out as well.

Some see the flood as a literal flood. Others, rightly, see it symbolizing evil teaching. It is to be compared with other symbolism of things coming out of mouths, such as the double-edge sword from Jesus' mouth or the three plagues from the rider's mouths in the sixth trumpet vision.

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1. Quoted in *Revelation: Four Views*

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## 7.0 Road Map

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We've passed the half-way point in Revelation now, so now would be a good time to review where we've been and overview where we're going.

### 7.1 The Letters (Rev 1-3)

The first three chapters are in the form of a circular letter sent to seven churches in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). While Historicists and early Dispensationalists saw these seven churches as symbolic, we saw they more likely were the literal contemporary churches named. The Apostle John was writing around AD 95 from the island of Patmos, where he was exiled. Unlike cultic adaptations of the Apocalypse genre, which wrote in the name of Old Testament heroes, John wrote in his own name to churches that know him.

### 7.2 The Unsealing of the Book (Rev 4-11)

#### 7.2.1 Theophany (Rev 4-5)

The first set of visions are of the unsealing of a scroll. With each of the seven seals being opened, John saw a symbolic vision. With the last seal, John saw another series of seven visions accompanied by trumpet blasts. The whole scene opens with a vision of God in heaven that reveals His power and majesty. The visions emphasize the sovereignty of God over history.

#### 7.2.2 The Seven Seals (Rev 6-8:1)

The opening of the seals introduces characters and forces at work in history, but don't really detail a sequence of events.

**Seals 1-4: The Four Horsemen (Rev 6:1-8).** The Gospel, Conflict, Subsistence Living, Death.

**Seal 5: Martyrs Under the Altar (Rev 6:9-11).** Their number is not yet complete.

**Seal 6: Cosmological Signs (Rev 6:12-16).** Hyperbolic language identical to that used in the Old Testament to describe historical destruction of cities. Here it represents the wars and conflicts that are ever with us.

**Interlude 1: The Sealing of the 144,000 (Rev 7:1-8).** These are the remnant of Israel, marked for preservation: God's first fruits of redemption.

**Interlude 2: Persons of Every Nation, Tribe, People, and Language (Rev 7:9-16).**

These are the whole church, the Gentiles who are "grafted" into Israel.

**Seal 7: Silence before the Trumpets (Rev 8:1).** The Seven Trumpets should probably be seen as part of the seventh seal.

**7.2.3 The Seven Trumpets (Rev 8-11)**

**Trumpets 1-4: Judgments on the Earth, Sea, Fresh Water, and Sky (Rev 8).**

**Trumpet 5: The Locust Plague (Rev 9:1-12).**

**Trumpet 6: The Army from the Euphrates (Rev 9:13-21).** “Furthermore, they did not repent...”

**Interlude 1: The Little Scroll (Rev 10).**

**Interlude 2: The Temple and the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:1-14).** “the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven”

**Trumpet 7: The Kingdom (Rev 11:15-19).** “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever”.

**7.3 Women, Beasts, and Judgment (Rev 12-22)**

**7.3.1 The Woman, Child, and Dragon (Rev 12)**

**7.3.2 Two Beasts (Rev 13)**

This is where the infamous “Mark of the Beast” is written about.

**7.3.3 A New Song and Three Messages (Rev 14)**

**7.3.4 Seven Final Plagues (Rev 15-16)**

**7.3.5 The Prostitute and Babylon (Rev 17-18)**

**7.3.6 Judgment of the Beasts (Rev 19-20)**

This is where we’ll get heavily into Millennial issues

**7.3.7 New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21-22)**



# Revelation 13: The Two Beasts

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**The Mark of the Beast is probably the most familiar images from Revelation in popular culture.**

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## 1.0 Background From Daniel

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The images from this chapter come largely from Daniel 7. Daniel saw a vision in which four beasts came up from the sea:

- Lion with eagle's wings (Dan 7:4)
- Bear (Dan 7:5)
- Leopard with Four Heads (Dan 7:6)
- Dreadful Beast with Ten Horns (Dan 7:7)

Careful study<sup>1</sup> of Daniel shows that these four beasts represent four kingdoms: Babylon of Daniel's time, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome respectively. The final kingdom is supplanted by the kingdom of God:

But the court will convene, and his ruling authority will be removed—  
destroyed and abolished forever.  
Then the kingdom, authority,  
and greatness of the kingdoms under all of heaven  
will be delivered to the people of the holy ones of the Most High.  
His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;  
all authorities will serve him and obey him. [Dan 7:26-27]

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1. See my study on the four kingdoms of Daniel on my web page.

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## 2.0 Beast with Seven Heads and Ten Horns (13:1-10)

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### 2.1 Appearance (13:1-2)

John sees a beast coming out of the sea with the following attributes:

- Ten Horns
- Seven Heads
- Like a Leopard
- Feet like Bear's
- Mouth like Lion's

In other words, this beast was a chimera of the four beasts of Daniel. The beast is also in the image of the dragon (Satan) as both have seven heads and ten horns.

This beast is not any one nation *per se*, but in the spirit of the symbolism from Daniel, it represents the kingdoms of the world throughout history under the authority of Satan. Revelation will use both Babylon and Rome as archetypal symbols for this concept.

### 2.2 Wounded Head (13:3-4)

The image of one of the heads being fatally wounded and healed is almost certainly a reference to the Roman civil war that occurred after Nero's death, a year also known as the year of four emperors. Interpreters of the literary-critical school will often identify this with the *Nero redivivus* myth. They would date a source document that "John" is using to shortly after Nero's death and have it perpetuating the popular myth of that time that Nero would come back to life and retake the empire. The evidence for this is nothing more than wishful thinking. A writer in AD 95, inspired or not, could easily think of the events of the year of four emperors as a death and resurrection of the empire.

### 2.3 Blasphemy and Authority (13:5-8)

The beast is given a ruling authority of forty-two months. As the beast is not Rome in particular, the forty-two months are not likely to be some literal forty two months that Rome does something in particular (like besiege Jerusalem or persecute Christians). Rather, we are looking again at the three and a half years representing the church age we have seen repeatedly (and especially clearly in chapter 12).

Note that the book of life was written "since the foundation of the world". Compare with Ephesians 1:4. Regardless of what one thinks about predestination versus free will, election took place before the beginning of time. There is no room for the "open theism" fad of late.

### 2.4 Providence (13:9-10)

A common theme in Revelation is that the events of (to John) future history are under God's control. Here we see another statement of this. It is, in fact, a major theme of the whole book.



### 3.0 Beast with Two Horns (13:11-18)

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#### 3.1 Appearance (13:11)

Daniel sees another beast, this one with two horns and the voice of a dragon. Many commentaries make a big deal of the “like a lamb” phrase, but only the horns are described as being like a lamb’s, not its general appearance. The beast is hardly lamb-like in either appearance or comportment.

#### 3.2 Authority (13:12)

The authority of the second beast is derived from the first beast (which in turn was derived from the red dragon). This beast directs worship to the first beast. Where the first beast represents political power (*à la* Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome), this beast seems to carry on a religious function. In fact, Rev 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10 refer to it as “the false prophet”. There is an interesting chain of command here: Satan, secular authority, and then religious authority. False doctrine is the servant of the state, and the state is the servant of Satan.

#### 3.3 Signs (13:13-15)

The second beast deceives people, partially by producing signs similar to those of the two witnesses back in chapter 11. The giving life to an image was a proverbial deception of the pagan priesthoods in the ancient world. For one (probably fictional) account, see the apocryphal *Bel and the Dragon*<sup>1</sup> 1-22. The signs that John sees the beast performing are not specific literal actions. By evoking the story of the battle between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, who were unable to bring fire down, the vision is indicating an increase in the intensity of the battle. The beast does bring down fire.

#### 3.4 The Mark of the Beast — 666 (13:16-18)

The Mark of the Beast enters the public consciousness through various occult themed movies that have been made through the years as well as through dispensational literature, such as Hal Lindsey’s *Late Great Planet Earth* or the LaHaye’s *Left Behind* series.

Biblically it is analogical to the mark God placed on the 144,000 Jews in chapter 7. As such, one might expect that the mark is not literal, but a symbolic representation in the vision of election. Economic isolation or shunning is hardly the invention of the Kennedy administration for dealing with Cuba. The idea, and practice, has existed for millennia. In an incident pointed to by Historicists, Pope Martin V issued a decree requiring that “they permit not the heretics to have houses in their districts, or enter into contracts, or carry on commerce.”<sup>2</sup>, referring to the Waldenses, which the Historicists points to as one of the faithful remnants (symbolized by the two witnesses) before the Reformation.

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1. Also called Daniel 14.

2. Gregg. *Revelation, Four Views*.

Here, the economic restriction seen in the vision almost certainly represents more than mere boycott. For an example brewing today, see the editorial in the November 2005 issue of *Analog: Science Fiction and Fact* magazine. It is about the debate over pharmacists who don't dispense certain drugs (such as birth control) because of religious objections. The editor's argument was that the pharmacist's right to freedom of religion ends where it interferes with someone else's rights<sup>1</sup>. He goes on to suggest that perhaps the pharmacist who can't dispense the drug should leave the field. The beast can be far more subtle in restricting Christian's economic activity than simple outright ban.

Far too much ink has been spilled identifying the man represented by 666. Preterists would generally identify it with Nero Caesar, which when spelled in Hebrew letters, and the customary numeric values are assigned to each letter, the sum comes up 666. This is not impossible from the Idealist perspective as Nero would then be serving as an archetype. One of the earliest suggestions known is Irenaeus' suggestion that it is the Greek word *Lateinos*, identifying the beast with the Roman Empire specifically. Historicists often identified the number with the Latin title for the Pope: VICARIVS FILII DEI, pulling out the letters that can represent numbers thusly: DCLVVIIIIII. More recently, it was pointed out that Ronald Wilson Reagan has six letters in each of his name.

In short, identifying a specific individual or institution represented by 666 is a futile exercise. Even the typical Idealist approach of finding meaning in the digit 6 as representing man falling short of perfection, represented by the digit 7, is little more than numerological speculation. The number probably meant something specific to the recipients in Ephesus and the other six cities. For us today, we need to humbly accept that we just don't know. We will be more productive as Christians to just accept the mystery and move on to things we do know.

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## 4.0 Other Interpretations

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### 4.1 Historicist

Historicists are widely split three ways on the specifics of identifying the beasts. One view is that both beasts represent pagan Rome. Others see the first beast as pagan Rome, and the second beast as papal Rome. Others see both beasts as aspects of papal Rome. Since the historicist presupposition precludes identifying the wounded head with the death of Nero, they look elsewhere, such as the death of the last heathen emperor, Julian the Apostate, and the end of tolerance of pagan ritual religion as the fatal wound, and the rise of the papacy as the revival of the beast. Another view among Seventh-Day Adventists has been that the wound was inflicted by Napoleon and restored by Mussolini! Much anti-papal rhetoric of the Reformers looked to this passage for inspiration.

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1. The argument is, of course, reversible. The customer's rights end when they interfere with the pharmacist's rights. Further, forcing the pharmacist to sell the drug anyway not only violates his religious freedom, but would amount to reducing him to slavery!

#### 4.2 Preterist

Preterists see Rome as a persecuting power, either under Nero and the Jewish War, or subsequently, leading up to Constantine. The wounded head has been identified with Nero, Julius Caesar, or the Empire being wounded by the spread of the Gospel.

#### 4.3 Futurist

Futurists typically associate the first beast with a future “revived” Roman Empire. Back when the European Union had only ten members, it was common to identify that as the beast. The forty-two months is usually associated with the second half of the seven-year tribulation. The antichrist is usually associated with the first beast, although some would identify him with the second one. The mark of the beast is generally taken literally and expected to be the basis of a future cashless society.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Even if that is not the intent of this passage, there are plenty of good reasons to fear such an economy any way.



# Revelation 14: The Great Commission

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**This chapter is about the growth of the Church and the spread of the Gospel message through evangelism.**

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## 1.0 Introduction

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*Mt 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 28:20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Chapter 14’s vision is a series of seven short scenes:

- v. 1-5, The Lamb with the 144,000;
- v. 6-7, An angel proclaims the eternal gospel;
- v. 8, An angel proclaims the fall of Babylon;
- v. 9-12, An angel proclaims the judgment of those who worship the beast;
- v. 13, A voice proclaims the blessedness of “those who die in the Lord from this moment on!”;
- v. 14-16, Christ reaps the elect;
- v. 17-20, An angel reaps the reprobate.

At first glance, these seem almost a random collection of unrelated scenes. I suggest that the theme is a radical change in the heavenly economy: the opening up of Israel to include the Gentiles through the Gospel Message, and the defeat of Satan’s hold on the world. It recapitulates the time of the dragon (chapter 12) and the beasts (chapter 13).

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## 2.0 The Lamb with the 144,000 (14:1-5)

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The clock is set back to the incarnation. We see the Lamb, the Messiah, on Mount Zion with the elect from Israel who are here described as firstfruits. It is they who give birth to the church, the new Israel that includes people of “every nation, tribe, language, and people”. The last time we encountered a “new song” was in Revelation 5:9 when the four living creatures sang a “new song”, before the seals were opened and the trumpets revealed:

You are worthy to take the scroll  
and to open its seals  
because you were killed,  
and at the cost of your own blood you have purchased for God  
persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation....

Here, the 144,000 are celebrating their redemption. They are described as virgins. This is symbolic. Worshiping other gods is repeatedly called adultery and prostitution in the Bible. It is not their sexual practices, *per se*, that is at issue here, but their worship practices. They are the firstfruits<sup>1</sup> of a crop that would yield “persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation.”

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### **3.0 Three Angels**

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Three angels fly overhead next in John’s vision, each proclaiming a message. The time frame of each of these proclamations is also the beginning of the church age.

#### **3.1 The Eternal Gospel (14:6-7)**

The first angel proclaims “the eternal gospel”, that is, the Gospel of Christ, to “every nation, tribe, language, and people, that is the Gentiles. There is only one Gospel (contrary to many Dispensationalists), as Paul wrote to the Galatians, “not that there really is another gospel .... But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell!”<sup>2</sup>

While it is not a literal angel from heaven that proclaims the eternal gospel in the church age, recall that the word *angelos* means messenger. The flying angel here represents the evangelistic role of the church to preach the gospel. Compare this with the angels of the seven churches that John addresses in chapters 2-3, and see the discussion on that usage in the study on that passage.

#### **3.2 Fall of Babylon (14:8)**

The Fall of Babylon is here proclaimed, although Babylon is not yet identified. We’ll see additional representations of this later in Revelation. In Daniel’s visions of four kingdoms, the kingdom of God defeats them. Babylon’s defeat is insured by the resurrection. Prophetic literature sometimes uses what is called the “prophetic perfect

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1. This term is discussed in more detail below in “Idealist” on page 58.

2. Gal 1:7-8

tense”: a future event is spoken of in a past tense because it is “as good as done”. We’ll see this again in later chapters. Other terms used to describe this is “realized eschatology” or “already, but not yet”. Or, to use an American idiom, he’s dead but he just doesn’t know it yet. To take the tense literally requires the viewpoint of the passage to jump back and forwards.

### **3.3 Judgment (14:9-12)**

**Re 14:9**A third angel followed the first two, declaring in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and takes the mark on his forehead or his hand, **14:10**that person will also drink of the wine of God’s anger that has been mixed undiluted in the cup of his wrath, and he will be tortured with fire and sulfur in front of the holy angels and in front of the Lamb. **14:11**And the smoke from their torture will go up forever and ever, and those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night, along with anyone who receives the mark of his name.” **14:12**This requires the steadfast endurance of the saints—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to their faith in Jesus.

Note that the form and tense of the condition suggests that the point of time in view is not the end, but the beginning of the tribulation: “If anyone worships...”. It is looking forward to the 42 months of the beast.

Their torture will extend forever. There is no room for universalism, annihilation, or any denial of Hell here. The saints will endure the tribulation of this world, but there is no endurance for the reprobate whether they suffer in this world or not.

The judgment here encompasses both the tribulation and the eternal state after death.

## **4.0 A Voice of Blessing (14:13)**

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**Re 14:13**Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this:  
‘Blessed are the dead,  
those who die in the Lord from this moment on!’”

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “so they can rest from their hard work, because their deeds will follow them.”

The wording “those who die in the Lord from this moment on” indicates that “this moment” is not the eschaton. Rather, it is the other end of the church age. The phrase marks the change in the divine economy marked by Christ’s redemption of the elect. We opened the chapter with the 144,000, the redeemed of ethnic Israel. Their redemption awaited the sacrifice of the Messiah throughout the Old Testament era. From the crucifixion and resurrection on, all who die in the Lord are redeemed. They may suffer some in the tribulation, at death they will find rest rather than torment.

## 5.0 The Harvests

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### 5.1 Use of the “Harvest” Metaphor by Jesus

**Mt. 9:36-38.** “Harvest” is a metaphor for evangelistic activity. The “workers” who “are few” are the disciples.

**Mt. 12:30.** “Gathering” (a word often used for gathering crops in Greek) is the activity of those who are with Jesus. The sense is again one of evangelism.

**Mt. 13:18-23.** A crop a hundred, sixty, or thirty times, is produced by seed sown in good soil. Elsewhere, we learn of the good works prepared for the Christian to do<sup>1</sup> and the fruits of the Spirit<sup>2</sup>. Something like that is likely the crop produced (and hence harvested) by the seed taking root in the individual.

**Mt. 13:36-43.** The harvest is explicitly stated to be the end of the age, and the reapers “angels”. Weeds are collected from Christ’s kingdom and burned in fire.

**Mt. 21:33-41.** The harvest is near when the landowner sends his slaves, and ultimately his son, to collect a portion of the crop. The tenants kill them. As the harvest is something that was supposed to happen at that time (when the slaves and the son — the prophets and Christ — were sent, it would have to be of something at that time. Either the ingathering of the repentant into the Kingdom, or their righteous deeds.

**Mk 4:26-28.** The harvest is probably the end of the age, and the crop the elect.

**Mk. 13:27.** Discussed below.

**Jn 4:35-38.** The disciples are sent to reap a harvest among the fields ready for harvesting. The intent is clearly evangelistic.

**Summary.** Jesus used the harvest metaphor for a range of meanings. The harvest can be of a crop of righteousness that results when the elect are saved. It can mean the immediate results of evangelistic effort, the ingathering of the elect into the church. The difference between the two is subtle as only the members of the kingdom, by the grace of God, are capable of any truly good act. Or it can mean the end of the age separation of the elect from the reprobate in the resurrection and judgment.

### 5.2 Reaping by the Son of Man (14:14-16)

The phrasing of verse 14 is an allusion to the Messianic passage in Dan 7:13. The important thing to remember about that passage is that the son of man is coming to heaven not to earth. It is a reference to the resurrection of Christ. If that is the time frame of this vision, then the reaping would be the evangelistic use of the metaphor.

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1. Ephesians 2:10

2. Gal 5:22-23



There is a very close parallel to this scene in the Olivet Discourse. In Mk 13:26, Jesus alluded to this very passage of Daniel. In Mt. 26:64, Jesus made it very clear that Daniel's passage is not about the parousia at the end of time: "*from now on* you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and *coming on the clouds of heaven*" [Emphasis added]. In the very next verse of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus said, "Then he will send angels and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven." The time frame of this gathering is limited by verse 30: "I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place". Thus an evangelistic intent seems most likely for the metaphor in the Olivet Discourse.

Given that Revelation here is putting the harvest metaphor adjacent to an allusion to the same passage from Daniel, and that the context so far seems to be the beginning of the church age, I believe that an evangelistic harvest is the intent of this passage as well.

### **5.3 Harvest of the Grapes (14:17-20)**

The Grapes are harvested to be placed through the "winepress of the wrath of God". One might be tempted to see this as eschatological judgment, but this is not necessarily so. Recall that from the beginning of the book, imminent judgment was threatened on certain of the churches. The whole sequence of seals and trumpets was one of judgments and tribulation being visited upon the earth. Given that context, this is more likely to be another symbolic representation of the tribulation, the whole church age. Note that the location of this winepress is not Hell, but "outside the city". This judgment is something that happens on earth. It is the wrath of God seen in the seven trumpets and completed in the seven bowl judgments of chapters 15-16.

## **6.0 Summary**

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We saw in the unsealing of the scroll and the trumpets that followed a representation of tribulation throughout the church age, but with men not responding to the warning (chapters 6-11). Then we saw Israel (symbolized by a woman) giving birth to the Messiah and Satan trying to destroy him. Messiah was resurrected to heaven and Satan pursued to woman and her other children (the Gentile church) throughout the church age (chapter 12). Then we saw two beasts that derive their authority from Satan persecuting the elect throughout the church age (chapter 13).

Thus prior to this chapter we've seen three views of the church age. Chapter 14 is a view of the same age. It opens with the elect of Israel singing a "new song" celebrating their redemption by the risen Messiah. We then see a representation of the proclamation of the Gospel, the defeat of "Babylon", and the threat of judgment on anyone who worships the beast. We then see a statement that all who die "from now on", that is the Gentile church during the church age are blessed. Finally we see the harvest of the elect into the church, and a harvest of wrath that the unregenerate world receives throughout the church age.

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## 7.0 Other Interpretations

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### 7.1 Historicist

There is no small variability amongst the Historicist interpreters. The 144,000 are the church, or they are representatives of the church. The new song is the doctrines of the Reformation, coming at the end of the 42 months of the beast (1,260 days = 1,260 years of Papal rule). The proclamation of the “everlasting gospel” occurs after the fall of a great anti-christian power at the end of the age, or it is the Great Awakening: the preaching of the Wesleys, Whitefield, Edwards, and Finney. Babylon is equated with papal Rome. The judgments and harvests are the final judgment of the Eschaton.

### 7.2 Preterist

Preterists are split on whether Babylon represents Jerusalem (judged in 66-70 AD ) or Rome (judged in the third century). There are no images here that stand out as being particular events. Babylon is obviously a symbol, an archetype for the idea of an oppressor. References to Rome in Revelation should generally also be seen as an archetype for an oppressor.

### 7.3 Futurist

Dispensationalists often distinguish between the gospel of the kingdom, taught up through John the Baptist, and the gospel of grace, taught in the church age; These interpreters believe “everlasting gospel” refers to the gospel of the kingdom that will apply again after the church is raptured. Other Dispensationalists and futurists rightly reject this approach as contradicting scripture about there being only one Gospel.

Babylon is seen as either the apostate church, a world government, or both. Both harvests are seen as harvests of judgment in the tribulation. This appears to be necessary since they believe the rapture has already occurred before tribulation. The text though has no indication of punishment associated with the first harvest, as it does with the second.

### 7.4 Idealist

The approach I took with this section was to regard it as a scene from the beginning of the church age in the first century recapitulating the previous scenes we have encountered. Other Idealist interpreters take it as taking place at the other end of the church age. In this approach, the 144,000 are the entire resurrected church and Zion stands for heaven. The sense of calling them firstfruits is that they are the portion of the eschatological harvest that is dedicated to God, the remainder of the harvest being the reprobate. This is contrary to Paul’s usage of the firstfruit metaphor in Romans 8:23 and 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23. Jesus is called the firstfruits of the resurrection, meaning the first of many. James 1:18 also refers to the early Jewish church as firstfruits.

This “futurist-idealist” approach must then shift back in time to just before the resurrection of the 144,000, treating the entreaties of the angels as “last chance” appeals. Then the time frame must shift further back to the resurrection of Christ to understand “from

now on” in verse 13, before shifting back to the eschaton for the remainder of the passage to represent the resurrection of the elect and reprobate.

Now it is true that time is somewhat nebulous in Revelation with its symbolism and tendency to recapitulate. But recapitulation occurs at boundaries between larger text units, and where time is non-linear, such as the seals trumpets not representing a specific sequence of events, it doesn’t jump back and forwards: the seals and trumpets each represent aspects, including repeating events, of the whole church age. Reading chapter 14 at the beginning of the church age makes for a more consistent understanding.



# Revelation 15-16: The Seven Bowls of Wrath

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**“Then I saw another great and astounding sign in heaven: seven angels who have seven final plagues (they are final because in them God’s anger is completed).”**

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## 1.0 The Heavenly Scene

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Before the seven seals were opened, John saw a theophany scene in heaven. Chapter 15 is not strictly a theophany although it functions similarly. God is present in his temple and his awesomeness is represented by the smoke from his glory and power filling the temple and keeping anyone from entering it.

If the temple represents the church, then the symbol of no one being able to enter the heavenly temple suggests that its resurrection has not happened yet. “Those who have conquered the beast” in verse 2 would be still disembodied souls.

Like in the previous theophany, here we have another doxology. This one is titled the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. Here we see yet another manifestation of the metanarrative: the two witnesses, Israel giving birth to the Gentile Church.

## 2.0 The Bowls of God's Wrath Compared to the Trumpets

There are numerous parallels between the visions accompanying the bowls and the visions accompanying the trumpets. The parallels are not exact, but as can be seen in the table, the general trend is for an intensification of the trumpet judgments.

TABLE 1.

Bowls and Trumpets Compared

### Bowls of Wrath

**16:2** Poured on the earth; sores on people who had the mark of the beast & worshiped his image

**16:3** Poured on the sea; it turned to blood; every living creature in sea died.

**16:4-7** Poured on the rivers and springs; they turned to blood.

**16:8-9** Poured on the sun; it scorched people with terrible heat.

**16:10-11** Poured on the throne of the beast; darkness covered his kingdom.

**16:12-16** Poured on the river Euphrates; river dried up to prepare way for kings of the east; three unclean spirits from dragon, beast, and false prophet bring kings of the earth together for battle at Armageddon.

**16:17-21** Pour on the air; "It is done!"; weather phenonoma and earthquake occur; Babylon split into three; cities of nations collapse; Babylon given cup filled with the wine made of God's furious wrath; Gigantic hailstones; people blaspheme God.

### Trumpets

**8:7** Hail and fire with blood thrown at the earth; a third of the earth burned up.

**8:8-9** Mountain of burning fire thrown into the sea; a third of the sea became blood; a third of the sea creatures died.

**8:10-11** Burning star landed on the rivers and springs; a third of them became wormwood.

**8:12-13** A third of the sun, moon, and stars are darkened.

**9:1-12** Locust plague (proverbial for swarming so thick they turn the sky dark).

**9:13-21** Four angels released from the Euphrates with 200,000,000 angels set free to kill a third of humanity.

**11:15-19** "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord"; temple in heaven opened; weather phenonoma and an earthquake occur.

For example, the first four of both involve the earth, sea, fresh water, and sky respectively. But whereas in the trumpets, only a third are effected, in the bowls, the effect is total. The effect isn't always the same effect though. In the fourth ones, the trumpet darkens the sun and other celestial lights, but the bowl intensifies the sun.

Idealists in general take two approaches to understanding the finality of the bowls. One is that they represent a future intensification of the tribulation, and so represent a finality of history. Another is that they represent the finality of death for the unrepentant sinner. This latter approach is rather unconvincing. There is nothing in the vision to indicate that the scope is the individual rather than humanity, especially when compared to the scope of the trumpet judgments. People and other living creatures die in both sets of judgments, so it makes little sense to apply only the bowls judgments to an individual's death and apply the trumpets only to warning judgments. This interpretation results more from a presuppositional bias against seeing anything resembling a futurist interpretation rather than allowing exegesis to lead where it leads.

We have some indication of an eschatological intensification of tribulation in the vision of the two witnesses (Rev 11:1-14). They witness throughout the tribulation, the 1,260 days representing the church age, but then, in what could be described as an intensification of persecution against them, they are killed.

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### 3.0 Armageddon

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The name "Armageddon" is a transliteration of the Hebrew for "Mountain of Megiddo". The region is an ancient battleground for Israel (Judges 5:19; 2 Kings 23:29-30; Zech 12:11).<sup>1</sup> Contrary to the usual Dispensational view, it is not at all clear that we should see Armageddon as a literal "World War 3" (or whatever number we are up to by then!). The fifth and sixth trumpets had images of demonic forces doing battle, so likewise here, we likely have a conflict at least in part in the spiritual or ideological realm.

The battle is describe in the future tense in Rev 16:14. As a singular event at the culmination of the intensification, it should probably be linked the the events surrounding the death of the two witnesses at the end of 1,260 days (the church age) that we encountered in Rev 11:7. In fact, "war" is also used to describe the conflict resulting in their deaths in that passage.

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### 4.0 Other Interpretations

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#### 4.1 Historicist

The first six bowl judgments are events surrounding the downfall of Papal power in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, beginning with the French Revolution. The seventh bowl is still future.

#### 4.2 Preterist

The preterist views see the judgments on either Jerusalem (70 AD) or Rome (476 AD). The early date preterists can site many parallels between the horrors of the bowl judgments and the catastrophes surrounding the fall of Jerusalem described by Josephus. As those events would be fresh on everyone's minds in 95 AD, not only because of the

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1. "Armageddon," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*

recentness of the event, but because Josephus' *Antiquities* was just published about five years earlier, the parallels are probably intentional. While the preterists are wrong about the bowl judgments being about the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in particular, those events are referenced as an archetype for the symbols in the vision.

#### **4.3 Futurist**

Speculation on what in particular various symbols mean in terms of specific future events is highly varied to the point that it should be clear it isn't profitable. For example, does the water turning to blood mean a literal transubstantiation? Or is it a hyperbolic statement meaning the water is tinted red by the blood of the slain? Or is it an allegorical statement referring to water tinted red by algae blooms (red tide) or pollution? Or is it entirely a metaphor having nothing to do with water literally being actually colored red at all?



# Revelation 17-18: The Whore of Babylon

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**The seven headed dragon is Satan, the seven headed beast is anti-Christian government in the image of Satan, the two horned beast, anti-Christian religion in the service of the anti-Christian government, and the whore of Babylon is....**

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## 1.0 Who or What is the Whore of Babylon?

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Numerous interpretations have been made of the Whore of Babylon:

- The Roman Catholic Church (Historicist, Futurist)
- The Imperial City of Rome in contrast to the Empire (late date Preterist)
- Jerusalem (early date Preterist)
- Coalition of apostate churches headquartered in Rome (Futurist)
- Human civilization (Futurist)
- Literal reconstructed city of Babylon (Futurist)<sup>1</sup>
- Rome, but Rome itself being symbolic (Idealist)
- The world and its lusts (Idealist)

By carefully sifting through the text, I think we can come to a reasonably certain understanding. Recall first the other beasts we have seen. First, there was the red dragon that is Satan. Then there was the seven headed, ten horned beast (in Satan's image). It's symbolism came from the symbols Daniel used for four world empires, and represents political power in the service of Satan. Then came a two horned beast with the voice of a dragon that directed worship to the seven headed beast. Called a false prophet elsewhere, it represents false religion supporting the anti-christian political power. Now we see a whore whose name is Babylon. We will see that she represents materialism. She is the marketplace of the world, alluring the world into spiritual adultery with the false gods of greed and avarice.

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1. Those that take this approach generally make a distinction between the Babylon of chapter 17 and of chapter 18. This interpretation only applies to chapter 18 then.

## 2.0 The Whore of Babylon

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### 2.1 The Whore Introduced (Rev 17:1-6)

In the Bible, worship of false gods is likened to adultery. Recall, for example, the story of Hosea and his wife in Hosea 1-3. That is the meaning behind the whoredom here, which, while certainly includes illicit sex, is not limited to it.

The beast she sits on is the seven headed, ten horned beast we have previously encountered. A new detail is added: the beast is scarlet (a deep red) color, further linking its appearance to the appearance of the red dragon. Sitting on the beast represents the fact that economic activity depends on the stability of government.

Her clothing and jewelry are representations of ostentatious wealth.

Symbolism of the other beasts used Rome as an archetype, so why Babylon here? In reality, Rome is probably still the archetype. To the Jews, Rome was another Babylon and could be describe as such. When Peter refers the church in Babylon in his closing in 1 Peter 5:13, he almost certainly means Rome and not the literal Babylon.

She is drunk on the blood of the saints and of those who testified to Jesus. Economic concerns (that is, greed) can motivate persecution. There is much money to be made at immorality, and the Christian faith can threaten that livelihood. For a biblical example see Acts 19:23-41. Paul's impact on the trade in silver shrines for Artemis triggered a riot in Ephesus.

### 2.2 The Beast Interpreted (Rev 17:7-14)

A common feature in apocalyptic literature, both canonical and cultic, is for a "guide" angel to provide some interpretation of the symbols, though often, somewhat cryptic terms.

**The beast was, is not, and is to come (17:7-8).** By themselves, these word are rather confusing. However, they would seem to echo back to chapter 13 where the beast received a seemingly fatal wound to one of its heads, then recovered. This alluded to the fatal wound the Roman Empire seemed to receive when Nero died and it was plunged into a civil war in the year with four emperors.

Throughout history, every empire has eventually fallen. Yet the beast has not yet been defeated. From every fatal wound the beast comes back as yet another persecuting empire.

**Seven Mountains (17:9a).** The reference to seven mountains is ambiguously a reference to Rome, the "City on Seven Hills" of the ancient poets. But remember that Rome is an archetype. The idea is that of a world power, of which Rome was the immediate example.

**Seven Kings (17:9b-11).** This passage is very cryptic. Daniel slipped between referring to kings and kingdoms freely, and so here the seven kings are probably kingdoms. The

five that were past would be the three from Daniel (Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece) and perhaps Egypt and Assyria from earlier. The one that is would be Rome. It is not clear what the seventh would be nor how the beast would be an eight, yet one of the seven. But the number of future kings are not limited to these...

**Ten Kings (17:12-14).** The ten horns are yet ten more kings. Trying to speculate which kingdoms of history correspond to each of these kings is a futile effort. We can get the general gist though. The beast will be active through many future kingdoms. In fact the numbers here are probably more symbolic than limiting the number of kingdoms to some specific number. Just when one seems to have died another will spring up in its place.

### 2.3 The Whore in the Hands of the Beast (Rev 17:15-18)

In spite of the fact that the Beast and Babylon are on the same side (that is, evil), the beast hates the whore. This is a reality we see in history. Economic prosperity creates an educated middle class and a powerful aristocracy of powerful business interests. Both are the enemy of despots everywhere. We saw this in Saddam Hussein executing anyone in his inner circle who showed any competence. We see this in Africa where governments institute poorly thought out “reforms” and actively resist outside groups helping to feed their own starving population. Verse 17 says this is God’s doing. Think also about what Jesus said about a house divided:

Mk 3:24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom will not be able to stand. 3:25 If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. 3:26 And if Satan rises against himself and is divided, he is not able to stand and his end has come.

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## 3.0 The Destruction of Babylon

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### 3.1 Fallen is Babylon (18:1-3)

We have another declaration of the fall of Babylon. If this means her destruction, it is a prophetic perfect. On the other hand it may indicate her moral fall. Note that the description of her effect on the nations is that they have fallen as well. This would parallel the fall of Satan as well. Regardless of the intention of this statement, it is clear that she is morally fallen and that she will fall into destruction as well.

### 3.2 Come Out (18:4-8)

God’s people are told to come out of Babylon. Jesus warning to leave Jerusalem before its destruction is an archetype for this figure of speech (Mk 13:14, Eusebius *Church History* 3.5.3). The meaning here is not to avoid physical co-location (“since you would then have to get of the world” as Paul said in 1 Cor. 5:10). Rather it is to avoid the temptations and sins that she allures the world to.

Her destruction will be sudden, “in a single day”. Suddenness and unexpectedness of destruction are frequent in judgment prophecies.

### **3.3 The Grief of the Kings and Merchants (18:9-20)**

When she is destroyed, the kings and merchants that had their “affairs” with her will mourn. It is here that we glean her identity as the economic lusts of materialism. See the list of precious cargoes that she led people to through her allurements in verses 12-14: gold, silver, precious stones, pearls, fine linen, purple cloth, silk, scarlet cloth, etc. etc. etc...

### **3.4 Destruction Symbolized by an Angel (18:21-24)**

Finally an angel symbolizes the destruction of Babylon by throwing a huge stone into the sea, where it would vanish suddenly without a trace. This image may echo Daniel 2:44-45, but the symbolism is different. In Daniel the stone is what does the destroying, while in Revelation, it is the thing thrown down to disappear under the sea.

# Revelation 19-20: The Millennium

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**This is the passage around which all Millennial issues orbit. A comprehensive discussion of all the issues surrounding this passage is not practical. Whole books have been devoted to the subject.**

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## 1.0 Definitions

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This section is where controversy and interest in Revelation really centers: What and When is the Millennium? Surprisingly, one's answer to that question is largely independent of how Revelation 1-18 is interpreted. Nearly all combinations of Historicist, Preterist, Futurist, and Idealist with Premillennialist, Amillennialist, and Postmillennialist can be found in the commentaries. That said, a few combinations are the most common encountered today: Futurist-Premillennialist, Idealist-Amillennialist, and Preterist-Postmillennialist.

Before discussing this further, let's review the definitions of these Millennialist terms. The term Millennium means 1,000 years. "The" millennium refers to the 1,000 years Satan is bound in Revelation 20:1-6. There are interpreters of all three Millennial schools that acknowledge that the 1,000 years may be symbolic of a long period of time, and not be literally 365,242<sup>1</sup> literal 24-hour days, while others insist on such a literal understanding.

All three schools begin a historic era termed the church age with the resurrection of Jesus. This age extends through today and on into the future. The three schools differ regarding what terminates the church age and what comes afterwards.

The term "Amillennialist" is a misnomer. It means literally one who believes in no millennium. What Amillennialism actually holds is that the millennium is a symbol for the whole church age. Satan is bound now, and the church age AKA millennium will end when he is released a short time, then thrown into Hell and everyone is resurrected to be either cast into Hell or live with Christ forevermore.

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1. Or 365,243 days if a third century leap year falls in the 1,000 years (Gregorian calendar)

Premillennialists and Postmillennialists believe that the millennium is in the future. The “Pre-” and “Post-” prefixes refer to the timing of the physical return (AKA the second coming) of Jesus Christ being either before or after, respectively, the millennium.

Thus premillennialists believe Jesus will return to earth, resurrect the saints, reign over a literal political kingdom for 1,000 years, then resurrect everyone else, sending the reprobate to Hell and dwelling with the redeemed eternally. Dispensational Premillennialists are a particular offshoot of this school that was begun in the 1830’s by John Nelson Darby. The main distinctions of this view are that there is a pre-tribulation rapture seven years before the beginning of the millennium, that the Jews are eternally separate from the Church, and that then the traditional Jewish worship with a temple and sacrifice will be restored. This Johnny-come-lately viewpoint is unfortunately the most common found in Evangelical Christianity today, popularized in large part by the Scofield Reference Bible of the early 20th century.

Postmillennialists believe that the millennium comes between the church age and the physical second coming of Jesus. Either by the gradual growth of the church or a great revival, a “silver age” will exist on a Christianized earth before Jesus returns, establishing the eternal “golden age”. The Puritans combined this view with the Historicist interpretation of Rev. 1-17, while the modern Reconstructionist movement combines it with the Preterist interpretation of those earlier chapters. My own view combines it with the Idealist view.

Some other variations exist. Some who identify the millennium with the church age like the amillennialists also believe in a gradual Christianization of the earth like post-millennialists. I prefer the term Optimistic Amillennialism for this school, but one finds this school referred to as Postmillennialism as well, which can be rather confusing.

The blatantly heretical Full Preterist interpretation of Revelation regards all of Revelation to have been fulfilled by 70 AD, and thus spiritualizes the references to resurrection. They don’t fit into any of the three Millennial views outlined above.

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## 2.0 Literary Structure

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Revelation 12-20 has a chiasmic structure. That is, after touching on A, B, C, and D, it then reverses the pattern and touches on D, C, B, and A. In this case, the points touched upon are the diabolical forces. First we are introduced to them acting out during the 3.5 year tribulation:

- The Red Dragon - Revelation 12,
- The Seven Headed Beast - Revelation 13:1-10,
- The Two Horned Beast - Revelation 13:11-18<sup>1</sup>, and
- The Whore of Babylon - Revelation 17.

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1. Revelation 14-16 are an interlude in this sequence. Interludes occur other sequences as well.

Then in unwinding the sequence, we see the destruction of each in reverse order:

- Babylon - Revelation 18,
- The Beast and False Prophet - Revelation 19:11-19, and
- The Dragon - Revelation 20.

We will look back at this structure when we discuss whether the binding of the dragon recapitulates the church age or deals strictly with the end of the church age.

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### 3.0 Celebrations in Heaven

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#### 3.1 The Destruction of Babylon (Rev 19:1-5)

The destruction of Babylon is celebrated in heaven. Since the “vast throng in heaven” is not identified, we should not speculate on their identity. They could be angels, or in a Dispensationalism, the resurrected church.

#### 3.2 Wedding Celebration of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-10)

Continuing the metaphor started by describing Babylon as a whore, the church is described here as a bride. She has made her self ready for her husband. The metaphor is mixed, creating some confusion. In verse 9, we read “Blessed are those who are invited to the banquet at the wedding celebration of the Lamb”. If the bride is the church, who are these others invited? Jesus used this wedding guest image (Mt 9:15; 22:2-14) to represent those called to be part of the kingdom, that is, Christians. It would seem that both the bride and the guests both symbolize the redeemed. If some distinction between members of the redeemed is intended, it is far from clear what that might be, and so I will not speculate on that here.

It would appear that John misunderstood what the angel meant when he said “These are the true words of God”, thinking he was being spoken to by God. The angel quickly corrected John when he tried to worship the angel. This passage is apologetically significant. An admirer of John writing this as a forgery would hardly have invented such an episode about his beloved hero. Nor would it be likely that John would create such an episode about himself if he were writing a fiction.

### 4.0 Defeat of the Beast and False Prophet (Rev 19:11-21)

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We’ve encountered the symbol of a white horse before. Here it is unambiguously clear that the one riding is the Messiah, the divine *Logos* of God. The White of his horse and his armies symbolize purity. The clothing dipped (or perhaps soaked or drenched) in blood may be a martial image. Ancient hand-to-hand combat was fought with swords, so the soldiers would be covered in blood. In fact, the weapon he strikes the nations with is a sword. On the other hand the blood could be the Messiah’s own.

The sword comes from his mouth. This indicates we are not dealing with a literal martial battle here, but one of theologies and ideologies. We've seen this sword referred to earlier as a double-edged sword. But, he also "stomps the winepress of the furious wrath of God". We've seen this image explicitly in chapter 14, and implicitly in the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls of wrath.

We saw an intensification of the conflict and the battle of Armageddon with the bowl judgments, and we saw the intensification of the conflict in the killing of the two witnesses at the end of the 1,260 days in chapter 11. Here we see again the kings and armies assembled for battle. The conclusion of the battle is revealed in greater detail: The beast (the anti-Christian political powers) and the false prophet (the anti-Christian religious powers) are cast into the lake of fire, that is, Hell, and their armies are killed. Since the weapon (the sword from his mouth) is likely a symbol, it is hard to tell to what degree the death and carnage here should be understood literally. The imagery here reflects that found in Ezekiel 38-39.

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## 5.0 Defeat of the Dragon (Rev 20:1-10)

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Except perhaps for Genesis 1, more ink has been spilled on these ten verses than any other passage in the Bible. I have no delusions that I am going to settle the issue here. I will present what is frankly my opinion. That fact alone presents two strikes against this. First it's mine, and second it's an opinion. Good Christians of every age have had a variety of opinions on understanding this passage, and the various opinions have waxed and waned in popularity as though they were a brand of shoes or a hair style. Thus one should approach this passage with humility and only with "fear and trembling" approach any single interpretation.

I have made several rewrites of this section. The number of issues that it brings up is overwhelming. There is no simple way to arrange the information.

### 5.1 Satan Bound (20:1-3)

**The Abyss.** We see a downward trajectory for Satan. First he is in heaven, then cast down to the earth. Now he is relegated to the abyss. This would seem, then, to be in sequence after the tribulation. Recall the chiasmic structure discussed above. The first half deals with the dragon, beast, false prophet, and Babylon in their roles during the three and one-half year tribulation. Then, in reverse order, we deal with their final disposition at the end of the tribulation. This is contrary to the amillennial position, which equates the 1,000 years with the three and one-half years.

Recall in chapter 11 the sequence of events after the two witnesses are killed. They lie dead for three and one-half days (that is, the public proclamation of the Gospel is silenced), then they are resurrected, 7,000 people are killed by an earthquake (a symbolic number chosen to be a negative image of the 7,000 remnant in Elijah's day), and finally something unique happens that doesn't happen after any of the other judgments: "the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven". Instead of a blaspheming of God, a massive revival occurs!



**Deception.** Satan is specifically said to be kept from deceiving the nations (not the church) during the 1,000 years. That is, a previous situation is brought to an end. Christ warned about deception in the Olivet Discourse (Mk 13:5ff and parallels). Paul said:

2 Co 4:3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, 4:4 among whom the god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe so they would not see the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God.

In Colossians 2:8 “deceitful philosophy” is attributed in part to “elemental spirits”, that is demonic forces. In Revelation itself, the role of the beast with two horns is to be a false prophet and deceive the nations into worshiping the image of the seven headed beast (Rev 13:11-18, especially verse 14 “he deceived those who live on the earth”). Babylon also deceived the nations (Rev 18:23) by her magic (Satanic) spells.

The straightforward reading of Revelation is that this deception ends with the destruction of Babylon, the false prophet, and the beast. Satan is effectively bound then (as spirit, we should understand the chains as figurative, of course), lacking the means through which he can deceive the nations. It is a common saying that if Satan is bound now (the amillennial position), then the chain is too long.

## 5.2 The First Resurrection and Second Death(20:4-6)

**Introduction.** If we could understand what the first resurrection is and who is resurrected, it would go a long way to determining what the millennium is. Alas a definitive answer escapes us. Gather ten scholars in a room, and you’ll end up with twenty interpretations. I cannot hope to give a comprehensive overview of all the interpretations of this passage, nor a rigorous proof that my opinion is right. None the less, this is scripture, and so I shall wrestle with it as best as I can.

**The Martyrs.** Martyrs have already been encountered in Revelation. When the fifth seal was opened, John “saw under the altar the souls of those who had been violently killed because of the word of God and because of the testimony they had given” [Rev 6:9]. They are described in almost identical words here.

The wording “souls of those...” indicates he is seeing disembodied souls. While the word “souls” can mean in-the-flesh “people”, we cannot translate this as “people of those...”; that would make no sense. They are described both positively and negatively (that is, in terms of what they are and what they are not). ASV and NASB are in error here in that they transform the relative clause into a second object (“I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded ... and those who had not worshipped the beast”). See D. E. Aune’s commentary, where he ponders whether one or two sets of martyrs (beheaded for two different reasons) is in sight here, not whether martyrs and someone else are listed:

One problem is whether two types of martyrs are in view in v 4bc, as Bousset ([1906] 437) claims, or just a single group. It is more natural to construe the text as referring to a single group of martyrs, who had been executed for both positive reasons (v 4b: their obedience to the

commands of God and their witness to Jesus) and negative reasons (v 4c: their refusal to worship the beast or its image and to receive its brand on their foreheads and right hands).<sup>1</sup>

A legitimate question is to ask who these martyrs represent. That is, might they be symbolic of more than literal martyrs? In both passages referring to martyrs, great emphasis is given to the violence of their execution. In Revelation 6, they are under an altar, representing a sacrificial death, and not just the death that comes to all men, and were “violently killed”. In our current passage, a specific, unambiguous, mode of execution is called out (although it likely stands for all modes of execution). Absent strong evidence to the contrary, I’m inclined to think actual literal martyrdom is referred to here.

**came to life.** The Greek verb here can be ingressive (came to life)<sup>2</sup> or constative (lived).<sup>3</sup> That it is referred to as a resurrection in verse 5, in my opinion, pretty much settles the issue that we should read it as an ingressive, as most translations in fact do.

**first resurrection.** One doesn’t usually describe something as first unless there is also a second. While the term second resurrection does not occur in Revelation, it is certainly implied. First we have the martyr come to life and reign with Christ for 1,000 years. Then we have the statement “The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were finished.” Some writers have attempted to read this to indicate only that they didn’t “come to life” during the 1,000 years, but doesn’t say anything about their coming to life afterwards.<sup>4</sup> This is essentially the same exegesis of Mt. 1:24b-25a that Roman Catholics use to argue for the perpetual virginity of Mary that Protestants, rightly, disparage: “He took his wife, but did not have marital relations with her until she gave birth to a son”. Further since 20:13 specifically refers to a resurrection event that includes those who are judged and cast into the lake of fire, it is pretty clear that a second resurrection is implied at the end of the millennium.

**second death.** The second death is explicitly defined as being cast into the lake of fire in verse 24. It is often contrasted with the first death, the physical death that all but the last generation will experience, and so referred to as a spiritual or figurative death. This dichotomy is then often linked to the first and second resurrection to treat them as different in kind as well. I’m not convinced this distinction between the two deaths is as strong as often supposed.

First, it is important to note that the person does not cease to exist after either death. After the first death, the soul is torn from the body and the body then decays. But at the resurrection, body and soul are reunited. Even the reprobate become living, breathing, walking around live people. But then they are cast into the lake of fire. Is it unreasonable to describe what happens to the body in the second death then as a literal death?

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1. D. E. Aune. 2002. *Vol. 52C: Word Biblical Commentary : Revelation 17-22*. p. 1088

2. See note in NET.

3. James A. Hugues. 1973. “Revelation 20:4-6 and the Question of the Millennium”. *Westminster Theological Journal* 35:3 Spring 1973. p. 289-290.

4. James A. Hugues. 1973. “Revelation 20:4-6 and the Question of the Millennium”. *Westminster Theological Journal* 35:3 Spring 1973.

Whatever it is that happens to the body, chemically, physically, or otherwise, it certainly isn't experiencing anything reasonably called a life.

**the rest of the dead.** The dead are divided into two explicitly disjoint subsets: the martyred dead and the rest of the dead. The former comes to life in a resurrection at the beginning of the millennium, the later in a resurrection at the end of the millennium. Given those terms, it seems unreasonable to assume the two resurrections are different in nature, and given the doctrine of the physical resurrection from the rest of scripture (not to mention Revelation 20:13), that resurrection is physical in nature.

How does this fit in with the rapture, that is, the transformation of the living that Paul refers to in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17?

4:13 Now we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest who have no hope. 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also we believe that God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep as Christians. 4:15 For we tell you this by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep. 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 4:17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be suddenly caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord.

Those "who have died in the Lord" is broader than just martyrs, so the event that Paul refers to must correspond to the resurrection that happens at the end of the millennium.

**reign.** revelation does not explain what it means for the martyrs to reign with Christ. It does not tell us if the resurrected martyred are translated to heaven to reign with Christ there, or whether they are on earth, walking around like those who were resurrected when Jesus rose from the dead (Mt. 27:52-53). It is a mystery that will be resolved when it happens.

We do see, however, in Rev 22:4-5, that reigning is something that the entire church does after the millennium ("and they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more, and they will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine on them, and they will reign forever and ever"). I think we can safely conclude from this that the reigning is not a simple political reign as envisioned by Dispensationalists.

### **5.3 Satan Cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:7-10)**

**Deceive.** The deception that had been interrupted for the thousand years is permitted again. The immediate result is opposition to Christ's saints. The target is the camp of the saints. No mention is made of Christ being physically present. Instead, rescue comes from heaven, and the devil is thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet had been cast at the beginning of the millennium.

**Gog and Magog.** There was already one allusion in chapter 19 to Ezekiel 38-39. Gog and Magog here is one. In Ezekiel, Gog is the prince of Magog who is prophesied to attack Israel and be miraculously and thoroughly defeated. While a detailed exegesis of the Ezekiel passage is beyond the scope of this study, we need to note that there are two interpretations of it in its own context. One is that predicts a historical conflict that has already taken place, usually the conflict with Antiochus IV. The other is that it is identical to the eschatological conflict here.

If the Ezekiel passage refers directly to a historical conflict, as seems very likely as it makes no explicitly eschatological references, then the allusions in Revelation are invoking the memory of that conflict by using symbols derived from that passage for the purpose of assuring us of the power of God to defeat his saint's enemies. He accomplished his purpose in the past and can do it again in the future.

#### 5.4 Amillennialism

I have present a post-millennial view above. Within Reformed churches, Amillennialism is actually more common. Amillennialism does not reach absolute consensus on every point of interpretation, so I'll touch on some of the main alternatives of exegesis by surveying a small handful of representative writers, as well as critique their views. I make no pretensions that this survey is comprehensive.

**William Hendriksen**<sup>1</sup>. Hendriksen argues for chapter 20 being a recapitulation of the previous chapter. He writes, "the connection between chapters 19 and 20 is similar to that between chapters 11 and 12."<sup>2</sup> However, recall the structural relationships we noted within chapters 4-11 and how chapter 12 began anew with a representation of the incarnation. Such a break is not in fact obvious at chapter 20. In fact, we've noted the chiasmic structure of chapters 12-20 that links chapter 20 with events that specifically take place at the end of the 1,260 days.

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1. William Hendriksen. 1967. *More Than Conquerors*.

2. p. 184

Hendriksen draws a number of parallels between chapters 11-14 and chapter 20 that he believes illustrate that the 1,260 days and the millennium are the same time period, reproduced below:<sup>1</sup>

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**TABLE 1.****Revelation 11-14 Compared With Revelation 20****Revelation 11-14**

12:5-12. In connection with Christ's birth, death, ascension, and coronation, Satan is hurled down from heaven. His accusations lose every semblance of justice.

11:2-6; 12:14ff. A long period of power and witness-bearing for the Church, which is nourished 'away from the face of the serpent (Satan)'. The devil's influence is curbed.

11:7ff; 13:7. A very brief period of most severe persecution. This is Satan's little season; the most terrible and also the final manifestation of the persecuting power of antichrist.

11:17,18; 14:14ff. The one and only second coming of Christ in judgment.

**Revelation 20**

20:1-3. Satan is bound and cast into the abyss; his power over the nations is curbed. Instead of the nations conquering the Church, the Church begins to conquer (evangelize) the nations.

20:2. A long period of power for the Church, Satan having been bound. He remains bound for a thousand years, that is, during this entire gospel age. (In heaven the souls of the redeemed are living and reigning with Christ, 20:4-6.)

20:7ff. A very brief period of most severe persecution; Satan marshals the army of Gog and Magog against the Church. This is the Battle of Har-Magedon.

20:11ff. The one and only second coming of Christ in judgment.

We may critique these parallels by noting that most are more accurately contrasts. When Satan was "hurled down from heaven", his domain was specifically cited as being the earth (Rev. 12:12 "But woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has come down to you"). When Satan is bound, it is in the abyss, a further removal downward. The separation between the church and Satan in Rev 12:14ff is by means of the woman being translated away from Satan, but in Revelation 20, it's by Satan being translated away from the earth. After the showdown in Revelation 11:7ff and the witnesses are killed, some sort of revival event happens that results in the survivors giving "glory to the God of heaven". In Revelation 20, the final battle is cut short before it begins. Gog and Magog gather around the saints, and fire comes down from heaven and consumes them.

Hendriksen exegetes the participants in the first resurrection as two groups:

First of all, all the souls of the martyrs, 'those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus'. Secondly, all other believers who died in their faith, 'such as worshipped not the beast', *etc.*

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1. *ibid.* p. 184.

Hendriksen appears to be quoting the ASV, which we noted earlier, mistranslates the relative clause. Most other interpreters resort to spiritualizing the martyrs instead to achieve the same exegesis.

**James A. Hughes<sup>1</sup>**. Hughes takes the common position that the first resurrection refers to the ascent of the elect souls to heaven to be with Christ at death. This of course requires expanding the reference to martyrs to include all the elect, a questionable exegesis in itself. But, he also proceeds to interpret numerous other references to resurrection in the New Testament to refer to this spiritual resurrection, and not the physical resurrection. Space and time do not permit examining each of these, but note that the effect of such unrestrained spiritualizing comes awfully close to full preterism. See my study on the physical resurrection on my web site.

Hugues interprets the resurrection of the rest of the dead to be a non-event, using the exegesis discussed above that is analogous to the Roman Catholic exegesis for the perpetual virginity of Mary.

**Norman Shepherd<sup>2</sup>**. Shepherd looks to Paul's use of resurrection as metaphor in Colossians 2:12, 3:1, and Ephesians 2:6 to interpret the first resurrection of Revelation 20:4 to represent the "raising up" the Christian experiences at baptism (which of course leads to an amillennial understanding of the thousand years). Seeking how symbols are used elsewhere in scripture is a good hermeneutic to use, so this is a quite attractive interpretation.

However, as we saw in the symbolism of the word "harvest", where we saw it used three different ways by Jesus, finding a symbolic use one place in scripture is not necessarily a guarantee of its interpretation in another. The big problem here, as I see it, is the questionable exegesis of the "rest of the dead" clause that we've already encountered. That is, Shepherd understands the clause "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were finished" to have an implicit "nor did they do so afterwards either". We've already discussed the drawbacks of this approach.

**Meredith B. Kline<sup>3</sup>**. Kline argues that just as the "first" and second deaths are not a sequence of like events, the first and "second" resurrections are similarly two things of a different nature. That is, one is spiritual and the other physical. What is a physical death for the unbeliever is a spiritual resurrection for the believer, and what is a spiritual death for the unbeliever is a physical life for the believer. This is based in large part on a rather tortured exegesis of what "first" means in scripture. Kline's general argument is that "first" is not used to indicate the first of a series of identical things, but is used in contrast to "new" or "last" in contexts where the "first" is the world that is passing while the "new" or "second" is the eternal world to come. Yes, "first" is used in contexts that

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1. James A. Hugues. 1973. "Revelation 20:4-6 and the Question of the Millennium". *Westminster Theological Journal* 35:3 Spring 1973.

2. Norman Shepherd. 1974. "The Resurrections of Revelation 20". *Westminster Theological Journal* 37:1 Fall 1974.

3. Meredith B. Kline. 1975. "The First Resurrection". *Westminster Theological Journal* 37:3. Spring 1975.

refer to the current age that is passing, but it is too much to reach such a technical meaning into the word itself.<sup>1</sup>

**R. Fowler White<sup>2</sup>.** White makes a number of exegetical contentions that he believes demonstrate that the thousand years of Rev. 20:1-10 must recapitulate the three and a half years of the previous chapters in general and Revelation 19:11-21 in particular, hence arguing for Amillennialism. I shall discuss some of the more compelling here.

His first is that the destruction of the nations in Revelation 19:11-21 leaves no nations to be ruled in Revelation 20:1-10. This reads too much into the prophetic language of destruction (which is often hyperbolic) in Revelation 19:11-21. In verse 15, we read “From his mouth extends a sharp sword, so that with it he can strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod, and he stomps the winepress of the furious wrath of God, the All-Powerful”. If verses 11-21 are about the total extermination of the nations, it seems pointless to refer to the symbol of the sword coming from his mouth (symbolic of the Gospel) and to refer to him ruling. What are destroyed are the beast and false prophet, which we have seen stand for anti-christian political and religious institutions. If anyone is literally killed here, it is the instruments of these abstractions, and not the nations as a whole.

White’s second point is that Ezekiel 38-39 are alluded to in both Revelation 19:17-21 and after the thousand years in Revelation 20:7-10. He argues that this indicates that both conflicts must be the same conflict. If the events of Ezekiel 38-39 could be confidently identified as being identical to the eschatological events in Revelation 19-20, then this might carry some weight. However, even an ardent amillennialist such as Hendriksen understands Ezekiel 38-39 to predict a historical invasion of Israel that took place nearly three centuries before John’s visions. These visions are picking up symbols from that passage, the birds eating the flesh in chapter 19, and the names Gog and Magog in chapter 20. This does not require equating them any more than the elusions to the wilderness wanderings of Israel in Jesus’ wilderness temptations and the woman fleeing into the wilderness in Rev 12 imply that they must be the same event.

White takes the cosmological upheavals as indicating the “cosmic dimensions of eschatological divine warfare”. This he thinks indicates they are all signifying the absolute end. Such hyperbolic cosmological language is used several times in the Old Testament, and even in the Gospels where it indicates not literal interstellar disturbances, but the upheaval of several different historical events. There is no justification for taking all such references in Revelation then to all signify one single eschatological literal upheaval.

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1. See also J. Ramsey Michaels. 1976. “The First Resurrection: A Response” *Westminster Theological Journal* 39:1. Fall 1976 for a premillennial response. Also Meredith G. Kline. 1976. “The First Resurrection: A Reaffirmation”. *Westminster Theological Journal* 39:1 Fall 1976; and Philp Edgcumbe Hughes. 1977. “The First Resurrection: Another Interpretation”. *Westminster Theological Journal* 39:2. Spring 1977.

2. R. Fowler White. 1989. “Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1-10”. *Westminster Theological Journal* 51:2 Fall 1989.

## 5.5 Postmillennialism

There are many variations of the millennium views. For example H. B. Swete takes a late date preterist view of Revelation 4-18, seeing the destruction of pagan Rome in the destruction of the beast, then identifies the millennium as starting with that time.<sup>1</sup>

If this or some similar interpretation be accepted, the question remains at what epoch the great chapter in history represented by the Thousand Years began. An obvious answer would be, 'With the Conversion of Constantine, or of the Empire.' If, however, the visions are to be regarded as following one another in something like chronological order (but see v. 1, note), St John has in view the moment of the overthrow of the Beast and the False Prophet, i.e. the final break up of the Roman world-power and its ally, the pagan system of priestcraft and superstition.

Reconstructionist post-millennialists generally take the optimistic amillennialist approach. They thus interpret the beginning and extent of the millennium and the first resurrection much like amillennialist, usually seeing the first resurrection as the metaphorical resurrection of salvation.<sup>2 3</sup>

Earlier post-millennialists to a different figurative approach to the first resurrection. Daniel Whitby they took the first resurrection to mean the revival of the martyr spirit, and thus represent the world-wide revival that inaugurates the millennium<sup>4</sup>. This suffers the same exegetical difficulty of taking the two resurrections to be different in nature when the objects of the resurrections are two explicitly non-overlapping groups.

## 5.6 Premillennialism

There are two popular flavors of premillennialism: historic and dispensational. They may also be described as post-tribulationist and pre-tribulationist respectively.<sup>5</sup> The premillennial viewpoint holds that Christ's physical return comes before the millennium. The millennium is preceded by a seven year tribulation. The historical premillennial view places this second coming after the seven-year tribulation. This view would identify the raising of the martyrs here with the resurrection of the saints and rapture of the living church. The martyrs would then be a symbol for all the redeemed.

Dispensationalists believe in a pre-tribulation rapture and resurrection. This event is not specifically mentioned in Revelation. It basically happens before hand. In fact, Dispensationalists identify a number of eschatological resurrection events.<sup>6</sup>

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1. H. B. Swete. 1907. *The Apocalypse of St. John*. p. 263

2. Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. 1997. *He Shall Have Dominion*. Institute for Christian Economics. p. 428, 430. "the binding of Satan continues throughout the Christian era .... it refers to the spiritual resurrection of those who are born again through the grace of God."

3. Keith A. Mathison. 1999. *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope*. p. 156.

4. Steve Gregg. 1997. *Revelation: Four Views*. Thomas Nelson.

5. There is also a mid-tribulationist viewpoint, but space precludes interacting with it in detail here.

6. Roy L. Aldrich. 1971. "Divisions of the First Resurrection". *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 128 #510*.



- Resurrection and Rapture of the saints before the seven-year tribulation;
- Resurrection of the two witnesses (two literal prophets) in the middle of the tribulation;
- Resurrection of those who are saved and martyred during the tribulation at the end of the tribulation/beginning of the millennium
- Resurrection and rapture at the end of the millennium

Although the multiplication of resurrection events that aren't clearly enumerated in scripture should raise red flags, recall that there are a number of pre-eschatological resurrection/rapture events as well<sup>1</sup>:

- Enoch
- Elijah
- Jesus Christ
- Those raised with Christ

The real problem is we see no indication of the physical descent of Jesus to earth to reign in Revelation. When we do see thrones, they are located in heaven, where Jesus sits reigning now at the right hand of God. Rather, we should probably see the parousia symbolized in chapter 21 in the descent of New Jerusalem to the earth.

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## 6.0 Sorting Through the Confusion

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We just covered several interpretive options of varying degrees of interdependence and independence in the first ten verses. We may summarize some of these options thusly to try to cut through some of the confusion.

### **The souls of those who had been beheaded:**

- Literal martyrs; or,
- Relative clause “who had not worshiped the beast” describes not the martyrs but is independent clause indicating all Christians; or,
- Symbolic for all Christians.

### **Came to life:**

- Should be translated “lived” (i.e., not a resurrection event); or,
- A Resurrection event that happens before the millennium; or,
- A figurative resurrection of the soul at salvation (like Paul's metaphorical use); or,
- A spiritual resurrection at death, when the soul goes to heaven to await the resurrection.

### **The rest of the dead:**

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1. Roy L. Aldrich. 1971. “Divisions of the First Resurrection”. *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 128 #510*.

- Physical resurrection after the millennium; or,
- Figurative/spiritual resurrection that never happens, neither during nor after the millennium.

**First Resurrection...Second Death. •**

- Both refer to real resurrections and death; or,
- First death is literal and second death figurative/spiritual, while first resurrection is figurative/spiritual while second resurrection is literal.

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## 7.0 White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15)

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In the judgment scene, there is a set of books with everyone's deeds, which numerous passages in scripture make clear would send everyone to hell if we were judged solely by them. The other book is the book of life. By these everyone is judged. If your name is in the book of life, you'll partake in the new heaven and earth of the following two chapters, else your deeds will result in your being cast into the lake of fire.

A general resurrection is in view here. This resurrection is a physical resurrection. Hades was the abode of the souls of the dead (Hades). The Sea and Death giving up the dead refers to the bodies to life, even those who received no proper burial. The resurrected bodies then are cast into the lake of fire here they experience a second death.

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## 8.0 Isaiah

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Pre and Postmillennialists see hints of the millennial expectation in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Amillennialists deal with these passages by spiritualizing the message to be something other than a literal hope. The problem with this is the genre of the passages in question is not apocalyptic, so the amillennial approach to these passages is hermeneutically questionable. Here we shall briefly examine a couple of the passages in Isaiah.

### 8.1 Isaiah 2:1-5

In its context, Isaiah holds up to Israel a picture of an idyllic future. It is not referring to a post-consummation future in heaven as there are still nations. Premillennialists see the reference to a temple here as a prediction of the reestablishment of the temple worship in the future. But it is New Testament teaching that Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial requirements of the Old Testament law, and even goes further to teach that Jesus is the temple (John 2:19-21).

Isaiah then contrasts that idyllic picture with the (then) present reality in verses 6-9, and threatens God's judgment in the remainder of the chapter. This parallels the development of events in Revelation 11 and 20. The present age is evil, and battles the two witnesses, even killing them. There are judgments against that evil and finally, after some number are killed when the two witnesses are resurrected, men praise God rather than

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1. Mathison 1999 is a decent survey of these passages.

blaspheming Him. After the beast and friends are thus defeated and Satan is bound, with have a millennial kingdom that would seem to conform to the idyllic picture of verses 1-6.

## 8.2 Isaiah 65:16-25

Here, God promises to create a “New heavens and a new earth”, but it is not the eschatological new heavens and earth of Revelation 21-22. That is, it is not the eternal state. It is an idyllic state that would seem to correspond with the millennium as people do still die eventually (verse 20). The amillennial view equates the two new heavens and new earth and must dismiss verse 20 as a poetic description of the eternal state.<sup>1</sup> Such symbolism strikes me as unlikely, even if the passage in question were apocalyptic in form (which it isn't). If such language is less than literal at all, it would more naturally be hyperbolic, exaggerating life spans, not short changing them.

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1. Robert B. Strimple in Darrel L. Bock, ed. 1999. *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*. Zondervan.



# Revelation 21-22: The New Heaven and New Earth

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**Whatever one's millennial view, the final result is the same.**

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## 1.0 The New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21:1-8)

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**A new heaven and a new earth.** With the apocalyptic literary form, our default assumption regarding visual things is that they are symbolic. So we must ask what might the words of verse 1 “really” mean. To answer this, I think we need to look at the resurrection process.

Jesus’ resurrection body was a literal body. The New Testament goes to pains to emphasize this. See Luke 24:36-43 where Jesus invites the apostles to touch his wounds and eats with them to prove to them that he back in the flesh. Paul says that the transformation of our bodies will be like Jesus’ in Philippians 3:20, and, in Romans 8:19-23, he links “the redemption of our bodies” (resurrection) with setting creation “free from the bondage of decay”.

We should therefore probably conclude that John’s description of the annihilation of the old heaven and earth and the appearance of a new one is not strictly literal, but a visualization of a hyperbole, much like Isaiah’s hyperbole in Isaiah 65:17ff. It represents instead a renewing of all creation, a resurrection-transformation corresponding to the transformation of our bodies at resurrection into incorruptible “spiritual” bodies (1 Cor 15:42-44).

**No more sea.** Similarly, the description of an absence of a sea has symbolic significance. The sea is where the beast came from (Rev 13:1), and the whore of Babylon sat on “many waters” (Rev 17:1) which are explicitly identified as “peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages” (Rev 17:15). The absence of the sea here may symbolize the unity of the post-consummation church as one people, one multitude, one nation, and one language.

**New Jerusalem.** The new Jerusalem descends from heaven and is “like a bride”, a symbol we’ve already seen as representing the church.

**Literalism and Spiritualizing.** We must avoid two extremes when interpreting this last passage. One is an extreme literalism often encountered in Dispensationalism. John is not getting a plain objective view of the after life (or more precisely, life after life after death<sup>1</sup>). Symbolism is the rule, rather than the exception, in apocalyptic literature. If a symbol is used as such elsewhere in scripture, then it usually is being used in a similar way in Revelation. Even the most ardent literalists resort to identifying certain images as symbols here.

On the other extreme, uncontrolled spiritualizing can bend the passage to say most anything one wants. The most extreme example of this is full preterism, which denies any reality to a future resurrection, looking forward to only a disembodied “resurrection” at death. The best (and pretty much only) control on interpretation is scripture itself.

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## **2.0 New Jerusalem (Rev 21:9-22:5)**

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**New Jerusalem.** The city is identified as “the bride, the wife of the Lamb”, that is, the church. A glorious picture is painted of it. The image of the church as a breath-taking city is a symbolic manifestation of the purified and redeemed church, much like a theophany is a symbolic manifestation of the glory of the invisible God. For the most part, we need to be satisfied with the overall impact of its architecture without identifying it as a literal place one the one hand or identifying deep significance to each individual little aspect of the images on the other, although sometimes we can identify, or at least suspect, symbolic meanings to the incidental details.

The twelve gates, and the twelve foundations (presumably of the wall segments connecting the gates together) are named for the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles. This again represents the two-fold witness: the Old and New Testaments, the two-edged sword.

The dimensions of the city (12,000 stadia) combine the symbolically significant number 12 (usually associated with divinely ordained administration) with the number 1,000. The number 12 also appears in the size of the walls (144 cubits, or the square of 12). The cubic shape may suggest the shape of the holy of holies. If so, it represents the fact that the resurrected church is purified enough to be allowed to dwell where before only the high priest was allowed to enter only one day a year.

The sheer size of the city strongly suggests it is not a literal objective description of an actual future city as it could hardly fit on the earth (and certainly not within the earth’s atmosphere!). The diagonal from one corner to the opposite would exceed the diameter of the moon.

**No Temple.** No temple is in the city because the literal temple had served as a sort of meeting ground between sinful man and a holy God where the former could obtain for-

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1. A favorite turn of phrase of N. T. Wright.

giveness. Since not only did Jesus pay the price for our sins, but in our transformed bodies we will no longer be sinful, such a “neutral territory” is superfluous.

**No sun or moon to shine on it.** The point the images regarding light is probably not that God will be a replacement for the sun, moon, and light bulbs in any literal sense. Rather, this is almost certainly imagery intended to invoke to common metaphorical usage of the word “light” for the understanding, knowledge, and wisdom that comes from God.

**River of the water of life.** Similarly, the river and trees of life are intended to invoke the metaphorical uses of water in the Bible as well as Eden. The later is especially in view in the reference to the curse being removed. Ezekiel 47 envisions a river coming from the temple as well. There it is clearly symbolic as it grows in size at an impossible rate and turns the sea to fresh water. In John 4:10-18, Jesus clarifies this metaphor by identifying the fountain of water as the message of salvation that he brings “springing up to eternal life”.

**Nations.** Some interpreters have, on the basis of the references to nations in verses 21:24 and 22:2, argued that 21:9-22:5, 14-15 are a recapitulation of the millennium.<sup>1</sup> However, Revelation 22:5 make it clear that eternity, and not just the millennium, are in view (“... and they will reign forever and ever”). The use of the word nations here is more likely an abbreviated reference to “persons from every nation, tribe, people, and language” (Rev 7:9). That is, it indicates the church as made up of people of all nations: Jews and Gentiles. The reference to healing in 22:5 need not indicate illness in the eternal state, but healing from the illnesses (figurative and literal) of the current age that is achieved when we are transformed (1 Cor 15:42, 51) into the eternal state.

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### 3.0 Epilog (Rev 22:6-20)

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The speaker shifts rapidly in this section. It was confusing, even to John, who once again threw himself down to worship at the feet of an angel. The speakers are the angel, Jesus, and John.

The angel speaks in verse 6, but in verse 7 it is evidently Jesus who speaks. In verse 8, John addresses the reader directly. The angel speaks in verses 9-11. Jesus is speaking again in verses 12-13. It is not clear who is speaking in verses 14-15. etc.

**Obey.** In verse 7, we are told that those who keep the words of the prophecy are blessed, and in verse 9, they angel refers to “those who obey the words of this book. Prophecy is a different genre than law, but it demands a response of “how then should we live?”<sup>2</sup> We do not live in a “eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die” world. Actions have eternal consequences.

**Do not seal up the words.** Verse 10 contrasts with Daniel 12:4, 9, where Daniel is told “close up these words and seal the book until the time of the end ... for these matters are

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1. *Expositors* on Rev 20:1-6.

2. I’m not sure where this quote comes from.

closed and sealed until the time of the end". However, what this sealing might actually mean is not certain.

**The evil doer must continue to do evil.** That the course of history is under God's control is a major theme of Revelation. Verse 11 would seem to be an expression of this — that history, with all its good and evil, is going to unfold as planned.

**Alpha and Omega.** Verse 14 reiterates the merisms found in Rev 1:8 (spoken by God) and Rev 1:17 (Spoken by Christ). Spoken by Christ here, they are a clear claim to deity. Similarly, verse 16, in which Jesus claims to be the root and the descendant of David makes claim to his dual nature as both God (the root, or source, of David) and man (the descendant of David).

**If anyone adds ... And if anyone takes away.** It is tempting to ignore Revelation due to its difficulties. But to do so would be to effectively excise it from scripture. That would be to effectively call upon oneself the curse of verses 18-19. This is scripture and so we must study it.

**Amen.**



# Epilog

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**A brief review.**

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## **1.0 An Block Diagram of Revelation**

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Revelation is a bewildering array of visions of strange animals, beasts, and people. The block diagram below attempts to bring some order to the more significant literary structures within the book without getting bogged down in too many details. In it, the major divisions are broken out with bold lines:

- The Letters (Rev 1-3)
- The Seals and Trumpets (Rev 4-11)
- The Beasts (Rev 12-20)
- Eternity (Rev 21-22)

Within each of these, the patterns of seven with their interludes are shown as smaller boxes within. The sizes of the individual boxes are not proportional to the amount of scripture they represent. Some represent only a couple verses (to show the structure of

sevens) and others a couple of chapters. The later could have been broke out in more detail, but the result would have been confusion rather than clarification.

**TABLE 1.** Block Diagram of Revelation

|                                 |   |  |  |  |                                  |                      |
|---------------------------------|---|--|--|--|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Introduction to Letters (Rev 1) | to Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7)                    | Theophany (Rev 4-5)                        | Seal 1 (Rev 6:1-2)<br>White Horse                          | Trumpet 1 (Rev 8:2-7)<br>on Earth                | The Dragon (Rev 12)              | Eternity (Rev 21-22) |
|                                 | to Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11)                    |  | Seal 2 (Rev 6:3-4)<br>Red Horse                            | Trumpet 2 (Rev 8:8-9)<br>on Sea                  | Seven Headed Beast (Rev 13:1-10) |                      |
|                                 | to Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17)                 |  | Seal 3 (Rev 6:5-6)<br>Black Horse                          | Trumpet 3 (Rev 8:10-11)<br>on Rivers and Springs | Two Horned Beast (Rev 13:11-18)  |                      |
|                                 | to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29)                 |  | Seal 4 (Rev 6:7-8)<br>Pale Horse                           | Trumpet 4 (Rev 8:12-13)<br>on Sky                | Seven Short Visions (Rev 14-15)  |                      |
|                                 | to Sardis (Rev 3:1-6)                     |  | Seal 5 (Rev 6:9-11)<br>Martyrs under Altar                 | Trumpet 5 (Rev 9:1-12)<br>Locusts                | Seven Bowls of Wrath (Rev 16)    |                      |
|                                 | to Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-13)              |  | Seal 6 (Rev 6:12-17)<br>Cosmological Signs                 | Trumpet 6 (Rev 9:13-21)<br>Army                  | Whore of Babylon (Rev 17)        |                      |
|                                 | to Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22)                 |  | 144,000 Sealed (Rev 7:1-8)                                 | Small Scroll (Rev 10)                            | Babylon Destroyed (Rev 18)       |                      |
|                                 | Great Multitude (Rev 7:9-17)              | Temple and Two Witnesses (Rev 11:1-14)     | Beast and False Prophet Cast into Lake of Fire (Rev 19)    |  |                                  |                      |
|                                 | Seal 7 (Rev 8:1)<br>Silence for Half Hour | Trumpet 7 (Rev 11:15-19)<br>Kingdom of God | Dragon Bound 1,000 years & Cast into Lake of Fire (Rev 20) |  |                                  |                      |

## 2.0 Interpretive Issues

We have seen that each of the four major sections presents its own unique interpretive difficulties and that there are multiple schools around each major section. Yet regardless of which school is right, the message that God is in control is still seen.

### 2.1 The Letters

While some interpreters have seen the seven churches as being symbolic for the church during seven sequential ages of church history, we saw that the letters were really written to seven actual churches in what is now Turkey. But, the problems of these seven churches are varied enough that any church of any age is likely to be able to see themselves somewhere in these. Thus, the reformers were not really that wrong in seeing the Roman church or the reformation church amongst their number.

### 2.2 The Seals and Trumpets

We saw on the basis of chapter 12, and on the basis of the non-specific generality of the visions themselves, that the seals and trumpets represent the situation of the world all throughout the church age. The tribulation began with Christ's crucifixion, continues today, and will likely continue for some time to come.

This period was represented by 1,260 days/42 months/3 ½ years as that period of time had recurred several times in Israel's past as a period of particular suffering. We saw that the Preterists, who take this section as referring to the Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD have made the mistake of mistaking the archetype for the type. That is, the destruction of Jerusalem, an event that took place about 25 years before Revelation was written, provided many of the images in this and the following section that are used to symbolize or typify the tribulation of this age, but those source-images are not themselves the things being predicted.

While the Historicist is right in seeing events of history and his own time in these passages, his mistake is in trying to find one-to-one correspondences between images in the visions and historical events, when the truth is that the correspondences are many-to-many. Each vision represents events that happen repeatedly and/or continuously in history. And they will continue to happen in the foreseeable future, and not just in some future seven year period as futurists hold.

### **2.3 The Beasts**

We saw a chiasmic structure in the visions about the beasts. The Dragon is Satan and pursues Israel and her children, the church throughout the tribulation. It's agents are the seven headed beast, representing political power, the two horned beast, also called the false prophet, representing false religious power, and the whore, representing economic power (greed). Some of the symbolism comes from the manifestation of the beast of John's time, the Roman Empire, which some Preterists again mistake for the exclusive target of the prophecies rather than as the archetype for all evil political powers. Preterists are split regarding whether the whore is Jerusalem or Pagan Rome.

We saw that the tribulation will intensify until the showdown at Armageddon, which may not be a literal martial battle. The outcome is the destruction of Babylon (the whore), and the casting of the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire.

The binding of Satan for a thousand years is difficult. I think it represents a great revival that will be the outcome of the battle of Armageddon. Others think it happened at Christ's crucifixion (Amillennialists and some Postmillennialists), and others think it will happen when Christ returns to rule for a thousand years on earth. The end of the thousand years is marked by the final judgment, and, if Christ didn't return already at the beginning, the return of Christ to raise the dead (Amillennial and Postmillennial views, respectively).

### **2.4 Eternity**

Finally, eternity is represented by a huge cubical city coming down from heaven. While some press the imagery as literally as possible, it is more likely images such as the huge city, the absence of a sea, streets of gold, etc. are more symbolic in nature. The true nature of our perfected bodies and restored creation is beyond what we can conceive of today, so any language used to describe it must be inadequate and abstract.



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# Index

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## Numerics

1,260 days 34, 40  
144,000 27, 49, 53  
666 49

## A

Abyss 72  
abyss 32  
adultery 65, 66  
Alpha and Omega 8, 88  
altar 73  
amillennial 7  
amillennialism 76  
amillennialist 69  
Amos 27  
angels 12  
annihilation 55  
antichrist 28  
apocalypse 3, 85  
apologetics 28  
archetype 66  
archetype 48  
Armageddon 63  
Armedgedon 72  
Asia 11  
authorship 1

## B

Baal 49  
Babylon 27, 47, 54, 65, 67  
Balaam 13  
banquet 71  
battles of kings 4  
bear 47, 48  
beast 47

bowls 62  
breastplates 32  
bride 71, 86

## C

calendar 34  
cataclysm 27  
chiasmic structure 70  
chimera 48  
church 61, 86  
church militant 35  
City on Seven Hills 66  
civil war 48  
Clement of Alexandria 1  
clouds 8  
come 13  
cosmological signs 27  
crowns 32  
Cults 4

## D

Dan 28  
Daniel 4, 8, 47  
date 1  
David 14  
dead 75  
Dead Sea Scrolls 4  
deceive 75  
deception 73  
Domitian 2  
doxologies 20  
doxology 7, 61  
dragon 39, 48, 65, 72

---

---

## E

eagle 47  
Egypt 30  
Elijah 35, 36, 49, 81  
Enoch 4, 81  
Ephesus 12  
Ephraim 28  
eternal gospel 54  
eternal state 55  
Euphrates 32  
European Union 51  
Eusebius 67  
evangelism 56  
Exodus 30  
Ezekiel 4, 18, 28, 33, 72, 76

## F

false prophet 49  
First and Last 8  
first resurrection 73, 74  
forty-two months 34, 48  
four beasts 4  
four horsemen 24  
Full Preterist 70  
futurist 5

## G

Genesis 4  
genre 2  
God 19  
Gog and Magog 76  
gospel 2  
great tribulation 27  
Greece 47  
guests 71

## H

harvest 56  
heads 48  
hermeneutics 5  
Hippolytus 1  
Historicist 5  
historicist 15  
horns 47, 48, 49  
Hosea 66  
hyper-preterist 6

## I

idealist 5  
incarnation 40  
interlude 33  
interludes 27  
Irenaeus 1  
iron rod 40  
Isaiah 4, 14, 27, 82

## J

Jamnia 2  
Jehovah Witnesses 27  
Jerusalem 1, 2, 14, 35, 36, 40, 48, 67  
Jewish War 2

Jews 12  
Jezebel 13  
Joel 27  
judgment 37  
Justin Martyr 1

## K

key of David 14  
kingdom 36, 47

## L

Lake of Fire 75  
Lamb 20, 53, 86  
lamb 49  
language 54  
languages 85  
Laodicea 14  
leopard 47, 48  
letter 2  
Lion 20  
lion 47, 48  
literary critical 5, 48  
literary criticism 19  
locusts 31  
Logos 71

## M

martyrs 26, 73, 81  
Medo-Persia 47  
Megiddo 63  
merchants 68  
Meta 41  
meta-narrative 41  
Michael 40  
millennarian 21  
millennium 6, 69  
moon 87  
Morning Star 13  
Moses 36  
Mount Zion 54  
multitudes 85

## N

name 14  
nation 54  
nations 40, 85, 87  
Nebuchadnezzar 4  
Nero 2, 36, 48, 50  
Nero redivivus 48  
new heaven and a new earth 85  
New Jerusalem 14, 86  
new song 54  
new songs 21  
Nicolaitans 12, 13

## O

Olivet Discourse 27, 57  
open theism 48  
Origen 1

---

**P**

parousia 57  
Parthian Empire 32  
Parthians 32  
Patmos 2  
Paul 7, 12  
people 54  
peoples 85  
Pergamum 13  
Philadelphia 14  
physical resurrection 82  
plagues 30, 61  
Pope 50  
postmillennial 6  
postmillennialism 80  
postmillennialist 69  
pregnant 39  
premillennial 6  
premillennialism 80  
premillennialist 69  
preterist 5  
prophecy 33  
prophet 49  
prophetic perfect 54  
prophets 81  
Protevangelion 39  
Providence 48  
Puritans 70

**R**

ram and goat 4  
realized eschatology 55  
Reconstructionist 70  
red dragon 39  
Resurrection 36, 81  
resurrection 40, 85  
river of the water of life 87  
Rome 2, 36, 47, 50, 66  
rule 40

**S**

Samaria 35  
Sardis 14  
Satan 39, 40, 48, 65  
scorpion 32  
scroll 20, 33, 54  
sea 68, 85  
seal 24, 87  
second death 13, 74  
seven churches 11  
Seven Hills 66  
seven kings 66  
seven spirits 7  
signs 49  
skeptical 5  
Smyrna 12  
son 40  
Son of man 8, 24  
souls 61, 73, 81  
sovereignty 28

Spirit 13  
spiritual 5  
spiritual resurrection 81  
stars 40  
stone 68  
sun 87  
sword 72  
synagogue of Satan 12

**T**

temple 2, 14, 34, 35, 61, 86  
ten days 13  
ten horns 67  
ten kings 67  
theophany 19, 61  
thief 14  
three and a half years 35  
Thyatira 13  
tradition 1  
tribe 54  
tribulation 8, 12, 27, 55, 81  
trumpets 30, 62  
two witnesses 34, 81

**U**

universalism 55

**V**

virgins 54

**W**

Waldenses 49  
war 41  
wedding 71  
white 14, 24  
white throne judgment 82  
whore 71  
Whore of Babylon 65  
winepress 72  
winepress of the wrath of God 57  
wings 32  
witnesses 34, 81  
woe 20  
woes 31  
woman 39

**Y**

year of four emperors 48

**Z**

Zechariah 4, 8

---

---