INTRODUCTION:

This commentary is based upon my personal notes, reflections and study of the Book of Revelation. It is intended to help you better understand some of the background and issues in John’s book. Like all my posted commentaries it is not a technical commentary designed for academic projects. This material is intended for use by members and friends of Southside Christian Church, especially our Life Group leaders, to help you lead your group in a verse by verse study of Revelation. However, I do not include discussion questions in the commentary. That I leave up to you as a group leader.

A few things need to be noted. There are occasional references to the original Greek words John used in a particular passage. Those Greek words are always quoted in italics and are transliterated into English from the Greek. I go chapter by chapter in the commentary and sometimes individual verses are commented upon, sometimes it is several sentences and sometimes a whole paragraph. This commentary is based on the New International Version and all Scripture quotations are taken from that version of the Bible. Books of the Bible, Scripture references and quotes are also italicized.

ABOUT THE GREEK LANGUAGE:

The Greek language which John used to write Revelation is a very precise and complex language, especially when it comes to verbs or action words. I refer at times to the tenses of Greek verbs in the commentary. Greek tenses are different from English verb tenses. English verbs most often refer to the timing of an action. Something happens in the past, present, or future. Greek tenses most often refer to the type of action. Unfortunately in our English translations that distinction is often lost. Thus the Greek present tense refers to continuous action in the present not simply an action that happens in the present. The aorist tense in Greek means a point action or an action that happens once and for all. Most English Bibles simply translate the aorist tense as a simple English past tense. We lose the impact of the aorist in English. The imperfect tense is a continuous action which happened in the past and not the present. The perfect tense in Greek is an action that happened in the past whose effects continue on into the present. It is most often translated in English using the helping verb to have. I have spoken to him. An aorist in English would be: I spoke to him. A present in English would be: I am speaking to him. An imperfect tense would be translated: I was speaking to him. The future tense in Greek is the closest to the English future and simply means an action that is yet to occur or it will occur. I will speak to him.

There are also verbal moods in Greek that work with the tenses to more precisely communicate the kind of action taking place. A verb may be in the indicative mood which the most common mood. The indicative is the mood of fact. I threw the ball. The subjunctive mood is the mood of contingency. I might throw the ball. The imperative mood is the mood of command. Throw the ball!

Finally there are two basic verbal voices in Greek. The first is the active voice which means the action is done by the subject of the sentence. I threw the ball. The passive voice means
the action is done to the subject. *The ball was thrown by me.* All of this may seem complicated but Greek was the language in which the New Testament was written. The Holy Spirit had his reasons and it helps to understand a little bit about Greek grammar so that we can better understand John’s meaning in *Revelation.*

**PREFACE:**

Revelation has proven more susceptible to fanciful interpretations than any other book in the Bible. Studying *Romans,* or *Mark,* or *Genesis,* we make every effort to understand what the author was saying and then apply it to our lives. But for some reason, when John in *Revelation* speaks of beasts and dragons, angels and plagues, we outdo ourselves in convoluted explanations and fail to wrestle with what John actually wrote.

*Revelation* is not a comfortable book, yet it supplies great comfort. We would rather not think about the forces of evil in our world, or God's judgment on a sinful human race. Nor do we relish the thought of suffering for our faith. But that is precisely what John points toward in his visions. Despite the terrors of the book, however, John breaks through to the ultimate victory of God and His Kingdom. The trials of this world and the sufferings of God’s people shall not be in vain. Behind it all stands our great God who bends all things to His ultimate purpose which is for us to be with him in heaven forever! *Revelation* truly speaks to our lives with a message that is timeless yet contemporary for us right now.

**AUTHOR:**

The author identifies himself as John, 1:1, 4, and as a prophet, 22:9. When he mentions the apostles in 21:14 he gives no hint that he is to be included in their number. He tells us he has been exiled on the little rocky island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea on account of his faith, 1:9. John writes to seven churches in western Asia Minor with which he was familiar and where he undoubtedly ministered, 1:4.

The Greek of *Revelation* is grammatically some of the worst in the New Testament. Scholars have concluded John thought in Aramaic and wrote in Greek. *Revelation* has a Jewish Christian cast to it and John gives more allusions to the Old Testament than any other New Testament author, yet few direct quotes. Scholars have also observed several interesting parallels between John and other New Testament figures. Only *Revelation* and the *Gospel of John* identify Jesus as the Word of God, *John* 1:1, Rev. 19:13. The author of *Revelation* also echoes the preaching of John the Baptist, especially his title for Jesus as the Lamb of God, *John* 1:29.

Who then was John? An ancient tradition in the church said the Apostle John, author of the *Fourth Gospel* and the *Letters of John,* wrote *Revelation.* Many church fathers disputed that tradition and only after some debate was *Revelation* included in the New Testament, mainly because of its difficult content. Many modern scholars object to the Apostle John as the author because of the difference in Greek style. The *Gospel of John* and the *Letters of John* are written in smooth simple Greek. *Revelation* does not begin to approach that style. Further John identifies himself as a prophet but never as one of the apostles. However, in *Second* and *Third John* he calls himself the Elder and not an apostle. Several New Testament letter writers including Paul and Peter used secretaries in their writing. This could easily account for the differences in Greek style since John was alone on Patmos when he wrote and so had no secretary to “clean up” his poor Greek grammar. For these reasons I agree with the ancient Church Fathers that the apostle John wrote *Revelation.* Tradition says John lived out his later years at Ephesus. That puts him in Asia Minor, the location of the seven churches to whom he writes.
Revelation may have been written by the apostle John but its true author is Jesus Christ, 1:1-2. He unveils “what must soon take place.”

SETTING:
Until the reign of Domitian the Caesars had been proclaimed as gods, but usually not until after death, and except for mad Caligula, not openly and with encouragement. But when Domitian came to power in A.D. 81-96, he demanded to be worshipped and proclaimed a god. He yoked emperor worship with loyalty to Rome, seeking to consolidate his political power through religious means. In the area around Rome he hunted out “atheists”, in particular Christians and Jews. He wanted to be addressed as “our Lord and God Domitian.” If one did not acknowledge him lord and god, one was executed or banished. What were Christians to do? They had little power or influence, and though their numbers had grown rapidly they were still a small minority.

Furthermore, Jews, and perhaps local authorities had been persecuting the seven churches in Asia Minor. Antipas, a Christian from Pergamum, had been martyred, 2:13. John tells the church at Smyrna to expect imprisonment and perhaps death, 2:10. John himself had been exiled on account of his faith to Patmos, 1:9.

John wrote to encourage Christians facing troubled times. He wrote his visions of Jesus to those who shared with him “the tribulation, the Kingdom, and the patient endurance”, 1:9.

DATE:
The evidence of the book and of history suggests the persecution of Domitian as the best date; about 90-95 A.D. Written on the Isle of Patmos, Revelation was probably edited and finally copied in Ephesus after Nerva (96-98), the next emperor, repealed Domitian's laws.

STYLE:
Revelation creates difficulty for most of us because of its style. Full of confusing symbols and visions, how can one make sense of it? John calls the book a prophecy, 1:3. The prophets were concerned with declaring the Word of God. When they made predictions they did it not to give a chart of the future, but to shed the light of the end of days upon present circumstances. They had a peculiar habit of telescoping events, like a picture of Mt. Rainier through a telephoto lens. The picture compresses the distance between us and the mountain. The prophets often blurred the distinction between present and future. Thus Amos could call both the Assyrian attack on Israel and the great salvation of God's people in the end times the Day of the Lord. See Amos 5:18, 9:11. Jesus in Mark 13 telescopes events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD with his return to earth at the climax of history. The prophets were constantly skipping back and forth, showing how present circumstances pointed to the end times and how the end times applied to present circumstances. John does the same thing in Revelation.

John also writes in a particular style called “apocalyptic”. Apocalyptic comes from the Greek word apokalupsis meaning to reveal or unveil, thus the Apocalypse or Revelation of John. Apocalyptic literature flourished among Jews and Christians from around 200 B.C. to 150 A.D. Unlike the prophets, the writers of apocalyptic despaired of God doing anything within history. They looked forward to the last days when God would intervene and end history, bringing his Kingdom. They usually wrote under pseudonyms of famous people (Moses, Enoch, or Ezra) to gain a hearing. They wrote in symbols and visions, with secret numbers telling readers that the
victory of God was imminent. They wrote primarily to encourage faith in times of trouble. The 
*Book of Daniel* is the earliest example of apocalyptic literature in the Old Testament.

*Revelation* has many similarities with apocalyptic. John writes to strengthen the faith of 
people under persecution. He uses symbols, visions, and numbers extensively. A large part of
*Revelation* deals with events of the last days, the consummation of God's reign on earth. But
*Revelation* also differs from apocalyptic. Nowhere does one sense John has abandoned hope of
God acting in history. John also needs no pseudonym, he uses his own name. He writes a
prophecy showing us what is to come but uses the style of apocalyptic.

**INTERPRETATION:**

Understanding the style of *Revelation* is one thing, understanding how to interpret John’s visions is quite another. The problem lies in the fact that John never tells us when he is being literal and when he is being symbolic. He gives us no key. Presumably his readers had the key;
we do not. Scholars over the ages have made several attempts at interpreting *Revelation*. Those efforts fall into five basic categories: the Preterist, Historical, Symbolic, Dispensational, and Prophetic.

The **PRETERIST** view sees *Revelation* as basically all fulfilled. A “tract for troubled times”, *Revelation* has no prophetic meaning. All the symbols have first century counterparts and the book has no significance for our day other than the encouragement we can take from John's writing to the churches. I would affirm that John writes to his day and that many of the symbols have first century counterparts, but to dismiss John's description of his work as a prophecy violates the text. The Preterist view helps us to understand some of *Revelation*, but it lacks the depth to explain it all.

The **HISTORICAL** view, favored by the Reformers like Luther and Calvin, sees
*Revelation* as a running prophecy of church history. The symbols in the book are interpreted to
represent different movements and events throughout the life of the church. One can fit events to
the text in this view, often quite creatively, but the text never gives us a key as to what applies
where. The Historical view places an artificial interpretation upon the text instead of letting
*Revelation* speak for itself.

The **SYMBOLIC** interpretation avoids seeing any historical events in *Revelation*. Instead,
this view interprets the visions as symbols portraying the cosmic struggle of God and Satan,
good and evil. There is some truth to this idea; for instance in *chapter 12* John shows us a picture
of war in heaven between God and Satan. But John describes his work as a prophecy, and uses
his symbolism to teach us about events of the last days. Yes, *Revelation* is symbolic, but
prophecy deals with history too.

Many biblical scholars share the **DISPENSATIONAL** view, including Dallas and Talbot
Theological Seminaries, well-known prophecy writer Hal Lindsay, the Schofield Reference
Bible, the *Left Behind* books and many TV and radio teachers. This view sees *Revelation* as a
prophecy of the events surrounding Jesus' return, written primarily for future believers and not
John's day. The Dispensational view sees two separate programs within *Revelation*, one for the
church, and one for the Jews. The seven letters are prophecies of seven ages of church history,
with Philadelphia as the “raptured” church, and Laodicea as the apostate church of the Great
Tribulation. John's ascension into heaven in *chapter 4* represents the rapture or catching up to
heaven of the church. *Chapters 6-18* depict the Great Tribulation, or the last seven year period
before Christ’s return when the Antichrist will reign on earth. During this time, the Jews will be
converted to Christ and sealed, *7:1-8*; the temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt, *11:1-3*; and the
Jews will suffer the wrath of the Antichrist, 13:5-10. The church during this seven year time serves God in heaven until Jesus' return and his thousand year reign called the Millennium, 20:4-6.

I have several problems with the Dispensational view. First, nothing in the seven letters tells us they are anything other than seven letters to seven historical churches. Second, in chapter 4, the text says John was taken up into heaven in a vision. One has to read into the text the church being raptured at that point. Third, despite the fact the word “church” does not occur from chapters 4 through 21, there remains no evidence to suggest that “God's people”, “the elect”, or “the saints”, as they are called in these chapters, are the Jews only and not the church. The Dispensational view, in my opinion, must therefore be rejected because it does not adequately deal with the text as written.

The interpretation I use is the PROPHETIC. The Prophetic viewpoint states that John wrote to the churches of his day using apocalyptic symbols to tell about the events of the last days. It sees the primary focus of Revelation as the future, yet does not deny the contemporary meaning and application to John's readers. The Prophetic view seeks no exact timeline and chronology of the events of Christ's return, but rather a general outline and meaning of the end times for us. Above all, the Prophetic view seeks to avoid reading into the text what is not there but lets Revelation speak for itself.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK:

Revelation consists of four series of seven (the seven letters, seals, trumpets, and bowls). These are interspersed at key places with interludes that help explain what John sees. John often repeats the same themes throughout. Earl Palmer, Pastor Emeritus at University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, has suggested that Revelation is like a great symphony where the composer takes up different themes and develops them, sets them aside, then returns to them in later movements. John introduces his two main ideas and characters in the first chapter. In 1:7 we see Jesus who is coming with the clouds in glory. In 1:9 we see John and his fellow Christians who share the trials, the promise of the Kingdom, and the need for perseverance. These themes we shall see again and again throughout the book. Revelation may be outlined as follows:

INTRODUCTION - The blessing; John's situation; the theme verse (1:9, tribulation, victory, perseverance); the address (the seven churches); 1:1-1:11.

I. THE OPENING VISION - The Main Character, Jesus Christ; 1:12-1:20

II. SEVEN LETTERS TO SEVEN CHURCHES - 2:1-3:22

III. A PICTURE OF HEAVEN - 4:1-5:14

A. Song to the Creator - 4:1-4:11

B. Song to the Redeemer - 5:1-5:14

IV. THE SEVEN SEALS - 6:1-8:1

A. The First Seal - The white horse to conquer
B. The Second Seal - The red horse of war
C. The Third Seal - The black horse of famine
D. The Fourth Seal - The pale horse of death
E. The Fifth Seal - The martyrs before the altar
F. The Sixth Seal - The wrath of the Lamb

(Interlude: 7:1-7:17; The sealing of the 144,000 and the great multitude before the throne)

G. The Seventh Seal - Silence in heaven

V. THE SEVEN TRUMPETS - 8:2-11:19

A. The First Trumpet - Hail, fire and blood on the earth
B. The Second Trumpet - The great burning mountain cast into the sea, a third of the sea turns to blood
C. The Third Trumpet - The burning star Wormwood falls on the rivers of the earth
D. The Fourth Trumpet - One third of the sun, moon and stars are darkened

(Interlude: 8:13; the great eagle announcing that the next three trumpets are The Three Woes)
E. The Fifth Trumpet - Opening of the Bottomless Pit, the great plague of demonic locusts, the First Woe; 9:1-12
F. The Sixth Trumpet - Release of the four angels at the River Euphrates, and the great army like serpents; 9:13-21

(Interlude: 10:1-11:14; the seven thunders, the bittersweet scroll, measuring the temple, the two witnesses, the Second Woe is passed)
G. The Seventh Trumpet - "The Kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ"; 11:14-19

(Interlude: 12:1-17; the woman with the child threatened by the dragon, the child taken to heaven, war in heaven between Satan and Michael, the dragon vainly pursues the holy child)

(Interlude: 13:1-14:20; The great beast from the sea with seven heads, the great beast from the land, the false prophet, 666, the Lamb and the 144,000, the eternal gospel proclaimed, a call for endurance, the Son of Man reaping the harvest, the wrath of God)
VI. THE SEVEN BOWLS - 15:1-16:21

(Interlude; 15:1-8; the conquering saints, the seven angels presented with the seven bowls of wrath)

A. The First Bowl - Evil sores on the people of the earth

B. The Second Bowl - The sea turns to blood and dies

C. The Third Bowl - The rivers and wells turn to blood

D. The Fourth Bowl - The sun scorches the earth yet people do not repent

E. The Fifth Bowl - The Beast's kingdom turned to darkness

F. The Sixth Bowl - The Euphrates River turns bitter, the froglike spirits gather the nations for war at Armageddon

G. The Seventh Bowl - "It is done!" judgment on Babylon

VII. THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON - 17:1-18:24


A. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords

B. The slaughter of God's enemies

C. The binding of Satan

D. The thousand year reign of Christ and the saints

E. Satan loosed, deceiving of the nations, the final victory of God

F. The Great White Throne Judgment

G. The new Heaven and New Earth, the New Jerusalem, God in the midst of His people

CONCLUSION - The words of John are true; don't seal up the book; the final blessing; “Come quickly Lord Jesus” (Aramaic, maranatha)

NOTE: I have included two Appendices at the end of the Commentary for your reference. Both concern critical Old Testament prophetic passages that relate to the understanding and
interpretation of *Revelation*. The first is my commentary on *Daniel* 7, 9 & 12 and the second is my commentary notes on *Ezekiel* 38-39 & 48-49.

THE COMMENTARY:

Chapter 1:

1:1-3 - God gave Jesus Christ the revelation, to show his servants, that is Jesus' servants or disciples, what must soon take place. The revelation is of Jesus and it is given by God. Jesus Christ is in the genitive case in Greek. It is either a subjective genitive, meaning the revelation is given by Jesus Christ or it is an objective genitive, meaning Jesus is the object of the revelation. The revelation is about Jesus. It is possible to take it both ways and John may have purposefully left it ambiguous because he means both ways. The Lord Jesus is both the revealer and the content of the revelation. At the very beginning of *Revelation* John is already showing us that Jesus is God himself. He will continue to make his case all throughout his book. God made the revelation known to John by sending his angel to him. However, the first thing John hears is the voice of God from heaven. The first great vision John sees is of the risen, glorified Jesus Christ. Angels do speak to John frequently in *Revelation* and are often the instruments of God's message to him. Yet they are not the exclusive agents of that revelation. Plus, the word angel can simply mean messenger and can be applied to a literal angel or even to Jesus as the revealer and messenger of God. *Revelation* agrees with *Hebrews* 1; Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation of God; of his plan, his character and his person.

John testifies to everything he saw, meaning the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. The testimony of Jesus is probably the gospel. The Word of God can mean the gospel or God's revelation to John but later in *Revelation* 19 John uses the Word of God as a title for Jesus himself similar to the Word or *logos* in the *Gospel of John* in John 1. Jesus is the Living Word.

These first three verses serve as a prologue and are written in the third person. Was this done on purpose by John or does it show that *Revelation* had an editor who framed John's work? That is certainly possible, especially since John tells us he was on Patmos in exile in 1:9. He received the revelation from God but he may not have had the means to finally edit and publish the manuscript, let alone see to its copying and distribution among the seven churches of Asia Minor to whom it is written. It is possible John wrote down what he saw and it was somehow smuggled off of Patmos to the Christians of Asia Minor, one of whom edited published and copied John's book.

Verse 3 says anyone who reads the words of this prophecy will be blessed and anyone who hears it and takes to heart what is written here will also be blessed. The word for "take to heart" is a word John uses in 3:10 where the Lord Jesus promised to "keep" the church in Philadelphia from the hour of trial that is coming on the world. The basic meaning of take to heart or keep is to guard, watch over, or preserve. Here in 1:3 the meaning implies obedience to the words of the prophecy. The phrase is a Hebraism, like to hear and obey, which is the Old Testament meaning of to hear something, especially from God. If one heard God one obeyed. If one did not obey one did not hear. Believers will be blessed if they hear and obey what God says in this prophecy.

John or the editor calls this book a prophecy. John himself repeats that claim in 22:18. *Revelation* is written in apocalyptic form with many visions of strange events and judgments yet it is not called a vision but a prophecy. Taken at face value this book tells us what is to come but
like many of the prophets of the Old Testament it also speaks God's Word directly to the people to whom it was written. The seven letters in *chapters 2 & 3* fit that description of prophecy. Calling John's work a prophecy gives us a clue as to how to understand and interpret the book. We need to look for an immediate application to John's readers, God's Word to them, and a prophetic future application, God's Word to us and to the generations to come. The editor says we need to hear and obey what Jesus says to us because the time is near. The Greek word for time is *kairos*, which relates not to a date on a calendar but the unfolding of God's plan for his Kingdom in history. God's ultimate plan for his world will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his coming. The time is near; God's *kairos* moment is at hand, when all will be completed.

**1:4-5** - The book now shifts from the prologue, probably written by the editor, to John's writing itself, which continues all the way to the end of the book. Technically *Revelation* is a letter addressed from John to the seven churches in the Roman Province of Asia, which was in western Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey. The seven churches are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. John gives more detail about these seven churches in *chapters 2 & 3* in his specific letters to the churches.

After the address John gives a typical Christian greeting and salutation similar to Paul's greetings in his letters, but in atypical language. Grace and peace is the familiar language of the New Testament usually followed by a reference to God the Father, and the Son Jesus Christ. Here John says who is and who was and who is to come. He is referring to God and this phrase is an allusion to God's sacred name in Hebrew, Yahweh, I AM. The Jewish rabbis interpreted God's name to reflect his eternal being. The Hebrew name of God can literally be translated I am who I am; I have been who I have been; or I will be who I will be. There is an element of all three tenses in God's name because it is based on the Hebrew verb to be. John takes that idea and gives God the title of the one who is, who was and who is to come. God is the eternal one. This is John's brilliant way of referring to God's Hebrew name without actually using the name itself. Any Jewish Christian reading this phrase would immediately know what John was saying. It is probable that Gentile Christians would as well because even late in the first century when John writes *Revelation* the Old Testament was used extensively in the churches as Scripture because it was the Scriptures the Lord Jesus and the apostles knew and used.

The seven spirits before his throne is a more difficult phrase. The number seven in *Revelation* is used in the Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic writings as the number symbolizing completion of God's plan in his world. Three is symbolically God's number and four represents the earth, as in the four corners of the earth. Thus three plus four, seven, equals the fulfillment of God's plan for his world. We know from the rest of the Bible God does not have seven spirits but he is one Holy Spirit. From the context here which is a benediction of grace and peace from God we know the seven spirits are not angels. This is describing God the Holy Spirit. He is the completion of God's plan in his world and the agent of God's plan presently at work in his church. The NIV uses a text note that describes the seven spirits here as the sevenfold spirit before his throne. John is describing the Holy Spirit and his work in the church and the world. He is before God's throne; that is, he is both IN his presence and flows FROM his presence to do God's work. This reflects language in John's gospel in *chapters 14-16* where Jesus says the Holy Spirit is sent both by the Father and the Son to Jesus' disciples. John may also be referring to *Isaiah 11* and a major prophecy of the Messiah Jesus. *Isaiah* says the stump and Branch of Jesse will be endowed with the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, power, knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Those are seven titles for the Spirit of the Lord with which
Messiah will be endowed. If that is the case then the seven spirits of God are the Spirit of the Lord who is given to the Messiah. This not only affirms the Holy Spirit but Jesus who is the Messiah and the Son of God.

The final benediction and greeting is from Jesus Christ. He is the faithful witness, meaning the trustworthy one who bears witness to God and who he is. He is the revealer of God and his plan. He is also the firstborn from the dead. Jesus said in John 14 that he was the way, the truth and the life, the only path to the Father. Paul calls Jesus the first fruits of the resurrection to come. That is essentially John's meaning here. Jesus Christ is the risen one. He will appear as the risen one in John's first vision later in chapter one. Jesus is also the ruler of the kings of the earth. This is John's way of saying Jesus is Lord, the fundamental confession of faith in the New Testament. John describes Jesus' second coming in chapter 19 and says his name will be written on his robe and on his thigh, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There is no higher authority on earth or in heaven than the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul agrees with John in Philippians 2 when he says God has bestowed on Jesus the Name that is above every name. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father! When John wrote his letter to the seven churches Domitian was emperor of Rome and demanded to be called our lord and god Domitian. Many Christians had been martyred or exiled because they refused to declare him that. Only Jesus Christ was Lord. John was on Patmos in exile because he knew and affirmed that Domitian was not lord; Jesus was Lord! Domitian thought he was the ultimate authority on earth. John knew that Jesus Christ ruled over even Rome's emperor.

Taken together John's greeting and blessing at the beginning of his letter is a Trinitarian blessing from God the Father, God the Holy Spirit and God the Son. It is unique in the New Testament for its language but agrees with the rest of the New Testament in its teaching; God is the Triune God! In fact Revelation is one of the most Trinitarian books in the New Testament; especially making the case that Jesus is God.

1:5-8 - John continues his doxology or praise of the Lord Jesus in these verses. Jesus is the one who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. These phrases echo Paul's statements in Romans or statements Hebrews 9 & 10 make about Jesus' death on the cross. The word translated freed in Greek means to loosen or unbind. It is not the word used for redeeming or freeing a slave but a word often associated with freeing someone from demonic oppression or loosing someone's chains. In this case Jesus has loosed us from the chains of sin through his death on the cross. John's language reflects much of the rest of the New Testament about Jesus' death for us. It is unlike his description of the Holy Spirit as the seven spirits before God's throne, which is unique to John's writing in Revelation.

Jesus' work has made us a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father. This language reflects 1 Peter 2:9-10 and Peter's description of the church as God's people and a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. In that passage Peter is quoting from Exodus 19 and God's purpose for Israel in his covenant with them at Mt. Sinai. As noted in the introduction to Revelation John alludes to more Old Testament Scriptures than any other New Testament book yet with few direct citations. Here John is declaring that through Jesus' death on the cross for us we have become a kingdom and priests to God the Father. Kingdom and priests are both in the accusative case, the case of the direct object. Literally it reads who has made us kingdom priests. John is talking about the church here and not the Israel of the Old Testament. He uses terms that describe God's Old Covenant people and applies them to the church made up of both Jews and Gentiles united in Jesus our Lord and Messiah. This is an important observation to make here in
the beginning of Revelation. John will be consistent in his descriptions of God's New Covenant people throughout his book. He does not see Israel as separate from the church. That is critical to understanding later passages about God's people. Dispensational scholars want to separate Israel and the church after chapter 4 and say everything from chapters 4-18 describes Israel during the Tribulation period. However, if it can be shown that John consistently uses language that combines Jews and Gentiles in one people and applies those Old Testament descriptions of Israel to the New Testament people of God, then the Dispensational argument for two separate prophetic timelines and fulfillments collapses. Once again we need to take Revelation at face value and deal with the text as it stands and not read into it what we want it to say to justify a theological position.

Verse 7 continues John's doxology about the Lord Jesus. He is coming with the clouds like the Son of Man in Daniel 7. This also reflects the language of Acts 1 describing Jesus' ascension and the angel's promise that he will come again in the clouds. John says every eye will see him, that is, the whole world will see him coming with the clouds. Jesus in Mark 13 says the Son of Man will come with the clouds and all men will see him. He adds in Matthew 24 that the sign of the Son of Man will shine like lightning from the east to the west and everyone will see him. Even those who pierced him will see him, which probably refers specifically to the Jews though it could also include the Romans. Zechariah 12 prophesies that the Jews will "look on me the one they have pierced and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child." John quotes that exact passage in describing Jesus' crucifixion and the soldier piercing Jesus' side in John 19:37. It is interesting to note that it was a Roman soldier who literally "pierced" Jesus and not a Jew. The description of those who pierced him here could be deliberately ambiguous to mean both the Romans and the Jews. This is reinforced by the next statement that says all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. They will mourn because they did not follow him. Jesus in Matthew 24 says the nations will mourn at his coming. John shows he is someone who not only was familiar with the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah but he was also intimately acquainted with the statements of the Lord Jesus and his teachings. He himself was an eyewitness of Jesus and had been with the Lord and listened and learned at his feet for the three years of his earthly ministry. This familiarity with Jesus' teachings is another piece of evidence that John the apostle wrote Revelation.

The opening statement of praise or doxology has centered on Jesus Christ. The closing statement however is given by "the Lord God." John hears God give three titles or names for himself. He is the Alpha and Omega. These were the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This is very similar to Isaiah 44:6 where God says, "I am the first and I am the last, apart from me there is no God." However Jesus says to John in 1:17 that he is the First and the Last and in 22:13 he says he is the Alpha and Omega and the First and the Last. Here in 1:8 this is clearly God speaking. John is showing us that Jesus, using the same language, is God himself as well. There is only one Alpha and Omega, First and Last. There cannot be two! Jesus is God!

The second name for God is the one used for God in 1:4; who is, and who was, and who is to come. As I stated earlier this reflects the Hebrew name for God, Yahweh, I AM, the eternal one. The final name is the Almighty, in Greek pantokrator, meaning the ruler of all, the omnipotent one, or all powerful one. Jeremiah's favorite title for God in his prophecy is the Lord Almighty. John is making it clear that God himself is speaking and that the Lord Jesus is God! John's revelation is not his own. It was given to him by the Lord God himself through Jesus Christ his Son.
1:9-11 - John identifies himself as their brother and their companion in the suffering, kingdom and patient endurance that are theirs in Jesus. The word for companion means literally to share in the same experience or enterprise with others. It is a compound word made up of "with" and koinos the root word of koinonia. It is an intensified version of koinonia meaning to have in common with someone, to have fellowship.

John shares three things with his fellow believers in the seven churches. He shares the suffering, literally the thlipsis in Greek, which most often is translated tribulation. It means affliction or oppression and the root word describes pressure or stress. John recalls the words of Jesus on the night of the Last Supper in John 16:33 when he said, “in this world you will have trouble (thlipsis), but take heart I have overcome the world.” The same word is used in the title of the Great Tribulation in prophetic passages in the New Testament. Does John mean his fellow believers are already experiencing the Great Tribulation? I do not believe so but the suffering and oppression they are experiencing under Domitian is a type of the ultimate tribulation God's people will undergo right before the Lord Jesus returns. John says they share the suffering but they also share the kingdom, God's Kingdom. It is coming and their future is secure. The final thing they share is the patient endurance. The word means steadfastness and perseverance. This is what John will frequently call his fellow believers to practice in the difficult days ahead. All three words he uses frequently throughout Revelation and in many ways these are the main themes in the book. They are, he says, ours in Jesus, meaning if one is a believer one of the "benefits" of being a Christian is tribulation or suffering, the kingdom and persevering through trials. These three things go with faith in Jesus Christ. We should not only expect them but value them! Certainly American Christians have trouble embracing tribulation and perseverance. We want the Kingdom but not the rest!

John said he was on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Early church tradition says John spent his later years in Ephesus and was the longest lived of all the apostles. If he was a young man when Jesus was on earth he would be an old man by the time of Domitian and the writing of Revelation around 95 or 96. He had been preaching and teaching the gospel and the teachings of Jesus for 60 years! As a leader of the church during a time of persecution concerning Christians refusing to declare Domitian as lord and god, John would have been a prime target. It is possible that Domitian did not want to make a martyr out of John so rather than crucify him as a rebel he exiled him to Patmos hoping the old man would not survive the barren island and would die. Patmos is a small rocky island in the Aegean Sea. There is almost nothing there and it would have been dry and hot for most of the year. The conditions would not have been conducive for a long life. Domitian was trying to punish and be rid of this troubling old man. God had other plans because it was here that he gave his closing revelation to his servant, the disciple whom Jesus loved!

In verse 10 John tells us he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day when he heard a voice behind him like a trumpet. The Lord's Day is Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection which early Christians used as their Sabbath. "In the Spirit" is a more difficult phrase to understand. The most basic meaning is that John was filled with the Holy Spirit and in an attitude of worship. It could mean he was filled with the Spirit and in a dreamlike state to receive the vision the Lord was going to give him, almost like a trance. However, that view is shaped by the events of Revelation. In context it probably means John was worshipping God in Spirit and truth as Jesus said in John 4.

The voice John hears sounds like a trumpet. In verse 15 he says it sounded like a waterfall, rapids, or rushing waters. There is a significant difference between the sound of a
trumpet and the rapids of a river. As Professor George Ladd of Fuller Seminary observes, the details of apocalyptic visions are often fluid and not always consistent. The trumpet was used in ancient Israel to sound the tribes to assembly or to war. This is not the shofar or ram's horn of the temple ceremonies. It was a silver trumpet that was used in the wilderness to assemble the tribes and alert them that it was time to move. In prophetic writings the sounding of the trumpet of the Lord is a signal that the Lord Jesus is about to return. The archangel was to blow the trumpet of God and assemble God's saints for resurrection day. See Matthew 24 or 1 Thessalonians 4. That is obviously not the case here in Revelation 1:10 but the visions of Revelation do reveal much about the future resurrection of God's people and the new heaven and earth where we will be with the Lord forever. Perhaps John is hinting here that what the Lord Jesus would tell him would have to do with those events and the events of his return. He is calling John to pay attention.

The voice that sounded like the trumpet tells John to write on a scroll what he sees and send it to the seven churches of Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Ephesus was founded by Paul and Laodicea was probably founded by Epaphras, one of Paul's evangelists, based on Colossians 4:16. Acts 19:10 says during Paul's two and a half year stay in Ephesus from 52-55 the entire Roman Province of Asia (western Asia Minor) heard the gospel. It is possible that the other five of the seven churches were evangelized by Paul's evangelists as well during his mission there. John writes Revelation around 95, so the seven churches had existed for at least 40 years when the Lord Jesus tells John to write to them. This was long enough for a second or even third generation to rise to leadership in each church. In other words these were not the young church plants to whom Paul mostly wrote in his letters. These were more mature churches.

1:12-16 - John turns around to see the source of the voice that was speaking to him. The first thing he sees was seven golden lampstands, probably shaped like the menorah, the seven branched lampstand that had stood in the holy place in the temple. The menorah had seven branches and on each branch there was an oil lamp that was to be lit at sunset and burn all night till the morning to signify the light of the presence of God in the temple. The lampstand had seven lamps on it to signify the number of completion of God's plan or in this case his presence in the holy place. In Zechariah 4 the prophet sees a seven branched lampstand with two olive trees on either side of the lampstand. The two olive trees are Joshua the priest and Zerubbabel the governor, God's handpicked leaders to lead the exiles back to the land and rebuild God's temple. The lampstand is representative of the presence and knowledge of God among the Jews. We learn in Revelation 1:20 that the seven lampstands are the seven churches to whom John writes. They represent the presence of God to the cities in which they live. Their light shines with the light of Christ to those cities. The churches themselves are the lampstands in which the light of Christ shines and they are God's holy people.

Among the lampstands John sees someone like a "son of man." This was Jesus' favorite title for himself and was the name for the heavenly figure that would come with the clouds and establish God's everlasting Kingdom on earth in Daniel 7. He is dressed in a robe reaching to his feet with a golden sash around his chest. The white robe and golden sash are reminiscent of the garments worn by the priests of Israel but not exactly the same. They most strongly resemble the garments worn by the angel sent to tell Daniel the meaning of his vision concerning the future of the Jews in Daniel 10. The meaning here may be that the Lord Jesus whom John sees is God's messenger to tell John the meaning of the visions he is about to receive concerning the future of
God's holy people, his church. John sees the "son of man" standing in the midst of his churches for this is the Lord Jesus Christ.

John calls the figure the "son of man" from Daniel 7 but the description of his hair like white wool, white as snow, and his eyes like a blazing fire are descriptions of the Ancient of Days, meaning God, from Daniel 7. Once again John uses imagery to establish that Jesus himself is God. He is God's messenger sent to John but he is also God. He will name the Lord Jesus as the Word of God in Revelation 19. That fits with his task of being God's messenger here.

The feet of the "son of man" were like bronze glowing in a furnace. The ESV reads burnished bronze refined in a furnace. The idea is the metal is hot and glowing like that coming out of a furnace. His feet shone with bright light. His voice was like the sound of rushing waters, literally the sound of many waters. The picture is of a powerful river or stream moving over rapids or a waterfall. The water literally roars as it passes by. This was the sound of the voice. However, in 1:10 John says the voice sounded like a trumpet being blown. The two sounds are both loud but they don't resemble one another at all. One could say the voice sounded like a trumpet when it first spoke to John and then changed to a waterfall afterwards but that would mean the vision was very fluid as well. The other possibility is related to the variability of a vision so that John's details are not always consistent. That is the nature of apocalyptic writings and visions. Perhaps both are true. Ezekiel hears the glory of the Lord returning to the temple roaring like many waters in his eschatological vision of the temple in Ezekiel 43. At least two more times in Revelation John describes hearing a sound like rushing waters or a waterfall. The first is Revelation 14 where he hears the 144,000 singing in heaven to the Lamb. The second is in chapter 19 where he hears the sound of a great multitude praising God singing Hallelujah at the return of the Lord Jesus and the wedding feast of the Lamb. Here in 1:15 the Lord Jesus speaks with a voice like rushing waters.

In his right hand he held seven stars. In verse 20 John is told the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches. See the commentary below for an explanation of the angels of the seven churches. Out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. This sword is representative of the sword used by the Roman legions. It was a shorter two-edged battle sword that cut both ways and could be used in battle to both stab and slash in either direction. It was a very effective close combat weapon. In Isaiah 49 the Lord describes Israel as his servant and says he has made his mouth like a two-edged sword. In Revelation 19 John describes the Lord Jesus’ Second Coming and sees him with a two-edged sword coming out of his mouth. Paul describes the Word of God as the sword of the Spirit in the armor of God in Ephesians 6. And Hebrews 4 says the Word of God is like a sharp two-edged sword. One must remember John is seeing a vision of the risen Lord Jesus here. The sword coming out of his mouth is therefore almost certainly symbolic of the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. The image of the sword reinforces John's title for Jesus in both John 1 and in Revelation 19, the Word!

John says the face of the "son of man" was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. John had seen Jesus' face shine like the sun once before, at his Transfiguration in Matthew 17. The veil that hid Jesus' heavenly glory was lifted for the three disciples on the mountain for a short time. He was revealed in his heavenly Person for them to see before he went to the cross. Here John sees the Lord Jesus once again in his heavenly glory, only this time risen and victorious.

There are parts of this vision that resemble some of the angels who spoke to Daniel or other prophets in the Old Testament. But there are other parts of John's vision that make it clear that the "son of man" he is seeing is no angel! In fact many parts of the vision make it clear this
is God himself. John consistently uses the imagery of his visions to demonstrate that Jesus Christ is God!

1:17-20 - When John sees the "son of man" he falls at his feet as though dead. He fainted! His reaction is similar to Daniel’s when twice Daniel faints or falls at the feet of an angel, once in Daniel 8 and once in Daniel 10. In Daniel the heavenly messenger was startling and overwhelming. Here in Revelation the risen Lord Jesus is the same. The Lord Jesus puts his right hand on him and tells him not to be afraid. Why the right hand? In the Old Testament God's right hand is the hand of power, blessing, and authority. God saves his people with his strong right hand. The king or the Messiah will be seated at the right hand of the Almighty. The hand of blessing was the right hand. Jesus touches John with his right hand symbolizing his blessing, power and authority as the Son of God and the Messiah. He affirms his servant and lifts him up. He tells him not to be afraid. Did John remember those same words from the Lord Jesus after the resurrection on Easter evening when he appeared to the disciples in the Upper Room? This time the Lord Jesus is not trying to prove to John and his friends that he is alive. Instead the Lord Jesus is declaring to John who he is. He is the First and the Last. That phrase the Lord God himself uses three times in Isaiah 41, 44, and 48. He says, “I am the First and the Last besides me there is no other god.” Here Jesus claims a title the prophet reserves only for God. Logically either Jesus is lying or he is God himself because there cannot be two firsts and lasts; there can be only one. Here is another instance where John uses language that proves Jesus is God!

The risen Jesus declares he is the Living One. The Greek word is a present active participle from the verb to live. The present tense denotes continuous action. Jesus is living and will keep on living. He had been crucified but now he lives forever. This title also relates to God being named the Living God frequently in the Old Testament. In context here the Living One probably is a synonym for the risen one because Jesus says immediately after the title, I was dead and behold I am alive forever and ever! He cannot die again. He is no longer subject to death because his very nature is the resurrection life of the Age to Come! The Lord Jesus reinforces that idea by saying he holds the keys to death and Hades. The symbol of the keys relates to his authority. Jesus has authority over death and the place of the dead which was Hades. Jesus Christ has control of death. Hades was the name for the Greek underworld but in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it is the Greek word used for Sheol, the Hebrew place of the dead, a shadowy world under the earth. By New Testament times Jewish thought had split Sheol into two parts; the punishment side, often called Hades and the paradise side, which Jesus refers to as Abraham's Bosom in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. In Revelation Hades is always used in a negative light and is paired with death as it is here in 1:18. That means Jesus is referring to the judgment side of Sheol, the place where the souls of the dead go to await the last judgment by God. Jesus is the judge. The pairing here of death and Hades most likely means that the Lord Jesus has authority over death and is ready to grant resurrection to his saints and he has control over Hades and is ready to judge those who reject him.

Jesus tells John to write what he has seen, what is now and what will take place later. Literally the Greek words read: “write what you saw; what is and what is about to be or become.” Jesus gives John a clue as to what his visions will be about. They will not only be about what has happened and what is happening in the world right now but also what is going to
happen. The sense of the Greek words for the future part of John's message do not convey the meaning of something far off in the future but something that is about to occur. John's prophecy will be like many of the Old Testament prophecies; it will look back at God's dealings with his people in the past; speak to his people in the present day and at the same time point to future events that have to do with the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. That prophetic perspective needs to guide our interpretation and understanding of Revelation. Some passages will reflect on past events, some on the present and some on the future.

The Lord Jesus then explains to John the meaning of the mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands. The word for mystery is often misunderstood. Our English word means a puzzle or question that people have tried to figure out but have so far failed to do so. It is a mystery to be solved. Mystery in a biblical sense as here in Revelation 1:10 means something that was hidden by God and is now revealed. People had not been trying to figure it out because it had been unknown to them. There were no hints or clues as to what the mystery was about. Only God can reveal that which has been hidden by him. We cannot guess it through good detective work! Jesus has come to John to reveal God's mysteries about his people and his plan for his creation.

The hidden meaning of the seven stars in Jesus' right hand is the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches. Angel in this context can be taken one of two ways. It can mean a literal angel, in which case it must mean some kind of guardian angel for that particular church. That is possible but it raises many difficulties. All the pronouns and subjects of the verbs in Jesus' letters to the seven churches are singular and not plural. They are written as to one person, the angel of that particular church. However, the "angel" is often told that Jesus has some things against him and he is called to repent. That can hardly be a literal angel because faithful angels do not sin. The other possibility for the meaning of the term is the more literal meaning of the word which is messenger. In that case it probably refers to the pastor of that church as the messenger of God. The letters are written to the pastors but he is representative of the whole church. Jesus holds the pastors in his right hand, the hand of authority over them and the hand of blessing to them. That interpretation better fits the context. It also serves as a guide for us as to the fluid and unique nature of John's book. The standard meaning of a term in the rest of the New Testament may not always be what John means here in Revelation. The context will best help us understand John's meaning.

The seven lampstands are the seven churches. This is a wonderful picture because it means that each church shines with God's light and the Lord Jesus is in their midst. He is the source of the light and guides them in their life and mission. He is the Lord of his churches and is now going to speak to each of them personally.

**Chapter 2:**

*2:1-3* - The Lord Jesus dictates seven letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor whom John knew. The letters follow a pattern. First is the address to the "angel" of the specific church. That is followed by a self-identification of the Lord Jesus based on John's vision in chapter 1. Next is a short description of the church's situation with praise for their perseverance or admirable qualities followed by criticism of the church and a call to repentance. The criticism is prefaced with the phrase, "but I have this against you." Jesus has nothing against two of the churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia; he only gives them encouragement. He has nothing good to say about Laodicea but only calls them to repentance. The call to repentance is framed in a command of what the church needs to do. Lastly Jesus gives a promise to the faithful in the church and a
command to "listen up!" Hear what the Spirit has to say to the churches. All seven letters follow this general format.

Some Dispensational scholars interpret the seven letters as seven ages of the church with each church representing a different stage of church history. One can find enough details in the text to make things somewhat fit into this scenario but the great weakness of this interpretation is that there is absolutely nothing in the text to suggest that this is what John was meaning. It is a completely artificial interpretation of the seven letters and should therefore be rejected. We need to take John's writing for what it is: seven letters from the Lord Jesus through John to seven churches that John knew.

The Lord Jesus begins his letters to the seven churches with Ephesus. John is asked to write to the angel of the church in Ephesus. If I am correct in my interpretation and the "angel" of the church is to be taken as the pastor, then he is representative of the church and stands for the congregation before the Lord.

Ephesus was rivaled by only Alexandria and Antioch as the greatest city in the eastern Roman Empire. Its claim to fame was the Temple of Artemis or Dianna, who was worshipped as the mother goddess or earth mother in the east by the Greeks and other peoples. Her temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Ephesus was a thriving port and center of trade but by John's time was almost 3 and one half miles inland due to the buildup of silt from the Cayster River. It was built on two intersecting trade routes and connected to the sea; the coastal route along the western coast of Asia Minor, and the inland route which opened to the Lycus Valley to the east, a fertile and populous area of Asia Minor. Ephesus was the chief city in the Roman Province of Asia in what is modern day western Turkey, one of the richest and most populous provinces of the Empire. Given its prominence in trade and its large population it is no surprise that John begins with Ephesus. Early church tradition said John lived out his later years in Ephesus, so this is probably also the church he knew the best. Ephesus was the residence of the Roman Proconsul in Asia Province even though the official Roman capital was in Pergamum because it was the Roman colony in Asia. Ephesus was a temple city in the Empire because it was the site of the temple of Diana and her great idol said to be carved from a meteorite, a stone that had fallen from heaven (see Acts 19:35). The temple brought many pilgrims to the city and resulted in a whole industry of hand crafted idols, many of which were silver, as Luke records in Acts 19. Paul's mission in Ephesus had interrupted the trade in small silver idols and the silversmiths led a riot in protest to stop the spread of the gospel.

The Lord Jesus identifies himself as the one who holds the seven stars in his hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. Jesus holds the pastors of his churches in his hand. This is a picture of care and authority. He also walks among his churches. He is present with them and among them. This too is a picture of care and authority. Jesus is Lord of his church!

The Lord begins by commending the Ephesian church. He knows their deeds, their hard work for the gospel and their perseverance, one of John's key themes from Revelation 1:9. Ministry is difficult. One must work hard at it in order to bear fruit. The Ephesians had done that and the Lord Jesus knew it. He commends them for those qualities. Do we work hard and persevere in our work at Southside? I pray we do! Jesus also commends them for their vigilance against false teachers and wicked people who would lead the church astray. They have tested leaders who claimed to be apostles but were not and have expelled them from the fellowship protecting it. In Acts 20 in his farewell message to the Ephesian elders Paul warned them that wolves in sheep’s clothing would come among their flock seeking to lead people astray. He called them to be diligent in that work. Paul left them in 57 which was almost 40 years before
John writes this letter. They had taken Paul's word seriously and had guarded the church well. The Lord Jesus commends them for their perseverance in difficult times. It was not easy in the latter part of the 1st century in the midst of a major pagan city to be a Christ-follower but they had done it. They had persevered. The Lord and Shepherd of his church tells them, "Well done!" That would have been a great encouragement during times of difficult opposition and the threat of persecution.

2:4-7 - The Head of his church however has something against them. All is not well. They have forsaken their first love. The word for forsaken means to send away, let go, or give up. It was the common word used for divorce. Jesus is saying you divorced your first love! Their first love was the Lord Jesus! The Lord calls them to remember how they used to be and to realize how far they have fallen. He calls them to repent and do the things they did at first.

Ephesus is an example of a doctrinally pure church that hates false teaching but has no love! Jesus is telling them correct doctrine is important, even critical but it is not enough. Love matters more than correct doctrine because he warns them in verse 5 if they do not repent and begin to love the Lord and one another as they used to do he will remove their lampstand. The Lord threatens to close their church! Notice that Jesus says repent and do the things you did at first. Love works itself out in behavior. Biblical love, agape love, is seen in deeds not emotion. Jesus tells them how they treat each other is just as important as what they believe together. A doctrinally correct church without love becomes a cold and judgmental congregation filled with suspicion with people always testing what is said yet ignoring how people actually treat one another in those tests. They talk about love and teach it but they do not do it! Jesus says repent or else you won't be a church anymore!

It is interesting to note that the apostle John wrote I John to the Ephesian church if the early church fathers are correct. He wrote it sometime in the late 80's before Domitian became emperor and began to persecute Christians. In it he calls them to love one another and to guard against false teachers. It seems the Ephesians received the counsel of the two great apostles who had written to them, both Paul and John, about watching out for false teachers but they ignored their counsel on loving one another. The Lord Jesus' letter to them through John a decade later is a warning that they cannot ignore loving one another any longer. It is threatening their very existence as a church.

After the Lord's call to repentance, he commends them once more for watching out for false teachers, as if to say keep your vigilance but add love. Don't swing so far the other way that you throw out true doctrine. He will address that kind of a church when he writes to Thyatira. Jesus says they have something in their favor; they hate the Nicolaitans, whom the Lord Jesus hates as well. The Nicolaitans were a sect who followed the teachings of Nicolaus of Antioch, an early Pre-Gnostic teacher who taught that Christians were free to live as they pleased and compromise with Roman culture. They did not need to live morally pure lives because they were already forgiven. Immoral habits were approved, including sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols. Nicolaus' teachings became a license to sin. They ignored holy living and tried to play both sides of the cultural fence at once. This was a grave danger to the church as it would be today. Cultural compromise and the denial of personal holiness leads to a moral cancer in the church and the stifling of the work of transformation the Holy Spirit seeks to do in us. The Lord Jesus hates such teaching! He commends the Ephesians for hating it as well.

Finally Jesus tells them to listen up! Pay attention to what the Spirit says to the churches. This is a curious phrase because already in chapter 1 John has spoken of "the seven spirits"
before God's throne. Here he speaks of the Holy Spirit as the one Spirit. The Lord Jesus is dictating the letter to John but he closes it with hear what the Spirit says to the churches! Jesus is identifying himself with the Holy Spirit in much the same way that he did in John 14-17. He is also telling all seven churches to listen up! This letter may be specifically to the Ephesians but it applies to the other six churches and by extension to us today. We need to pay attention to what the Lord Jesus says to his church!!!

In the early 100's Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote to the Ephesian church and commended them for their harmony and the love they showed one another. It appears the Ephesian Christians listened to the Lord Jesus' warning. They repented. They heard and obeyed; a proper Hebrew response to the Lord's commands!

Jesus closes this letter with a promise. To the one who overcomes, he will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God. This is the first time the tree is mentioned since God thrust Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 after the fall. Jesus promises if the Ephesians persevere, literally conquer or gain the victory, then he will give them eternal life. Jesus uses the same word in John 16:33 when he tells the disciples in this world you will have tribulation but take heart, I have overcome the world. Jesus has the victory over the world and his people have it too in him! Keep the faith Jesus says; love one another and you will be victorious and as a reward I will give you eternal life in Paradise! That picture of heaven with the tree of life is the one with which John ends his book in Revelation 22.

2:8-11 - The Lord Jesus now addresses the church in Smyrna. Smyrna was one of the most beautiful cities in Asia Minor and was about 40 miles north of Ephesus on the Aegean Coast. It was a major sea port situated at the mouth of the Hermus River and an important east-west trade route in Asia Minor. Smyrna vied for trade superiority in Asia Minor with Ephesus. Smyrna was founded by Greeks but was destroyed around 600 BC by the Lydian king Alyattes. It remained virtually abandoned for 300 years until it was rebuilt by successors of Alexander the Great in the middle 300's BC. They moved the city a little further south from its original site. In 195 BC the city allied itself with Rome and built a temple dedicated to Rome in the city. In 26 AD the Smyrnans built another temple dedicated to Caesar as a god. Smyrna became one of the main centers of emperor worship. The city was given the title of temple warden for its participation in the imperial cult. The Smyrnan church was probably founded by Paul's evangelists during his two year stay in Ephesus in 56-57. Luke comments in Acts 19 that all of Asia Province had heard the gospel. Since Smyrna was only 40 miles north of Ephesus it makes sense that someone from Paul's mission had founded the church, much like Epaphras had founded the churches in Colossae and Laodicea during the same time.

Jesus addresses the church as the First and the Last and the one who died and came to life again. Jesus is God, because he uses language that only God uses in Isaiah. In the temple to the Caesars Domitian was worshipped as our lord and god Domitian. Jesus tells the Smyrnans he alone is Lord and God. Domitian will die; Jesus never will! Their city had died and come to life again. Jesus died on the cross for them and was resurrected. A city could be destroyed again. Jesus will never die and will reign victorious forever! They may be threatened by Roman and Jewish persecution in their city but the Lord of their church is stronger than any opposition they face.

Jesus says he know their afflictions. The word is thlipsis, meaning tribulation, and is one of John's theme words from 1:9. The Ephesians were commended for their patient endurance or perseverance. The Smyrnans are commended for their suffering, for their thlipsis. Jesus says he
also knows their poverty yet they are rich. Resistance from the Romans and the Jews produced economic hardship among the Christians in Smyrna as well. They may be economically poor but spiritually and eternally in Christ they are rich beyond imagination! As American Christians we do not relish Jesus' words of commendation to the Smyrnans. Yet we need to acknowledge that these same conditions are suffered by many of our brothers and sisters around the world today. We wonder if we would remain faithful if our riches as Americans were taken away and it became increasingly hard to be a Christ follower in a society who hated and persecuted Christians. I hope we would but I fear many would fall away from the Lord Jesus if that happened. The Head of his church comforts his people by telling them that he knows their situation. They are not alone.

Jesus says he knows the slander of those who say they are Jews but are really a synagogue of Satan. Literally the words mean these are people who say they are Jews but worship Satan instead. That is probably not John's meaning. These are more likely Jews who reject Jesus as their Messiah and who had syncretized their Jewish faith with pagan and Greek philosophical ideas similar to what Paul describes in Colossians. It could also mean that these are Jews who oppose and persecute Christians and thereby do the work of Satan. Jewish opposition in Smyrna would continue into the next century. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was martyred in 156, partly due to Jewish opposition to the church.

The Lord Jesus tells them not to be afraid of what they are about to suffer. I know as American Christians that is not what we want to hear from the Lord. We want him to tell us we will be delivered from any suffering we might face not go through it. Jesus tells the Smyrnans that the suffering they are to undergo will be short lived, only 10 days, which is probably a symbolic rather than literal number. It will only be a little time. Behind the suffering will be the devil, who will put some of them into prison to test them and persecute them. Jesus calls them to be faithful even to the point of death, which Polycarp would suffer 60 years later. Besides Jewish opposition there would also likely have been Roman persecution of the Christians in Smyrna because they refused to worship Caesar Domitian as a god at the temple to the emperor. Jesus' commands to them are don't be afraid and be faithful to him. He only commends them and encourages them. Jesus has nothing negative to say to the Smyrnans.

If they are faithful Jesus will give them the crown of life. Several ancient Greek writers named the hill above Smyrna the crown of life, because it resembled the head of a statue with its feet at the harbor and its head towering above the city. Jesus tells them he will give them the true crown of life, his life, eternal life and they will reign with him. He does not hide from them the fact that they will suffer. He encourages them to stay faithful and reminds them the suffering will only be for a short time. He points them to eternity and helps them keep their eyes on the true prize, eternal life. Worldly comforts are nothing compared to eternity with Jesus!

Jesus finishes with the exhortation for all the churches to listen and pay attention to what he has to say to us! The one who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death. The second death in Revelation 20 is the lake of fire that burns forever where the devil and the antichrist are punished; in other words, hell. If we are faithful to Jesus hell holds no terror for us because we have eternal life with God! The word overcome is the same word Jesus used at the end of the letter to the Ephesians in 2:7. It means to gain the victory. See notes for 2:4-7 for a further explanation of the word.

2:12-13 - The Lord Jesus through John now addresses the church, or the angel-pastor of the church in Pergamum. The name in Greek means fortress and Pergamum was built on a large
conical hill some 1000 feet above the surrounding plain of the Caicus River Valley some 45 miles north of Smyrna. Pergamum did not gain prominence until after Alexander the Great when the Hellenistic king Attalus I built up the city and founded the Pergamite Kingdom. He allied himself with Rome and built temples to the Greek gods Zeus, Athena, Dionysius and Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. Besides the temple to Asclepius, Pergamum was the site of a famous medical school and healing center. The Greek physician Galen came from Pergamum. Under Attalus' son, Eumenes, Pergamum gained the height of its power. He built many temples and a huge library storing over 200,000 volumes rivaling the great library in Alexandria. In fact because of the extensive writing and copying of manuscripts in Pergamum a whole new industry using cured and dried sheepskin for books sprung up. It was called *pergamena* from which we take the name parchment. When Attalus III, the last king of Pergamum died he left no heir so he willed his entire kingdom to Rome. Pergamum became the capital of the Roman Province of Asia and in 29BC the first temple to Caesar in the Empire was built in Pergamum. The city became a seat of emperor worship throughout Asia. Because of its many temples to the Greek gods and its temple to the Caesars Pergamum became one of the greatest pagan religious centers in the Roman world. This is probably why one of the believers in Pergamum, Antipas, had already been martyred as there would have been great opposition to "atheists" who refused to worship the gods and Caesar as god.

Jesus addresses the church as the one who has the sharp double-edged sword. This is a reference to the Roman two-edged fighting sword that the legionaries used all over the Roman world. It is also a reference to the Roman governor who was said to have the power of the sword to execute Roman justice. Paul makes reference to that fact in *Romans 13*. Rome may think they are in charge and have ultimate authority but the truth is Jesus Christ is the true Lord of all and has the ultimate power of life and death.

The Lord tells the Pergamum believers that he knows where they live and where Satan has his throne. Jesus acknowledges the difficulties they have trying to follow Christ and live in Pergamum. He knows they are persecuted. Satan's throne could be a reference to the temple of Zeus who was the chief pagan god of the Greeks or a general reference to the many temples to the gods in Pergamum that had made it a pagan religious center. However, it is more likely that he is speaking of the temple to the Caesars and the strong cult of emperor worship in Pergamum. This makes the most sense as the beast in *Revelation 13* and the later chapters of *Revelation* is personified as the Roman emperor. Even his number of 666 can mean Neron Caesar, an obvious reference to Nero who had gone insane and power mad during his reign. If that is the case then once again John is not being literal; the emperor was not Satan. Jesus is saying the Roman power and authority when it persecutes and oppresses his people is doing Satan's work and when they demand to be worshipped as a god they are acting like Satan who desires to take God's place. In *Revelation 13* and following the beast is Satan personified on earth and along with the false prophet, form a sort of satanic trinity; the dragon (Satan), the beast (the antichrist) and the false prophet. All three are finally destroyed by the Lord Jesus at his coming with the sharp two-edged sword which comes from his mouth, symbolizing the powerful Word of God. See *Revelation 13* and 19.

Jesus commends them for staying faithful to him even during a recent difficult time of persecution when Antipas, one of their own, was executed for his faith. The Lord declares their city is where Satan lives. The believers in Pergamum were called to bear witness to the Lord Jesus and share the gospel in the very city where Satan lived! No wonder he commends them for their faithfulness!!
2:14-16 - Jesus has commended them for their faithfulness during difficult times yet he does have "a few things against you." He singles out those who hold to false teaching, namely the teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. He says, "you have people there who hold..." meaning they are not only tolerated they are a visible part of the church. Pergamum was soft on false teaching. The two false teachings could be the same group as Balaam in Hebrew and Nicolaus in Greek both mean to overcome or consume. Jesus' exhortation is not surprising given Pergamum's difficult situation. When persecution happens there are always those who advocate compromise in order to get along and survive. This is what had happened in Pergamum. Balaam was the Babylonian prophet or diviner hired by Balak, King of Moab, in Numbers 22-25 to prophesy against Israel who was invading the territory of Moab prior to conquering the Promiseland. God intervened so that whenever Balaam tried to curse Israel which he was hired to do, he ended up blessing them instead and cursing the Moabites.

Balaam, in the teaching of the rabbis of the first century had become a symbol for the false prophet who seduced the Jews to compromise the Law with idolatry and sexual immorality. That is exactly what John accuses those who hold to Balaam's teaching of doing in Pergamum. He then mentions those who follow the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Because the names Nicolaus and Balaam mean the same thing it is likely that their teaching was also the same. This gives us a major clue as to the morality of the Nicolaitans. Their strategy was compromise in order to survive using God's forgiveness as an excuse. It was a denial of personal holiness and moral transformation which the Holy Spirit works in us. That strategy was a major fault of the Jews in the Old Testament and led to a paganizing of the worship of God and a denial of his Law in their lives. Compromise with pagan society is not the Lord's will. He calls the church in Pergamum to repent.

The Lord tells them if they do not repent he will come soon and fight against those who follow this false teaching with the sword of his mouth. The sword represents the Word of God. One way the Lord Jesus rules his church is through his Word. It is powerful and penetrating, sharper than a two-edged sword. See Hebrews 4. Pergamum was the seat of the Roman proconsul and government in Asia Province. Paul said in Romans 13 that the government was given the power of the sword to execute justice against wrong-doers. The true power of the sword however is executed by the Lord Jesus Christ in his church. The Lord of his church says in order to preserve and save his church he will fight some of the people within Pergamum! Jesus will come to discipline not to destroy. But false teaching of the kind present in Pergamum is so dangerous Jesus warns his church to repent. They do not want him to come and fight against those who hold this false teaching! Exactly what the Lord Jesus coming to the church in discipline to fight against the false teachers would look like we are not told. It is possible it could be through a powerful prophetic ministry but we do not know. It is clear however that the Lord loves his church, his bride, and will do whatever he must to preserve her and present her pure before him when he comes again. That includes discipline that can be painful to experience. He is jealous for his church!

2:17 - Jesus exhorts his churches to listen to what the Spirit says! That command is given to all the churches not just Pergamum! The Lord closes this letter with a promise to the one who overcomes or gains the victory. He will give the victorious some of the hidden manna. Manna was the "bread" that God gave the Israelites every day in the desert until they entered the Promiseland. They were able to gather just enough for their daily needs. The Hebrew word means, "What is it?" The manna in the desert was visible and plain to see and touch. Here Jesus
says he will give the hidden manna to the believers of Pergamum. Jesus called himself the bread of life in John 6. There he contrasts the manna that the people ate in the desert yet died and the "bread of life" or the "bread that comes down from heaven", which if you eat of it you will have eternal life. He calls himself "the bread of life." This saying followed the feeding of the 5000, the miracle of the loaves and fishes. I think Jesus is referring to himself when he speaks of the hidden manna. One cannot see Jesus yet his presence in them and among them by his Spirit and his Word brings life, just as it does to us. We feed spiritually off of him and are sustained by him through even the worst of times.

Jesus then promises he will give them a white stone with a new name written on it. The white stone could mean two different things. A white stone in that time was often used as a ticket to ancient sporting events or shows in the theater. It was also used as a way of voting in elections or in a court, white for yes or black for no, or white for acquittal and black for conviction. Both images may be meant here. The believers have a ticket to the Kingdom of God. They have been justified by the Lord Jesus through his work for them on the cross and in the resurrection. Jesus the Judge has pronounced them not guilty! In the latter chapters of Isaiah the Messiah-Servant will give his people a new name, his own name when he saves them. In Revelation 14 the 144,000 who are with the Lamb have the Lamb's name and the Father's name written on their foreheads. The new name probably refers to Jesus' name in which we believe and are saved. We are marked as his and nothing can separate us from him, even difficult times and persecution!

2:18-19 - Jesus addresses the fourth "angel" or pastor of the seven churches, Thyatira. The first three letters to Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum were written to churches near the western Aegean coast, going from Ephesus in the south to Pergamum in the north. The final four letters beginning with Thyatira are written to the four churches along the Roman road that was inland with Thyatira being the northernmost, then Sardis, Philadelphia and finally Laodicea, the southernmost city. Thyatira was the least important of the seven cities of Asia Province to which John writes, however, it receives the longest letter. Thyatira was inland some 40 miles from the Aegean coast about 50 miles northeast of Smyrna and 40 miles east southeast of Pergamum. It was situated on the main Roman road from Pergamum to Laodicea which was in the populous Lycus Valley east of Ephesus. Thyatira was a manufacturing center for shining bronze articles especially, battle shields. It was also famous for a purple dye that was made from a root grown in the area. Purple was an important color for the Romans and was worn by the emperor and the elites in Rome such as the rich or the senatorial class. Lydia, whom Luke mentions in Acts 16, was from Thyatira and was a seller of purple goods. She was probably the agent for the merchants of Thyatira in Philippi, the Roman colony in Macedonia. Thyatira was also well known for its various craft or trade guilds that often held idolatrous feasts. If one wanted to ply one's trade or craft in the city it was almost mandatory one belonged to a trade or craft guild. Thus they held considerable influence over merchants and tradespeople in the city. It was not uncommon for each trade or craft to have its patron pagan god or goddess who was said to watch over that craft. Christian tradespeople were then caught in a bind in the city. If they wanted to work their trade in Thyatira, like Paul had been a tent-maker, then they needed to belong to a guild. If they belonged to a guild they were expected to participate in the guild's activities some of which involved the worship of pagan gods. Their Christian faith was at odds with the Greco-Roman culture of their day. Something similar is occurring with increasing frequency in America today as well.
Jesus addresses the church in Thyatira as the Son of God whose eyes are like fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. The Greek word for burnished bronze is used only in *Revelation*. It describes a metal related to bronze or brass but finer and more precious, perhaps because it was more difficult to smelt. It had a shining or bright nature. The burnished bronze of Jesus’ feet certainly relate to the chief metal-working craft of Thyatira. The idea that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God himself declares that he is above all the other pagan gods of the city’s trade guilds. He is the ultimate authority in believer's lives.

The Lord says he knows their deeds, their love and faith, service and perseverance. They have grown in all of those things. Unlike Ephesus they have not forgotten their first love but have grown in their relationship with the Lord and the loving deeds that demonstrate that relationship. That is high praise from the Lord Jesus. We too should expect to get better at loving people and serving their needs. We should expect growth and lifechange; Jesus does!

2:20-25 - Thyatira is the opposite from Ephesus in that they have grown in their love and service to the Lord. Unfortunately they are also opposite from Ephesus in that they tolerate false teachers and their false teaching. The word for tolerate means they let them continue to teach in the church without testing their teaching or prophecy by God’s Word. John mentions Jezebel, a woman prophet or prophetess in the Thyatiran church. Jezebel is almost certainly a symbolic name for no self-respecting Christian woman would be named after the famous evil queen of Israel! Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab who led Israel into idolatry and opposed Elijah and Elisha God's prophets. She was the daughter of the King of Tyre and worshipped the Tyrian Baal. She tried to stamp out the worship of Yahweh in Israel. See *I Kings* 16 through *II King* 9 for her story.

John says this woman calls herself a prophetess, meaning that she claims she speaks with the Spirit's authority but she is false. The Spirit of God is not in her. By her teaching she leads many believers in Thyatira astray by telling them it is all right to practice sexual immorality (*porneia* in Greek) and to eat food sacrificed to idols. This is similar teaching to the Nicolaitans mentioned in the letters to Ephesus and Pergamum. John does not say however that "Jezebel" belonged to the Nicolaitan sect. She taught compromise with the pagan culture of Thyatira. It is quite possible that her teaching was related to people in the church who belonged to the craft-trade guilds. She was trying to give them an out as to how they would work their craft in the city and belong to a guild yet still be a Christ-follower. Her solution was compromise. Basically she said holiness was not that important. Idolatry was fine in order to get along in life. She taught a lax sexual purity which probably referred to some of the sexual orgies of the guild feasts or cult prostitution practiced in the many pagan temples. This undermined God's commandments as well as Christian marriage. The Lord Jesus knew how dangerous this accommodation to the culture was for the spiritual health of the believers in Thyatira as well as all his churches. Behind her teaching of compromise also lay a lack of trust and faith in the Lord to protect and provide for his people. She taught the believers who belonged to the guilds they had to compromise because how were they going to make a living otherwise! Jesus wasn't big enough or strong enough to provide for them. They had to take their futures and their family's needs into their own hands rather than trusting God.

The Lord Jesus has some very strong words for "Jezebel" and her followers. The Son of God, the Lord of his church has given her time to repent of her immorality but she is unwilling. Literally the word translated immorality in the NIV and NASB is *porneia*, meaning sexual immorality. The NLT translates it fornication. Jezebel is practicing fornication openly and won't
stop! The Son of God, the judge of the world, will cast her on a bed of suffering. Literally the Greek words mean "I will throw her on a couch or stretcher." The ESV translates the phrase "I will throw her on a sickbed." A literal sickbed or illness as discipline and punishment is rare in the New Testament but that is what is implied here. In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul says some in Corinth have been sick and some have even died because of their disrespecting of the Lord's Supper. In Acts 5 the Holy Spirit takes the life of Ananias and Sapphira in order to remove their lies and corruption from the infant church. We discount the Lord Jesus being that serious about sin in his church today but that is exactly what is going on here in Thyatira. The Lord will not allow his church to be destroyed by false teachers and unrepentant sin. He will discipline them and those who follow them. By naming the woman Jezebel and declaring that she is a false prophet it could be John is telling us she is not a true follower of Christ and the Holy Spirit is not in her even though she claims to be a prophetess. If that is the case then the sickness Jesus causes her to suffer is judgment for her sins in order to get her to repent, similar to the plagues in the later chapters of Revelation. The plagues are designed as judgment on a sinful human race to bring people to repentance. This is different than discipline of a believer to bring them to repentance in that a believer's sins are forgiven but Jezebel's are not until she truly turns to Christ. It is a chilling picture because it says this woman has gained authority and status to teach false doctrine in the church in Thyatira and she is not even a believer! Abandoning Scripture as the standard of faith and life in order to accommodate people and be seen as tolerant and accepting is a recipe for disaster in a church just as surely as is failure to love. Both extremes are harmful and threaten the very survival of a church!

John says, "those who commit adultery with her" Jesus will cause to "suffer intensely". The Greek words are mega thlipsis, meaning great tribulation! The phrase about committing adultery with her may have a double meaning. She has failed to repent of her sexual immorality and John may be singling out those who literally are engaging in sexual immorality with her. The other option is that adultery is John's way of naming her false teaching and lifestyle as serious sin. The Old Testament prophets often called Israel's idolatry and sin adultery against the Lord because it broke the first and greatest commandment of his covenant with them. In Revelation 19 the church is called the bride of the Lamb. False doctrine and idolatry breaks the marriage covenant the Lord Jesus has with his people. That is why Jezebel's sinful teaching was so terrible because it taught people to break their relationship with Jesus. The Lord Jesus however is the Son of God who is pure and shines with the fire of God's holiness. He will not tolerate sin in his bride. His purpose is to present us pure and holy before him and he will do whatever it takes to fulfill that purpose! He died for us and saved us and he will not allow our sin and false teaching that leads us astray to undo what he has done!

The Lord calls the people of Thyatira who have been caught up in Jezebel's web to "repent of her ways." Great suffering will come upon them until they do. In fact Jesus says he will even "strike her children dead." Given the context John is probably referring to Jezebel's followers in Thyatira and not her literal children. Jezebel and her followers are threatening Jesus' church. He is ready to take them out. If they are believers they are already forgiven and he will take them home rather than allow them to sow more harm in the church, just as he did Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. If they are unbelievers in the midst of the fellowship then no more chance for repentance is left and the Lord takes them in order to finally judge them. That is how serious Jesus takes sin and false teaching in his congregation that threatens to harm it and destroy it. It is a side of the Lord Jesus we do not want to see and often deny because it is not the picture of Jesus we desire. We want him to be so forgiving that he lets us sin as we please and just keeps
forgiving us. But his grace is not cheap because it cost him his life. If we believe in him and follow him as Lord then his call to a holy transformed life is unavoidable because he is not only gracious but he is God! Jesus is love and Jesus is holy!

The leaders in Thyatira didn't want to offend anyone so instead of testing Jezebel's teaching by God's Word they let her continue so as not to cause any kind of controversy. They had become blind to the need for correct doctrine and teaching. Unfortunately the damage her teaching was causing now threatened the very existence of their church. The situation was so serious the Lord has to take drastic action in order to save them. The discipline and judgment that the Lord will bring on Jezebel and her followers is not just for Thyatira alone. It is a signal to all the churches that Jesus is Lord of his church and knows our hearts and deeds. He will judge sin in his church and will weed out those who have risen to prominence in the church who do not know him and discipline those he loves who do know him in order to purify his people just as the craftsmen smelt the bronze to purify it.

After this frightening prospect of judgment and discipline the Lord Jesus seeks to comfort the faithful in Thyatira who have not followed Jezebel and her teaching. He speaks of them as those who have not learned "Satan's so-called deep secrets". John does not give any more details as to what the deep secrets of Satan might be. The historical context of Revelation however suggests that these teachings were linked to some sort of pre-Gnostic doctrines of secret spiritual knowledge that was supposed to lead to salvation and spiritual power over and above the gospel. The uninitiated were not given this knowledge and were therefore left out. The Lord Jesus declares that this Gnostic idea is not of God but is of Satan. The Gnostics, who flourished in the latter second and third centuries, believed that matter was evil and spirit was good. They denied that Jesus was fully human but recognized him as God. They believed people needed more than faith in Jesus to be saved. They needed angelic intermediaries and secret knowledge from the angels and God in order to be raised to eternal life. Their morality was marked by either ascetic practices and denial of the body or the opposite extreme of a libertarian attitude towards whatever one did in the body because it would be destroyed and could not harm the spirit. Thus some Gnostics taught people to indulge their body's desires. Full Gnostic teaching was not prevalent in the church until later but there is ample evidence in Paul's prison letters and the letters of John, 2 Peter and Jude that pre-Gnostic ideas were already current in the church by Revelation's writing and were a threat to the survival of the church. It is likely that Jezebel's teaching and perhaps the Nicolaitans contained some of these pre-Gnostic ideas. That is why the Lord Jesus singles them out.

Jesus encourages the faithful in Thyatira to hold fast to what they have until he comes. He says he will impose no other burden on them. This is similar to Jesus' promise in Matthew 11 about taking his burden and yoke upon them which is light to carry. Jesus’ coming could refer to his coming in judgment upon Jezebel and her followers when he visits Thyatira through the presence of the Holy Spirit, or he could be looking forward to his final return at his Second Coming. Both events may be indicated by "until I come." Jesus is saying either, hang on until I come and fix the situation in Thyatira or continue to be faithful and persevere until I come again.

2:26-29 - As he does in all seven letters the Lord Jesus gives a promise to those who persevere and overcome. This time he adds, "to the one who overcomes and does my will to the end." The end is probably Jesus' Second Coming or at the very least the end of a person's life. Jesus calls the believers in Thyatira to remain faithful to him no matter what. If they do he says he will give authority over the nations just as he received the same authority from the Father. In Matthew
28:18 Jesus tells the disciples that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. Jesus' promise to the Thyatiran believers echoes Paul's promise to Timothy in a saying in 2 Timothy 2:12: If we endure, we will also reign with him. Jesus himself promised the disciples at the Last Supper in Luke 22 that he confers on them a kingdom just as the Father conferred the Kingdom to him and that they would sit at his table in the Kingdom and judge the Twelve Tribes of Israel. John confirms what other New Testament writers state that part of the rewards that Jesus will give to his disciples is to reign over his Messianic Kingdom ruling the nations with him. John then adds a modified quote from Psalm 2:9, a Messianic Psalm that says the Messiah will rule over the nations with an iron scepter and smash them to pieces like pottery. In Psalm 2 the pronouns are second person singular, "you". Here in Revelation 2 John changes the pronouns to third person singular, "he". This is one of the few times John directly quotes the Old Testament in Revelation yet even here he slightly modifies the text. Psalm 2 was a Messianic Psalm that celebrates the choice of the king as God's Son saying, "today I have begotten you." It is frequently quoted in the New Testament.

Jesus further promises to give those who overcome the morning star. In Revelation 22:16 Jesus names himself the "bright morning star." The title is connected with him being the Messiah. 2 Peter 1:19 says the morning star will rise on our hearts when the "day dawns", meaning when the Lord Jesus returns. The morning star may be a play on the name of Lucifer, the devil, which means Son of the Morning. It comes from Isaiah 14:12 that speaks of the fallen Day Star or Son of the Morning and is commonly believed to refer to Satan and his fall. Lucifer is the Latin translation of Son of the Morning and became the name of Satan before his fall. If I am correct then the Lord Jesus is telling his people; the followers of Jezebel are learning the deep secrets of a fallen angel who will be defeated and judged. Jesus however will give himself to the one who is victorious and perseveres. Which would you rather have; a loser or the one who will rule God's Kingdom forever?

He closes out the letter with the call for the churches to hear what the Spirit has to say. The message to Thyatira is not only for that specific church but all seven churches and by application for us today at Southside!

Chapter 3:
3:1-3 - The fourth church to whom John is told to write by the Lord Jesus is Sardis. Sardis was the capitol of the once great Kingdom of Lydia and was founded in 1200 BC. Lydia was one of the greatest foreign powers the Greeks encountered when they settled Asia Minor. Its wealth was famous throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Sardis had an impregnable acropolis built above the Hermus River Valley on Mt. Tmolus. The fortress was some 1500 feet above the plain, overlooking the intersection of two major roads in Asia Minor; one north-south and the other east-west. The city was never taken in a frontal assault but Cyrus the Great captured it in 546 BC by having his troops scale the walls of Mt. Tmolus at night. Alexander the Great used the same tactic and captured the city by stealth a second time in 334 BC. By Roman times the city had lost its earlier glory and was only a shadow of its former self. It was however still one of the richest cities in the east because of the trade in fine woolen fabric and goods. At its peak it became a center for the Jewish Diaspora after the Babylonian exile and is probably the Sepharad that is mentioned in Obadiah 20.

Jesus addresses the church as the one who holds the seven spirits of God or the seven-fold spirit of God and the seven stars. See the comments above on 1:4 for a more detailed explanation of the seven spirits of God. This is a reference to the Holy Spirit and refers back to
the seven-fold Spirit that anoints the Messiah in *Isaiah 11:2*. In *1:4* the seven spirits are before the throne of God. Here the Lord Jesus holds them in his hand. The implication is the Lord Jesus has authority over the seven spirits of God or the Holy Spirit. He does Jesus' bidding in his church, yet the seven spirits are not mentioned in John's vision of the risen Lord Jesus in *1:12-20*. The seven stars are the angels or pastors of the seven churches. The Lord Jesus is telling them that he holds his churches and their leaders in his hand and has authority over them and also protects them. He is Lord of his church through his Spirit!

Jesus knows what is happening in Sardis. They have the reputation or name of being alive and look good on the outside but inside they are spiritually dead. They cannot fool the Lord of his church! Jesus tells them to wake up. The church is like its namesake city. Sardis had an ancient and famous reputation in the east but it had fallen far from its glory days by the time John writes his letter. The command to "Wake up!" is almost like a shout to someone who has overslept. Jesus exhorts them to strengthen, establish or fix what remains and is about to die. There is still hope for Sardis but it will take drastic action to save the church. If they do not obey the Lord Jesus their church will die all together! This is a church that is in desperate need of revival from the Spirit of God.

The Lord Jesus says he has not found their deeds complete in the sight of God. The verb means to fulfill, complete or be filled up. The verbs “found” and “complete” are in the perfect tense, meaning something started in the past and its effects are still going on in the present. John implies by the words he uses that the Lord Jesus had begun to work in the church but the energy they once had for doing the Lord's work has dissipated. They were no longer filled with his Spirit and doing things under his power. Jesus had more for them to do to fulfill their purpose as his church but they have lost his life, power and presence among them. They were still doing good things but there was no Spirit in them, no life. Jesus is telling them they need more than dead works, even good actions; they need his Spirit and a relationship with him. They need faith! There is no persecution mentioned here or even false teaching. The impression from this letter is the Christians in Sardis don't even know there is anything wrong because they are so dead. They are what someone described as, "Looking forward to the past."

The Lord Jesus calls the church to remember what they received and heard; obey it and repent. In the beginning they had heard and received the gospel. Jesus is calling them to go back to the beginning. They need to obey what God says and repent. Jesus' commands hold out hope for this dying church that it is not too late. There is still an opportunity for repentance and renewal no matter how slim. Jesus does not say that he is through with Sardis. The hope they have is dependent upon the people of Sardis to listen to what the Spirit says to them, recognize their spiritual deadness and repent. It's almost like they need to hear and believe the gospel all over again. They have the form of godliness but no power. Their Christian faith is mere religion and good deeds with no relationship with the Lord Jesus. This dying church needs to acknowledge its sinfulness before the Lord which is very hard to do when the people are so spiritually dead.

Jesus warns them if they do not wake up he will come like a thief and they will not know the time he will come to them. The time is literally the hour. This could also be a reminder to the people of Sardis that both Cyrus and Alexander captured the city by stealth because the people were not ready. The reference to coming like a thief could be they will be totally surprised by Jesus’ Second Coming and will be terrified and caught off guard. Jesus warns the disciples often in the gospels that he will come like a thief when people least expect him to come. But then he exhorts the disciples to be ready, watch and pray lest that day surprise them. See *Matthew 24-25,*
Mark 13 and Luke 22. However, it is also possible that Jesus is referring to a special visit from the Spirit of God to discipline his church in Sardis. Both interpretations are possible and perhaps Jesus is purposefully vague enough so that the people in Sardis hear both meanings. Certainly Jesus is ready to come to the church through the power of the Holy Spirit and wake them up because he loves his church. It is also true that if we are not ready for his coming, watching and praying, his coming will surprise us and we might be tempted to deny him or fall away from him before he comes. Jesus does not want that to happen even to the spiritually dead believers in Sardis. He loves them all!

3:4-6 - Even in a dead church like Sardis there are still those who know the Lord Jesus. There are some who have not soiled their clothes. This is a reference to the worldliness of the people in Sardis. Jesus does not call them to repent of immorality or idolatry like the other churches. The people in Sardis still do good things but they are dead spiritually. They have lost their relationship with the Lord and have been coopted by the world. The Lord says those who are still pure and know him will walk with him dressed in white because they are worthy. The Lord promises his faithful ones in Sardis they will have fellowship with him and he will purify them and keep them pure.

Those who repent and overcome will be dressed in white as well. The reference is probably to the fine white wool cloth that was a major industry in Sardis. When Jesus looks at most of the believers in Sardis he sees people dressed in filthy robes because they have allowed the world to dominate their thinking and lives. A few of them still are dressed in fine white clothes because they have remained faithful to the Lord Jesus. Still others if they repent will be spiritually renewed and made holy again by the Lord Jesus.

Jesus says to those who repent he will not blot their names out of the book of life but will acknowledge them before his Father and all the angels. The Book of Life is referred to again in Revelation 20 at the Last Judgment. Those whose names are found written in the Book of Life are saved from the lake of fire or hell. There are several places in the Old Testament that reference a book in which God has written the names of his people: Exodus 32, Deuteronomy 29, Daniel 12 and Malachi 3. Jesus in Luke 10 tells the seventy to rejoice because their names are written in heaven. John in Revelation names that book, the Book of Life. It lists the names of those who know the Lord Jesus and with whom he has a relationship. He promises those who repent in Sardis that he will not blot their names out of the book. They will not lose their salvation if they repent but will have eternal life. The implication is there are some in Sardis for whom it is already too late. They have either abandoned their faith or they never had it in the first place. They have the name of being a Christian but they never knew Jesus Christ. Their names are not written in God's book, the Book of Life!

The reference to acknowledging believers before Jesus' Father is from Matthew 10:32-33. Jesus declares that whoever acknowledges him before people Jesus will acknowledge before the Father. Whoever does not acknowledge him before people Jesus will disown before the Father. In other words public confession of faith in Jesus brings salvation, just as Paul declared in Romans 10:9. The implication for the people in Sardis is that there were some who were "part of the church" but would not publicly declare that Jesus was Lord. The Lord's promise here is to those who confess him publicly as Lord and are not ashamed to be called his disciple. The Lord, even if he has to come and discipline the church of Sardis, will not disown those who follow him and have remained faithful!
The letter ends as the others do with the admonition to listen to what the Spirit has to say to the churches. Jesus is speaking to his churches through John's letters but it is through the Spirit guiding John that he is speaking. The Holy Spirit is Jesus' voice to his church between his resurrection and his Second Coming!

3:7 - The sixth letter is to the church or the angel-pastor of the church in Philadelphia. This was a city about 25 miles south of Sardis on the road from Pergamum to Laodicea. It was founded by King Attalus II of Pergamum in 140 BC to spread Greek culture in the region of Phrygia of which it was a part. It was the youngest of the seven cities situated on a fertile plain where lush vineyards grew. Philadelphia grew prosperous because of its wine production and its strategic location on the major trade routes in the area. However, because of frequent earthquakes the city never reached the prominence of some of the other cities of the seven churches. In fact many people moved out of the city proper into the countryside because of the tremors. In 17 AD a major earthquake levelled the city. A grant from the Roman Emperor Tiberius helped rebuild it. After it was rebuilt the city took the name Neocaesarea because of Tiberius' help. Under Vespasian, Domitian's grandfather, it was renamed Flavia, after the emperor's family. John addresses the church by its historic name. Philadelphia was famous for its many pagan temples and religious festivals. In the third century it became a center for the worship of the emperor.

Even though in John's day there was no temple to the Caesars the emperor and Rome were held in high regard because of their help in rebuilding the city. Philadelphia means brotherly love and was probably named that because of Attalus' love and devotion to his brother King Eumenes. Like in the letter to Smyrna the Lord Jesus finds no fault in this church. He only gives it encouragement and support. With the exception of Smyrna there are still Christians with a bishop in Philadelphia to this day. This is a 1920 year old church!

3:7-10 - The Lord Jesus identifies himself as the one who is holy and true. This is the first time John uses the word holy to describe Jesus or God the Father. Yet, in his vision of Jesus in chapter 1 the Lord is clothed in white robes and his eyes shine with fire and his feet are like molten metal. Those are all images of his holiness or purity. Holy also ties the Lord Jesus to God the Father in that the Lord God is holy and so is his Son, the Messiah. The word "true" probably refers to Jesus as the faithful witness to God's truth in 1:5. In 6:10 the souls of the martyrs under the altar in heaven cry out to God for justice and they call him the Sovereign Lord, holy and true. Jesus perfectly reveals who God is and his plan for his people and his world. He is God!!!

The Lord identifies himself as the one who holds the key of David; who opens and no one can shut and who shuts and no one can open. The key of David refers back to 1:18 where Jesus says he holds the keys to Death and Hades. He is the Living One the Messiah. In Matthew 16:19 Jesus tells Peter he will give him the keys of the Kingdom and the power of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth. Jesus is the Messiah, the king from David's line who will reign over the Kingdom of God. He is telling his church in Philadelphia that he is sovereign and in control. He has the power over every kingdom and every ruler and even over death itself. They can trust him and don't need to be afraid! When the Lord purposes to do something no power on earth or in the spiritual world can stop him or prevent him from carrying out his purpose.

The Lord Jesus knows their deeds. He knows that his church in Philadelphia has little power or little strength, yet they have been faithful. They have kept his word and have not denied his name. The word for power is 

\[ \text{dunamis} \], meaning ability, power or capacity. They have little capacity or ability to do much of anything given their circumstances. From a worldly point of
view they are weak and nothing to be concerned about. Yet Jesus says he has put before them an open door which no one can shut. The open door is a great opportunity. It could be a missionary opportunity to bear witness to the truth of the gospel. Paul speaks of an open door for the gospel in *1 Corinthians* 16:9 and there are other examples as well. It could be Jesus himself. He calls himself the door or the gate to eternal life in *John* 10. The door could also be the Kingdom of God. All three interpretations are possible. I lean toward a door of missionary opportunity given the context of the little power and ability in the church. Despite their little power they have remained faithful and have kept Jesus' name in spite of opposition.

In verse 9 the Lord tells them that he will make those who claim to be Jews but are not but lie; he will make them come and bow down before their feet and acknowledge that the Lord Jesus loves the Christians in Philadelphia. Jesus calls the Jews who oppose them a synagogue of Satan. Satan is the father of lies according to Jesus in *John* 8. These Jews claim to be true Jews but are not. I do not believe that Jesus is saying they literally worship Satan. See the comments above about 2:9-10 in the letter to Smyrna. Jesus shows us that Jews who reject him as Messiah are not true Jews but in fact open themselves up to do the work of Satan when they persecute and oppose Jesus and his followers. By his definition true Jews are Jews who follow Jesus as Messiah. I think it is stretching the text too far to define true Jews as the church, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. However, it is clear that those Jews who oppose the Lord Jesus oppose God and are no longer following the covenant God made with his ancient people. Jesus will bring such Jews to justice. He will make them come and bow down before his church and acknowledge that they had been wrong and that the Lord Jesus is the Messiah and he loves his people. Remember, by John's writing of *Revelation* the leading Jewish rabbis had included into the synagogue liturgy the "birkath-ha-minum" prayer which was designed to uncover the presence of "Nazarenes and heretics" in the Sabbath worship service. The prayer was written to deny Jesus as Messiah and God. This drove deeper wedges between the remaining Jewish Christians like John and their Jewish brothers and sisters.

Jesus then gives the people in Philadelphia a promise. One must remember that all throughout the letters Jesus through John is speaking to the angel-pastor of each church. The pronouns are singular not plural. The pastor represents his people before the Lord Jesus. So the promise here is literally to the angel-pastor even though we can conclude from the text that Jesus is talking to the whole church. He commends them for keeping his command and enduring patiently, one of the three themes John gives in 1:9. Jesus' command here is not specified but from the other letters it is probably to love one another as Jesus has loved them from *John* 22. It could also be the Great Commandment to love God and love one's neighbor from *Matthew* 13 & 15. The word for keep Jesus' command in this context means to keep as in obey. The word also can mean guard, protect, keep unharmed or preserve. The basic meaning is to guard or watch over.

Jesus then promises he will also "keep you (literally singular) from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth." They have been faithful to Jesus so he will be faithful to them and guard and keep them. The hour of trial means literally the hour or time of testing or temptation. This could refer to some further time of persecution that was about to come like the Roman persecution of Christians in the second and third centuries. It is more likely to refer to the Great Tribulation time of *Revelation* 13-15 and what Jesus spoke about in *Matthew* 24 and *Mark* 13. The hour of trial will be God's doing to test the people of the world. It is unlike the time of testing that Satan brought upon the Christians in Smyrna in 2:10. This is the final short time of God's judgments on a sinful human race trying to
bring people to repentance before Jesus comes back. The rabbis called it the Birth Pangs of the Messiah. Many of the later chapters in Revelation deal with this final time of judgment and trial.

Jesus repeats the verb for keep in verse 10 only this time it does not have to do with the Philadelphians keeping Jesus' commandments. He says because they have been faithful he will "keep you from the hour of trial." In context the word means to protect, guard, or watch over. The preposition most translations translate "from" is ek in Greek. It means out of, from, away from, and denotes separation from something. In this case Jesus promises to guard, or protect them from the hour of trial coming on the whole world. The question is what does that mean in this context. The verb means to keep or protect in the midst of a difficult time and not to remove someone from that difficulty. Many Dispensational scholars interpret the seven letters as seven letters describing different eras of church history. The letter to Philadelphia they say is written to the church that is raptured before the Tribulation and Jesus' Second Coming. They base that interpretation on the translation of the "ek" in verse 10. Jesus promises to take them "out of" the time of testing. Therefore this is a reference to the Rapture since Philadelphia is the church of the Rapture. The problem with this view is that there is nothing in the text that suggests this is anything other than Jesus' letter through John to the angel-pastor of the church in Philadelphia. Interpreting the seven letters as seven church ages is ingenious and some details can be made to fit but it is reading into the text what I want it to say in order to justify my interpretation rather than simply letting the text speak for itself.

What does Jesus mean here by promising protection from the hour of trial? His promise is similar to what God did for Israel during the plagues in Egypt. In Goshen where the Hebrews were living the plagues did not hurt the Israelites. God protected them or kept them. He did not remove them completely from the situation. I think that is what John is telling the Philadelphians here. The Lord Jesus will guard them during this time of testing. The judgments that are coming are not aimed at the church. They are aimed at a godless world that rejects God. They are designed to bring people to repentance. Jesus promises his church he will protect them during this terrible time. The result however will be an even greater hatred for God's people because they are not affected by the plagues that are coming. They may not suffer the plagues but they will suffer greater and greater persecution by a world that hates and rejects God. That scenario is clear from the later chapters of Revelation.

3:11-13 - Jesus says he is coming soon, meaning quickly, without delay. Is this a promise of the Second Coming or of some other visitation by the Holy Spirit on the church in Philadelphia to encourage them and build them up? In other contexts this almost always refers to the Second Coming and I see no reason to interpret this any other way. However, if it does refer to Jesus' Second Coming how are we to take this promise from the Lord? The simple historical fact is he has not yet come back and it has been more than 1900 years since he gave the promise! From a human point of view that is hardly soon. We know Jesus did not lie, so what are we to do with this statement? Author John Bright in his book, The Kingdom of God, suggests we need to recover the New Testament tension of the soon return of the Lord Jesus. We live in the time between the comings, the already and not yet. The entire New Testament expects the Lord Jesus to return at any moment. Whenever we abandon that tension we step out of the New Testament world view and its understanding of the future. We need to recover that tension today if we are to be New Testament believers. Obviously there has been a delay in the Lord's return, much more than the first century Christians would had believed. But that does not mean he is not coming soon! We need to remember as well that our definition of time and God's definition and
understanding are two different things. We need to watch and be ready as Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 24-25.

The Lord is coming soon. In the meantime what are the believers in Philadelphia to do? They are to hold on to what they have so that no one will take their crown. What did they have? They had their faith. They had kept the name of Jesus and not denied him. They have kept the Lord's command to love and have endured patiently the difficult times they were in. They need to keep doing those things and not give up. It was hard because they had little power to affect their city. One gets the impression that they were a little church with few people of influence in Philadelphia. Here Jesus shows us it is not the size of the church that matters but the faithfulness and courage of the believers in the church. Their faithfulness and patient endurance had earned them a crown. The crown is probably the crown of victory that God's people will wear with Jesus because they will reign with him and judge angels and the world with him. They already wear this crown, and they are to stay faithful so no one can take it from them. The inference is that if we know Jesus we already wear a crown, at least spiritually or symbolically.

Jesus promises the one who overcomes, who is victorious, he will make a pillar in the temple of God. Never again will he leave it. Why a pillar? This is probably a reference to the many earthquakes in Philadelphia that more than once had destroyed their city. Jesus will make them a pillar that cannot be shaken. Peter in 1 Peter 5 says the Lord himself will make us strong and steadfast, someone that can never be shaken. The Lord Jesus contrasts their little power with the image of a strong pillar that cannot be overturned! This pillar will be in the Lord's temple. By John's writing of Revelation the Jewish temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed for over twenty years. Jesus cannot be referring to that. Several times in Revelation John refers to the temple of the Lord in heaven of which the earthly temple was merely a copy. That is probably what Jesus means here. The other possibility is that John means the church as the living temple of God. Both Peter and Paul refer to the church this way. Both apostles talk about being living stones in a living temple in 1 Peter 2 & Ephesians 2. The pillar in the temple of God in heaven is the most likely meaning. Jesus will make them pillars in God's temple to be in the Lord's presence unshakable forever! They will never leave the Lord's presence again!

Jesus promises he will write several names on them. He will write the name of God on them, probably Yahweh, the sacred name of the Lord. He will write the name of the city of the New Jerusalem, the city of God on them. This signifies they belong to the new city that comes down out of heaven from God. See Revelation 21-22 for a description. He will also write on their pillars his own new name. At his Second Coming in Revelation 19 John describes the Lord Jesus as having a name written on his thigh, King of Kings and Lord of Lords and another written on him, the Word of God. There is a third name that only he knows. I am not sure that is the name to which John refers here. I think it is probably King of Kings and Lord of Lords or the Word of God. By writing on them his new name Jesus marks them as his own forever. No one will take them from his hand! They are secure. Their city may have been shaky and their church may have had little power and influence but they will reign secure in heaven with Christ forever!

John closes the letter with the command to listen up! This letter like all the others may have been specifically written to one church, Philadelphia, but the message is for every church, including ours at Southside!

3:14 - The seventh and final letter to the angel-pastors of the seven churches of Asia Province is to the church in Laodicea. Laodicea was an important city built at the crossroads of the north-
south road from Pergamum to the southern coast of Asia Minor at Attalia, and the east-west road from Ephesus to the Turkish central plateau and on to Antioch in Syria. It was about 99 miles east of Ephesus near its sister cities of Hierapolis and Colossae. Laodicea was a commercial, agricultural and banking center in the populous and fertile Lycus Valley. It was famous for its black wool and for its great medical school where they made a well-known eye salve. Laodicea was founded by the Seleucid king Antiochus II around 250 BC and was named after his wife, Laodice. It was a proud city and very wealthy. An earthquake destroyed the city in 60 but because of its wealth the city leaders turned down aid to rebuild from Emperor Nero. The Laodicea of John's day would have been a modern new city rebuilt after the earthquake. That pride and self-sufficiency was a characteristic of the city.

Laodicea however had one major problem. It was built at the major crossroads but it did not have a good native water supply. Colossae, some 15 miles up the valley east of Laodicea had a fresh cool spring to supply it. Hierapolis ten miles north across the broad Lycus Valley had a huge and famous hot springs. Laodicea had neither. Its water was furnished by aqueduct from springs about six miles north of the city in the direction of Hierapolis. It is probable that the springs were connected or related to the famous hot springs of Hierapolis because Laodicea's water was a nauseating lukewarm by the time it reached the city. Jesus uses this fact to describe the self-sufficient church.

The church was probably founded by Epaphras one of Paul's evangelists who founded the church at Colossae and also worked in Hierapolis. All three cities were grouped together in the Lycus Valley. Paul wrote a letter to the Laodiceans which we do not have, which he tells the Colossians to read as well in Colossians 4:16. It does not appear that Paul ever visited Laodicea but because it had been founded by one of his assistants he wrote to it as he did the Colossians. The foundational theology of the Laodicean church would therefore have been based on the teachings of the great apostle and evangelist. Paul like John would have been appalled by their lukewarm, self-sufficient attitude. He would have agreed with the Lord Jesus' exhortation to them to repent!

3:14-18 - Jesus identifies himself as the Amen, which was a common liturgical word used in Jewish and Christian worship. It was used by the congregation to affirm what was said or as an ending to prayers just as it is still used today. Roughly translated it means; so let it be, or truly. Jesus used it frequently in sayings such as, "truly, truly I say to you" which is literally amen, amen I say to you. In the context here it is related to Jesus saying he is the faithful and true witness and the ruler of God's creation. Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:20 says in Jesus all the promises of God find their Yes in him. It is therefore through Jesus that we declare our Amen to God for his glory. John may have a similar idea in mind here in Revelation 3. Jesus is God's witness to the truth of who God is and who we are as his creatures and our need for his salvation. Jesus told Pilate in John 18 he came to testify to the truth and everyone on the side of truth listens to Jesus. John is emphasizing Jesus as the embodiment of the truth and God's spokesperson for the truth. He was faithful to God's truth even unto death for us. He is God's Amen to everything that God accomplished through him in his death and resurrection. Because of that he is also the ruler of God's creation. The Greek word for ruler is archa, which can mean: beginning, source, origin, ruler or first. That is why the translations differ in their interpretations and most add an alternative note as well. The word emphasizes Jesus' primacy in all things. He is the beginning and is sovereign over everything he made. The point of Jesus' self-identity to the Laodiceans is that he is the one who truly knows who they are. They in their pride and self-sufficiency are
spiritually blind to their reality. They need someone to tell them the truth before it is too late because they are deluded and deceived.

Laodicea is the opposite of Smyrna and Philadelphia. Jesus has nothing positive to say to this church, only his warning and promises if they repent. He knows their deeds; they are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold. This is an obvious reference to Laodicea's water supply but it is a chilling reference to the church's spiritual condition. Jesus says he wishes they were one or the other. One needs to be careful that we don't overextend the text at this point. Some commentators have tried to say based on this text that Jesus would rather have his church unbelieving or cold in their faith, rather than lukewarm like Laodicea. They point to the Sardis church which was dead and the Philadelphia church which was alive in their faith. This view has some merit but Jesus could just as easily be painting a picture of a church that makes him sick with its lukewarm faith with which the Laodiceans would immediately identify with the water they drank every day. Hot water is useful and cold water refreshing. Lukewarm water is merely nauseating and one has to force oneself to drink it! The truth is the Laodiceans make the Lord Jesus sick! He is about to spit them out of his mouth! The image is a vivid one. One takes a drink of water expecting to be refreshed and one gets lukewarm nauseating water instead. One's first instinct is to spit it out. That's what Jesus is going to do with this church! Their deeds are lukewarm as is their faith. Spit them out of his mouth is a dramatic way to tell them their church and their very salvation are at risk if they do not repent. Jesus' accusation makes clear that there were many in Laodicea who had nominal lukewarm faith and truly did not know the Lord Jesus. He is giving them one last chance to repent. It once more needs to be noted that though I frequently write in the plural as if Jesus is speaking to the whole church, literally he is speaking in the singular to the angel-pastor who is representative of Laodicea before him. This is true in all the letters.

Their view of themselves is instructive. It is related to their city's reputation as wealthy and self-sufficient. They are rich and by their own efforts have been successful. They need nothing. Their city did not need the emperor's help to rebuild after the earthquake twenty years before and they do not really need God's help to be successful. They have been able to do just fine on their own. There are many in America today with that same attitude! They have measured success in life by material wealth and accomplishments. Jesus is about to tell them that outward prosperity is no indication of spiritual health. That is one reason why the health and wealth gospel is such a dangerous heresy. It is too easy to become a Laodicean in one's faith; self-sufficient and lukewarm!

Jesus says the truth is they are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked! John piles up the words here to expose the Laodicean's need. They are wretched, meaning miserable, distressed and in pain. They are pitiful, meaning people who deserve pity because of their condition. Poor means poor economically and refers to someone who is dependent on others for support. The word is a synonym for beggar. It denotes someone in desperate need of assistance. Blind means to be without physical sight but also to be spiritually blind and unable to grasp the truth. Jesus said in John 9 that he came to give sight to those who do not see and make blind those who claim to see like the Pharisees. The Laodiceans think they see. The truth is they are blind spiritually and do not perceive their need. Finally they are naked, without clothes. They are stripped bare which in that culture would have been a shameful thing. They are prideful and self-sufficient when in reality they should be ashamed of themselves and humbled by their condition.

Jesus says they are not rich and without need. In fact they are in desperate need of something that only he can supply. John uses images from their city to help them understand their need. Laodicea was a famous banking center known for its wealth. Jesus says buy gold
refined in the fire from him. Their money means nothing if they do not have the true wealth Jesus gives. They need to come to Jesus to buy the right clothes to wear. Laodicea made famous black wool clothes. Jesus says they need white clothes from him to cover their shameful nakedness with his righteousness. Their sickening sin the Lord sees clearly. They need to see themselves as he sees them and take upon themselves his character and nature that he will give them. They need the righteousness of Christ not their sinful rags that cover nothing! Finally Jesus says they need to buy eye salve for their own eyes so they can see. Laodicea was famous for its medical school which made a well-known eye salve to treat people's eyes and blindness. They need to have Jesus heal their spiritual blindness so they can see their sin and their need and can repent so he can heal them. They need the light of his truth to expose their sin then they can repent. That is a great lesson for us. Unless we are made aware of our sin it is impossible to repent of it. When Jesus exposes our sin he is doing us a favor. In repentance we can be healed by him when we come to him in humility and confession. The Laodiceans thought they had no need to repent. They were fine. They couldn't see their sin. Jesus writes to his church to show them. It was painful but absolutely necessary if they were to be healed!

3:19-20 - Jesus' words to his church about spitting them out of his mouth and their true spiritual picture of their desperate need for repentance and change may have seemed harsh to the Laodiceans. The Lord reminds them that they would not be experiencing any of his discipline if he did not love them. Jesus tells them those whom he loves he rebukes and disciplines. It is like my wife Betty used to tell our two girls as they were growing up, "I love you too much to let you keep acting this way." That is Jesus' attitude toward his church. He loves them and wants them to repent so he rebukes them despite how painful that is. He calls them to be "earnest", meaning be eager, earnest or zealous as the ESV translates and repent. The two verbs are present active imperatives, implying a continuous process not a one-time action. The Laodiceans need to have an ongoing shift in their relationship with the Lord if they are to return to his favor.

Jesus then makes them an extraordinary offer. He stands at the door and knocks. Jesus told the people in Sardis to wake up because if they didn't he would come like a thief and they wouldn't know when he was coming. Here he tells the Laodiceans he is at the door already! He is ready to accept them if they will open up to him or to discipline them if they will not. Their time to choose is upon them. If anyone hears him and opens the door Jesus will come in and share a meal with them and they with him. A meal was the most profound sign of fellowship in that culture. Jesus is telling his lukewarm, nominal-faith church that he desires intimate fellowship with them above everything else. The image is an instructive one. Jesus stands outside the door of the house of either the individual believer in Laodicea or to the church as a whole. The verb tenses and pronouns are singular implying he is speaking to each individual believer. He is not inside but outside. Do they even know him? Have they known him in the past but their lukewarm faith has chased him away from them? Are they truly believers or not?

American Evangelicals often use this verse as a favorite at evangelistic crusades. The actual context however is not evangelistic but focuses on renewal and revival. Jesus is not speaking to a pagan audience who needs to hear the gospel for the first time. He is speaking to a group of Christians whose faith is so nominal it sickens him. He desires them to open up and let him into their lives in order to have a true relationship with them. Jesus says he is knocking but they need to open up to him. Our Lord will not force his way into anyone's heart. The famous painting of this verse shows Jesus standing outside a home, knocking on the door, but there is no doorknob on the outside. The door can only be opened from the inside. I think the painting
captures the meaning of the text. Jesus longs for fellowship with the Laodiceans but he will not break down the door of their church and force that fellowship upon them. He knocks. It is their choice whether they let him into their lives or not. Jesus promises if they hear his voice and open the door he will come in. That implies the Laodiceans need to be listening for the Lord's knock. If they do not they will miss his invitation. Once they hear it they need to make a choice to open the door of their lives or hearts to him so he can come in. It is not enough to hear Jesus' invitation to a relationship with him. One must open one's heart and let him come in. It takes a choice, a deliberate act of the will to surrender our lives to Jesus Christ. When he does come in he wants to share intimate fellowship with us symbolized by a meal. This is a possible veiled reference to the Lord's Supper here but it is more likely this is simply Jesus' visually painting a powerful image of fellowship for the Laodiceans.

We do not know what the response to Jesus' invitation was by the Laodiceans. One hopes they repented and enjoyed fellowship with their Lord. John never tells us. Some Dispensational scholars try and paint the church in Laodicea as the apostate church of the Great Tribulation. That is a fanciful interpretation that has no merit in the text itself. There is nothing in the text to indicate that John's letter to the Laodiceans is to anything other than a real late first century church! To teach otherwise one must read into the text something that is not there.

3:21-22 - Jesus finishes his letter to the Laodiceans just like he finishes the other six letters with a promise to those who overcome. The ones who hear the Lord's voice in Laodicea and open up to him and repent, he will grant the right to sit with him on his throne. Jesus overcame the cross, despising the shame as Hebrews 12 says, and was raised to sit down with his Father on his throne, the throne of God himself. John does not use the typical New Testament language here describing Jesus seated at the right hand of God, the position of power and privilege. Here he says he is seated on the throne of God himself. John blurs the lines between the Father and the Son. He will do the same in chapters 4-5 in his vision of the worship of heaven. The throne of God becomes the throne of God and the Lamb. They share it as equals. Once again John using apocalyptic imagery and symbolism is telling us that Jesus, the Son, is fully God!

The throne Jesus offers the Laodiceans is his throne, meaning his throne as the Messiah, the King of the Kingdom of God. Since God is the king this is probably another way of saying God's throne but Jesus uses language that makes it sound separate. Jesus' promise is stunning. Think of it. He is addressing a church that was so self-sufficient and proud that it thought it lacked nothing! Jesus tells them the truth. They lack everything! They have nothing! He invites them to repent and fellowship with him and to those who do he says I will give you the right to rule the Messianic Kingdom with me "on my throne!" In themselves they are poor, wretched, blind and naked. In fellowship with Jesus they will rule the universe with him in his Kingdom! They will have everything!

Jesus tells them he is already seated on his Father's throne. He has already taken up his heavenly reign as Messiah and Lord. One day he will reign on earth as he reigns in heaven. The Kingdom of God is already and not yet. The rest of Revelation will give us insight into the ultimate fulfillment of the not yet, and the physical return of Jesus Christ to this earth to take up his Messianic reign. John will outline for us the Birth Pangs of the Messiah's final coming and the ultimate picture of God and his people in a new heaven and earth with Satan, sin and death forever and finally defeated. The remarkable thing is Jesus offers a place in that Kingdom to these lukewarm, nominal, sickening Christians in Laodicea. Even they will reign forever with the Lord Jesus if they will open up to him and repent. Such is the grace of God to his people! Jesus
closes with the final "listen up" to all the churches to what the Spirit has to say. As in the other six letters that applies to us at Southside as well. The letter to Laodicea concludes John’s first set of seven, the seven letters to the seven churches. In Chapters 4-5 he will change scenes from the Roman first century world of the seven churches of Asia Minor to heaven itself.

Chapter 4:

4:1-2 - John has completed the first series of seven in his book, the seven letters to the seven churches. Chapter 4 marks a shift from the more practical historical letters to the visions that dominate the rest of Revelation. As I said in the Introduction the visions state, restate and develop theological and prophetic themes that John wants to communicate to his readers. Like a composer writing a great symphony those themes will appear, disappear and reappear throughout the rest of the book. It makes more sense to see Revelation this way than to try and interpret it as an exact chronological, historical timeline of end time events. That does not mean there is no chronology to John's visions it simply helps us understand why certain themes, judgments or incidents intensify and repeat as we get closer to chapter 19 and Jesus' Second Coming.

John begins the vision section with a picture of heaven. In 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 Paul describes a vision of heaven of which he could not directly speak. John describes a vision of heaven that we are privileged to share. He speaks through Old Testament images that have been transformed by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. John is also continuing to speak to the seven churches, answering their questions as to why they need to repent, hold fast and persevere until the Lord comes again.

John says "after this", meaning after the seven letters and the immediate context of his writing Revelation. He looked and saw an open door standing before him in heaven. Remember, in the rest of Revelation John writes in apocalyptic imagery. The details of that imagery are not always consistent nor do they always have reasonable explanations. The open door is probably the door of revelation for John. See notes above in 3:7-10 about further uses of the image of the door in John's writings. There are no significant Old Testament prophetic uses of the figure of the door that can be applied here.

The voice like a trumpet that he heard in 1:10, which was the voice of the Lord Jesus, tells him to "come up here and I will show you what must take place after this." It is interesting to note that the NIV, NASB, NLT and NRSV do not put these words in red letters marking the speech of the Lord Jesus while the ESV does. Based on the description of the voice this is clearly Jesus speaking to John. He invites him to "come up here", referring to heaven since that is what John reports in verse 2. The purpose of coming up to heaven is for the Lord Jesus to show John what must take place after this, in other words revealing the prophetic future and plan of God. John's remaining visions will be future oriented in nature. The difficulty, as is often true in prophetic writings, is to know whether the visions speak of events soon to come or events far into the future in the last days, or both.

Jesus speaks only to John here. The verbs and pronouns in these verses are all singular. Some Dispensational scholars teach that Jesus' invitation to John is the Rapture and that John represents the church raptured to be with the Lord Jesus during the Great Tribulation. They base this contention on the fact that the word church does not appear from Revelation 4:1 until 22:16. In the rest of the book John speaks about the saints or describes God's people in other terms. Based on that data they maintain that the church is in heaven with the Lord Jesus for all of John's visions about the Great Tribulation and that when Jesus invites John to come up to heaven it is symbolically the taking up of the church.
There are huge difficulties with this view. The first and most important one is that Jesus speaks to John and invites him up to heaven. There is no hint in the text that John somehow represents the raptured church. One must read into the text that meaning. Second, John reports in 4:2 that he was "at once in the Spirit" and that is when he sees the vision of God's throne in heaven. John used that description before in 1:10 when he received his vision of the risen Lord Jesus; the same vision where Jesus' voice spoke to him like a trumpet. Apocalyptic visions may be fluid in their details but John admits he was having a vision when he was taken into heaven. He was not translated there in body. Third, the disappearance of the word church from chapter 4 through chapter 22 proves nothing about a raptured church. Whenever John uses the word church or churches in Revelation he always refers to a specific congregation or congregations, namely the seven churches to whom he writes. When he wants to refer to God's people corporately or inclusively he uses words like servants, saints, multitude, etc. Based on the text therefore I conclude that the Lord Jesus invited John alone to view heaven as it is and John was taken there by the power of the Holy Spirit. 4:1 has nothing to do with the Rapture of the church!

John is once again caught up in a vision the Spirit gives him only this time he sees the throne of God in heaven and someone seated on that throne! The rest of chapter 4 will detail John's vision of God the Creator. I called this the Song to the Creator in the outline of the book. See page 5 above.

4:3-8 - John sees a throne in heaven with someone seated upon it and then describes what he sees. He uses images from three great visions of God in the Old Testament: the lightning and crystal sea from Exodus 19 & 24; the four living creatures from Ezekiel 1; the holy, holy, holy song of the seraphim from Isaiah 6.

John says the one who sat on the throne looked like precious stones, like jasper and carnelian. These are agate-like semi-precious stones made up of microscopic quartz crystals. They are filled with swirls of color in reds and browns, interspersed with white or clear quartz. Jasper is included as one of the stones of the high priest's breastplate in Exodus 28. John describes the holy city, the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21 as having the appearance of jasper and the sixth of the twelve foundation stones of the city was carnelian. The stones represent the presence and glory of God in the city. Surrounding the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald, that is a deep, clear green. Ezekiel reports in his vision of God in Ezekiel 1 that the Lord appeared to him with the brilliant radiance of a rainbow but he does not mention an emerald rainbow. An emerald is also one of the stones in the high priest's breastplate in Exodus 28 and one of the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21. The image of the emerald rainbow is unique to John's vision. John's description of the figure of God sitting on his throne contains no human terms at all except the fact that someone was sitting on the throne. He only speaks about God in terms of color and light. Think of the emerald rainbow and the bright swirling colors of jasper and carnelian in contrast. That is John's perception of God the Creator seated upon his throne. He is far above human beings even in his appearance. He is God not man!

Surrounding God's throne were twenty-four other thrones and seated upon them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had golden crowns upon their heads. There is some debate about the identity of the elders. Some scholars maintain that because of their number, 24, they represent God's Old Covenant and New Covenant people, Israel and the church. Dispensational scholars maintain that because the church has been raptured in 4:1 twelve of the twenty-four are the apostles and the other twelve represent the patriarchs of the twelve
tribes of Israel. The number 24 is certainly symbolic and is probably linked to God's people. However, throughout Revelation the elders never play the role of one of God's people, his saints. They are always shown around God's throne in worship like the angels and at least twice one of them speaks to John in chapters 5 & 7. Whenever God's people, his saints, are shown praising God the elders are always separate from them and never part of them. Based on all of this I believe the elders are mighty angelic beings. They represent God's angelic court seen in various places in the Old Testament like Genesis, Psalms, Job and Isaiah. The number 24 most often represents God's people. Twelve times two or twelve plus twelve is obviously symbolic and probably represents the fact that God's heavenly court is closely involved in helping God carry out his plan to make a people for himself with whom he can have fellowship forever. In Revelation the elders are most often seen leading or taking part in the worship of God around his throne in heaven. The white robes the elders wear represent their holiness and their crowns represent their power and position or rank before the Lord God Almighty.

Lightning and rumblings of thunder flash and sound from the throne of God. John says heaven sounds like a thunderstorm! This image is based on Exodus 19 when the children of Israel were camped before Mt. Sinai. A thick cloud descended upon the mountain and there were thunder and lightning all around the mountain as the presence of God descended on Mt. Sinai. The thunder and lightning represent the direct, overwhelming presence of God.

Before the throne seven lamps were blazing which represent the seven spirits of God or the seven-fold Spirit of God. See the commentary notes above on 1:4 and 3:1 concerning the seven-fold Spirit of God. Sometimes he or they are mentioned as being before God's throne but at 3:1 the Lord Jesus says he holds the seven-fold Spirit in his hand. Seven is one of the most significant symbolic numbers in apocalyptic literature, especially in Revelation. It is three, the number of God, plus four, the number of the earth. Seven therefore represents God fulfilling his plan for his world. John sees the Holy Spirit of God as being one of the chief agents of God's work in the world to fulfill his plan for a people for himself and to defeat Satan, sin and death.

Before the throne is a sea of glass, clear as crystal. This image resembles the picture in Exodus 24 of the pavement of sapphire clear as the sky that was under the feet of God on Mt. Sinai. The elders of Israel saw it when they went up on the mountain to eat a meal in the presence of God to ratify God's covenant with the Israelites. John borrows that image to describe the pavement before the throne of God in heaven. John is demonstrating to his readers that the one he saw on the throne was none other than the Creator, Yahweh Almighty.

In the center around the throne John saw four living creatures, covered with eyes in front and back. These are the seraphim or cherubim that directly surround the throne of God. John's vision is made up of two visions of these mighty angels from Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. In Isaiah 6 there is no mention of the number of these angels but they have six wings, two of which cover their faces, two of which cover their feet and with two they flew. Isaiah calls them the seraphim. In Ezekiel 1 there are four mighty angels each with four wings. In appearance they looked like a man but they had four faces: that of a man, a lion, an ox and an eagle. In Ezekiel 1 underneath the living creatures were fiery wheels that had eyes inside and outside of the wheels. In Ezekiel 9 and 10 the prophet has a second vision of the four living creatures that is slightly different. In Ezekiel 9 he names them cherubim the name of the angels that guard the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant and that were carved into the walls of the temple of Solomon. In Ezekiel 10 the cherubim have four faces, this time of a cherub, a man, a lion and an eagle. They had eyes all over their bodies, including their wings and their hands. John's vision of the four living creatures around God's throne is drawn from all three prophetic visions of the cherubim or seraphim in the
Old Testament. In Revelation 4 the living creatures do not have four faces but are of four different appearances. The first was like a lion, the second an ox, the third a man and the fourth like a flying eagle. They each have six wings and are covered with eyes all around. Their eyes symbolize intelligence or wisdom and the ability to see all that goes on in heaven and earth. They are not omniscient like God but because they are so close to him and so powerful and wise they see and know much of what happens. In ancient times the lion stood for nobility, the ox for strength, the man for wisdom and the eagle for swiftness. Perhaps John is trying to say that these four mightiest of angels represent the greatest in the created order but even these creatures are created and are not God!

Day and night the four creatures never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!" This is similar to the song of the seraphim Isaiah heard in the temple in Isaiah 6 when he saw the glory of the Lord. The four living creatures sing of the holiness of God. The great Swiss theologian Karl Barth described God's holiness as being "wholly other." God is pure, righteous and mighty but he is not a man. He is completely separate from human beings. John's description of God on his throne in Revelation 4 serves to show us God is not like us. He is other; he is separate; he is holy. God is the God who was and is and is to come. See the commentary on 1:8 for a further explanation of this phrase. This is John's version of the sacred name of God in the Old Testament, Yahweh, I am who I am. There can be no doubt. John sees the Lord God Almighty seated on his throne in heaven surrounded by the greatest angels in creation and his heavenly court. The Lord Jesus has opened a door of revelation to John to behold the heavenly throne room of God and to hear and see what occurs therein.

4:9-11 - In verse 8 John says the living creatures never stop singing their holy, holy, holy song to God. In verse 9 he says whenever the cherubim, the living creatures, give glory, honor and thanks to God who sits on the throne, who lives forever, the twenty-four elders fall down before the Lord and worship him. The picture John paints is one of perpetual worship and praise of God before his throne by the mighty angelic beings that surround him and are nearest to him. The word for fall down means to go down or fall down whether intentionally or not. Here in Revelation John uses the word as a synonym for the Greek word proskuneo, which is the common word for worship in the New Testament and means to bow down or prostrate oneself. "Fall down" means to cast oneself down before God in worship. John uses it 7 times in Revelation in chapters 4, 5, 7, 11, 19 and 22, all to describe the action of the elders falling down in worship, usually as a response to the praise of the living creatures. In verse 10 John says the elders fall down before God in worship and then cast or throw their crowns before the throne and sing praise to God as the Creator. Their crowns are symbols of their authority, position, and power in heaven as the angelic council of God. They are rewards from God for their service. In worship the great angels throw their crowns before God's feet and offer them to him in praise. They do so freely and out of love and honor to God. There is no sense of coercion here. They worship God by their own free choice. They are not worthy. Only God the Creator is truly worthy of worship and praise.

John gives us insight into true worship with his picture of heaven. God is the reason the angels worship but he is not the primary actor. He is the audience. The angels are the worshippers. They give him praise but they also give him what they have of greatest value, their crowns given to them by God. John's understanding of worship needs to inform our practice. Worship is not about what I get out of it because it is not about me! Worship is totally centered
on God and giving him praise, honor and glory. I do receive much in worship but only when I concentrate on God and give myself to him. When I do I am blessed by his presence. When I concentrate on my needs and see worship as a means to meeting my needs I lose my focus and am not truly worshiping. Such "worship" will leave me empty and does not please or honor God!

Verse 11 is the song to the Creator that the elders sing when they cast their crowns before God's throne in praise and worship. God is our Lord and God and worthy to receive glory, honor and power, a three-fold blessing. He is worthy because he created all things and by his will they were created and have their being. In other words all that exists is a direct result of a decision by God to create the universe and the heavenly realms. The elders' song is similar to the Stoic poem Paul quotes to the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17: "In him we live and move and have our being." Human beings continually ask the question why am I here. John answers, by the will of God! He created you and me. I exist because of a direct choice of God. I have being because of God. I am continuously sustained because of the ongoing choice and grace of God.

John shows us that God not only has the right but the power to hold his creatures and all his creation accountable because he made us. God as Creator is a fundamental tenet of the Christian faith. The Christians of the seven churches do not have to wonder whether God is sovereign and in control over his creation. The terrible judgments that are about to come upon "those who live upon the earth" (3:10) are wholly within God's right as the Creator to execute. The whole world is accountable to him because they exist and have their being as a result of his direct creative choice. All creatures whether angelic or human must answer to God their Creator!

John paints a picture in chapter 4 of heaven and the worship of God the Creator. It is painted in symbolic language borrowed from Old Testament visions of God and his throne. Is it accurate? Yes, in that what John shows us is a true reflection of what exists in heaven. Yet Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:9 that no one has seen or can comprehend what God has in store for us in heaven. In 1 Corinthians 13:12 he says what we see of heaven now is like looking in a poor reflection in a mirror. Someday we will see face to face. We must recognize that John in his vision is trying to give us a picture of a reality for which we have no possible frame of reference. His first vision of heaven and the worship of God as Creator lays the foundation for all the visions that follow in Revelation. Where does one start to understand the events of the end times? John's answer is one starts in heaven; one begins with God the Creator receiving the worship he deserves from the mightiest beings he created! God is sovereign and in control!

Chapter 5:

5:1-5 - John looks and sees a scroll held in God's right hand, written on both sides and sealed with seven seals. Outside of the fact that John saw the throne of God in heaven and someone seated upon it in 4:2 this is the first human characteristic John reports God the Creator has. He holds the scroll in his right hand. In the Old Testament the right hand is the hand of power and promise. One swears an oath with the right hand and blesses others with it. When used to describe God, his right hand is the hand of power and salvation. He delivers Israel from slavery and her enemies with his strong right hand. The Messiah will be seated or stand at God's right hand in power and favor. John sees God holding the scroll in his right hand, the hand of power, authority and blessing.

The scroll itself was written on both sides, meaning on the inside and the outside. It was sealed with seven seals. Ezekiel is given a scroll by God with writing on both sides in Ezekiel 2. It is a scroll with words of judgment and woe for Israel. In Revelation 5 no one is found in
heaven or earth that could open the scroll or even look inside of it. The scroll resembles a sealed Roman will and represents God's plan for his Kingdom and universe. The person would seal the document with their own seal as a mark of its authenticity and importance. The meaning here is clear. God has sealed his plan with his own seal seven times, the number of completion for his plan for his world. This is the second series of sevens in Revelation.

A mighty angel asks in a loud voice if there is anyone worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. Who can break that which God has sealed but God himself? The mighty angel could be Gabriel, as the Greek word for mighty means strong, mighty or powerful. The name Gabriel means "the strength of God" in Hebrew. We know from Daniel and Luke that Gabriel is one of the great angels who stand in the presence of God. No one is found in heaven, earth or under the earth that is worthy and able to break the seals and look inside the scroll. There is no angel, human being, dead or alive, or demon that is great enough to break the seals. John weeps because no one is found worthy. He weeps because the implication is God's plan cannot be revealed. Unless God himself breaks the seals then no one will know what God has in store for his people. Yet Jesus had told him he was bringing John up to heaven in order to see what must soon take place. Perhaps John is thinking now he will never know what the Lord wanted to show him because no one can open God's plan and read it!

One of the elders tells John not to weep because the Messiah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David has triumphed. He is able to break the seals and open the scroll. The elder identifies the Messiah from two prophecies. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah is from Jacob's blessing of his twelve sons in Genesis 49:8-10. Jacob says his brothers will bow down to Judah and he is a lion's cub. Then he gives the famous Shiloh prophecy in verse 10: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs (or until Shiloh comes) and the obedience of the nations is his." This is one of the earliest prophecies of the Messiah, even though it does not specifically mention David's line. The Root of David is based on Isaiah 11, where Isaiah says, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." Isaiah goes on to describe the Messiah who will be endowed with the seven-fold Spirit of God and will bring righteousness and justice to the nations. Both are pictures of the Messiah from David's line which says the Messiah is a full human being who has an ancestry like all other human beings. He has triumphed the elder tells John and is able to open the scroll and its seven seals. Jesus is fully human, the Messiah of Israel, but he is also fully divine because only God can break God's seals and open God's plan. No one else in the entire universe is able to do so. Once again John affirms that Jesus is God by the way he reports his visions.

The scroll represents the plan of God for his Kingdom and his people. If John's details are consistent in his vision then the true contents of the scroll are not revealed until all seven seals are broken. As we will see in chapter 6 and ff. as each seal is broken fantastic and often terrible events take place, many of which are judgments upon those who reject the Lord Jesus. The implication is that the judgments that come as the seals are broken take place within history and are the beginnings of the “Birth Pangs” of the Messiah. From chapter 8 on one sees the contents of the scroll itself. However, once the seventh seal is broken the scroll is not mentioned again in Revelation. It disappears from view. John's visions reflect the Jewish pattern of the end times. In Jewish thought there is this age, followed by the age to come. The “Birth Pangs of the Messiah” are momentous events and catastrophes that immediately precede the Messiah's coming and the dawn of the age to come. Jesus refers to them in Mark 13:8 and Matthew 24:8 as “the beginning of birth pains.” John outlines a final short time of judgments and calamities that most scholars
name the Great Tribulation, relating it to Daniel 9-12. The Great Tribulation is commonly believed to be either seven or three and a half years, that immediately precedes the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. There is debate over whether the seven or three and a half years are symbolic or literal or both. We will deal further with this issue as we encounter it later in Revelation.

5:6-8 - John looks and sees a lamb standing in the midst or in the middle of the throne, encircled by the elders and the four living creatures. The ESV translates the phrase standing between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders. John uses the same phrase in Greek to describe where the Lamb was in relation to the creatures and the elders. Literally it reads "in middle" or "in the midst." The NIV brings out the sense of the words a little better than the ESV. The point is the Lamb was inside the four living creatures around God's throne. He was standing in the center of God's throne. He is on God's throne! Once again John uses the details of his vision to affirm that Jesus is God! He is different than the one seated on the throne, God the Creator and Father, yet he is the same for he is standing where only God can stand. He is God!

The Lamb looked as if it had been slain or slaughtered. The participle in Greek is a perfect passive, meaning an event happened in the past whose effects are still going on in the present. The Lamb had been slain by someone else and yet now stands upright alive on the throne of God! John's image points to Jesus' death and resurrection! The word for slain means to be slaughtered specifically cut with a knife. In secular Greek and the Greek of the LXX the word refers to the ritual slaughter of animals for sacrifice but it can also mean slaughter as in murder. John chooses his word carefully because Jesus' death from a human point of view was the murder or slaughter of an innocent man but from God's point of view he was the sacrifice that paid for human sin. John the Baptist in John 1:29 calls Jesus "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." That is precisely the meaning John wants to convey here in Revelation 5. The Lamb is alive yet he bears the marks of his death. Jesus still bears the marks of his crucifixion in his hands, feet and side. John had seen them. Jesus told Thomas after the resurrection to touch the marks in John 20. Luke 24 says Jesus showed the disciples his hands and feet on Easter evening when he appeared to them. Jesus is the Lamb!

The slaughtered Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits or seven-fold Spirit of God sent out into all the earth. The seven horns represent power and authority. The Lamb is complete in power or all-powerful just like God. The seven eyes are the seven spirits of God which in 4:5 were seven lamps blazing around the throne of the Creator. In 3:1 the Lord Jesus holds in his hand the seven spirits of God. Here the seven spirits are the eyes of the Lamb and give him all-knowing sight, wisdom and knowledge. In Zechariah 4:10 the prophet says the seven eyes are the eyes of the Lord which go all throughout the earth. In John 14-16 Jesus links the Spirit of God to both himself and the Father. Jesus says he will come to the disciples in the person of the Holy Spirit whom he and the Father will send to them after he is glorified, meaning crucified and resurrected. In Revelation 5 the seven spirits are the eyes of the Lamb but they have also been sent out into all the earth. The word for sent is the root word of apostle in Greek and the participle for sent out is a perfect passive participle. The seven-fold Spirit has been sent out to all the earth not by himself, but by the Lamb, yet he is still part of the Lamb. The Spirit is the presence of Jesus in his church. John's vision reinforces the apostolic teaching about the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus and the church.

John says the Lamb came and took the scroll from God the Creator on his throne. One of the elders had told John in 5:5 that the Messiah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of
David was worthy to take the scroll and break its seals. The Lamb is the Messiah! See also Isaiah 53, the great Servant Song which combines the Servant of God with the Messiah. Jesus the crucified and risen one, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is the Root of David and the Lion of Judah. The Messiah, who is a man, descended from David is also the one who stands in the midst of the throne of God and is therefore God. The Lamb is the God-Man! When the Lamb takes the scroll the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb and worship him in song. The creatures and the elders give worship to the Lamb in the same way they give worship to the Creator who sits upon the throne of God! Jesus is God!!!

John adds to the description of the twenty-four elders. He says they held harps in their hands and golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints. The harps are instruments of praise in Revelation. Sometimes the elders or angels use them and sometimes the saints use them to praise God. In the Old Testament the harp was one of the chief instruments used by the Levites in the temple for the praise and worship of God. That is the meaning of the harps in the hands of the elders here in Revelation. The bowls full of incense represent the prayers of the saints. The altar of incense in the temple of Solomon represented the prayers of Israel to God. Here the prayers are prayers of praise to the Lamb and for God's will to be done in carrying out his plan. One must be careful in how far one takes John's image of the elders holding the bowls of incense. We know from the rest of the New Testament that the Holy Spirit himself intercedes for his people and guides our prayers. We know the Lord Jesus also intercedes for us. Paul affirms both ideas in Romans 8. Jesus taught his disciples in Luke 11 that we have direct and unhindered access to the Father and need no intermediary to help us reach him. Some who interpret the twenty-four elders as representative of God's people and not angelic beings interpret the elders carrying out an intermediate function in prayer to God, as if to assist the saints when they pray. This is similar to the Roman Catholic view of the saints as helpers in prayer. I don't believe John is trying to say that at all. I think he is merely using the image to reinforce the idea that the angelic world and God's people all are part of the praise of the Lamb who was slain, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

5:9-10 - The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing a new song of praise to the Lamb. It is a song declaring what the Lamb has done. Sometimes praise is declarative, telling others what God has done. Sometimes our praise affirms who God is in his being and his character. Both are appropriate ways to praise God.

The elders declare that the Lamb is worthy to take the scroll of God's Kingdom plan and open the seals. He is worthy because he has been slain or sacrificed, and by that sacrifice has purchased men, or men and women, for God from every tribe, language, people and nation. Jesus Christ has gathered an expanded people of God that includes not only the Jews, God's ancient covenant people, but Gentiles from every culture and ethnic group. The word for purchased means to buy but it was also used to describe a Roman practice of buying back or ransoming a slave to free them. Someone would go to a pagan temple and pay the god the price of the slave and buy them for the god then set them free. The slave was considered freed by the gods. John uses that word and that concept to describe what Jesus has done for us. He paid the ransom price for us on the cross and bought our freedom! We have been set free from the tyranny of sin, death and Satan by Jesus’ finished work on the cross on our behalf. The price he paid was not money but his own precious blood as Peter declares in 1 Peter 1.
Jesus’ death and resurrection on our behalf has made us a kingdom and priests to serve our God. John in the theme verse of Revelation 1:9 says he shares with us the suffering, the kingdom and the patient endurance. Jesus has made us a kingdom, meaning we belong to the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is not territory or nations or political structures, it is people. God’s Kingdom is God's rule and reign in the hearts of his people who are his! We are his Kingdom and we are also his priests. God uses similar language in Exodus 19 when he establishes the covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai. He says, “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Peter reiterates that language in describing God’s new covenant people in 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” Jesus has made us all priests. Unlike the Old Covenant where only the sons of Aaron could be priests to God now all God’s people are priests. John affirms one of the fundamental tenets of the Reformation, the priesthood of all believers!

The point is the church is the people of God because of what Jesus has done for us. Does the church replace Israel and negate God's covenant promises to his ancient people? No, but it is clear from John's vision here in Revelation 5 and the rest of the New Testament that through Jesus Christ the Gentiles have been taken up into Israel and now inherit the promises made to her. God still has a plan for his ancient people but that plan is not separated from their Messiah, Jesus Christ, nor is it separate from his church which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles!

John says not only are God's people priests to serve God but they will reign on the earth. Right now we are a kingdom and priests to our God. Someday in the future we will reign on the earth with the Lamb, Jesus Christ. John looks ahead to when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord as Paul says in Philippians 2. Revelation 19-22 will describe Jesus’ Second Coming, the final defeat of Satan and the rule of the Messiah with his people forever. That is what John refers to here. That is the final part of the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God for his people. We will reign with Christ forever in the new heaven and the new earth!

5:11-14 - John then beholds a crescendo of praise to the Lamb and to God who sits upon his throne. In verses 8-10 the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders who are around the throne of God sing their new song to the Lamb. In verses 11-12, thousands and thousands of angels, ten thousand times ten thousand who encircle the living creatures and the elders sing a song to the Lamb. In verse 13 John hears every creature in heaven on earth or under the earth and on the sea, all creatures everywhere, sing a song of praise to God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. Every creature in the universe sings praise to God!

John says the angels who surround God's throne in the circle just outside the living creatures and the elders numbered thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand. That number is literally 100 million. John is not trying to give us a literal count of the angels in heaven surrounding God's throne. The Greek word is literally myriad which is often translated as 10,000. However, it can also mean an indeterminate number that represents a very large multitude that is simply too great to count. Based on the context that is the best translation of the word. John looked and saw a multitude of angels beyond his ability to count; myriads upon myriads. The description is very similar to the picture of God's throne in Daniel 7 where Daniel sees the Ancient of Days and “thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.” John is making sure we understand this is God Almighty on his throne.

The angels sing a song of praise to the Lamb. It is a seven-fold song of praise. The Lamb is worthy to receive: power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and blessing. Jesus Christ the
Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, possesses all these things in and of himself. Yet the angels in their song pray that he might receive more. In 4:11 the elders sang that God the Creator is worthy to receive glory, honor and power. Those are the same words the angels sing the Lamb is worthy to receive. In 5:13 every creature sings that God the Creator and the Lamb are worthy to receive praise, honor, glory and power or might. Once again John through the images of his vision is showing us that Jesus the Lamb is God because he is given praise and honor that is only given to God himself. We know from Exodus 20 that God is a jealous God and gives his honor and glory to no one else. Jesus therefore cannot be just a man, a creature. He must be God himself because he receives the praise due only God!

John then hears every creature in the physical universe and the spiritual world praising God who sits on the throne and the Lamb giving praise, honor, glory and power or might to God and the Lamb. When they do, the four living creatures say "Amen" and the elders fall down and worship. The difficulty with this scene is what John means by every creature. More than all human beings and all the angels are implied by every creature in heaven and earth. Somehow even the animals are given a voice to praise God. Under the earth is also a difficult phrase. Normally under the earth means the place of the dead or Sheol in Hebrew thought. In Greek thought it would be Hades. Is John saying even the dead who are lost in Hades or Sheol are praising God? That is what he implies. Are the demons implied in this too? I do not think so as Jesus often forbid the demons from declaring who he was in the Gospels. However, John's picture of praise here is all encompassing and he could be painting the picture of the ultimate victory of God where even God's enemies, those in hell and the demonic, are forced to bow the knee and praise him. On the sea is also a difficult phrase. The ESV translates the Greek preposition *epi* as “in”. The NIV translates it as “on”. Literally the word means on but it is fluid enough it can also be translated in. I think the idea is all the creatures of the sea. Even the fish are given a voice to praise God and the Lamb! John leaves no doubt, every creature in heaven and earth, in Hades or the sea is accountable to God and to Jesus Christ. No creature is worthy of the praise they receive. All creatures owe their existence to God and Jesus is God. There is no one higher than him! He is worthy to open the seals on God's Kingdom plan for his people. That is what John will describe next in chapter 6.

Chapter 6:

6:1-2 - John sees the Lamb open the first of the seven seals on the scroll of God's Kingdom plan. This is the second set of sevens in Revelation. If the scroll contains the final plan of God to establish his Kingdom, save his people and defeat Satan then the contents of the scroll cannot be read until all seven seals are broken. As each seal is broken momentous events occur or things that were hidden are revealed like the cries of the martyrs in heaven. Themes in the seven seals will be repeated in the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. This is the beginning of what I called in the Introduction the great symphony; John stating and re-stating apocalyptic themes that intensify in each re-statement. In between the sets of seven are interludes that fill in details of what God is doing in judgment against a rebellious world or give us a clearer picture of what he is doing with his people. If I am correct in my interpretation then the seven seals, trumpets and bowls are not necessarily in chronological order. Instead they repeat and intensify prophetic themes revealing what will happen leading up to the Great Tribulation (the Birth Pangs of the Messiah), the Second Coming of Jesus and the final defeat of Satan and the Antichrist. Remember the Lord Jesus invited John up to heaven to see "what must take place after this." The images of the sevens are yet to occur when John was given Revelation. The three sets of seven
do not always agree. Sometimes they are similar and sometimes their images are different. They
are however consistent in that they build in intensity until some final cataclysm followed by a
statement of God's Kingdom being established. John does not give us a key for when these
events all occur. Some are definitely within history, from John's day to the present. Some are
certainly in the Great Tribulation time that has yet to occur. He also does not give us a key as to
how literally one is to take the various judgments and calamities. One must do one's best to
interpret John's visions given the text in its context. We must let Revelation speak for itself!

Jesus breaks the first seal and John hears one of the living creatures shout in a voice like
thunder, "Come!" John sees a white horse, apparently emerging from the broken seal. This is the
first of the so-called Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Its rider held a bow and he was given a
crown and he rode out to conquer bent on conquest. The white horse is difficult. The other
occurrence of a white horse and rider is in Revelation 19 when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to
earth with his victorious armies. White in Revelation most often refers to righteousness and
purity. Therefore some scholars interpret the rider on the white horse as the Lord Jesus going out
to spread the gospel and conquer at the same time as the other three horsemen. There are
problems however with this view. First, the Lord Jesus is the one who breaks the seal so how
could he be emerging from the seal as well? Second, the rider on the white horse emerges at the
command of one of the living creatures. The word "Come" is in the imperative mood in Greek.
Apocalyptic imagery is not always consistent but this would mean Jesus is under the authority of
one of the living creatures which completely contradicts chapter 5! Third, the other three
horsemen are negative images associated with death and destruction in human history. Based on
these three reasons I do not believe the rider on the white horse is the Lord Jesus or the gospel.
This is one of those places where apocalyptic imagery is not consistent and white here does not
represent God's righteousness or purity.

Some Dispensational scholars believe the white rider is the antichrist or the beast of
Revelation 13 and ff. The white rider goes out to conquer and that is what the antichrist will do
as well. However, if the seven seals are prior to the Great Tribulation because they are broken in
order to reveal God's final plan and judgment to bring in his Kingdom then the antichrist does
not appear in history until after the seventh seal is broken. In that case he would come on the
scene during either the seven trumpet judgments or the seven bowls. I have stated already that
apocalyptic visions are not always consistent but it makes the most sense of the text to see the
white rider as representing nations, powers or rulers that seek conquest rather than a specific
historical or eschatological figure like the antichrist. The other three horsemen are also not
specific but represent conditions across history when conquerors set out to conquer.

What does the white rider represent? In the context of John's time the rider could be
picturing the Parthian hordes. The Parthians were a people from around the Caspian Sea who had
conquered Persia and ruled an empire from the Euphrates to the Indus River during New
Testament times. They opposed Rome in the east and had twice defeated Roman efforts at
conquest once in around 40 BC and once in 53 AD. Their main military weapon was light mobile
cavalry that used the bow and shot from horseback as the later Mongol army of Genghis Khan
would do. The Romans perceived them as a threat and feared them. It is possible that the rider on
the white horse who held a bow and was given a crown is a picture of the Parthians. The crown
can represent rule or authority. The purpose of the rider is conquest. Literally the Greek words
read, "He rode out conquering in order to conquer." The white rider is given the power and
authority to conquer other nations. The history of the world from John's day to our day is replete
with nations trying to conquer other nations by any means necessary including war. The consequences of those efforts at conquest are outlined in the other three horsemen.

John's vision of the *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* is similar to a vision of four chariots in *Zechariah* 6:1-7. Zechariah sees four chariots each with different colored horses. They were red, black, white and dappled or spotted. They represented the four spirits or winds of heaven each going in a different direction throughout the earth. They symbolized God's control over the nations of the earth on behalf of his people. John's vision is obviously different but there are similarities. There can be no doubt that God is in control of the Four Horsemen and they do his bidding among the nations.

6:3-4 - When the Lord Jesus breaks the second seal John heard the second living creature say "Come!" In verse 1 John says he heard one of the four living creatures shout "Come!" Here it is the second. When the third and fourth seals are broken it is the third and fourth living creatures who command the horsemen to emerge. It is probable that the first horseman came out at the command of the first living creature but John is more specific with the other three.

A second rider comes out of the seal and it is fiery red in color. The word for red translated fiery red is a form of the word for fire. Fire is related to judgment and destruction in *Revelation* along with God's presence. Roman soldiers wore red cloaks over their battle armor and the red horse may also be reflecting the Roman army. The rider is given power or authority to take peace from the earth and make people slaughter or violently kill one another. This could mean war or any other form of violence like murder or in our day even gang shootings. Most likely the image of the rider is related to war which creates the most violent slaughter of people. That idea is reinforced by the large sword or the great sword the rider is given. The word for sword is the normal New Testament word which most often describes the short two-edged Roman battle sword that was designed for close combat. This sword however is a great sword much larger than normal probably symbolizing the rider's ability to sow violence and strife wherever it goes. Traditionally the red horse is related to war. Literally the red horse takes away peace from the earth.

The Four Horsemen, conquest, war, famine and death, are related to Jesus' predictions of the end of days in *Matthew* 24 and *Mark* 13. Jesus said in *Mark* 13:7-8: When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nations, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginnings of birth pains. In some respects the breaking of all six seals relate to Jesus' statement. This also reinforces the interpretation that the breaking of the seals happen in history as a prelude to the final end times or *Great Tribulation*. We see these things happening today, as indeed they have happened throughout history since Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. They are only the beginning of the birth pains!

6:5-6 - The Lord Jesus, the Lamb, opens the third seal and John hears the third living creature command the next horseman to come out. John sees a black horse and the rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. A voice comes from among the four creatures, perhaps from them or perhaps from God's throne itself. It gives instructions to the black rider. He is told the prices for a quart of wheat and three quarts of barley, a day's wage for each. Literally the word in Greek is a *choinix*, which is equivalent to a modern quart or liter in volume. It was a dry measure. A *choinix* or quart of wheat was a day's ration for a person. A day's wage for a day's ration of grain is an outrageous price! The day's wage is literally a denarius, the normal coin paid to a day laborer for
a day's work. Three quarts of barley for a denarius is also an extremely high in price. Barley was cheaper than wheat and was often called the poor man's grain because it was simpler to grow but did not have as much nutritional value as wheat. The scales would be used to measure out both the weight of the coins and the weight of the barley and wheat. It was a way to fix the price of something.

Think of the situation described here. If the famine lasted several months or even a year and the grain you needed for the day cost a day's wage, then after even a month you and your family would have no money to pay for rent or any other necessities because you would have used all your money just to feed your family. Plus, a day's ration of wheat cost a day's wage. What if you had a family of four, five or ten? There is no way to feed your family! The black rider brings economic conditions that cause hunger and economic hardship. Are prices high because of a shortage of food or are prices high for some other reason? We are not told. Historically, famine often results from war because food stops being grown, harvested and shipped to market. The black horse and rider represent the severe inflation that often results from war and the failure of farmers to be able to grow crops to feed the population.

The black rider is told not to damage the oil and the wine. In Revelation 7:3 and 9:4 angels who are bringing judgments against those who do not follow the Lamb are told not to damage the plants or trees. Specifically the black rider is given instructions about the cost of grain for people to eat. He is not given instructions to destroy the wheat and barley crops only to charge outrageous prices for the grain. That agrees with the command not to damage the oil or wine. The plants are not damaged because it is a shortage that causes the famine following the war. John could be showing God's care for his creation apart from human beings. God will guard the plants even while terrible judgments are taking place against those who reject him and the Lord Jesus Christ. However, in Revelation 8 in the first of the seven trumpet judgments a third of the trees are burned up. Sometimes God protects his creation while he judges sinful humanity and sometimes his creation suffers along with humanity. This is one of those places where John's visions are not always consistent. We are not told why God tells the rider not to damage the oil and wine. Is it out of compassion to those who are hurt by the war and famine? Oil and wine were used as medicines in the Roman world. Or is it out of a desire to protect his creation? Either may be possible or both ideas may be mistaken. This is a question that we may not be able to answer.

6:7-8 - The Lamb opens the fourth seal and John hears the fourth living creature command the final horseman to come out. The NIV says the rider was on a pale horse. The NRSV reads a pale green horse as does the NLT. The NASB reads an ashen horse with a text note saying sickly pale. The word in Greek is chloros meaning green, pale green or pale. We get the word chlorophyll from chloros. Often it is used to describe green plants or grass. In the context here in Revelation 6:8 it means pale green to describe a corpse because its rider's name is Death.

One prophecy expert claims the "green" rider is a reference to Islam since the color of many Islamic flags is green. He says various Bible translations have mistranslated the word over the centuries. It should literally read green and not pale. He claims John is telling us that Islam as a force will kill a fourth of the people of the earth and that we are living in the time of the "Fourth Horseman." There are great difficulties with his view. The most important one is the title of the rider, Death. In our day radical Islamic terrorists like ISIS have sown death wherever they go, but that does not mean all Muslim nations do the same thing. Furthermore, Death and Hades were given power to kill by the sword, famine, plague and wild beasts or scavengers. These are
all related to God's judgments in the Old Testament against Israel and Judah and the other nations around them. Sword, famine, plague and scavenging wild beasts all follow one another. They relate to the first three horsemen and are logical consequences that follow from conquest, war and famine. See Jeremiah 15 and Ezekiel 5 and Jeremiah's prophecies against the nations in Jeremiah 46-51. To completely separate the fourth horseman from the first three is not good exegesis. It uses the dubious premise that because we live in the last days before Jesus' return (which this particular prophecy scholar teaches) there are things in Revelation that are now plain to us that were not known to John or the people of his day. John could not have foreseen the rise of Islam as another major world religion. We in our day now have the historical clues to decode the fourth horseman. This principle is also used in the other visions in Revelation. The problem is it is circular reasoning. We are in the last days therefore we know what John couldn't therefore our interpretation based on our current events is correct. It does not interpret the text in its context and then apply it to our day which is how all other Scripture is interpreted. Why invent a brand new way of interpreting Scripture just for Revelation? Plus, John says he wrote his vision from the Lord Jesus to the seven churches of Asia Province. By this prophecy scholar's view John gave them a vision most of which they could not understand and that did not apply to them. I find that very difficult to believe, especially since John is told in Revelation 22:10 not to seal up his vision because the time is near.

The rider's name is Death and Hades, or the place of the dead, follows the rider. Jesus said in Revelation 1 and 3 that he holds the keys to Death and Hades. He has authority over them. That is confirmed here in verse 8 in that Death and Hades are given power to kill a fourth of the earth or the people of the earth by sword, famine, plague and wild beasts. They are given power to sow war and all its consequences against a sinful, pagan world. They are under the authority of the Lord Jesus!

6:9-11 - When the Lord Jesus breaks the fifth seal the scene shifts from the "Four Horsemen" and what they unleash on the earth to heaven. John sees the souls of those who had been slain because of their testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ. The word for slain is the same word John uses to describe the Lamb who was slain. It means slaughtered or murdered. In Revelation 2:13 Antipas is mentioned as a martyr in Pergamum. Luke writes about Stephen who was killed by the Sanhedrin as the first Christian to die for their faith in Acts 7. He tells us that James, brother of John, was the first of the apostles to be martyred in Acts 12. Between Acts and Revelation many would die for their testimony about Jesus, including Peter and Paul! Tradition says that John was the only one of Jesus' original twelve who did not die a martyr's death. Following Revelation in the second and third centuries brutal persecution broke out against Christians in the Roman Empire. In the 20th century more Christians died for their faith than in all the prior centuries combined. Does John see the martyrs from heaven's perspective, outside of time, which would be all the martyrs in history? Or does he see them from his historical perspective, all those who had been killed for their faith from the resurrection until John writes? It is impossible to know. Since John's brother James was martyred does he see his soul under the altar as well, along with Peter's and Paul's? We are not told.

The martyrs' testimony is about the Word of God. John says in 1:9 that he was in exile on the island of Patmos for the same reason. Jesus is named the Word of God in John 1 and he is called by that name in Revelation 19 when he returns at his Second Coming. The Word of God is either a code name for the Lord Jesus or it is the gospel. Perhaps it is both.
John sees the souls of the martyrs under the altar in heaven. We need to be careful how far we push the details of John's vision here, but it is clear that the martyrs are not yet resurrected. They do not have resurrection bodies. They are present with God in heaven in an immortal state; they live, yet they are not yet complete. This describes the state of all believers in Jesus who die before he returns and we are resurrected. They await the great resurrection of the saints when the Lord Jesus returns.

The difficulty of this fifth seal is the idea that the souls of the martyrs are kept under the altar in heaven. Several times in Revelation John mentions the temple of God in heaven which is analogous to the temple on earth which had been destroyed in 70 by the Romans. See Revelation 11:19. It represents God's presence but it is separate from his throne, although in 16:17 John says he hears a loud voice out of the temple from the throne of God. Based on that verse it sounds like the throne of God is in the temple of God in heaven. We are not told any more details and to gain a clearer picture may be impossible. The martyrs are under the altar, presumably in the temple in heaven. John does not explain why they are there rather than worshipping God before his throne. He does not tell us why the martyrs are kept separate from the other saints who have died and are now with the Lord in heaven. John sees the souls of the martyrs under the altar but we are not told if this was a permanent arrangement until the time of their vindication or a onetime event that John saw and reported in his vision. Plus in the rest of the Bible nothing is kept or put underneath the altar in the temple. In the Old Testament the priests bring the sacrifices and put them on the altar, or sprinkle blood on the horns of the altar or on the sides but never underneath. It is possible the altar John refers to here is the altar of incense before the curtain of the holy of holies but that is unlikely. The whole idea of the souls of the martyrs kept underneath the altar is very curious. It is without precedent in the rest of Scripture and so immediately becomes difficult to understand as to what John is referring.

Once again we must be careful not to stretch the details of John's vision too far. I think we must take this scene in the fifth seal as symbolic and not literal. The difficulties mount if we take it literally. I believe John gives us this picture to single out the fate of those who have died for their faith in order to strengthen the believers in the seven churches and all believers in the future who face persecution. They are protected in heaven by God and no one will ever harm them again! Plus God will vindicate them and bring to justice those who murdered them.

They cry out to God and address him as "Sovereign Lord, holy and true." The Lord Jesus is named holy and true in the letter to Philadelphia in Revelation 3. Once again John uses a name for God that is also used for the Lord Jesus demonstrating that Jesus is God. The martyrs ask when God is going to judge an ungodly world and avenge their blood. In Genesis 4 God says Abel's blood cries out from the ground as a witness to Cain's murder of his brother. In Jeremiah 19 God says he will judge Judah because they have shed innocent blood. Yet, unlike Jesus on the cross or Stephen when he was being stoned, the martyrs do not ask for forgiveness for their killers. They seek vengeance. Rather than being rebuked for a non-Christlike attitude they are encouraged to wait a little longer. This is a very different attitude than the rest of the New Testament. Paul in Romans 12 says leave vengeance to God and do not seek to repay evil. Perhaps that is what they are doing, asking God when he will take out his vengeance on those who kill his people. There is no plea for giving their killers a chance at repentance. It is as if all opportunity for repentance has passed. There is only judgment left.

The souls of the martyrs are given white robes to wear and are told to wait a little longer until the number of their fellow servants is completed, those who are yet to be martyred for their faith. The white robes usually symbolize purity or holiness. Jesus promises the believers at
Sardis in 3:4-5 that if they overcome they will be dressed in white. He counsels the Laodiceans to buy white clothes from him to hide their nakedness in 3:18. The great multitude beyond count that John sees standing before the throne of God and of the Lamb in Revelation 7 is dressed in white as are the elders around God's throne in chapter 4. Jesus himself is robed in white when he returns in Revelation 19. All of these pictures of white robes relate to God affirming the martyrs as pure and holy before him. They are clothed like Jesus because in their faithfulness they are like Jesus. How a soul can be clothed in a white robe John does not explain. This is one of those places where taking apocalyptic imagery too literally can result in confusing and even silly interpretations. This is a vision and is not always an exact representation of concrete reality and events. John's vision is symbolic and we need to interpret his symbols in ways that make sense.

The martyrs are told to wait a little longer for the day of God's judgment and vengeance. Their wait will be short because the implication is the time of God's judgment is near. However, there are more martyrs to be added to their number. Persecution is coming for God's church on earth. John says in 1:9, the theme verse of Revelation, he and the people of the seven churches share the suffering. Part of what he means is persecution that in some cases results in martyrdom. That has been true throughout the church's history and is true in our day as well. Those who have been killed for their faith can take comfort that they are protected in heaven and are affirmed. God will take vengeance for their murder on those who killed them. God will not allow those who murder his people to escape his justice! They will be avenged! The picture of the souls of the martyrs under the altar is designed to encourage and comfort those who are facing death for their faith. It is also a reminder that physical death on earth is not the worst fate that can befall a person. Facing God's justice and vengeance for killing one of his own is much worse!

John watches as the Lord Jesus opens the sixth seal. What follows is beyond human comprehension and beyond anything anyone on earth has ever experienced. There is a great earthquake so powerful that every mountain was shaken and moved and every island was moved from its place. The Greek word translated remove is kineo, from which we get the word kinetic and means to move, move away or remove. The word carries with it the idea of motion. This is apocalyptic imagery and describes an event that is unimaginable. This is an earthquake that would affect the entire world and shake every mountain so greatly that it would be reduced to rubble. Can you imagine Mt. Rainer shaken so badly that it collapsed in minutes and all that was left was debris? Or Vancouver Island shaken and moved so violently that it is moved from its place and is no longer just off the coast of British Columbia? That is the kind of earthquake John describes. An earthquake of that magnitude and that scope would leave only a handful of people alive on the earth. Every city and town would be destroyed. Civilization would end. Yet for John the scroll of God's plan and judgments has not even been opened yet! He describes another earthquake similar in magnitude in Revelation 16:17-21 as part of the seventh bowl of wrath. There no city is left on earth and all the islands and mountains flee away. They are all destroyed.

One problem we have in interpreting Revelation if John's visions are literal and chronological is who is left alive on the earth after the great earthquake and events of the sixth seal let alone who is left to survive to the seventh bowl? How large are the armies of the kings of the earth to gather against God's people and the Lord Jesus at Armageddon in 16:16 if there is no one left alive? There is simply no way one can interpret the seals, trumpets and bowls literally and chronologically and have anyone left alive on earth who could even function! Plus the great events repeat and intensify. That is obvious from the earthquake. Revelation 16:18 says the earthquake that occurs during the seventh bowl was so great no earthquake like it has ever
occurred in human history! Yet here in 6:14 it is similar in magnitude. This to me is evidence that John repeats themes and judgments in good Hebrew fashion and those judgments intensify in magnitude and scope the closer one gets to Jesus' Second Coming. John uses imagery from the prophets in the Old Testament that describe the great and terrible Day of the Lord, the final day of judgment and wrath against all pagan peoples who oppose God and his people. It brings judgment to the earth and salvation to God's people. The judgments are symbolic yet represent terrible events whose purpose is to punish those who oppose God and bring them to repentance. God will give the human race one last chance to repent and turn to him through his Son, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

The great earthquake is not the only event that occurs when the sixth seal is broken. John says the sun turned black like sackcloth made of black goat hair. The moon turned blood red. He is describing a solar and lunar eclipse. For us today with our knowledge of astronomy and celestial mechanics we understand what happens in a solar and lunar eclipse. For the people of John's day they were mysterious and terrifying signs in the heavens. However, even if we understand the reasons behind solar and lunar eclipses that does not mean they are not signs from God! Plus the Old Testament prophets had prophesied that in the Day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment and salvation, the sun would turn black and the moon would turn red. Joel 2 says on the Day of the Lord the sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood. Amos 5 says woe to those who desire the Day of the Lord for it will be a day of darkness and not light. Isaiah 13 says on the Day of the Lord the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. John says the stars fell from the sky like figs falling from the trees. The sky receded like a scroll rolling up. From our modern perspective we cannot even begin to understand how this could happen nor what it would be like. All the stars winking out of existence would be a frightening spectacle. Isaiah 34 says all the stars of heaven will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll. All the stars will fall like figs falling from the tree. The Lord Jesus combines Isaiah 13 and Isaiah 34 when he quotes both passages in Matthew 24. He says at the end of the Birth Pangs and the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall from the sky and all the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Genesis 1 tells us that God placed the stars in the sky to give light and to mark the passing of the seasons. The stars were thought to be in the firmament, a dome over the earth where God put them. Ancient peoples used the movement of the stars in the constellations to mark the seasons so they would know when to plant and harvest their crops. Here John says God does exactly the opposite. He causes the stars in the sky to fall from the firmament, reversing the very order of creation! All of this imagery is to show that the Day of the Lord has come in the breaking of the sixth seal. Yet, this is only the sixth seal! There are still many judgments to come in the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of God's wrath.

If John's vision in Revelation is meant to be taken not only literally but chronologically it would be impossible to fulfill. John clearly says in the sixth seal the sun is darkened and all the stars fall from the sky. Yet in the fourth trumpet judgment a third of the sun, moon and stars are darkened. How is that possible when the stars have already fallen? John's vision repeats themes and intensifies but it is not chronological. It cannot be! John describes here in chapter 6 the Day of the Lord, the final climax of God's judgment upon a sinful human race to bring the ungodly to their knees so that they acknowledge God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 15-17 give their answer.
6:15-17 - John says at the falling of the stars and the great earthquake, all the people of the earth, from kings and princes, to generals, from the rich and powerful to the slaves; every free person on the earth hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called on the mountains to fall on them in order to hide from God. Since during the earthquake every mountain is brought down there are plenty of rocks in which to hide! They do not cry out to God for deliverance. They cry out to the mountains to hide them and cover them because they are afraid of the wrath of God. They say hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne, meaning God and from the wrath of the Lamb. The great day of their wrath has come, the Day of the Lord and who can stand? They know it is impossible to resist God yet they do not turn to him!

All of these frightening catastrophes do not bring repentance. They bring fear and the desire to hide from God. That is exactly what Adam and Eve did in the Garden in Genesis 3. They hid from God because they were afraid. They knew they had sinned. In their pride ungodly humanity knows they have sinned. They know they deserve God's wrath yet they will not repent. In Revelation 9 at the end of the sixth trumpet John says people did not repent. In Revelation 16 after the fourth bowl of wrath John reports people did not repent. They knew these judgments were from God because of their refusal to worship him and acknowledge the Lord Jesus but they refused to turn away from their sin and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ!

Ezekiel 18 says God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He would rather they turn from their wickedness and repent. The judgments of Revelation are judgments to repentance. God's wrath against human sin is being poured out on the people of the earth who reject him and who persecute and kill his saints. Yet even during these terrible judgments God desires the ungodly to turn to him. He is still giving humans one last chance to repent. When the Lord Jesus returns in chapter 19 there will be no more time for repentance. The door will be closed and the number of God's people will be set forever. As C.S. Lewis says in Mere Christianity, "When the author walks onto the stage the play is over!" In the last days God is giving sinful humanity one last chance to submit to him!

Chapter 7:
7:1-4 - This is the first of the major interludes in the seven seals, trumpets and bowls sections of Revelation. This interlude about God's people comes between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals. The next major interlude comes between the blowing of the sixth and seventh trumpets. The largest interlude about the woman, the dragon and the beast comes between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath. In these interludes John fills in the picture of what is happening to God's people in heaven and on earth and how the judgments fit into God's overall plan to bring his Kingdom. In chapter 7 the interlude deals specifically with God's people. John has shown us the judgments that are coming in history as each of the seven seals are broken and God's plan is revealed. This interlude in chapter 7 answers the question of what happens to the church in the midst of all of these terrible judgments and events. We are given a picture of God's people on earth in verses 1-8 and the saints in heaven in verses 9-17.

John sees four angels standing at the four corners of the earth. In Hebrew thought, like all ancient peoples, the world is flat and therefore it has four corners or four cardinal directions, north, south, east and west. They had no conception of the earth as a globe orbiting around the sun nor did they understand the immensity of space. God did not reveal to them our modern understanding of the universe. If he had given the authors of Scripture a more accurate picture of the earth and space they would have had no frame of reference within which to fit it. Just because the Bible speaks of the "four corners of the earth" does not mean it is false or
untrustworthy. There are things we do not yet understand about the universe. Imagine people two thousand years from now reading things written today. Some of those things will seem quaint and inaccurate due to our lack of knowledge. Some of what is written will give great insight into the world and people. We need to remember God did not give us the Scriptures as a science textbook but to reveal himself and his plan of salvation in Jesus Christ!

The four angels standing at the four corners of the earth hold back the four winds to prevent them from damaging the land, sea and trees. There are several references to the four winds in the Old Testament prophets. The four winds in Jeremiah 49 are winds of judgment against Elam or Persia. In Ezekiel 37 the breath that breathes life into the dry bones of Israel comes from the four winds. In Daniel 7 the four beasts of Daniel's vision emerge from the sea that the four winds are stirring up. In Zechariah 6 the four winds describe the four chariots of Zechariah's vision that go throughout the earth. The NIV translates winds as the four spirits from heaven since the Hebrew word for wind, ruach, can also mean breath or spirit. The same is true for the Greek word for wind, breath or spirit, pneuma. Jesus in Matthew 24 says his angels will gather his elect from the four winds, meaning from all over the earth, when the last trumpet sounds at his Second Coming. The four winds can be used in various ways but John chooses to use them as pictures of judgment here in chapter 7. The context of the interlude between the breaking of the sixth and seventh seals helps us understand he is speaking of the judgments that will be unleashed in the breaking of the seals and in the trumpets and bowls that are to come. The angels holding back the winds of judgment are told to wait until God's people can be sealed.

Another angel comes from the east or literally, ascending with the rising of the sun, who has the seal of the living God. The seal in his hand is the instrument by which the 144,000 will be marked with God's seal. In the ancient world it was often a signet ring or a cylindrical stamp made out of metal which made an impression in soft clay. Wax was not used until centuries later. Slaves were often branded with their owner's name or sign as a way of sealing them, showing they belonged to their owner. John says the angel told the four angels of the four winds to hold back their judgments until "we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." The word the NIV translates servants is doulos in Greek and literally means slave or bond-servant. That lends credence to the idea that the seal of God on the foreheads of his saints is a sign of God's ownership over his people. They belong to him!

The angel calls out to the four angels who have power over the four winds to harm the land and sea to hold the winds and not harm land, sea or trees until God's people are sealed. In Ezekiel 9 an angel is told to go throughout Jerusalem and mark the foreheads of all those who grieve over the idolatry and wickedness of the city. There are six other angels who follow the angel who marks those who are faithful to God. They are told to slaughter without mercy any in the city who do not have God's mark on their foreheads. Immediately following this vision of the marking of God's faithful the glory of God leaves the temple and departs to the east. Ezekiel is given a vision of the saving of the remnant of Judah during the calamity of the fall of Jerusalem. Many will be killed by the Babylonians but some will be spared because they are faithful to God and he knows who they are! They carry his mark on their foreheads. The mark is spiritual or symbolic and not literal.

Paul in Ephesians 1:13-14 says believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption, meaning the day of resurrection when the Lord Jesus returns. God's seal is his guarantee of our inheritance in Christ. Here in Revelation 7 John does not describe the seal but it could be God's name in Hebrew, Yahweh, or even a Greek chi, or X, for Christ. God's people are
marked with his seal to show they are his. They will be protected from the terrible judgments that are to come upon the earth to judge those who reject God and the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ!

John hears the number of those who were sealed, 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. As we will show the number 144,000 is a symbolic number and is not to be taken literally. It is a highly significant symbolic number however because it is 12, the number of God's people, times 12 or 12 squared, times 1000. 1000 or any multiple of ten in Hebrew thought represents a good round number. 1000 or in this case 144,000 is a huge number. The other important thing to note in verse 4 is that the 144,000 are from all the tribes of Israel. The word can mean all or every. The idea is within the 144,000 each tribe of Israel is represented. As we will see in verses 5-8 that is not literally the case. John is giving us a clue as to the meaning of the number 144,000.

7:5-8 - In verses 5-8 John gives us the list of each of the twelve tribes of Israel who are sealed with God's seal and therefore protected from the judgments the four winds will unleash upon the earth. He says 12,000 from each tribe were sealed. 12,000 is a significant symbolic number in apocalyptic writings. It is 12, the number for God's people, times 1000. Any multiple of ten equals a round number and 1000 represents a large round number. Since each tribe had 12,000 sealed and there are twelve tribes the total adds up to 144,000. In Hebrew thinking 144,000 would denote the perfect full number of God's people.

The problem comes when we look at the list of tribes John uses. It is completely unique in the Scriptures. The order of the tribes is unlike any list in the Old Testament and the list does not contain all twelve tribes of Israel. Here are the sons of Jacob in order of their birth from Genesis 29-30: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, and Joseph. Benjamin's birth, the twelfth and final son, is recorded in Genesis 35. Here is the order in Moses' census in Numbers 1: Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim (Joseph's son), Manasseh (Joseph's son), Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Gad, Naphtali. Levi is not listed in the census because it was the priestly tribe and would not receive any land in the Promiseland. The two half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are listed in his place. Here is the list of tribes in the blessing of Moses at the close of Moses' final address to the people in Deuteronomy 33: Reuben, Judah, Levi, Benjamin, Joseph, Ephraim, Manasseh (the sons of Joseph, so Joseph as a tribe is listed twice), Zebulun, Issachar, Gad, Dan, Naphtali, and Asher. Only eleven tribes are listed. Simeon is not mentioned, perhaps because very quickly it became absorbed into Judah once Israel entered the Promiseland. In 1 Chronicles 2:1 the sons of Israel are listed: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad and Asher. In chapters 2-7 that follow the author gives the genealogies of the tribes, some much more extensive than others. The tribes as listed are: Judah, Simeon, Reuben, Gad, Manasseh is mentioned (with no genealogy), Levi, Issachar, Benjamin, Naphtali, Manasseh is listed a second time (this time with his genealogy), Ephraim and Asher. Dan is left out with no reason given. Some prophecy scholars maintain he was left out because of Jacob's statement about him in Genesis 49. He said Dan is a serpent by the roadside. They link the metaphor of a viper ready to strike with the serpent in the Garden of Eden and say Dan became idolatrous and satanic and therefore was eliminated from the twelve tribes. John does not mention Dan in his list in Revelation 7 and does not give a reason why. Ezekiel gives the final significant list of the twelve tribes in the Old Testament in Ezekiel 48 prophesying about a renewed temple and a renewed Promiseland in the times of the Messiah. The tribes in Ezekiel are listed as follows: Reuben, Judah, Levi, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, Naphtali.
We can make some observations about the lists of the twelve tribes in the Old Testament. Reuben is almost always listed first because he was the oldest. Simeon is often listed second because he was second oldest. Levi is often not listed as one of the tribes because he received no significant land in the Promised Land. Joseph is usually not listed but his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh are listed in his place because the two half-tribes were both large and powerful and they took the place of both Joseph and Levi when the lists deal with the land. Ephraim and Manasseh are also frequently used to denote the northern kingdom of Israel in the prophets and historical writings. Ephraim is sometimes listed alone as representative of the northern kingdom but never Manasseh. The list in Ezekiel is different from the other lists because Ezekiel is portraying an ideal Israel restored to the land after the Babylonian captivity with a rebuilt temple and a renewed Promised Land. Ezekiel lists all twelve tribes including Levi and Joseph. He leaves out no tribe.

Compare John's list in Revelation 7: Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin. John's list is different from every Old Testament list. Judah is listed first as it was in 1 Chronicles. Levi is listed which means John's list does not concern the tribes that received land. Dan is omitted without explanation just as in the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 2-7. Joseph is listed as a tribe along with Manasseh, yet inexplicably Ephraim is left out. Thus the tribe of Joseph is listed one and a half times. Finally the normal order is jumbled compared to the other Old Testament lists. It should be noted however that many of the Old Testament lists have a different order for the tribes especially in the latter parts of the list.

What do we conclude from all of this? I cannot see how John is referring to a literal Israel in his list with 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes because of the simple fact that each of the twelve tribes is not listed! Any believer who had a working knowledge of the Old Testament would view John's list as odd. For someone as steeped in Old Testament knowledge as John obviously was with his frequent use of Old Testament prophetic images, to list the tribes as he does here in Revelation 7 can only mean one thing: John is not describing a literal Israel. His list therefore must be symbolic, possibly of God's knowledge of the number of his people the saints, the true Israel, Jesus' church. Any attempt to interpret this list as a literal Israel representative of a remnant of Jews who will accept Jesus as Messiah in the Great Tribulation and evangelize the nations falls apart quickly when one looks at the details of the list. John is listing a symbolic Israel, a perfect number sealed by God that represents his people who will be protected from the great judgments that are coming on the earth just as his ancient people were protected in the land of Goshen from the plagues against the Egyptians in Exodus 7-11. I believe John is giving us a picture of the church from God's perspective. He knows the exact number of his people, both Jews and Gentiles, and has them all sealed and numbered.

7:9-10 - John looks again and sees a great multitude that no one could count. This is not 144,000 people. This crowd is so big John could not even begin to count them all! They are from every nation, tribe, people and language. John makes it clear that no nation, ethnic group, tribe or people are left out of this crowd. This is a picture of the saints of God in heaven, the fulfillment of Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28. There are believers in this multitude from all nations! This great multitude is standing before the throne of God, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They are not wearing the clothing of their native lands and peoples. They are all wearing white robes. White robes were the color of the robes given to a conquering Roman general in a triumphal parade in Rome. John could be referring to Jesus'
statements in the seven letters to the seven churches about overcoming and the white robes represent the saints who have persevered and conquered and are now in heaven with God in triumph. There is also another possibility. In Revelation 19 God's people are given fine linen to wear for the wedding feast of the Lamb. Fine linen is white in color. In Matthew 22 in the parable of the Wedding Banquet the wedding guests are given wedding clothes to wear provided by the king. The white robes here in Revelation 7 could be similar. They are given to God's saints to wear symbolizing their righteousness before God, which is Jesus' righteousness. Both ideas for the white robes may be true. Palm branches were used by the crowd around Jesus on Palm Sunday when they welcomed him to Jerusalem and proclaimed him the Messiah. See John 12. In Exodus 23 in the description of the Feast of Tabernacles, Moses instructs the people to gather palm branches and use them to rejoice before the Lord. John is showing us God's people rejoicing and praising God and the Lamb in heaven.

Verses 13-17 describe in greater detail who makes up the great multitude but I believe John gives us a picture of God's people, his saints, from our perspective. There are so many from every tribe and language and people they are beyond count. The 144,000 are God's people from his perspective. They are complete and he knows their exact number. Some have said the 144,000 are the Jews who believe in Jesus while the great multitude is the Gentile believers. That is certainly possible. However, once again one runs into the problem of the list of tribes when one tries to take the 144,000 as a literal Israel. Perhaps John lists the tribes as he does to show us that God will save his ancient people through their Messiah Jesus but not all Israel will believe. If that is the case why single out Dan as the tribe that is left out? I think it makes more sense to see the 144,000 as symbolic of all of God's people whom he has perfectly numbered. John lists the tribes as he does to give us the clue that he is not talking about a literal Israel. This is one of those places in Revelation where one must do the best one can to interpret the text in its context and recognize that there may be more than one interpretation of what John is telling us.

The people sing a song of praise. They declare that salvation belongs to God who sits on the throne, the Creator, and to the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ. Like in chapter 5, praise that is given to God the Creator is also given to the Lord Jesus, demonstrating that he is God!

7:11-12 - The song of the saints is followed by the song of the angels praising God. All the angels surrounding the throne, plus the elders, plus the four living creatures sing this song. The elders are included singing with the angels which is a clue that the twenty-four elders are not representative of the Old and New Testament saints but are in fact the angelic council of God, his court around his throne.

They worship God and sing a seven-fold praise to God. Praise, glory, wisdom, thanks, honor, power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. They begin and end the song with Amen, which suggests that their song is in agreement with the song of the saints who praise God who sits on the throne and the Lamb. The angels praise "our God." Our God in Revelation is the Creator who sits on the throne and the Lamb who was slain! John shows us a picture of God's people joining with the angels in praising God in heaven. Notice that here God's saints take the lead in praising him and the angels respond. In Revelation 5 it was the angels who took the lead and all creatures responded.

7:13-14 - One of the elders comes to John and asks him the identity of all those in white robes and if John knows from whence they come. John's answer reminds me of Ezekiel's answer to
God when he asked the prophet if he knew what all the dry bones were in Ezekiel 37, "Sir you know." That means I haven't a clue but you must know!

The elder, the great angel, tells John that these are they who have come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb. There are several things to understand in this statement. What does the elder mean by "they who have come out of the great tribulation"? The NIV translates the verb to come as a perfect or a past tense, have come out. However, the verb for come out in Greek is a present participle. Literally the phrase reads, "They are the coming out of the great tribulation ones." The ESV tries to capture the present participle by translating the phrase, "these are the ones coming out of the great tribulation." The implication is the great tribulation is ongoing and the process of the saints triumphing in heaven is happening as John sees the vision.

The key is what John means by the great tribulation. In 1:9, the theme verse of Revelation, he says he shares the suffering, the kingdom and the patient endurance with his fellow believers. The NIV translates the word suffering but literally it reads tribulation. Jesus in John 16:33 said, "In this world you will have tribulation but take heart I have overcome the world." Here in Revelation 7 is the last time John uses the word in Revelation. The three other times he uses it besides 1:9 are all in the seven letters describing situations the believers face or are about to face. Jesus in Matthew 24:21 says in the last days before his Second Coming, "...there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." Many Dispensational scholars take Jesus' statement and link it to the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel 9 and teach that Jesus is speaking of the final seven years before his coming, the "70th week" of Daniel's prophecy. They give the title "The Great Tribulation" to those final seven years. The problem with that viewpoint is that Jesus in Matthew 24 is being descriptive of the severity of the times rather than giving a title to them. This is confirmed in Mark's version of Jesus' sermon about the end times in Mark 13:19 when Mark reports Jesus says, "For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of creation..." Jesus simply describes the awful nature of the times before his coming. He does not say the final seven years before his coming will be called "The Great Tribulation." That title is an artificial title used by certain scholars to support a particular Dispensational interpretation of end time prophecy. Given the Greek grammar of the sentence here in Revelation 7:14 it appears "the great tribulation" is descriptive language of the time described by the breaking of the seals in John's vision. The breaking of the seals happens in history following the seven letters. They begin to describe events leading up to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. In Jewish terms they describe the beginnings of the birth pangs of the Messiah, the transition between this age and the age to come. God's people that John sees praising God in heaven are not the "raptured church" because there is an ongoing process of them coming out of the tribulation or trouble happening on the earth. Plus they have been experiencing that trouble. If they were the raptured church as some Dispensational scholars teach they would have avoided it because they would already be in heaven before the "Great Tribulation" had started.

The great multitude John sees is coming out of the great time of trouble on the earth. They are obviously in heaven and therefore have died on the earth. Are they the martyrs or are simply believers who have suffered but have persevered in their faith and died? John does not tell us. The problem with seeing the multitude as those who have been martyred is how does one reconcile this passage in chapter 7 with the breaking of the 5th seal and the souls of the martyrs under the altar in heaven crying out for vengeance? The souls of the martyrs in chapter 5 were also given white robes to wear and told to wait a little longer until their numbers were complete.
Is John's vision of the great multitude the completed number of martyrs? If that is the case why then does he use a present tense verb that means their coming out is an ongoing process rather than a completed one? Given how John describes his vision of the great multitude of believers from every nation I conclude they are all the saints who have died and are dying as the terrible judgments upon the earth are unfolding. The martyrs under the altar in chapter 5 are a subset of this multitude. John in chapter 7 gives us two visions of God's people. God has his people numbered and they are sealed by him to be protected from the judgments that come upon the ungodly of the earth. That is the vision of the 144,000. Any saint, who dies during the judgments, even if they are martyred, will triumph and be with God's people in heaven praising him forever. That is the vision of the great multitude. They are visions of assurance!

The elder-angel also tells John the multitude of the saints have all washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This is a reference to Jesus' death for us. In the song to the Lamb in Revelation 5:9 the angels sing, "...because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." John uses the same four words to describe the scope of the great multitude here in chapter 7. In I John 1:7 John writes: "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." John gives a picture of that statement here in Revelation 7. The saints have not purified themselves. The blood of the Lamb has done that for them. Washing their robes in Jesus' blood is a picture of faith and commitment to the Lord Jesus. It also helps us understanding the meaning of the white robes. They were not white before they were washed in the Lamb's blood. They have been made white by his sacrificial death. This is an image of Jesus' righteousness given to us by faith as Paul describes in Romans 3. We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, washed clean of our guilt and sin because of his death on the cross for us. The old spiritual sang: "There is a fountain filled with blood that flows from Emmanuel's veins, and sinners washed beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains." All our sins have been paid for. God's people stand pure before him in heaven, completely justified and free from sin!

7:15-17 - The elder-angel describes to John the fate or destiny of the saints with God in heaven. They are before God's throne and serve him day and night in his temple. It is clear in this verse that God's throne is within his temple in heaven. The temple on earth in Jerusalem was thought to be the footstool of God's throne and represented his presence on the earth. According to the Law of Moses only the High Priest on the Day of Atonement with the blood of the sacrifice could approach the Holy of Holies and actually look on the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat. Here in heaven there are no more limitations. Human sin has been washed clean by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and so all his people have direct access into the presence of God. They are with him and serve him as priests. In the Greek New Testament the word for serve John uses here always refers to the worship of God as service to him. See Romans 12:1 where Paul uses the same word. The saints are worshipping the Lord. John reaffirms that vision in chapter 22. God's people will serve him in heaven. Their service will be their worship.

John sees God and his people in his temple in heaven in one scene and in another sees God on his throne with his people and the nations coming to him openly as in chapter 22. Here in Revelation 7 God’s throne is in God's temple. That is not always the case in the rest of Revelation. This is another instance where John's apocalyptic visions are sometimes inconsistent from scene to scene.
John says God who sits on his throne will *spread his tent over* his people. The ESV translates this verse: *will shelter them with his presence*. The NASB reads, *will spread his tabernacle over them*. The NLT reads, *will live among them and shelter them*. The Greek verb John uses here means to live or dwell. The nouns that come from this verb mean a tent, dwelling, lodging or specifically God's temple. The various translations seek to express these meanings. John uses the verb and the noun in 21:4 where he sees the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. He hears a voice that says the dwelling of God is with people and he will live or dwell with them. Perhaps the most significant usage of this verb is in John 1:14: *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*. The word for dwell is the same word John uses here in Revelation 7:15. Some scholars have translated John 1:14 to read and the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us or tabernacled among us. The reference is to the tabernacle in the wilderness where God was among his people Israel. The tabernacle becomes a type of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus, God becoming man and dwelling or living among us. I believe John is using the same image here in 7:15. God will dwell or live directly with his people. John introduces us to pictures of heaven that he will repeat later in Revelation especially in the final climax of his vision in chapters 21-22.

The elder says never again will God's people hunger or thirst. Their needs will always be met. One must be careful not to take John's statement too literally as if God's people in heaven needed food and drink to survive. They are immortal. John is being symbolic. He borrows many images from the prophets and the gospels in these verses that describe God's people in heaven. Isaiah 49 says in the time of God's favor God's servant will be a covenant for his people. He will restore them and free them from their captivity. In 49:9-10 Isaiah says God will pasture his people and have compassion on them. He or his Servant will guide and shepherd them. They will neither hunger or thirst not will the sun beat down upon them. God will lead them to springs of water. In John 6 Jesus declares that he is the bread of life, the bread that comes down from heaven. He says the one who eats of this bread, meaning himself, will never be hungry or thirsty again. God's saints will be safe from scorching heat and the sun will not beat down on them. This recalls the language of Psalm 121 where the Psalmist says the sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night because the Lord watches over you. The visions of God's prophets in the Old Testament are fulfilled in heaven for God's people.

Verse 17 says the Lamb, the one at the center of God's throne, meaning God himself, will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Ezekiel 34 prophesies that in the last days God will send his servant David to shepherd his people and he will protect them and care for them. Micah 5 says the Lord will send the Messiah, the king from David's line who will shepherd his people Israel. Jesus said in John 10 that he is the good shepherd who cares for his sheep and no one can take them from his hand. He told the woman at the well in John 4 that whoever drinks from the water he gives will never thirst again and will have a spring inside welling up to eternal life. Isaiah 25 says God will swallow up death forever and wipe away all tears from the faces of his people. In Isaiah 35 the prophet saw a vision of the last days when God will bring gladness and joy to his people and all sorrow will flee away. In Isaiah 65 he sees a new heaven and earth where the sound of weeping and crying will be heard no more. John, in his vision of the new heaven and earth in Revelation 21, says God will be with his people and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. John introduces us to the final state of God's people here in chapter 7. It is a fulfillment of the visions of the prophets and of what the Lord Jesus declared in the gospels, especially John.
Chapter 8:
8:1 - John sees the Lord Jesus open the seventh seal on God's scroll. The scroll and its contents should now be ready to read. Yet instead of some great calamity or judgment John reports there was silence in heaven for half an hour! The word for silence means quiet, the absence of all noise whether made by speaking or anything else. Habakkuk 2:20 says: "But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him." Habakkuk is contrasting the idols the pagan nations worship who cannot speak with all the nations being silent before the Lord God. That is the only reference to silence in the Scriptures that relates to the silence in heaven here in Revelation 8:1. Immediately following the silence John sees the seven angels with the seven trumpets and the altar of incense in God's temple in heaven. After all the calamities and judgments upon the earth the silence in heaven may be a call for the people of the earth to pay attention to God. It could also be the calm before the storm of the judgments of the seven trumpets. Whatever its meaning it is short lived. John says it only lasts half an hour.

With the seventh seal now opened one would expect the contents of God's scroll to be revealed. Yet after this verse the scroll disappears from Revelation all together. It is never mentioned again. It is possible the seven trumpet judgments and the rest of Revelation are the contents of the scroll but one would have expected John to at least refer to that, yet he does not. Whatever the case, the judgments revealed in chapters 8-19 get more severe and appear to occur in a much shorter timeframe. They are the final Birth Pangs of the Messiah, what some have named the Great Tribulation, which leads to the final return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth in Revelation 19.

8:2-5 - Verse 2 is a transition from one scene in John's vision to another. He often uses the phrase, "and I saw" or "and I looked and saw" as a means of moving from scene to scene.

John sees seven angels who stand before God. In Jewish Rabbinic writings there were seven archangels who are the mightiest and most important of the angels. They are: Uriel, the fire of God; Raphael, God has healed; Raguel, the friend of God; Michael, who is like God; Sariel, the prince of God; Gabriel, God is my strength; and Remiel, the thunder of God. Only Michael and Gabriel are mentioned in the Bible. Michael is described as the great prince and guardian of Israel in Daniel 10 & 12. Gabriel is God's messenger to Daniel and also to Zechariah and Mary in Luke 1. Are these the seven "archangels" of the rabbinic writings? That is possible, though one would have expected the archangels to execute the final judgments of God in the seven bowls of wrath, but they appear to be a different set of angels. John is simply not specific enough for us to know. He does tell us these seven all stand in the direct presence of God and they are given seven trumpets. The trumpet in ancient Israel signaled assembly for God’s people and also attack in battle. John may see the trumpets as sounding attack on a sinful world.

John sees another angel, who had a golden censer, come and stand before the altar, presumably in God's temple in heaven. He was given much incense to offer and mix with the prayers of the saints on the golden altar before God's throne. John's description tells us this altar is analogous to the altar of incense in the tabernacle or temple. The altar of incense was a small
altar that stood immediately before the curtain of the Holy of Holies. Incense was burned on it in the morning and the evening. It came to symbolize the prayers of God's people before him. John directly links the burning of the incense with the prayers of the saints here in Revelation 8. The incense and the prayers went up before God from the angel's hand. John does not tell us the content of those prayers though the martyrs in chapter 5 were crying out to God for vengeance upon those who had killed them. The context implies that these prayers are not prayers of praise. Perhaps they are prayers asking God to execute his judgments upon an unbelieving world or for protection of his people or both. We do not know.

The angel fills his censer with fire from the altar and throws it down on the earth. The result was thunder and lightning like a great thunderstorm and an earthquake. In Exodus 19 God comes down on Mt. Sinai with a great cloud with thunder and lightning and a loud trumpet blast. The whole mountain trembled violently with billows of smoke like a volcano. The people were so terrified of God's presence and holiness they asked Moses to speak to God for them. The images are similar here in Revelation 8 however God is not coming down to earth to make a covenant with his people but to unleash his wrath against an ungodly world.

8:6-12 - John sees the seven angels with the seven trumpets prepare to sound them. The seven trumpets could correspond to the breaking of the seventh seal, after the half hour silence in heaven but as I have noted, John does not mention the scroll or its contents again in Revelation. The judgments that come upon the earth and its people are terrible but they are not total. There is still more to come after the seven trumpets. In 9:20-21 John tells us that the people who survive the trumpet judgments do not repent. They continue to worship demons and idols and commit murder, sexual immorality and practice the occult arts. That tells us the trumpet judgments are designed to push people who reject God to repentance but they refuse.

One of the greatest problems we have with the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath is how to take them. Should we take them literally, symbolically or both? If we take even the seven trumpets literally we are left with an earth that is so devastated civilization itself would cease to exist as we know it. There would be so much devastation and death that the problems would overwhelm any government's ability to meet the crisis. Yet when one reads the seven bowl judgments it is clear that there are still many people left on the earth and governments and trade are still functioning. How is that possible? If we take them symbolically what do they actually mean? As we will see many of the judgments are linked to the plagues in Egypt in Exodus and the covenant curses in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Those are all historical events that happened in Egypt and later in Israel and Judah when God judged his people for their idolatry. My best guess is that one needs to take the trumpet and bowl judgments as both symbolic and literal. They describe terrible events and catastrophes that will come upon the earth but they are not always literal. Plus, the consequences may not be permanent. For instance when John says a third of the stars, sun and moon turn dark in the fourth trumpet is he describing a one-time event that is temporary in nature or is he saying a third of the sky was permanently darkened? That would mean when one reaches the time of the seven bowls the world has been existing with only two-thirds of the normal light it has been used to! The trumpet judgments and bowls of wrath present many problems in trying to understand them! One of the most important things to note is the increasing intensity of the judgments as they unfold. They get worse and worse. That fits the Jewish idea of the Birth Pangs of the Messiah. Calamities increase in intensity until the Messiah is finally revealed and he brings in the Kingdom of God. Jesus indicated this would happen in Matthew 24. That pattern fits Revelation very well.
The first angel sounds his trumpet and hail and fire mixed with blood rain down upon the earth. A third of the earth is burned up, a third of the trees and all the green grass are burned. In *Exodus* 9 God sends a great hailstorm upon Egypt, the worst in its history and the hail destroys crops, cattle and people that had not taken shelter. It was accompanied by great lightening and thunder. Here there is hail all over the earth. It is accompanied by fire from heaven and blood. This judgment is against the earth and not the seas or water. Blood in the Old Testament defiles the land. Hail would destroy crops and the fire burns the trees and grass, perhaps in great forest and prairie fires. Imagine the smoke from all the fires. Imagine all the grass being burned up; every pasture would be burned. There would be no grazing for cattle and other livestock. Animals would begin to die all over the world. John says a third of the forests are burned up. Think of the greenhouse gasses from all those forest fires! Forest animals would die or flee from the forests into settled areas. Oxygen levels in the atmosphere would decrease from all the fires and destruction. This is a disaster of unimaginable proportions yet it is only the beginning of God's judgments upon a sinful human race for refusing to repent and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The second angel blows his trumpet. John sees something like a huge mountain all on fire that was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turns to blood and a third of all the living creatures in the sea from plankton to fish to whales die. A third of all the ships are destroyed. What John saw we do not know. From our modern perspective it sounds like an asteroid strike that falls into the ocean but that is pure speculation. The result of the "mountain" falling into the sea was a third of it turned to blood. The first plague in Egypt in *Exodus* 7 was the water of the Nile turning to blood. Here blood pollutes a third of the oceans. A third of the sea life is killed and it even affects merchant trade and the navies of the world's nations as a third of all the ships are destroyed. God's judgments affect trade and the world economy not just nature. In chapter 18 the ship captains and merchants mourn the fall and judgment of Babylon the Great. Fisheries are devastated around the world as are coastlines if they are near where the sea turns to blood. Is this literal blood or is John describing the color of the water that he saw? It is impossible to know. However, if it is literal blood then the mountain's fall would defile a third of all the oceans of the world. All John knew was the Mediterranean Sea. Did he know the stories of the Minoan or Cretan civilization that was destroyed by a massive volcanic eruption around 1300 BC, around the time of the Exodus? The Mediterranean turned red from the ash, and the Minoan fleet was destroyed, never again to rise as a great power. Some believe Plato's legend of Atlantis was based on those eruptions. Was John aware of the stories and did they contribute to his description of his vision? We do not know but it is possible.

The third angel blows his trumpet and a great star like a blazing torch falls from the sky and strikes the rivers and springs of the world that is the fresh water. The blazing star named Wormwood (meaning bitter) is selective as it only affects the fresh water and it spoils only a third of it not all of it. In the third bowl judgment of chapter 16 all the fresh water in the world turns to blood. Wormwood is a class of plants called Artemisia that was known in the ancient world and was named after its bitter taste. In *Deuteronomy* 29:17-18 Moses warns the people to guard against idolatry and turning away from the Lord. He warns them to make sure there is no one among the people who would produce bitter poison (wormwood). Amos uses the word in *Amos* 6:12 to describe sinful and idolatrous Israel. He condemns those who have "turned justice to poison and the fruit of righteousness to wormwood." In *Jeremiah* 9:13 and 23:15 Jeremiah uses the word wormwood which is translated bitter. Below are my notes from my commentary on *Jeremiah* from *Jeremiah* 23:15. "Wormwood is a little used term from a rare root word.
meaning to curse. Metaphorically it means bitter or bitterness which is how the NIV translates it. In *Revelation 8:10-11* Wormwood is the name of the great star that falls from the sky and poisons a third of the rivers and springs of fresh water so they turned bitter. It is the third of the trumpet judgments in *Revelation 8-9*. The similarity between *Revelation* and this passage in *Jeremiah* is that both speak of judgment and both speak of things tasting bitter. In *Jeremiah* it is the food and in *Revelation* it is the water. In *Jeremiah* however the bitter food or wormwood is focused upon the false prophets while in *Revelation 8* it is one third of the world. John might have borrowed Jeremiah’s metaphor and expanded it to describe the terrible judgments God would bring during the end times.

The fourth angel sounded his trumpet and a third of the sun, moon and stars were struck with something so that they turned dark. A third of the day was without light as was a third of the night. In the fifth bowl judgment in *chapter 16* the kingdom of the beast was plunged into total darkness. The ninth plague against Pharaoh and Egypt in *Exodus 10* was darkness. Here the darkness is noticeable but not total. In *Isaiah 13:10* Isaiah is describing the Day of the Lord, the day of God's judgment against Israel's enemies and salvation for his people. He says the stars, sun and moon will not give their light but will be darkened. Jesus in *Matthew 24* quotes the verse in *Isaiah* in describing the coming of the Son of Man with the clouds of heaven. In *Exodus, Isaiah*, and *Matthew* the darkness is total. Here in *Revelation 8* the darkness is partial. John is telling his readers the Birth Pangs of the Messiah are coming. The partial darkness is a sign of what is about to take place. God is giving people one last chance to repent before the Lord Jesus returns and no chance remains. He is also telling them worse things are coming!

8:13 - John hears an eagle flying in midair or mid-heaven and calling out in a loud voice. The eagle declares three woes are coming upon the inhabitants of the earth when the remaining three angels sound their trumpets. The final three trumpet judgments are therefore the “three woes.” Woe is an interjection or cry denoting pain, displeasure or grief. It is the opposite of blessed as in Jesus’ Beatitudes in *Matthew 5*. Woe refers to suffering, calamity or deep trouble. The fifth trumpet is the first woe. The sixth trumpet is the second woe. One would then expect the seventh trumpet to be the third woe but it is never specified as such. John reports that the seventh trumpet is blown but never says the third woe has passed. It is possible that like the seventh seal being the seven trumpets, the seventh trumpet or third woe is the seven bowls of wrath. The third woe would then become the completion of God's wrath against a sinful humanity. This would probably include the rise of the beast and false prophet and the judgment towards Babylon or Rome. However, John never directly states this, so this interpretation is simply a theory.

This statement is a short interlude between the fourth and fifth trumpets. Why an eagle? God is described as an eagle in *Exodus 19*. He bore Israel out of Egypt on eagle's wings. The fourth living creature in *Revelation 4:7* had the appearance or face of a flying eagle but the text does not indicate that this eagle was one of the living creatures around God's throne. The eagle often represents swiftness in the prophets. John could be saying that the three woes are about to come swiftly upon the earth and no one can stop them. The warning of the eagle is a warning to repent before the final three trumpet judgments are unleashed.

**Chapter 9:**

9:1-6 - The fifth angel blows his trumpet (the first woe) and John sees a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. The Abyss is described in two ways in the New Testament. It is a prison for disobedient spirits, meaning demons or it is
described in *Romans 10:7* as the realm of the dead similar to Hades. The majority of the references are to a prison for demons. The legion of demons in the demon possessed man in *Luke 8* begs Jesus not to send them to the Abyss or the Pit. The other references to the Abyss are all in *Revelation*. Here in *chapter 9* a plague of demonic locusts ascends from the Abyss. The Beast or Antichrist rises from the Abyss in *Revelation 11 and 17*. Satan is bound in the Abyss or Pit in *Revelation 20* for a thousand years after Jesus' Second Coming. It is clear from these references that the Abyss is a place where demons are restricted and imprisoned. At the blowing of the fifth trumpet some of those demons are loosed upon the earth to torment people who do not know the Lord Jesus. God looses the restraints on the demonic and allows them to wreak havoc upon the earth the closer we get to the Lord's return.

The star that had fallen from the sky is a curious figure. Isaiah describes the King of Babylon in *Isaiah 14* as fallen from heaven, and calls him the morning star. In the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible, the morning star is Lucifer. *Isaiah* is describing a human figure yet his description does not fit any human. Many scholars believe this is a symbolic reference to the fall of Satan. *Isaiah* sees Lucifer as a star fallen from heaven, cast down to the earth. The star in *Revelation 9* is also fallen down to the earth. It is given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. Is this Satan? It is unclear. John says the demonic locusts have as king over them the angel of the Abyss, in Hebrew Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon, meaning Destroyer. In several references in *Job* and *Psalms* Abaddon is called Destruction and is paired with Death or Sheol. This could be one of Satan's lieutenants or Satan himself. If it is Satan God gives him authority to torture unbelieving humanity but not the Lord's people. Satan is not yet in the Abyss but has authority over the demons that emerge from it.

The fallen angel opens the Abyss and smoke rises up from it that is so thick that it darkens the sun. Out of the smoke emerge locusts that come down on the earth. Locusts in the Middle East would travel in swarms that looked like huge clouds and could darken the sun. The eighth plague against Pharaoh and Egypt was the plague of locusts in *Exodus 10* that consumed every green plant in Egypt. These locusts are demons and were given power like scorpions, meaning they could sting and cause pain. They were forbidden to harm any of the grass, plants or trees of the earth but only those people who did not have God's seal on their foreheads. Clearly these are not natural locusts which would have consumed everything in their path leaving nothing green alive like the plague in Egypt. Those who are sealed with God's seal are the 144,000 in *chapter 7*. This is another clue that 144,000 is not a literal number but a symbolic one representing the complete number of God's people. There are certainly more than 144,000 believers on the earth when the demonic locusts are unleashed. There is no clue that the believers have been taken away or raptured off the earth before the seven trumpet judgments are unleashed.

The demonic locusts from the Abyss are given power to torture unbelievers with their stings for five months. However, they were not allowed to kill anyone. Why, because in 9:20-21 John says the rest of humanity who was not killed by all the plagues from the trumpet judgments did not repent. Even now during the Birth Pangs of the Messiah at the end of this age God wants to give humanity the chance to repent so there can be no doubt when the Lord Jesus returns. The trumpet judgments are to repentance to bring the ungodly to their knees in repentance and humility. John says the demonic locusts were permitted to torture but not kill people for five months. This is a short time and is the lifespan of some species of locusts. The pain they caused was so bad John says people will seek death but will not find it. They will long to die because of the torture. One must remember God is using the demonic locusts and their lust to cause pain to
bring unbelievers to repentance. He allows them to torture the ungodly but does not torture people himself. The locusts from the Abyss are simply following their perverted evil natures.

The prophet Joel describes the Day of the Lord as a mighty swarm of locusts that God unleashes on his people to discipline them and bring them to repentance in Joel 1 & 2. He describes it as an army that cannot be stopped coming on with the sound of many chariots. They have the appearance of horses and gallop along like cavalry. The earth shakes and the sky trembles before them. Joel asks who can stand against them. He says in 2:12, even now there is still the possibility of repentance if the people will turn to the Lord. I think John uses the same themes here in Revelation 9. No one on earth who is not one of God's saints can stand against the demonic locusts yet if they would repent and turn to God he would accept them, but they do not.

The seven trumpet judgments confirm what is in the heart of the ungodly. They refuse to repent and deserve God the Creator's judgment upon them. They will not give up their idolatry or immorality to submit themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ!

9:7-12 - John describes the demonic locusts as looking like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold and their faces looked like human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, presumably long, and their teeth like those of a lion. In Joel 1 & 2 the prophet describes the locust swarm that is coming upon Israel in judgment as having lion's teeth and the appearance of cavalry horses. The noise of the locusts was like galloping horses and chariots in battle. John borrows some of his imagery for the demonic locusts from Joel. Nahum says the princes and scribes of Assyria are like a swarm of locusts that fly away. The faces on the locusts' heads here in Revelation 9 could be a reference to Nahum but that is tenuous. The faces like human faces and hair like women's hair on the locusts is curious. One of the four faces of the living creatures that Ezekiel saw around God's throne had the face of a man. Ezekiel is describing a powerful angel whereas here in Revelation 9 John is describing a demon from the Abyss! However, their natures are both angelic even if the one from the Abyss has been twisted by evil. There is no significant reference to women's hair in the Scriptures that John might be using as a basis for his description. It is possible he is saying the locusts had the appearance of women in their faces with a woman's hair. Is he saying their faces looked attractive so as to deceive people? I do not know. It is a question that remains unanswered.

The locusts had iron breastplates which would have been unheard of in Roman times. The breastplate of a Roman soldier was made of leather and bronze. Iron was reserved for the steel in their swords. The image suggests the locusts were heavily armored and difficult to kill. Their wings sounded like the thundering of horses and chariots in battle. This is similar to the sound of the locust swarm in the Day of the Lord in Joel 2. The tails of the demonic locusts had stings like scorpion stings and that is how they tormented the ungodly on the earth for the five months they were allowed to roam free.

As noted above the king over the locusts was the angel of the Abyss, Abaddon in Hebrew or Apollyon in Greek, which means destruction or destroyer. I think John is referring to Satan here as he is still loose upon the earth to oppose God and his people. The time of judgment upon an unbelieving world, that is the Birth Pangs of the Messiah, is a time of increased satanic and demonic activity that God allows in order to move people to repent before the Lord Jesus returns.

In 9:20-21 John summarizes the results of the trumpet judgments upon the people of the earth who do not believe in the Lord Jesus. They do not repent but continue to worship the idols they have made and practice their occult arts. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 that behind all idols stands the demonic and that when people worship idols they really are worshipping demons. The
plague of demonic locusts could be seen as the logical consequences of worshiping idols and demons. They reward their worshippers not with favors but with torment! God simply allows the demons to give people what they deserve in the delusion of their idolatry.

John says the first woe is past, meaning the fifth trumpet. Two other woes are yet to come, meaning the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments.

9:13-16 - The sixth angel sounds his trumpet, which is the second woe. John hears a voice from the horns of the golden altar. This is probably the altar of incense mentioned in 8:2-4. In the temple the altar of incense was before the Holy of Holies and incense was burned on it to represent the prayers of God's people going up to God. The same image is used by John in 8:4. The horns were projections at each of the corners of the altar that represented the power of God. It is not clear whether the voice from the altar is God's voice or the voice of an angel that speaks God's orders to be carried out. The voice does not command the sixth angel to sound his trumpet. Rather the trumpet is blown and the voice from the altar commands the sixth angel to release the four angels bound at the Euphrates River. It is curious why when the angel blew his trumpet the four angels were not released. He had to be commanded to release them by the voice from the altar. As I have stated before apocalyptic visions are not always consistent.

The four angels to be released have been bound at the River Euphrates. The verb in Greek is a perfect passive denoting an action done in the past but whose effects continue on into the present. These four angels had been bound long ago and only at the blowing of the sixth trumpet are they to be released. God's plan for the trumpet judgments was set down ages ago! The word for bound can mean imprisoned or chained up but it can also simply mean tied up like one would tie a horse to a post. The question is are these four angels demonic in origin or are they God's holy angels? If they are God's angels why were they tied up or imprisoned? If they are demonic why doesn't John call them demonic spirits like the three frog spirits that the dragon, the beast and the false prophet unleash at the River Euphrates to begin the battle of Armageddon in the sixth bowl judgment of Revelation 16? I think the four angels here are demonic because they have been restrained somehow, they unleash a violent war that kills a third of humanity and because the horses they bring are not literal horses. They resemble horses but spit out fire and sulfur from their mouths.

John says the four angels are released for the very hour, day, month and year for which they have been kept ready. God is carrying out his plan of judgment upon a rebellious human race. Paul says in Galatians 4 Jesus came at precisely the right time. God commands these four warlike spirits to be released at his precise time as well. Their task however is not to bring salvation but to bring war and death, a war so terrible that it kills a third of mankind. Then John suddenly announces the number of mounted troops. It is clear the four angels bring an army from across the great River Euphrates, two hundred million mounted troops! That is an unimaginable army in any day not just John's! Imagine trying to feed and care for two hundred million horses let alone two hundred million soldiers! The Euphrates River was the river all invading armies from the north would have to cross in order to invade Israel in biblical times. The Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians and Parthians all came across the Euphrates. The Parthians in New Testament times had defeated the Romans in the east near the Euphrates and they used mounted cavalry the Romans feared. John's vision of this supernatural cavalry could be related to the Parthian hordes. See John's description in 9:17-19. Some today claim the Chinese have boasted they could field a two hundred million man army and John is seeing a Chinese invasion force far into the future at the last days. That is possible but dubious. No modern army uses horses
anymore and John sees this army mounted on horses. The horses are different and exhibit extraordinary capabilities but John still says they are horses not terrible metal beasts of some sort.

John says it was this horde from the east that unleashed a war that kills a third of humanity. Prophecy writers are too quick to say this must be a nuclear exchange because that is the only thing that could kill a third of mankind. We need to remember this is a vision and not a literal reading of human future events. Too many people want to interpret John's vision as if God simply showed him a movie of future events before the Lord Jesus returns and John had to do the best he could to describe what he saw to his readers. That interpretation is impossible to confirm or refute but it contains many problems. One of the greatest is if indeed God showed John modern warfare and weapons John had absolutely no frame of reference in which to understand what he saw. He would have been confused and disturbed like Daniel in his visions of the beasts in Daniel 7-12. Yet John gives no hint in Revelation that he is confused or unclear about what he sees. Many of John's visions contain allusions to prophetic writings or the gospels. John uses biblical imagery to further highlight what he sees and what God is communicating to him about what is to come. It is clear from this that John is shaping his visions and tying together different strains of the Scriptures and not just reporting some future history that God shows him like a movie in his mind. Some of John's visions fit other prophetic images from the Old Testament and some have no Old Testament analog or reference to something Jesus said or did in the gospels. Further it is clear that John orders his visions as the Spirit guided him and that the judgments intensify the closer one gets to the Lord's return. The problem of an absolutely literal interpretation of the visions I will further address in 9:17-19.

It should also be noted that the first woe was the locust-demons from the Abyss that tortured rebellious humanity for five months but were not allowed to kill anyone. The second woe is the two hundred million cavalry spurred on by the four angels that kill a third of mankind. The proportion of a third fits the other trumpet judgments; a third of the earth and trees burned up; a third of the sea turned to blood; a third of the fresh water turned bitter and a third of the sun, moon and stars darkened. Now a third of humanity is slaughtered in an unimaginable war! The most brutal and costly war in history was World War II. Total military and civilian casualties in that war were 62 million. The world population at present is 7.2 billion. A war that would kill a third of humanity at the present population would kill almost 2 and a half billion people!

9:17-19 - John describes the horses and riders of the massive two hundred million man army invading from the east across the Euphrates River. The breastplates the horses or riders wore had bright colors; fiery red, dark blue and yellow like sulfur. Literally the words mean the color of fire, sapphire or hyacinth and sulfur. The Good News Version translates the phrase, "they had breastplates red as fire, blue as sapphire and yellow as sulphur." That is probably an accurate description. The colors are perhaps related to the fire, smoke and sulfur that come out of the horses’ mouths and kill people. The heads of the horses resemble the heads of lions which would have been fearsome in appearance and perhaps related to strength. As noted the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur come out of their mouths. Fire, smoke and sulfur all relate to the Abyss and the lake of burning sulfur or the lake of fire in Revelation 19-21. This leads me to conclude that the army is demonic in origin like the locusts of the fifth trumpet and the four angels who have been tied or bound up at the Euphrates River are demons and not angels loyal to God. They want to unleash destruction and death and God allows it to execute his justice and judgment just
as he used wicked nations like Assyria and Babylon to execute his judgment upon an unfaithful Israel and Judah in the Old Testament. See 2 Kings 17 & 25.

The horses unleash fire, smoke and sulfur upon the earth and kill a third of humanity through these plagues. Some modern prophecy writers have said the horses John saw were tanks or attack helicopters and that is what the two hundred million man army was using to wage war on the world. This ignores the context of Revelation 9 and the images that relate to the demonic and tries to give a modern interpretation to what John saw in order to fit a particular prophetic scenario. That effort is dubious at best.

The number of horses and riders, two hundred million, may be related to the number of angels that attend God's throne in Daniel 7. There ten thousand times ten thousand or 100 million serve God. Here the demonic army is two hundred million twice that of the angels around God's throne! From a Hebrew perspective John is telling us the number of horses and riders is beyond imagination.

John says the power of the horses was in their mouths but also their tails which were like snakes having heads that could injure people. Snakes are often related to the demonic and Satan is called "that ancient serpent" in Revelation 20. The idea that burning sulfur, fire and smoke come out of the horses mouths and their tails have snake heads that attack people lends further credence to the fact that the horses and riders are not human at all but some sort of demonic creatures related to the plague of demonic locusts in the fifth trumpet and first woe.

A word needs to be said about how literally we are to take each of the trumpet judgments and the seven bowls of wrath that follow in chapter 16. It seems reasonable to assume that the trumpet judgments follow one after another in a short span of time. This would be the pattern of the Jewish understanding of the last days and the Birth Pangs of the Messiah right before the Kingdom of God is revealed. It is possible the trumpet judgments are spread out over a long period of history but unlikely. If they are revealed in a short time frame think about the consequences of these judgments. Imagine the carnage if a third of the sea was so polluted that a third of the fish and sea life died. Imagine if a third of the fresh water in the world was so bitter people could not drink it. Imagine a third of the plant life and all the grass destroyed from fire. Then imagine a third of the light we receive from the sun, moon and stars diminished. What would be the outcome of just those traumas upon the population of the planet? How disruptive would all of that be to civilization as we know it? How would the governments of the world cope with such crises? There would be death, starvation, disease and civil unrest on an unprecedented scale. Trade and economies would collapse! Food supplies would be disrupted. Air quality and pollution from all the smoke would be severe. All of this would occur from just the first four trumpets! Then add to that the suffering and torture of the demonic locusts on top of all the other trauma. How would people interpret the locusts? Secular people who have no frame of reference within which to fit such demonic evil would be terrified and overwhelmed. Fear, pain, grief and depression would dominate. And then John says on top of all of that some sort of two hundred million man army of demonic soldiers is unleashed to bring a war upon the earth that kills a third of the earth's population! Given the current world population of 7 billion that would be two and a half BILLION people! What would be left? Who would be left? The chapters that follow Revelation 9 describe the beast, the false prophet and their reign. They detail the judgment of Babylon and the collapse of world trade at its fall. If the trumpet judgments are to be taken literally there would be no civilization left for the beast to rule! Nations would have collapsed already. The world would be in a new dark age where the survival of the human race would be in great doubt! Yet the bowl judgments of Revelation 16 are worse than the trumpet judgments! I
believe John is simply increasing the intensity of his visions in order to tell us that terrible judgments will come upon the people of the earth who reject God before the Lord Jesus returns. He repeats and intensifies those judgments not to show literally what happens but to represent symbolically God's just judgments designed to give human beings one last chance to repent before the Lord returns and repentance is no longer possible.

9:20-21 - John reports despite massive loss of life from all the trumpet judgments including an unprecedented war, the people left alive refuse to repent and turn to God. Human beings are sinful and stubborn in rebellion against their Creator. People kept worshipping demons through the idols they made with their hands; dead idols that cannot see or hear or walk. John confirms what Paul tells the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 10 that behind all idols are demons. Demons have deceived and deluded people into giving worship to them rather than the true Creator of the universe the Lord God Almighty.

John also confirms what Israel's prophets declared. Idolatry leads to wickedness. When people refused to give up their idolatry and worship God they continued to do what ought not to be done. They did not repent of their murders, magic arts, meaning occult practices, sexual immorality or thievery. The word for magic arts in Greek is pharmakon from which we get the word pharmacy. The word can mean various things depending on the context including poison, sorcery, casting spells, making potions, medicines or drugs. Here it refers to people who practice sorcery, that is casting spells through the use of potions or who use various drugs to influence events and people. Magic or sorcery is almost always linked with drugs or potions in Greek. From a modern perspective we know the links between drug abuse and immoral behavior. Plus modern people who practice the occult use various drugs in their rituals. There is still today a strong link between the occult and the use of drugs. Sexual immorality is the Greek word porneia, which sometimes is translated fornication. It means any kind of sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Broadly translated it means any kind of sexual immorality including things like pornography.

John states what Paul outlines as the consequences of human sin in Romans 1. When people give up the worship of God and worship idols they descend into delusion and wickedness. Ancient Israel and Judah practiced the same behavior and God judged them and destroyed their nations because of their idolatry and wickedness. The prophets like Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel outlined the reasons for God's judgment and their refusal to repent. John says God applies the same standards of conduct to all the nations and peoples of the world. He sends his judgments in order to bring people to their senses and to their knees in repentance but they refuse! God is just and righteous and human beings who refuse to bow down to him deserve his wrath. People refuse to give up their rebellion against God. The trumpet judgments confirm that fact.

Chapter 10:

10:1-4 - Chapter 10 begins with a long interlude between the blowing of the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments just as he had done between the sixth and seventh seals. The interlude is from 10:1-11:14 before the sounding of the seventh trumpet. It is difficult to determine when the events he describes are taking place but presumably they happen between the two trumpet judgments or at least during the judgments. Once more however we must note that although the sequence of events in Revelation is presented as chronological the visions may be repeating and intensifying prophetic themes in good Hebrew fashion. As noted above it is extremely difficult to
take all the trumpet judgments literally and then add to them the bowl judgments in some chronological order.

John sees "another mighty angel" coming down from heaven. In 18:1 and 20:1 he describes two more angels coming down from heaven. This one is given the description of a mighty angel. The word for mighty means powerful and is related to the Greek word *dunamis* which means power as ability. The description of this angel contains many features that John has already used to describe God himself and as powerful and amazing as he paints this angel even this mighty being is not God. God is still far above even this angel in power and majesty.

He was robed in a cloud like God in Exodus 19 or the four living creatures surrounding the glory of the Lord in Ezekiel 1. The angel had a rainbow above his head. Ezekiel sees a rainbow above God's throne and around the four living creatures in his vision of God's glory in Ezekiel 1. In Revelation 4 John sees an emerald colored rainbow around God's throne. The angel's face was like the sun and his legs were like fiery pillars. That is similar to Ezekiel's vision of God seated on his throne surrounded by the four living creatures in Ezekiel 1. God's face, body and legs appeared like fire. This is also somewhat similar to John's vision of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 1. John's description of the mighty angel makes it appear like God yet this is not God. This is a creature God has created that reflects his majesty and power.

In his hand the mighty angel had a little scroll that was open, meaning one could read its contents. This is not the scroll sealed with seven seals that God was holding that only the Lord Jesus could open in Revelation 5. This scroll appears to be more instructions for John as to what he is to say to the churches.

The angel is huge! He plants his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land and he gave a mighty shout like the roar of a lion. God is said to roar like a lion in Joel 3 and Amos 1. Once again John describes this mighty angel with characteristics that resemble God. He speaks for God and is close to him.

When the angel shouts the seven thunders spoke. John is about to write down what they said when a voice from heaven tells him to seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down. This is a curious command because John is told by the Lord Jesus in 4:1 to write down what he saw and heard. In Revelation 22:10 he is told not to seal up the words of the prophecy because the time is near. This is in contrast to Daniel who was told to seal up his prophecy and visions until the time of the end in Daniel 12. The seven thunders express the mystery of God's revelation to us. Even though John is given his visions to reveal "what must soon take place" there is still more that is hidden and that perhaps we shall never understand about God's plan and person. In 19:12 it is revealed the Lord Jesus has a name only he knows. That expresses the same idea. There will always be part of God we will never comprehend that will remain a mystery to us. He is God and we are simply his creatures! Therefore it is useless to speculate on what the seven thunders might have said because we are not told!

10:5-7 - The mighty angel who had been standing on the sea and the land raises his right hand to heaven and swears an oath. He swears by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens, earth and seas and all that is in them, namely God the Creator. An oath was used in the Bible to guarantee the truth of a statement or the veracity of a person to carry out what they proclaimed they would do. One swore often in the Old Testament using the name of the Lord. The third of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 prohibits using the Lord's name in vain. It was a commandment meant to avoid using God's name in frivolous oaths. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 not to use oaths at all but simply tell the truth always. "Let
you yes be yes and your no be no." Here the mighty angel is allowed to swear an oath to guarantee to God's people that God will carry out his plan.

The mighty angel swears by God himself that there will be no more delay. In the days of the sounding of the seventh trumpet by the seventh angel the mystery of God will be accomplished. That mystery he had announced to his servants the prophets. Mystery in the New Testament means the plans and thoughts of God which are hidden from human reason and comprehension and sometimes even the angels and must be revealed by God in order to be understood. Mystery here means the plan of God for his people and his world. In one sense the whole Book of Revelation is God's mystery that he reveals to John his servant and prophet. Paul uses the word frequently, especially in Ephesians to describe the gospel and God's purpose to form one people out of two, Jews and Gentiles. See Ephesians 1 & 3.

The mighty angel says in the days of the sounding of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God, God's plan, will be accomplished not just announced. This lends credibility to my theory that the series of sevens in Revelation are an intensifying of prophetic themes rather than simply a chronology of literal end time events. If the seventh trumpet brings the accomplishment of God's plan then why have the bowl judgments at all, everything would be done? The word for accomplished in Greek is teleo, which means fulfilled, to bring to an end, complete or finish. It is from the same word Jesus used in his final cry on the cross in John 19, "It is finished!" That appears to mean that at the seventh trumpet God's plan is finished and yet there is more to come in Revelation.

10:8-11 - The voice that had come from heaven telling John not to write down what the seven thunders said now tells John to take the scroll from the hand of the mighty angel. John goes and does as he is told. Can you imagine what that must have been like? Even in a vision taking the scroll from the hand of such an amazing and imposing creature would be frightening! The mighty angel tells John to take the scroll and eat it. He warns him however that the scroll will turn his stomach sour, meaning it will upset his stomach. It will taste sweet like honey but be sour in his stomach.

Jeremiah declares in Jeremiah 15 that when God's words came to him he ate them and they were his joy and his heart's delight. Jeremiah means that he took joy in God speaking to him and joy in taking in God's Word. However, God's Word ultimately gave Jeremiah grief and pain because his Word to Jeremiah was consistently one of judgment for Judah's sin. He said in one of his "confessions" in Jeremiah 20 that he wanted to quit as God's prophet and he would no longer speak his Word. But God's Word was in him like a fire and he could not hold it in. In Ezekiel 2 & 3 Ezekiel is given a scroll to eat full of words of lament, mourning and woe. Ezekiel ate it and it tasted sweet as honey in his mouth. Yet later in chapter 3 Ezekiel says after his vision he sat down appalled and overwhelmed before he could even speak to his fellow Jews in Babylon.

John's vision of the scroll is similar to Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's and identifies John as one of God's prophets like the two great prophets of the exile. The contents of the scroll which represent God's Word to him are sweet to his taste like honey. Like Jeremiah it is a joy and a delight to be so close to God you receive his very Word! Yet when he has taken it into himself, as in eating the scroll, it turns his stomach sour. It is a privilege to be one of God's prophets and speak for him but the message one is given is often not full of joy or grace. Sometime the message one is given to speak is one of judgment and wrath. That was John's task in Revelation. Before he can speak about the new heaven and the new earth and God's ultimate plan for his people to be with him forever he must speak words about God's wrath against human sin. He
must reveal Satan's plan to bring forth the beast or the antichrist on the earth and the millions of people who will follow him and be lost forever in their sins. It will sicken John.

The announcement of the mighty angel made it sound as if John's work is almost done. The seventh trumpet is about to be sounded and then God's plan will be accomplished. But the angel tells John he must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings. His job is not finished, there is much more the Lord Jesus wants to reveal to him. If the seventh in each series becomes the seven in the next series then the seventh trumpet is the seven bowls of wrath. Plus before the seven bowls John is about to be shown a picture of cosmic history that relates to God's people, the coming of the Messiah and the great dragon or Satan. Then God will reveal to him the rise of the two beasts related to Satan; the antichrist and the false prophet who supports him. All of this will be given to him before the seven bowls of God's wrath are revealed. John is only halfway done! The implication of the scroll he was given to eat is this will be a sweet experience to be given God's Word but the content will be appalling and difficult to accept. God is gracious and merciful to his people. But to rebellious human beings who follow the devil and his demons he will turn his wrath against them and destroy them! That is not a pleasant prospect!

**Chapter 11:**

11:1-2 - John was given a measuring rod like a reed and told to go and measure the temple of God and the altar and count the worshippers around the altar. The altar is almost certainly the altar of burnt offering outside the holy place of the temple because there are worshippers around it. The altar of incense was inside the holy place and only the priests had access to it. The altar of burnt offering was where Jewish men came to worship God led by the priests who were performing the sacrifices and the Levites who were leading the people in singing the Psalms of praise to God. This is similar to Ezekiel's vision of measuring the temple in Ezekiel 40 and following. In Ezekiel the prophet watched as an angelic figure measured the temple and all its courts. In Revelation 11 John is given a rod to measure the temple and the altar. Ezekiel's vision is of an ideal temple rebuilt after the Messiah comes and the Kingdom of God is established. The temple John is told to measure presents us with some difficulties.

The difficulty is in determining whether this is a literal temple in Jerusalem or some kind of symbolic structure representing God's people. When John wrote Revelation the temple in Jerusalem had already been in ruins for 25 years. It had been destroyed in 70 by the Roman general Titus during the first Jewish Revolt. In John's day the temple was a ruin and the Jews were forbidden to worship there except on the day in August when they would mourn the destruction of Solomon's temple by the Babylonians. The Roman emperors allowed them to go to the Temple Mount and mourn the loss of their first and second temples, meaning Herod's temple destroyed by Titus. There are therefore only two possibilities about this temple. First, John is told to measure a temple rebuilt by the Jews in the last days before the Lord Jesus returns. Second, the temple John is told to measure is somehow symbolic of God's people, the church. John is told to also count the worshippers around the altar.

This is the only time in Revelation where John appears to refer to an actual temple in Jerusalem. All the other passages to the temple refer to the temple of God in heaven and not a literal one on earth. However, it is not clear that John is referring to a literal Jewish temple rebuilt during the end times. In the first place Hebrews 9-10 state that Jesus' sacrifice of himself on the cross has done away with the animal sacrifices of the temple. His death pays for sin once and for all. The Jews rejected Jesus' sacrifice for them as a people and God allowed the Romans
to destroy the temple in 70 because of their rejection of Jesus as Messiah. Plus a rebuilt temple is a terrible affront to the Lord Jesus' death for us and an insult to his sacrifice. Why would God allow his ancient people to insult his Son and their Messiah? The counter to that are Jesus' statements in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 that speak of the abomination of desolation prophesied in Daniel 9 that will take place in the temple. However, it is quite possible to take those verses to mean the Roman general Titus and his sacrifice of a pig on the temple altar when the Romans destroyed the temple during the Jewish War in 70. There is not a clear-cut case that the temple will be rebuilt.

Measuring the temple is similar to sealing the 144,000; it is a sign of God's protection for his people. John is told to count the worshippers around the altar inside the temple court. Are these Jews, Jewish followers of Jesus, or all Christians? It is unclear. If this is a literal Jewish temple rebuilt during the end times then those around the altar are probably Jews. John is told not to measure the outer court because it has been given to the Gentiles. If this is God's temple in heaven this command makes no sense. The only possibility if this is in heaven is that John is speaking here of Jewish believers in Jesus who are gathered to him in heaven and protected by him. If that is the case why then say the outer court, "has been given to the Gentiles", if it is God's temple in heaven? Paul calls the church God's temple in Ephesians 2. Peter says in 1 Peter 2 that believers are living stones being built into a spiritual house for God. It is possible John is using the temple metaphor to describe Jewish Christians that God will preserve during the Birth Pangs of the Messiah.

Jesus said in Luke 21 that Jerusalem would be destroyed and would be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled. He was prophesying about the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus and the Romans in 70. John may be referring to Jesus' statement here in verse 2. The outer court of the temple he saw has been given over to the Gentiles. He follows that statement with the observation that the Gentiles will trample on the holy city, meaning Jerusalem, for 42 months. Jesus uses the same word, trample, in Luke 21. It paints the picture of a victorious army swarming through a city in triumph. Technically John does not say the Gentiles trample on the outer court of the temple but only on the holy city. However the juxtaposition of the temple and Jerusalem is hardly coincidental. This lends credibility to the view that John is speaking here of a rebuilt Jewish temple during the last days. If that is the case what does John mean that the Gentiles trample on the holy city and the outer courts of God's temple? Trample is a negative image and not a positive one. John is not saying the Gentiles come to God during these 42 months he is saying they trample on the holy city like a conquering army.

The 42 months the Gentiles are trampling on the holy city are three and a half years. In verse 3 John refers to God's two witnesses who prophesy for 1260 days, which is 42 months. Three and a half years all refer back to the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel 9. Three and a half years refers to the time of persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes, the Greek Seleucid king who ruled over Israel and the Jews in the 160's BC. He defiled the temple in June of 167 and persecuted the Jews. He denied them the right to sacrifice at the temple, circumcise their sons or to read and keep the Torah for three and a half years. In December of 164 Judas Maccabaeus led an army of Jews who retook Jerusalem and cleansed the temple. This is the origin of the Jewish Feast of Hanukkah. The three and a half year persecution of Antiochus becomes a type of the persecution by the antichrist or beast in the final days before the Lord's return. John uses the time frame of Antiochus' persecution to describe the "trampling" of Jerusalem by the Gentiles. It also sets up the next verses which describe the ministry of the two witnesses.
John introduces us to God's two witnesses. They will prophesy for 1260 days clothed in sackcloth. Are the 1260 days of their prophetic ministry the same 1260 days or 42 months of the Gentiles trampling on Jerusalem? The context says they are but it is not entirely clear. Who are the two witnesses? They are either two literal prophets who have the power of Moses and Elijah (see below) or they are symbolic of believers in some way; two individuals that symbolize Jews and Gentiles who are followers of Jesus. The more likely interpretation is they are two Christian prophets who embody the power and ministries of Moses and Elijah. They wear sackcloth as a sign of mourning because their message is one of judgment. Jeremiah often grieved over the message the Lord had him speak to Judah and it gave him no pleasure to continue to have to speak a word of judgment to his people. The sackcloth of the two witnesses expresses something similar here in Revelation 11.

God's two prophetic witnesses prophesy for 1260 days, or 42 months or three and one half years. That timeframe relates back to Daniel 9 (see comments on 11:1-2 above). Whether it is literal or symbolic, three and one half years is the final period of rule by the beast or antichrist before the Lord Jesus returns. John says the two witnesses carry out their ministry during that time. In 11:7 he says the beast from the Abyss, or the antichrist, is already ruling the world.

John identifies the two witnesses as the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth, meaning God the Creator or the Lord Jesus Christ. In Zechariah 4 Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel the governor and grandson of King Jehoiachin are portrayed as two olive trees who stand on either side of a golden seven branched lampstand or menorah. Joshua and Zerubbabel were instrumental in leading the returning exiles to complete the second temple in 515 BC. God calls them "the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth." Paul describes the church in Romans 11 as the tame olive tree of the Jews and the wild olive tree of the Gentiles that has been grafted into the tame. If the two witnesses are a symbol of the church then Paul's metaphor is closest to what John is using here in Revelation. The lampstand in Zechariah represents the Spirit of God and his presence with his two servants. John uses similar language to describe the two witnesses. John also uses the image of the lampstand in Revelation 1-3. He sees seven lampstands with the Lord Jesus in their midst. They represent the seven churches to whom John writes. In both Zechariah and Revelation the lampstand is related to the light of God's Spirit in the world and his people as his witnesses led and empowered by that same Spirit.

The two witnesses stand before God. That means they come from heaven. During the time of their ministry, the 1260 days, if anyone tries to harm them fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. Fire is often seen as an instrument of God's judgment in the Scriptures. Fire came from the Tabernacle and destroyed the 250 men who were burning unauthorized incense before the Lord in Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16. Fire came down from heaven and burned up the sacrifice Elijah had prepared in 1 Kings 18. Jeremiah said God's Word was like fire in his mouth in Jeremiah 5. The fire comes from the mouths of the two witnesses which probably symbolizes the Word of God since they are his prophets.

John says the two witnesses have power to shut up the sky and keep it from raining. That is like Elijah who declared it would not rain for three years in 1 Kings 17. The witnesses have the power to turn the waters into blood and send every kind of plague against the earth as often as they want. This reflects the power God gave to Moses in Exodus 7-10. Moses and Elijah were seen as the most powerful and greatest of Israel's prophets. They were the two prophets who appeared with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration in Luke 9. John says they come from heaven and they have the power of Moses and Elijah but they are not literally the two
prophets. We know that because Moses and Elijah were with the Lord Jesus, transfigured before Peter, James and John. They were already in heaven and immortal. In 11:7 John says the beast from the Abyss kills the two prophets and in 11:11-12 God resurrects them and then brings them up to heaven with him. There are all sorts of conundrums that arise if one says they are literally Moses and Elijah, not the least of which is how could they be killed if they were already immortal with God in heaven? It makes the most sense to understand the two witnesses as either the Jewish and Gentile church witnessing during the reign of the beast or two prophets of the Lord who witness during that time who have the power of Moses and Elijah. Their ministry is one of judgment and torment to the people of the earth who follow the beast.

11:7-10 - John reports when the 1260 days of the witnesses' testimony was ended the beast from the Abyss attacked them and killed them, despite their power to bring plagues and kill their enemies with fire from their mouths. John says the beast and his forces will overpower them. That implies a massive effort to stop them. The beast is most often referred to as the antichrist and John describes it in more detail in chapter 13. From chapter 13 through chapter 19 the beast is a major character in John's visions. See the comments in chapter 13 for a more detailed explanation for the identity of the beast. Clearly the beast is already ruling when the witnesses are carrying out their ministry. Chapter 13 says the beast is given authority to rule over the world and to blaspheme God for 42 months, which is 1260 days, the same time period as the two witnesses. That means all throughout the beast's reign the two witnesses are preaching God's Word and countering the beast's and false prophet's blasphemies! No wonder he wants them killed!

At the end of the 1260 days or 42 months or three and one half years the two prophets finish their testimony. God allows the beast to attack and overpower them, killing them. John says their bodies are left to lie in the street of the great city. Burial in the Middle East was usually done the same day because of the climate and the lack of modern embalming techniques. The embalming of the Egyptians was done for their ruling class and not the common people. In Israel spices were used to anoint the body to cover the smell like the women were going to do with Jesus' body before his resurrection. When the two witnesses' bodies are left in the street to rot it is a grave insult to them. The beast and the people of the world hate the two witnesses. The beast and the false prophet (see chapter 13) had deceived the people of the world and were declaring blasphemies against God. The people of the world believed their lies. The two witnesses spoke God's truth to the world which was in direct contradiction to the deception of the beast and false prophet. People wanted to believe the beast not the two prophets, just like Jeremiah with the people of Judah. When people are trapped in Satan's deception they hate the truth and not only reject it but try and stop it from being spoken. When the two witnesses are killed people rejoice because the truth that they did not want to hear is now silenced.

John calls the great city Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified, meaning the witnesses' Lord. That identifies the city as Jerusalem. In Isaiah 1, Jeremiah 23, and Ezekiel 16 the three prophets all identify Jerusalem with Sodom. The prophets perceived Jerusalem's sins were as great as the city God destroyed for its wickedness in Genesis 19. In Ezekiel 23 Ezekiel accuses the Jews of playing the prostitute in Egypt. He is speaking about their idolatry and says it began way back in Egypt. It continued to the time of the exile which is why God destroyed their land and sent the Jews into Babylon. Judah as a nation often thought Egypt would help them fight and defeat the Babylonians and made alliances with Egypt hoping a military-political solution would save them against Babylon. The prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel kept telling...
them only a spiritual solution would work. They needed to repent! By calling Jerusalem Sodom and Egypt John is saying the problems of "the great city" in the days of the beast and the two witnesses are the same problems the Jews faced in the days before their exile to Babylon. They are wicked and idolatrous and have turned away from God. They have rejected their Messiah by crucifying him. Now they reject God's prophets and follow the beast! These are the people of Jerusalem, mostly Jews!

John reports that for three and one half days people from all over the world will gaze on their corpses and refuse to let them be buried. The ESV translates the phrase, "some from the peoples, tribes etc." will gaze on their bodies. That implies there were some who did not. That is technically correct but the sense of the Greek is closer to the NASB, "those from the peoples, tribes etc." John implies that outside of those who love the Lord Jesus, the whole world rejoices at the death of the two witnesses. In fact he says in verse 10 the whole world throws a party for three and one half days and sends gifts to each other because the two prophets are now dead and are no longer tormenting people! The prophets had spoken God's truth to the people but people had rejected it and were so deluded by Satan that when the prophets were killed they celebrated and partied all over the world. People believed Satan's lies because they wanted to and became so hostile to the truth they vilified the ones who spoke it. How the whole world would have known the two prophets were killed in John's day he does not say. In our day with our media it would be instantaneous.

11:11-14 - After three and one half days God resurrects the two witnesses. John says a breath of life entered into them and they stood on their feet. This is very close to the language Ezekiel uses in Ezekiel 37 to describe the dry bones coming to life! In Ezekiel the dry bones represent all the house of Israel. Do the two witnesses represent God's people as well? It is unclear. When the two witnesses stood on their feet those that saw them were terrified! It would be obvious to anyone who saw them dead that they were alive again and that God had done it! The people of Jerusalem who are Jews did not believe the two witnesses nor did they accept the resurrection of Jesus. Now here are two people God has resurrected standing before them. They knew they were dead but now they are alive! It caused them to re-evaluate what they believed.

Why three and one half days and not on the third day like the Lord Jesus? I am not sure. It is possible that the three and one half days relate to the three and one half years of their ministry and the beast's reign but that is only speculation. There is no Scriptural reference that applies here. One could say the days relate to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus but one would expect John to say three days not three and one half.

Their resurrection strikes terror into people who saw them! Like Jesus' resurrection God's action in raising his two witnesses validates their message. It shows that what they were speaking was the truth even though it contradicted what people wanted to hear and led to the beast killing them to silence them.

A voice comes from heaven and commands them to "Come up here!" God takes them up to heaven in a cloud similar to the Lord Jesus' ascension in Acts 1. God also took Elijah the prophet up to heaven in a chariot of fire in 2 Kings 2. God takes them while their enemies look on, helpless to do anything to stop them. It is a reminder that God is in control and can overcome anything they try and do even silencing the two prophets. They are helpless against the Lord God Almighty and his power!

Right when God takes his two prophets up to heaven there is a massive earthquake in Jerusalem. A tenth of the city collapses and 7000 people are killed. John reports two other great
earthquakes in his vision. The first is when the Lord Jesus opened the sixth seal in 6:12. That earthquake was so powerful it leveled mountains and moved islands. The second is during the seventh bowl of wrath and John says there has never been an earthquake so great in all of human history. The great city Babylon or Rome was split into three parts. Those two quakes make this quake in Jerusalem seem small. The death toll from the two great quakes would have been unimaginable. Here "only" 7000 people die and "only" a tenth of the city was destroyed. Earthquakes are frequently mentioned in the Bible both as a natural occurrence and as a judgment of God upon sinful people. Israel is an active earthquake zone because the Great Rift Valley is on its eastern side in the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. Jerusalem has experienced earthquakes during its history but there is no Biblical report of an earthquake where a tenth of the city was destroyed and 7000 people were killed.

The numbers may not be literal but symbolic. The city is Jerusalem and the people are almost certainly Jews who do not yet believe in Jesus as the Messiah. John reports that the survivors of the quake were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. That is the opposite reaction from the "people who dwell upon the earth" when they experienced God's judgments. John says they refused to repent even though they knew God was judging them. Here the people praise God. This leads me to believe that even though the two witnesses preached to the entire world their base was in Jerusalem and when the unbelieving Jews of the city saw their resurrection, their ascension and experienced the earthquake they gave glory to God. Did they proclaim Jesus as Messiah? John does not say but this could be the beginning of the turning of God's ancient people towards their Messiah. It is also possible this earthquake is not as massive as the others John reports because even though God is judging Jerusalem and its people he is also protecting it in order to bring his people to repentance. That is my best guess as to why this earthquake is smaller than the others.

The size of this quake also once again helps us see how John intensifies his visions and repeats themes. The earthquake at the sixth seal would have been so massive that the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount would have been reduced to rubble and shaken from their foundations. Yet there is not even a hint that Jerusalem is damaged in any sort of overwhelming way here. Plus Zechariah 14 says the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, will return on the Mount of Olives and the mountain will be split into two parts when he does. Acts 1 affirms he will return on the Mount of Olives as well. If the mountain has already been leveled in the sixth seal earthquake how can the Lord return on a mountain that no longer exists? Apocalyptic visions are fluid and John repeats and intensifies prophetic themes in Revelation like a symphony repeating themes in each movement.

In verse 14 John returns to his narrative of the seven trumpets and the three woes. He says the second woe, meaning the sixth trumpet is now complete. The third woe or the seventh trumpet is coming soon. This leads me to believe that the interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments happens during the trumpet judgments or perhaps even between the sixth and the seventh trumpets. That means the two witnesses are prophesying during the great war that will kill a third of mankind during the sixth trumpet or the second woe. It also hints that Jerusalem will not be wiped out during that war but the war will involve other nations of the earth. However, that is by no means certain because John's vision is not always consistent in its details.

11:15-19 - The seventh angel sounds the seventh trumpet and one would expect some terrible judgment based on the other six trumpets. The fifth and sixth trumpets were the first two woes so
one would expect the seventh trumpet to be the third woe. John even says in 11:14 that the third woe is coming soon. But we are never told the third woe has come or has been completed. Instead John shows us the great announcement from heaven that the Kingdom of God has been established and the praise of the twenty-four elders. That is followed in 11:19 by a picture of God's temple in heaven being opened and the Ark being seen along with lighting, thunder, an earthquake and heavy hail. After that comes the Great Interlude between the seven trumpets and the seven bowl judgments from 12:1-14:20. The seven bowls come in chapters 15 & 16. It appears that the seven bowls are the seventh trumpet just like the seven trumpets expressed the seventh seal. Once again John intensifies his vision and repeats prophetic themes of judgment on an unbelieving world and vengeance and salvation for God's saints.

When the angel blows the seventh trumpet John hears loud voices in heaven which proclaim, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign for ever and ever." The loud voices are probably angels. In 11:12 the two resurrected witnesses are told to come up to heaven by a loud voice. Other times commands come from heaven and it is always a singular voice which speaks. That could be God or a mighty angel it is not clear. Here however loud voices proclaim the reign of God. Are these angels? Are they God's saints already in heaven with him? Is it both? We are not told. Handel used this line as a bridge in his great Hallelujah Chorus in the Messiah. The old KJV read the "kingdoms of this world" but the Greek word for kingdom is singular. Modern translations read correctly the "kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord." Heaven's announcement is not about the nations being ruled by the Lord Jesus Christ but the whole world, Satan's world, being ruled by the Lord Jesus. Jesus called Satan the prince of this world in John 12. He said right before the cross that Satan would be driven out when Jesus was lifted up, meaning lifted up on the cross. Paul in Ephesians 2 calls Satan the prince of the power of the air who rules over those who disobey God. John in the Great Interlude that follows the seventh trumpet introduces Satan as the power behind the beast or antichrist who tries to reign over the whole earth. The proclamation from heaven declares that God's Kingdom now rules over the world. The voices declare that the kingdom of the world "has become" the kingdom of the Lord. Has become is in the aorist tense in Greek meaning a point action that occurs once and for all. Jesus now reigns John tells us yet at the blowing of the seventh trumpet the Lord Jesus has not yet returned nor has Satan been bound. There is more to come. Perhaps John is saying to his readers even as Satan puts forth all his power to rule and dominate the world the outcome is no longer in doubt. The Lord Jesus Christ reigns and Satan is defeated. Heaven declares beforehand what is certain to happen and nothing will be able to change that!

At the proclamation from heaven concerning God's Kingdom the twenty-four elders fall on their faces before God's throne and worship. They declare their thanks to God Almighty, the One who is and was. Notice they do not add and who is to come, as they have earlier in Revelation. I am not sure if that is significant here or not. The elders declare God has taken his great power and has begun to reign. God reigning over his world and people is the essence of the Kingdom of God; it is the rule of God in heaven and earth in people's hearts.

The elders state that the nations were angry because God's wrath has come. The verb tenses are all in the aorist, expressing past actions that have been accomplished. Why are the nations angry? Their day is finished. Their time is up! God is taking control of his world and bringing it into line with his will. This is the day that his will is done on earth as it is done in heaven as Jesus taught his disciples to pray. The ESV translates this phrase, "the nations raged but your wrath came." That phrase is similar to Psalm 2 which asks, "Why do the nations
conspire and the peoples plot in vain?" The apostles quote this Psalm in the prayer of the church for God to act in Acts 4. They quote the Septuagint version which is translated, "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?" This is a Messianic Psalm that prophesies the reign of the Messiah Jesus. Did John remember those words as he was writing down the elders' prayer? He was there in the Upper Room that night when the church prayed after he and Peter had been commanded by the Sanhedrin to stop preaching in the Name of Jesus. The time for preaching is now finished because God is taking up his rule and there will be no more opportunity for the human race to choose whether to follow Christ or not. The day has finally arrived and God is out of patience with a wicked sinful world.

The elders state that the time for judging the dead has come and for rewarding God's servants the prophets and his saints and those who revere God's name both great and small. God is finally bringing human history to an end. It is Judgment Day, the Day of the Lord! He will judge those who reject him and save those who love him. For his saints it is a glorious day. For the ungodly it is a day of terror because all their lies are stripped from them and they must face the Lord God Almighty in all his glory! John will give much more detail about the return of the Lord Jesus and the last judgment in chapters 19-20.

The elders declare that God is also judging those who destroy the earth. The word destroy means to waste away or be ruined. Jesus used it in Luke 12 to describe what moths do to clothes here on earth. He was encouraging the disciples to lay up treasures in heaven where nothing can destroy them. This is a different Greek word than Apollyon which means the Destroyer, the angel over the Abyss in Revelation 9. The word for destroy here can mean physical destruction or moral ruin and decay. This is a general term the elders use to describe all those whether human or demonic who have worked destruction and ruin on the earth. Literally the phrase reads, "to destroy those who destroy the earth." In context I think John means more than those who pollute and destroy the land. The word means moral ruin as well as physical and describes the full effects of sin on human beings and on the planet. Sin breaks all our relationships; with God, with each other and with the earth out of which we were formed. That is the lesson of Genesis 3 and the fall of humankind. John says on Judgment Day God is going to take vengeance on all who have sown sin in the world against other humans and against the planet he gave us. Judgment Day will see Satan and his demons finally and completely defeated and all human beings who followed them also punished and sent away from God's presence forever.

John reports that after the elders sang their song of praise he saw God's temple in heaven opened and within the temple was seen the Ark of the Covenant. John has already shown us the temple in heaven in 7:15 in his vision of the great multitude of his saints before God's throne. There the temple is parallel with God's throne and represents God's direct presence in heaven. The implication is God's throne is in God's temple. That would make sense from an Old Testament viewpoint in that the temple and specifically the Ark of the Covenant were seen as the footstool of God's throne on earth. After Jesus' death on the cross the veil in the temple separating the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was torn in two from top to bottom opening up the Holy of Holies. That symbolized the price for sin had been paid on the cross by Jesus' death and the way is now open to God. The Book of Hebrews declares the same thing in Hebrews 9-10. John sees the temple open here in Revelation 11 and the Ark readily visible.

The Ark in the Old Testament was the symbol of God's covenant he made with Israel at Mt. Sinai after he rescued them from Egypt. It contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, a clay jar full of manna and Aaron's staff that had budded to show he was God's chosen priest. Jewish legend says the Ark was spirited away by the priests during the reign of Josiah before the
Babylonians captured the city but there is nothing in Scripture to support that story. The Ark was more likely to have been destroyed sometime earlier probably by other invading powers like the Assyrians or Egyptians because it is not mentioned that it was captured in any of the prophets or histories at the time of the exile. The Ark was never seen publicly and when it was moved it was always covered. It was kept within the Holy of Holies in the temple. On top of the Ark was the mercy seat or the atonement cover which was overshadowed by two golden cherubim who shielded it with their wings. This was thought by the Israelites to be the footstool of God's throne. Why does John say he saw the Ark here in Revelation? What does the symbol mean because the Old Covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant in Jesus Christ? There is no more need for the Ark because mercy has been granted the human race and the sacrifice for sin has been given once and for all by the Lord Jesus on the cross. I think the Ark for John symbolizes the direct presence of God on his throne. It is another Old Testament image John uses to tie together his vision with the rest of Scripture.

There is also a literary possibility for why John uses the temple in heaven and the Ark. In 8:3-5 right before the seven angels blow their seven trumpets, John sees an angel with a golden censor who comes to the altar of incense in God's temple and fills it with fire from the altar. He hurls the censor with God's fire on the earth and there come thunder, lightning, and an earthquake. Here in 11:19 at the end of the seven trumpets we see God's temple opened and the Ark visible and there come lightning, thunder, an earthquake and hail. At the beginning of the seven bowls in 15:5-8 the temple in heaven is once again opened and out of the temple come the seven angels with the seven last plagues. The temple is filled with smoke and the glory of God was so powerful no one could enter the temple until the seven last plagues were finished. At the end of the seven bowls in 16:17-21 when the seventh angel pours out his bowl there is lightning, thunder, an immense earthquake, more powerful than any in history, and a hailstorm with hundred pound hailstones poured out upon the earth. John uses the temple and the lightning, thunder, earthquakes and hail to tie together the trumpet and bowl judgments. God's temple and the lightning, thunder etc. are always seen at the beginning or the end of the trumpets and bowls. Plus, in chapter 8 the angel is seen getting fire from the altar of incense before the Holy of Holies and the Ark. In chapter 11 the Ark is seen within the temple. In chapter 15 the Ark is not seen but the cloud of the glory of the Lord hides the temple and no one could enter just as it did when Solomon dedicated the earthly temple in 1 Kings 8. There is an intensification of John's vision of the temple from chapters 8 to 11 to 15. Is this all literal? Perhaps, but it also serves as a literary device to weave together the judgments of God upon the earth. The temple and the lightning, thunder etc., also serve to set apart the Great Interlude that follows the seven trumpets and precedes the seven bowls from 12:1-14:20.

Chapter 12:
12:1-6 - Chapter 12 marks the beginning of what I call the Great Interlude between the seven trumpet judgments and the seven bowls of wrath, the last of God's judgments for repentance upon a sinful human race. As I have commented before the various interludes serve to fill in the gaps in John's visions especially as they relate to God's people and God's Kingdom plan. In the Great Interlude we are introduced to cosmic history and the rise of the dragon or Satan along with the beast or antichrist and the false prophet who supports him and leads a world religion that worships the beast. The 144,000 once again appear as well and John shows us a great harvest for the gospel during the time of the judgments of God. The entire interlude prepares us
for God's final judgments and the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and his reign upon the earth in chapters 15-20.

John sees a "great and wondrous sign" appearing in heaven. A sign is something which points to something else. This is the most highly symbolic chapter in all of Revelation. The "sign" is images or figures that represent cosmic history or the history of the struggle between God's people, his plan for his people and Satan, introduced to us here as a great red dragon. The first "sign" John sees is a woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and wearing a crown of twelve stars. The woman is pregnant and cried out in the pain of labor. Verse 5 says her child is a son who will rule the nations and will be snatched up to heaven and God's throne. That indicates the child is the Messiah, Jesus. Who then is the woman? Most likely this is a symbol for Israel. In Song of Songs 6:10 the chorus asks "Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?" In context the chorus is talking about the shepherd's bride. This is the only reference I can find in the Old Testament that refers both to the sun and the moon describing either God or God's people Israel. Most of the references are to God's judgment and stopping the moon from shining or darkening the sun in the Day of the Lord. In Revelation 21 God's people have no need of the sun or moon to shine because the Lord God will be their light. Many times in the Old Testament God describes Israel as his bride. See Hosea 1 & 2 and Jeremiah 31 for examples. The New Testament also sees God's people as the bride of the Lord Jesus. See Ephesians 5 & Revelation 19. John gives us an idealized picture of God's people as his bride, here shining like the sun. This is not sinful Israel God had to judge and send into exile. This is the pure, holy, redeemed people of God. The twelve stars represent the twelve tribes. The New Jerusalem, the dwelling of God and his people in Revelation 21, has twelve gates representing the twelve tribes.

It makes the most sense to see the woman as Israel because she births the Messiah. The Lord Jesus was not born of the church but of Israel. He founded the church out of Israel and included the Gentiles within the one people of God. In verse 2 the woman cries out in the pain of childbirth and in verse 5 she gives birth to a son who will rule the nations and be taken up to God's throne in heaven. This is the Lord Jesus Christ. John has already shown in chapters 1 & 5 that Jesus is God. Here in a symbolic way he shows that Jesus is human. He was born and his human ancestry can be traced from the Jewish people.

John sees a second great "sign" in heaven; an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars from the sky and flung them to earth. John identifies the dragon in 12:9 as "that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan." In Middle Eastern writings a dragon was a mythical creature with great power and beauty. Isaiah 27 identifies the dragon with Leviathan, the sea serpent, representing Israel's enemies that God will slay in the Day of the Lord. In Isaiah 51 God will triumph over Rahab when he saves his people. Rahab was the dragon of chaos in Middle Eastern creation myths that the gods supposedly subdued when the world was created. There is no hint of that battle in Genesis 1 when God created the heavens and the earth but the Old Testament sometimes uses Rahab to represent the forces of chaos and evil in the world. It became associated with Egypt in the prophets as in Isaiah 51. From a New Testament perspective chaos and Satan go together as evil sows chaos both morally and historically in the world.

The dragon or Satan has seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. The beast or the antichrist of Revelation 13 has seven heads, ten horns and ten crowns on the horns, not seven crowns on the heads as does the dragon. John shows us the dragon or Satan and the beast are related. The beast flows from the dragon and is like him. The antichrist will be like
Satan and will seek not only worldwide worship but worldwide power. The dragon will give his power to the beast. Why seven heads and ten horns? I do not know for certain. Seven is usually the number of God’s plan in the world or the completion of that plan or perfection. One possibility is that the seven heads represent the fact that God created Satan perfect in the beginning, one of the greatest and most powerful of all the angels and he fell from that perfection through his pride and sin. Two passages in the Old Testament prophets are believed to be about Satan's fall. The first is in Isaiah 14 and concerns the king of Babylon. However it describes him as aspiring to sit on God's throne in the heavens and wanting to be God. In Christian teaching this is the fundamental sin of Satan, wanting to take God's place himself. This is also the focus of Satan's temptation to Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, to be like God. Isaiah 14:12 reads, "How you have fallen from heaven O morning star, son of the dawn." In the Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, son of the dawn is Lucifer, which is where the traditional original name for Satan comes. The second passage is in Ezekiel 28 in a prophecy concerning the King of Tyre. In it Ezekiel describes someone in language that cannot be a mere human being. He calls the king one of the anointed cherubs who guarded God's throne and who was in Eden in the beginning. He was perfect in wisdom and beauty until he fell into sin because his heart became proud and he was filled with violence. This passage in Ezekiel has also been applied to Satan and his fall. If one takes the two prophetic passages as applying to Satan then the seven heads John sees on the dragon could represent the perfection with which God created Lucifer in the beginning. That still leaves the ten horns. Horns in apocalyptic writings often represent power. The fourth beast Daniel saw in his vision of the four beasts in Daniel 7 had ten horns and crushed other nations under its feet. The beast of Revelation 13 who is the antichrist has ten horns and also subdues the entire world under its power. The ten horns are probably related to the power of the dragon and its direction of powerful pagan nations that seek world domination. Satan seeks world domination, power and worship as well. He wants to be God and take God's place!

Verse 4 says the dragon's tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. In Revelation 8 in the fourth trumpet judgment a third of the sun, moon and stars were darkened but it does not say they were swept from the sky. Also the timing of the trumpet judgments is different from the cosmic history John is describing here in Revelation 12. Furthermore the word translated "swept down" means to pull, drag or draw something. The implication is the dragon did not knock the stars from the sky he pulled them or drew them to him. The most likely meaning of the stars swept from the sky is it represents the angels who rebelled against God and followed Satan and who became the demons. Does John mean literally a third of the angels rebelled against God or is the number approximate and symbolic? It is difficult to know but in a passage with a great red dragon with seven heads one must be careful to say a number like a third of the angels is absolutely literal! The stars John says were swept from the sky and flung to the earth. Jesus said he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven in Luke 10. John tells us in 12:7-9 that the dragon and his angels lost their place in heaven and were thrown down to the earth. Jesus calls Satan the prince of this world in John 12. It appears the sphere of Satan's influence is now this planet and his focus is to thwart God's Kingdom and will from being done and to destroy God's people that he loves.

John says in verse 4 Satan stood before the woman, Israel, who was in labor to kill or devour her child the moment he was born. The word for devour means to eat up, consume or destroy. John's meaning is clear. Satan wanted to kill the Messiah before he could take up his reign. In Matthew 2 Herod the Great sought to kill the infant Jesus before he could become a
threat to his rule. Satan used the evil king to carry out his wishes. Did John know that history and is this a veiled reference to Herod's attempt to kill the Lord Jesus in infancy? We do not know but it is possible.

The woman gave birth to a male child, a son, who would rule the nations with an iron scepter. This is the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. The iron scepter is a reference to Psalm 2, a Messianic Psalm which says, "Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." The Lord Jesus speaking to the church in Thyatira quoted this passage in Revelation 2:27. He quotes it in reference to his Messianic reign over the nations. John's vision of the child is about the Messiah, Jesus. Satan tries to destroy him but God rescues him. Satan believed the cross would rid him of God's Son but instead it sealed Jesus' victory. Sin was paid for and Satan defeated. God raised Jesus from the dead and then he ascended to heaven where he now sits at the right hand of God in power and Messianic authority. See Acts 1, Romans 8 and Philippians 2. Satan failed to destroy the child born of the woman. Jesus became Israel's Messiah and King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

Verse 6 says the woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God where she might be taken care of for 1260 days. Here the desert is a place of safety for Israel. One could see the woman here as now representing the church made up of both Jews and Gentiles but I believe John is still talking about God's ancient people Israel here. He does not shift to the church in this vision until 12:10-11 and 12:17. What does the place in the desert mean? Once again in a passage that is highly symbolic with a seven-headed dragon and a woman with the moon at her feet we need to be very careful what we take as absolutely literal. Some prophecy writers have taken this verse and interpreted it to mean that God is going to preserve a remnant of the Jews during the Great Tribulation in the ancient ruins of Petra in Jordan. Getting that interpretation out of this text is just plain silly! The desert may be referring back to Israel's time in the wilderness when God cared for her and protected her. See Deuteronomy 2 & 8, Isaiah 48, Hosea 13 and Amos 2. God will protect his people and care for them in the coming time of trouble just as he did for 40 years in the wilderness. The place prepared by God for Israel his ancient people is probably symbolic and represents his protection. If John is being literal it is impossible to know what the place in the desert is. It is clear however that God will preserve a remnant of the Jews as he has so many times throughout history. See Paul's discussion of this topic in Romans 11.

The 1260 days John refers to in chapter 11 as the time of the two witnesses in Jerusalem. John has fast forwarded in time from the ascension of the Lord Jesus at the end of his earthly ministry to the final time right before the return of Christ. This is also a direct reference to the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel in Daniel 9:24-27. 1260 days is 42 months or three and one half years. Daniel says during the final "week" or seven years before God completes his plan for his people the antichrist will make a covenant with many, the temple will be rebuilt and the antichrist will betray that covenant. As is Revelation 12, the seventy weeks prophecy of Daniel 9 is a highly symbolic passage so we must be careful how we take the half a week or three and one half years of the final seven. John's vision implies that God will protect his ancient people the Jews during the final chaotic time of tribulation when the antichrist rules the earth before the Lord Jesus returns and puts all things right. Scholars continue to debate whether the 1260 days are literal or symbolic. In Daniel 9-12 it relates to the approximately three and one half years of the persecution of the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes in 167-164 BC, the foundation for the Jewish Feast of Hanukkah in December of each year. The persecution of the Jews by Antiochus becomes a type of the final persecution of God's people by the beast of Revelation 13, the ruler
who is Satan personified and who opposes God's people and God's Kingdom. For a more detailed discussion of Daniel 9 and the 70 weeks prophecy see Appendix One, p.160, of this commentary which is an excerpt from my commentary on Daniel.

12:7-9 - John continues his picture of cosmic history. There is another time shift here just as in verse 6 from verse 5. John describes a war in heaven between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels. When did this "war" take place? John does not tell us. However, John does say Satan and his demons lost the war and lost their place in heaven. The "great dragon" was thrown down to earth along with all his angels. The question is when did this happen. There are several possibilities. First, this happened before the creation of the world and the creation of human beings. This is usually based on the fact that Satan tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. Scholars conclude the devil had already fallen when he tempted Eve because he lies and tempts her to rebel against God. Furthermore if Ezekiel 28 is a symbolic passage about Satan then it says he was in Eden in the beginning but fell because of his desire to be God and take his place. This is the traditional view of most Christian scholars and of the church beginning with the early Church Fathers.

A second view is a later view and sees Satan's fall as happening early and him tempting Eve in the Garden of Eden but still having access to God in heaven. This is based on the story of Job in Job 1-2. Job does not say that Satan is an evil angel but he does play the role of accuser or prosecuting attorney in a trial. The name Satan means accuser. It appears Satan has access to heaven and God's throne in Job. The problem is the Old Testament does not have a developed doctrine of Satan and demons. It is in the New Testament that we learn more about who they are and their function and power. Drawing final conclusions from the story of Job for when Satan fell is tentative at best. The other passages that are used to justify a later fall for Satan are from Luke 10 and John 12. Jesus declares to the seventy returning from their mission that he saw Satan "fall like lightning from heaven." Some scholars take this to mean that Satan's fall occurred during Jesus' lifetime, or it had just occurred. However, it is clear from Jesus' temptation in Matthew 4 & Luke 4 that Satan tempts Jesus with the rule of the world and has already fallen. Jesus in John 12 declares that "now will the ruler of this world be cast out." Jesus is referring to his cross as the time when Satan will be defeated and cast down. Paul in Colossians 2 says Jesus disarmed and defeated the demonic world at the cross. However, these verses talk about Satan's defeat and not his fall. The two events are separate. It appears that is what John is saying here. When Satan fell is unclear but it probably occurred before God's creation of human beings. His defeat however occurs when the Lord Jesus is crucified and resurrected.

The question still remains however as to when the war in heaven between Satan and his angels and God's angels led by Michael occurred. It is not clear. What is clear is that Michael led the angels loyal to God in a war against the devil and his demons. Satan lost and he and the demons were thrown down to earth. Michael is the angel or archangel mentioned in Daniel 10 that fights for God's ancient people Israel. Jude 9 names Michael as an archangel. In Daniel 10 Michael fights the "prince of Persia" alongside the angel sent to Daniel which could be Gabriel. In Revelation 12 Michael also fights but as a general leading heaven's armies and not as an individual soldier. As in Daniel 10, John's vision pulls back the curtain to give us a small glimpse of a spiritual reality that we can scarcely imagine. One thing is clear from John's vision, there was war in heaven; a place where no war should have ever occurred! Perhaps that is why God will create a new heaven AND a new earth in Revelation 21. Satan's fall and rebellion damaged even heaven itself!
John clearly identifies the dragon in verse 8. He is the serpent of Genesis 3 who tempted Eve. He is the devil, the adversary, who tempted the Lord Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. He is Satan, the accuser of the saints, as in Revelation 12:10. Because of the cross and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ there is no more condemnation for those in Christ Jesus as Paul says in Romans 8:1. Jesus himself is our defense attorney or advocate before the Father in heaven according to 1 John 2:1. Even if Satan accuses us before God Jesus is there to defend us and he has never lost a case!

John says Satan is the one who leads the whole world astray. The word can also mean to deceive which is how the ESV translates it. Revelation 20 says Satan will be freed one final time before the final judgment to deceive the nations and lead them in rebellion against God. Then he will finally be judged and thrown into the lake of fire. Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan was a liar from the beginning and is the father of lies. After his defeat by Michael and his angels Satan has been cast down to earth along with all of his demons. The planet earth now becomes the sphere of his activity and influence. The final chapters of the cosmic drama of heaven are now played out on earth. In verse 9 John fast forwards his vision of cosmic history to current human history. John has set the stage for the emergence of the beast of chapter 13, the antichrist.

12:10-12 - After Satan is thrown down to the earth with his demons John hears a loud voice from heaven declare God's victory and the victory of his saints. This is not the chorus of voices who sang of God's Kingdom at the blowing of the seventh trumpet. The singular voice, as in 10:8, declares that the salvation and power and kingdom of God and the authority of his Christ have come. All that Satan tried to prevent by killing the Messiah of Israel has happened! Salvation has come to the human race through the child of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ. Power here probably refers to God's power over Satan as does the authority of the Messiah. The key to this declaration of praise is to understand all the verbs are in the aorist tense in Greek. That means the action has been completed. It has been accomplished. The power, authority and Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ have been established! The blood of Jesus has overcome Satan and his demons at the cross as Paul affirms in Colossians 2.

John hears that the accuser of our brothers and sisters, namely Satan, has been hurled down to earth. He accused God's people day and night before God but now no more! If we take John's vision at face value then the implications are profound. When we experience Satan's voice telling us God will not forgive us or the sin we committed is so terrible we are no longer God's child we need to understand he can no longer do that in God's presence. He is trying to trick us into believing that we are guilty before God. He is trying to deceive us into believing that the blood of Jesus does not purify us from all our sin as 1 John 1 says. If Satan's days as the prosecutor in heaven are finished then as 1 John 2 says when we sin the one who speaks in heaven before the Father about us is our Lord Jesus, our advocate and defense attorney! Satan's voice in heaven has been silenced because he has been defeated and thrown down! We are forgiven by the blood of the Lamb!

The voice declares that God's people have overcome the devil by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. The people the loud voice is telling us about here in verse 11 are probably all believers in Jesus and not just Jewish believers. God's people recognize they are forgiven in Jesus Christ by virtue of his blood shed for us on the cross and they no longer allow Satan to deceive them into believing God cannot or will not forgive their sins. They have overcome or conquered. This is the same word the Lord Jesus used in the seven letters to the seven churches telling them the blessings that would come to the "one who overcomes". Their
faith is the thing that overcomes Satan. They overcome first through faith in his work on the cross and trusting that work for their forgiveness and salvation. The second thing believers do that overcomes Satan is they have faith and confidence in the Lord to testify about him. They do not fear even death but boldly proclaim the gospel despite all opposition. When believers are fearless in their testimony they overcome our ancient enemy. He is defeated when we will not be silenced even if threatened with death. This is one reason *Revelation* lifts up the martyrs as being special to God and reinforces the idea that they have their reward in heaven because of their testimony. The implication of John's statement in verse 11 is that overcoming does not necessarily lead to martyrdom but that believers boldly proclaim the gospel even if threatened with death for declaring it. They will not be silenced! When we are courageous and bold like that we defeat the enemy because the power of God in the gospel is proclaimed and Satan's plans and schemes are defeated. See *Romans* 1:16-17.

John says the voice calls for rejoicing in heaven because of Satan's defeat and the faithfulness of his saints even in the face of death. It calls upon all those who dwell in heaven to rejoice. This would include both the angels and all the saints who live with the Lord Jesus in heaven waiting for their resurrection when the Lord returns to earth. In contrast the voice warns the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you. The word means to come down or go down. It is interesting that the voice warns the earth and sea and not specifically those who dwell on the earth. Even creation will suffer because the devil has been cast out of heaven and thrown down to earth. Why? He is filled with fury or great wrath because he knows his time is short. Satan is like Nazi Germany at the end of World War II. The Battle of the Bulge was Hitler's attempt to prolong the war even though his generals knew they were going to lose it. Satan knows his days are numbered but he will never surrender because to surrender means he would have to submit to God and that is something he is not prepared to do. Spiritual warfare will continue as Paul outlines in *Ephesians* 6. However the outcome of that war is no longer in doubt. The enemy has been defeated and he will lose the fight. God's people need to persevere and boldly testify to their faith in the Lord Jesus. Satan is finished!

12:13-13:1 - John returns to the image of the woman who represents Israel. After the dragon or Satan was defeated in heaven and thrown down to the earth he pursued the woman and tried to destroy her. John does not speak about when the original rebellion and fall of Satan happened when he rebelled against God and turned from the greatest of angels to the adversary of God and tried to take God's place. He speaks here of the result of the war in heaven when Michael led God's angels against Satan and his demons. Taking into account this is a highly symbolic passage outlining cosmic history, John tells us that Israel existed when Satan was thrown out of heaven and defeated. That tells us that his expulsion and defeat in heaven happened in history and not before human beings were created. When did that occur? My best guess is during the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, the child of the woman Israel.

Since Satan cannot go back to heaven and continue his rebellion and war in heaven against God and his angels he takes out his wrath and defeat on the woman who bore the Messiah. He pursues Israel to destroy her. However, John tells us that God protects her. She is given two eagles’ wings to fly into the place in the desert where she will be preserved and a remnant protected for the three and one half years, the time, times and half a time. John does not specifically say three and one half years but from the context in *chapters* 11 & 12 it is reasonable to interpret the time, times and half a time as years. They are related to the 1260 days of the two witnesses in *chapter* 11 and the 1260 days in 12:6 where John says God will protect the woman
in a place in the desert prepared for her. Whatever this place in the desert represents symbolically God will protect Israel and preserve her during this terrible time of tribulation and turmoil in the world. The eagle's wings could be a reference to God's statement in Exodus 19 when he tells Moses that the Lord bore Israel out of Egypt on eagles' wings and brought her to himself. As I stated above the place in the desert is symbolically related to the Lord protecting and providing for Israel in the wilderness after they escaped Egypt and before they conquered the Promised Land. Whatever the precise meaning of the eagle's wings and the place in the desert, the clear sense of the text is that God will supernaturally protect Israel or a remnant of Israel from the wrath and attacks of Satan during the final years before Jesus' return. Satan will not be able to harm the woman during this time.

Verse 15 says Satan tries to overwhelm the woman with a river or flood from his mouth. The Greek word normally is translated as river. However, Jesus uses this word in Matthew 7 in his parable about the wise man who builds his house upon the rock. When the floods come his house stood. I think the idea of a flash flood that comes down the wadis around the Sea of Galilee from a thunderstorm is a more likely translation here than a simple river. The picture is of water threatening to sweep the woman away. Satan tries to destroy the woman before she can get to her place of safety. He is unsuccessful because the earth itself opens up and swallows the flood before it harms the woman Israel. What does this mean? From the larger context of Revelation and John's vision of cosmic history this part of the vision reinforces God's supernatural protection for the remnant of Israel. God will preserve them. As for the flood I do not know for certain. One possible explanation is from the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel 9. Daniel 9:26 says the people of the ruler who will come will destroy Jerusalem and its end will come like a flood. In my commentary on Daniel I state this is most likely a reference to the Romans under Titus when they attacked and destroyed Jerusalem in 70. See Appendix One of this commentary on the relevant sections of Daniel. John may be referring to the Roman attack on the Jews and the fall of Jerusalem. The Jewish historian Josephus says millions of Jews were slaughtered or taken captive as slaves by Rome during that time. It is possible John has that in mind when he describes the flood that comes from the dragon's mouth to overwhelm the woman. Yet the Jews survived that "flood." They still exist as a people today. If the Roman attack is not the literal fulfillment of John's vision then it is at least a type of an attack by Satan that will come in the final years before the Lord's return. It appears Satan's flood attack comes before the woman reaches the place of safety in the desert. A more precise interpretation is not possible given the highly symbolic nature of this passage.

John sees that Satan's flood fails to destroy the woman. The devil is furious with her and takes out his wrath against her on "the rest of her offspring". He defines them as "those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus." John is describing Christians. Since the woman Israel is now protected by God in the desert, the ones who follow Jesus that Satan wants to attack are probably Gentiles. John calls them the woman's offspring. This follows the teaching of Paul in Romans 1 and Ephesians 2, Peter in 1 Peter 1 and Luke's narrative in Acts 10, 15 & 28. The Gentiles have now been included into God's people by faith in Israel's Messiah, Jesus. John tells us that Satan hates the Jews but he also hates all Christ followers because they have become part of God's people along with the Jews. John says the dragon or Satan goes off to make war upon God's saints because of his wrath against God's ancient people, the Jews. The plain sense of the text is that there are believers who are present upon the earth during these final years before the Lord Jesus returns. They have not all been taken out by a Rapture and will face
Satan's wrath and persecution. That wrath and persecution will be expressed through two new figures that John introduces to us in *chapter 13*: the beast and the false prophet.

The reason Satan brings forth the beast and the false prophet is to make war on God's people, those who hold to the testimony of Jesus. He will rule the world in order to persecute and annihilate Christians! Satan hates us with a passion because we are Jesus' people and love him. He cannot win and in fact has already been defeated. The stakes in these next few chapters are nothing less than the whole world and eternity itself. Throughout the next chapters of *Revelation* we will see the increasing dichotomy between those who worship the beast and those who follow Jesus. In the end there will be no one who sits upon the fence. Religion will not be a nominal thing. All people will declare their allegiance either to the beast and Satan or to Jesus Christ as Lord!

In *13:1* John sees the dragon standing on the shores of the sea. The sea in prophetic writings and later Jewish apocalyptic writings represented the forces of chaos and also the Gentile nations of the world. The Gentile nations are probably what John is referring to here.

**Chapter 13:**

*13:1-4* - The 7th trumpet brings us to the last days of this age and the final part of the Birth Pangs of the Messiah. The mystery of God, meaning his Kingdom and his judgments are completed. The final time of the end is characterized by two things: the outpouring of divine judgments (the 7 bowls of wrath which are God's judgments on a rebellious civilization, Babylon-Rome) and the final persecution of the church. *Chapters 13-14* are the last part of the Great Interlude that describes the cosmic battle between God and Satan, good and evil. In *chapter 12* John prepared his readers for this climactic struggle with the story of the woman and the dragon. Now in *chapter 13* John introduces the two beasts which will wage war and persecute God's people. John shows us how we are drawn into the cosmic struggle between God and Satan and his demons. Satan's doom is sure but he does not surrender and resists God with greater and greater hatred until the bitter end and his ultimate defeat. When Satan failed to conquer the woman Israel and her child, the Messiah, he focuses his wrath on the offspring of the woman, God's people, the church. The two beasts make war, and even conquer and persecute the saints. John is providing us a context in which to view the persecution of the world against Jesus' church.

John sees a beast coming up or rising up out of the sea. The sea often represents the nations of the world and the forces of chaos in the world. The beast emerging from the sea means the beast is a Gentile nation or power and represents a world ruler. It has ten horns and seven heads with ten crowns on its horns. On each of the seven heads it has a blasphemous name meaning each name is slanderous to God and defames him. The beast is like the dragon or Satan. Both have seven heads and ten horns. The difference is the dragon has seven crowns or diadems on his seven heads. The beast has ten crowns on his ten horns. The point is the beast is Satan personified or Satan incarnate. He is the ultimate false Christ or the antichrist. Some scholars have maintained the seven heads of the beast are the seven main emperors of the Roman Empire between Tiberius and Domitian. The problem is there were three men who briefly held power during the year following Nero's death until Vespasian took the throne. The symbol is only partially true and does not literally work. If John is referring to Rome as the beast then at the very least the Roman emperors like Domitian who demanded to be worshipped as a god are a type of the antichrist.
John builds his image of the beast from two key Old and New Testament passages. The first is Daniel 7 and Daniel's vision of the four beasts. Four great beasts emerge from the churning sea. The first was like a lion with the wings of an eagle. The second was like a bear; the third like a leopard with four wings. The fourth beast was unlike the others and had iron teeth and ten horns. The second passage is from 1 John 2 and 1 John 4 both of which speak of the antichrist, the spirit of whom John says is already in the world and who will deny that Jesus is the Son of God come in the flesh. The antichrist is related in 1 John to false teaching about Jesus that denies the incarnation and that Jesus is God himself. Two other passages also apply. The first is in 2 Corinthians 11 where Paul says Satan disguises himself as an angel of light to lead many astray. The second is Paul's description of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2. He will exalt himself above all gods and set himself up in God's temple demanding to be worshipped as God. All these passages describe the beast or the antichrist.

John says the beast he saw resembled a leopard but had feet like a bear and the mouth of a lion. John is telling us the beast he saw resembles the great world empires and powers that Daniel saw in his dream in Daniel 7. It is connected to world empires and domination. The dragon gave his power, throne and authority to the beast. Satan tells Jesus in Luke 4 that if he will worship him he will give the Lord Jesus all the splendor and authority of the kingdoms of the world because they are his to grant. Jesus calls Satan the "prince of this world" in John 12. Satan gives the beast his authority over the kingdoms of this world. It is a false gift that cannot last however because as John has already shown us when the seventh trumpet was sounded in Revelation 11; "the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign for ever and ever."

One of the seven heads on the beast looked as if it had received a fatal or mortal wound. The word for wound means to slaughter or kill. The beast imitates the Lord Jesus, the Lamb who was slain. The beast's fatal wound had been healed or cured. This is a miraculous sign because the wound should have killed the beast but it did not. The wound that was healed also gives us a major clue as to the nature of the beast. It is not just interested in world domination and power. It wants peoples' hearts, allegiance and worship. The beast, or Satan through the beast, wants in people what belongs to God alone. When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4 and Luke 4 Jesus responded to Satan's temptation to worship him by saying, "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." God allows the beast's deception in order to test the people of the world. Are their hearts turned towards God their Creator or are they so rebellious they will worship Satan and the beast? Ultimately the reign of the beast is not about politics or economics or even power; it is about the human heart and who we worship.

People are so rebellious against God they are easily deceived into worshipping the beast and the dragon. The whole world is astonished by the beast's wound that was healed. They readily follow the beast and worship Satan because they sense Satan has given his power and authority to the beast. They are drawn to the power of the beast and ask who is like him or who can fight him; meaning he is so strong no one can defeat him! Contrast the attitude of the people in the world who worship the beast with the visions John has of God the Creator and of the Lord Jesus in Revelation 1, 4, 5 & 11! During the reign of the beast Satan succeeds in deceiving the nations of the world. They give their allegiance and worship to the beast and to Satan and reject God's Messiah the Lord Jesus Christ.

13:5-8 - John reports that the beast was given a mouth to utter "proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months." Who gave the beast the authority over the
nations and to blaspheme God? There are three possibilities. First God did and second Satan did. The third possibility is the most likely; both God and Satan gave the beast its authority. God permits the beast to blaspheme him and lead people astray and to exercise authority over the nations in order to test them and to fulfill his plan foretold in the prophets. Satan gives the beast its power in order not to test the people of the world but to deceive them and rule them. Does God participate in the beast's evil? No, Satan rebels against God and the beast follows Satan and people follow the beast. God allows it but he is able to use even the deeds of those who oppose him to fulfill his plan to save the human race and finally defeat evil because nothing will ultimately thwart his will.

The beast is only granted authority from God for a limited time, forty two months. This is the same timeframe as the ministry of the two witnesses in Revelation 12. It is three and one half years or one half of seven a number related to the seventy weeks prophecy of Daniel 9. It may appear that the beast has ultimate and complete power over the world and even over God’s people living in the world but his reign is short. It has already been pre-determined by God. He has forty-two months and then he will be utterly defeated and destroyed by the return of the Messiah of Israel and the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ!

The word for "proud" in the NIV is megala in Greek which means great or large. The NIV along with the other major translations use the context to interpret the word to mean proud or haughty. John could be referring to Daniel 7 where the "little horn" speaks boastful things. In Daniel 11 the king who will come "will exalt and magnify himself above every god and say unheard of things against the God of gods." In Daniel's historical context he is speaking of the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes who proclaimed himself Zeus personified. See Appendix One at the end of this commentary for a more detailed explanation of Daniel 7 & 11. Even if we take John's Greek words literally here in verse 5 the beast speaks "great and blasphemous words". John means that the beast proclaims himself as a power as great as or greater than God! Verse 6 says he blasphemes God meaning he profanes his Name and slanders it along with his dwelling place and those who live in heaven, meaning his angels and the saints. The word for dwelling is literally tent or tabernacle. John said in 11:19 at the end of the seven trumpets that he saw the temple in heaven opened and the Ark of the Covenant inside. In 15:5 he sees the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven. John appears to use the images of the tabernacle and the temple interchangeably to describe God's dwelling in heaven or his throne. The point is the beast profanes God's dwelling place, his person, and all those who follow him. He defames God's name, slanders it and tears down his character, his actions and his person. That is what blasphemy means.

John tells us the beast was given or granted power to make war against the saints. John frequently uses this verb and it means to engage in an armed conflict or war and he uses it of nations against nations, of the angels against the demons or as here of the beast against the saints. Not only will the beast make war against the saints he is granted the power to "conquer" them. This is the word John uses frequently in Revelation meaning conquer, overcome, or be victorious. It is the word Jesus uses in the seven letters telling God's people what will happen if they prevail in their faith through tribulation or troubled times. He uses it to describe the final victory of the Lord Jesus over Satan and the antichrist when he comes again. In the context here it means the beast will be allowed to defeat some of God's people and they will undoubtedly be martyred for their faith. The beast does not have the final victory, that belongs to the Lord Jesus but the beast will succeed in killing some of God's people. They however will still conquer because God will raise them from the dead when the Lord returns.
The beast is given authority over the entire human race, all the nations, tribes, peoples and languages. Everyone who lives on the earth will worship the beast and bow down to him. The only exceptions will be those who follow the Lord Jesus and whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. In other words the beast may kill God's people for refusing to follow him but he has no ultimate authority over them except that which is given him during the forty-two months when he will be in power. John is telling his readers that they may be threatened with death and even be martyred for their faith but their salvation is safe. Nothing will be able to tear them away from God's love. This time of persecution and the war against them by the beast is only temporary. It will not last. Soon the Lord Jesus will return to take them to himself and raise them forever victorious over Satan, the beast and death. They belong to the Lamb who was slain before the foundation or creation of the world. God's plan was always to send Jesus to die for us that we might live forever with God!

13:9-10 - John or the voice from heaven from 12:10 exhorts the readers to pay attention to what is said. It uses the same words the Lord Jesus uses at the end of each of the seven letters; "he who has an ear, let him hear." It means listen up or pay attention.

The exhortation says if anyone is to go into captivity into captivity he will go and if anyone is to be killed with the sword, meaning die in a war or be executed, they will be killed with the sword. This is a prophetic statement outlining the fate of God's people. Some will be killed and some will be taken captive. In John's day when he wrote Revelation this was already happening. John himself was captive in exile on Patmos because of his faith. Some had already been martyred in Pergamum for their faith; see 2:13. Jesus warns the church in Smyrna they are about to undergo persecution and even death in chapter 2. John says the same thing will happen during the reign of the beast. God's saints can expect opposition, persecution, imprisonment and even death.

This prophecy sounds similar to prophecies in Jeremiah 15 & 43 that speak of the future of the Jews in the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Some will be destined for pestilence, some for famine, some for the sword and some for captivity.

John ends this prophecy with a call for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people. These two verses recall the theme verse of Revelation 1:9 which says, "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering, and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus..." John tells us that whether his readers are from his time, our time or the time of the reign of the beast, God's people need to stay faithful to the Lord Jesus and endure patiently difficult and trying times. Salvation is coming! The trials will not last forever! The Lord Jesus is returning and his victory is at hand!

13:11-15 - John sees a second beast only this one comes out of the earth. In Daniel 7 Daniel sees four beasts that arise out of the earth representing four conquering kingdoms. It is possible John is relating this second beast to the four kingdoms in Daniel 7. The obvious difference with the first beast however is that this second beast is not a nation but a religious figure, a priest of the beast who is called the false prophet in Revelation 19:21. The second beast supports the beast and his kingdom. He combines politics and religion to aid the beast in subduing and deceiving the people of the earth.

John says the second beast had two horns like a lamb but he spoke like the dragon. The false prophet looks good. He looks like the Lamb, like Christ. But he speaks the dragon's words. He speaks Satan's lies to the world. He has all the authority of the first beast and exercises that
authority on his behalf. He is the spokesperson for the beast like Aaron was for Moses in Exodus. The false prophet mixes the power and authority of the beast with the religion of the beast. He has enough power that he is able to coerce the people of the world to worship the beast, including all those who follow the other major world religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam! Why would they do this? Think of all the catastrophes and wars that have already occurred during the seven seal and trumpet judgments. People are desperate for solutions because nothing is able to stop God's judgments. Then along comes the beast with the false prophet who has the ability to perform counterfeit supernatural signs with Satan's power, even causing fire to come down from heaven like Elijah, in order to deceive people. He leads them to worship the beast whose fatal wound had been miraculously healed. The beast with the help of the false prophet is seen as the savior of the world and the one who can restore order and stability. When people are desperate enough they will believe anything, even Satan! This is why the Lord Jesus and the apostles often warn us of false prophets and teachers who lead people astray. We are to be on guard against false teaching and test the spirits to see whether they are of God as 1 John 4 says.

John introduces us here to the unholy trinity, Satan's trinity; the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. Together they work to deceive the world into following the beast rather than God. Together they set out to rule the whole world and dominate all its people and together they work to destroy God's people, his saints and wipe them out.

The false prophet orders the people of the earth to set up an image of the beast, an idol, so that people will worship it. The word means a likeness and often refers to the image of the emperor on a Roman coin. It is not the normal word for idol but that is essentially what it is. The false prophet was given power by Satan to give breath, Greek pneuma, to the image of the beast so that it could speak. The image or idol appears alive and this further astonishes the people of the world and makes them want to worship the beast all the more. All those who would not worship the beast's image are killed. This is very similar to Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol in Daniel 3. The three Jewish friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, refused to worship the golden idol and Nebuchadnezzar had them thrown into the fiery furnace. However God saved the three faithful Jews from death in the fire and delivered them. It is possible John is recalling that story here in Revelation 13 to encourage believers to be faithful even to death. The Lord will deliver us when the time of great persecution comes! This is an encouragement to the people of John's day too. The Emperor Domitian had combined politics and religion just like the beast and false prophet. He demanded to be worshipped as a god and addressed as our lord and god Domitian. Christians who refused were often exiled like John had been or were killed in the arena. John says the beast and the false prophet will try the same strategy in the last days before Jesus' return. They want the rule of the world and the worship of all its people. Faithful Christ followers are the ones who stand in their way so they hate them with a special passion. Satan hates us as well because we are the offspring of the Lady Israel and the Messiah Jesus. See 12:17.

13:16-18 - John now gives us one of the most controversial and debated passages in the Book of Revelation; the mark of the beast and its number, 666. Let's look at it carefully and try to discern what he is saying. John tells us that to understand the number of the beast takes wisdom. Unfortunately many prophecy writers abandon wisdom when they come to the number of the beast and take off on flights of fancy and wild speculation!
The false prophet is the one who forces the entire world to receive the mark of the beast. That tells us that the beast and false prophet are trying to combine both religious and political power into one. This is exactly what the Emperor Domitian was trying to do during the time John wrote Revelation. He was trying to give his reign religious validation besides a political one. It is something tyrants all throughout history have attempted to do in order to give their reign divine legitimacy and squelch dissent. If you resist the emperor or the state you resist God or the gods. Constantine did this when he converted to Christianity in the 4th century. He linked political power and the power of the church together. Kings in Europe spoke of the divine right of kings to rule. Even in the American Revolution Christians in America had to justify disobeying King George because it was seen as disobeying God. The first thing we need to understand about the mark of the beast is that even though it might have a physical manifestation at its heart it is religious in nature. The beast is not only to be obeyed he is to be worshipped!

The word for mark means literally a stamp or brand. Pagan worshippers in John's day often received a mark, tattoo or brand but usually on their temples and not their foreheads. The mark was the name of a god, in order to proclaim their loyalty. A mark was also commonly used to brand slaves as belonging to their masters. This showed ownership however and not loyalty. One can see John's implication. Those who are marked are slaves to the beast but are also declaring their loyalty to him. Is the mark a physical mark or is it spiritual and symbolic? It is probably symbolic, the counter to the seal of God on his people, but I cannot rule out a physical mark. The Holy Spirit is the one who seals God's people according to Paul in Ephesians 1. Satan has no such power. He must brand his followers and coerce them into receiving his mark.

This is very important to understand because of verse 17. John says that people could not buy or sell anything within the beast's kingdom unless they had the mark. Prophecy teachers have so focused on this phrase that they miss the larger implications. Economically the mark of the beast allows one to participate in commerce and to buy what one needs to survive. But, one sells one's soul in order to participate in the world economy because the mark of the beast is fundamentally a declaration of loyalty and worship. Receiving the mark from God's perspective is more than simple expediency in order to survive. It is turning from the worship of God and worshipping Satan. Receiving the mark of the beast is the ultimate rebellion against God! John further explains that the mark or brand is the name of the beast or the number of its name. This refers back to the sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7 and to the marking of the name of God, Yahweh, on the foreheads of faithful Jews in the temple in Jerusalem in Ezekiel 9. John says in 14:1 that the 144,000 have the name of the Lamb and the Father's name written on their foreheads. The 144,000 are deliberately contrasted with the people of the world who have the beast's name tattooed on their foreheads. Once again John shows us that in the time before the Lord's return there are only two groups of people; those marked with the name of the beast and those sealed with the name of the Lamb! This understanding saves us from some modern prophecy teachers who try and equate RFID chips as the mark of the beast. RFID might have sinister technological implications concerning privacy and control but it presently has nothing to do with any kind of religious group or idea. Until it does I think we can safely say an RFID chip on one's hand is not the mark of the beast!

What about those who are sealed with God's name? How are they to survive the beast's reign? How are they to buy or sell or even eat if they do not worship the beast or have his mark? One immediate conclusion is that they will not survive. They will be martyred for refusing to worship the beast and receive his mark just as Christians in John's day refused to bow down to the Emperor Domitian and call him a god. But we must also not forget Jesus' teaching in the
gospels. He promises that if we seek first his Kingdom he will provide all we need. If we find ourselves living in the time of the antichrist we need to trust God to provide and know that even if we die for our faith the beast will only reign a brief time (three and one half years according to 13:5). His defeat is as certain as Satan's. If we are alive when the beast reigns then we know the Lord Jesus' return is close at hand. John is telling his readers to trust God and not give up hope. He calls them to persevere in the face of persecution and suffering because the Kingdom of God is near! This goes back to John's theme verse in Revelation 1:9.

John gives us the number of the beast which is related to his name. He says it calls for wisdom to understand it. It is 666. John says it takes insight to calculate the number. What does he mean? Sometimes symbolic numbers can be derived from the numerical values of a name or word. For instance one assigns the letter a the value of 1, b with 2 and so on. Both Greek and Hebrew use this system because neither language has names for numerals like our modern Arabic numbering system. Scholars have come up with some fanciful possibilities for the meaning of 666. Irenaeus, the early church father, suggested that the meaning of the number was the "Latin Empire" signifying Rome. Many scholars agree with him. There is no name which works out in Greek for 666. However, if one switches to Hebrew and changes the spelling slightly 666 stands for Neron Kaisar or Nero Caesar. There was a popular myth in John's day that Nero would rise from the grave one day and come back to rule again and persecute Rome in his insanity as he had before his death. Some scholars believe John is referring to that here. However, as George Ladd of Fuller Seminary observes no scholar can explain why John reverted to a convoluted Hebrew numerology to identify the beast to a group of Greek-speaking Christians that would not have known Hebrew! One can manipulate Greek letters and numbers to come up with some remarkable solutions. For instance if one assigns the number values of a=100, b=101, c=102, etc., the name Hitler totals 666. Is that coincidental? I do not know. Certainly Hitler was a type of the beast or antichrist and many Christians during World War II perceived him that way. In an early Christian apocalyptic writing the Greek name of Jesus = 888. Ladd observes that if 7 is God's number of perfection and the Messiah's name equals 888 then the best Satan can do is 666 which falls far short. This may be the meaning of John's comment that the beast's number is a human number.

Whatever its precise meaning 666 is Satan's counterfeit to God's name and the name of the Lamb with which his people are sealed. We see this in the very first sentence of chapter 14. Though the mark of the beast has economic implications its true significance is spiritual. Receiving the mark of the beast declares your loyalty to Satan and the beast. If you choose that path there is no hope for repentance left. You have marked yourself for God's judgment and destruction!

Chapter 14:

14:1-5 - The details of this section are confusing. John sees the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, standing on Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion is Jerusalem and is linked to the line of David and the Messiah along with the Lord's temple in the Old Testament. Hebrews 12 calls Mt. Zion the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. If John is referring to the New Jerusalem, see Revelation 21 & 22, then the details of this paragraph make more sense. If this is the earthly Jerusalem then this passage is more difficult to interpret because the Lamb and the 144,000 with him are in Jerusalem in verse 1 and then suddenly appear in heaven in verse 3. The 144,000 have the Lamb's name and God the Father's name written on their foreheads. The word for written is a perfect passive participle in Greek. That means the names of the Father and the Lamb were written on the 144,000's
foreheads in the past and they continue to be there up to the moment John sees them. In other words the 144,000 have been saved in the past and now follow Christ. These are not recent martyrs or saints just delivered from the reign of the beast. Are these the same 144,000 who were sealed with God's seal on their foreheads in *chapter 7*, representing God's people? Probably, but that is by no means certain. As I said the details of this paragraph are confusing. The contrast however is unmistakable. The 144,000 are marked with the name of the Lamb and of God the Father. The names of Christ and the Father are spiritual marks representing the relationship the 144,000 have with the Lamb and with God. Those who are marked with the beast's mark worship the beast and Satan not God. They are bound to the earth. The 144,000 are with Jesus on earth and in heaven!

What makes this paragraph difficult to interpret are *verses 2 & 3*. John hears a loud sound like many waterfalls and a loud peal of thunder. He says the sound he heard was like harpists playing harps. Those are some harps! When have you ever heard a harp sound like a thunderclap?! Then he says "they sang a new song before the throne and before the living creatures and the elders." Presumably "they" are the 144,000. In *verse 1* he says they were with the lamb on Mt. Zion. Now they are clearly in heaven before God's throne. John gives no explanation for how or why he switched scenes from Jerusalem to heaven. This is another one of those places where we need to remember that apocalyptic visions are fluid and sometimes the details don't always mesh together.

On a side note, the 144,000 are playing harps and singing. In 5:8 the twenty-four elders or angels have harps that they play as they sing praises to God. In 15:2 John says those who have conquered the beast and his image are in heaven before God's throne playing harps and singing praises to God. If you combine the two images from chapters 5 & 15 with this scene in *chapter 14* you get the source for the popular image that in heaven we'll all be playing harps and singing like the angels.

John says the 144,000 sing a new song that no one knows but them. In 5:9 the four living creatures and twenty-four elders sing a new song in praise to the Lamb for his work on the cross and his redemption of people from every nation for God. In 15:2 those who have followed the Lamb and conquered the beast and his image are in heaven before God's throne playing harps and singing praises to God. If you combine the two images from *chapters 5 & 15* with this scene in *chapter 14* you get the source for the popular image that in heaven we'll all be playing harps and singing like the angels.

John says the 144,000 have not defiled themselves with women for they have kept themselves pure. This is another difficult verse. If we take this absolutely literally the 144,000 must be men because they have not been with women. The phrase the NIV translates, "they kept themselves pure" literally means "they are virgins." What does John mean? Again if we take John's language literally then we must understand the 144,000 here as only men and their purity is related exclusively to sexual purity. They would be virgin men who are celibate. I have major problems with a literal interpretation of this verse. The only other time the 144,000
are mentioned is in *Revelation 7* where they are God's people sealed with God's seal to protect them from the judgments that are to come. See the notes on *Revelation 7* above for a more detailed explanation. The 144,000 John mentions here in *chapter 14* are most likely the same 144,000. In context they are God's people marked with God's name in contrast to the people of the world who have taken the mark of the beast. The ungodly are on earth and the godly are with the Lamb on Mt. Zion or in heaven. They go where he goes. There is absolutely no hint in *chapter 7* that the 144,000 are celibate men and do not include women. The reference to the 144,000 not defiling themselves with women therefore is symbolic and points to idol worship along with refraining from sexual immorality. I think one must take John's reference here as inclusive of men and women and not exclusively men.

What then does John mean by not defiling themselves with women and that the 144,000 have kept themselves pure or are virgins? In *Revelation 17* we are introduced to Mystery Babylon the mother of harlots, the great prostitute who commits adultery with the kings of the earth and the people of the earth. She is a personification of Rome and the ungodly world culture fed by idolatry and greed. Mystery Babylon is drunk with the blood of God's people and hates them. In *Revelation 2* in the letter to the church in Pergamum the Lord Jesus warns the church to turn away from false teaching that leads to the worship of idols and sexual immorality. In the letter to the church in Thyatira, also in *Revelation 2*, he warns the church to reject the teaching of "that woman Jezebel" a false prophet and teacher in the church. She too teaches a lax morality and tells Christians it is all right to practice sexual immorality and one does not have to be sexually pure to be pleasing to God. I think John is using sexual purity here in *Revelation 14* with a double meaning. It does refer to sexual purity but it also means relational and religious purity. The 144,000 have kept themselves sexually pure but have also not worshipped pagan idols which in *chapter 17* are personified as Mystery Babylon the great harlot. Furthermore Paul symbolically refers to the Corinthian church as a pure virgin bride that he longs to present to their one husband, namely the Lord Jesus in 2 *Corinthians 11:2*. If John is not being symbolic here in *chapter 14* then this is a very difficult passage because he is implying a special class of celibate, virgin Christian men who have been rescued from the world and the realm of the beast. I simply do not think the rest of *Revelation* and the rest of John's writings or the New Testament supports such a view. As in all other books of the Bible Scripture must interpret Scripture. The plain texts must interpret the obscure.

The 144,000 follow the Lamb wherever he goes. The word is frequently used in the Gospels to describe someone following the Lord Jesus as his disciple. For instance in *Matthew 9* Jesus calls Levi and he leaves his tax collector booth and follows him. Jesus uses the same word in *John 10* when he says his sheep know his voice, they listen to him and they follow him. John is using this word "follow" to help us understand the 144,000 are Jesus' disciples who follow him.

He says they have been purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. This is another difficult phrase. The idea of purchased for God from among people is not difficult. The word for purchased means redeemed or bought back. It referred to the practice of someone buying a slave and freeing them. Often people in John’s day would buy a slave in the name of a pagan god and then free them. The idea was the god freed the slave. John, along with many other New Testament writers including Paul, uses this word to describe what the Lord Jesus has done for us. He has purchased us or redeemed us by his sacrifice on the cross and through his resurrection. We are now free from the slavery of sin, death and Satan. See the notes on *Revelation 5* and the Song of the Lamb where John uses the identical word and concept.
The difficulty is the second half of the phrase; "offered as firstfruits to God and to the 
Lamb." Firstfruits is a Hebrew concept and referred originally to the Feast of Firstfruits in 
Exodus 23 & Numbers 28 which is also called the Feast of Weeks and is called the Feast of 
Pentecost in the New Testament. Israel was told the firstfruits of all their crops or herds were 
holy to the Lord and were to be offered to him. The firstfruits were the first grain, grapes, olives, 
lambs or calves that the Israelites would harvest and were sacred to the Lord as a reminder to 
them that he was the one who blessed Israel and gave them fertile crops and herds. Paul calls the 
Holy Spirit the firstfruits of the life to come in us in Romans 8. Jesus is called the firstfruits of 
the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. Paul calls the Thessalonians the firstfruits of those being 
saved in 2 Thessalonians 2. The question is what does John mean here in Revelation 14? One 
possibility is that the 144,000 represent those whom God has redeemed from the time of great 
persecution and tribulation during the three and a half year reign of the beast. They are the 
firstfruits, the first signs of a great harvest of believers right before the Lord Jesus returns. In 
14:14-16 John sees a "son of man" harvesting the earth and gathering his harvest. See notes 
below for a more detailed interpretation of those verses. It appears this is the Lord Jesus reaping 
his harvest of believers even up to the final stages of the Birth Pangs of the Messiah before he 
returns. If that is accurate, then the 144,000 as firstfruits could represent the beginning of a great 
revival right before the Lord Jesus' return. The problem is that would divorce John's reference 
here in chapter 14 from the 144,000 in chapter 7. He would be using the same symbolic number 
to describe a different set of believers in each chapter. That is certainly possible given the fluid 
nature of apocalyptic visions but the inconsistency creates problems. In the end context must 
help us determine what John means by the 144,000 and their being offered to God as firstfruits. I 
think it means that even though Satan will increase his attacks on God's people during the reign 
of the beast God will redeem a great number of people who will turn to him in the final years 
before the Lord Jesus returns. The 144,000 are a sign of hope. The Lamb wins!

John says no lie was found in the 144,000. They are blameless. He holds up purity and 
honesty, truth-telling, as great virtues for God's people in the last days. The implication is 
believers will be very tempted in the last days with sexual immorality and idolatry along with 
lying and avoiding telling the truth. The 144,000 are blameless in their conduct but that is a 
result of their redemption in Christ Jesus not as a result of their own moral strength and effort. 
We can safely assume this because of the testimony of the rest of the New Testament. Why does 
John hold up telling the truth and no lies in the 144,000? Zephaniah 3 says in the last days the 
redeemed of Israel shall do no injustice and no lies will be found among them. I think more 
importantly he is contrasting God's people with those who follow the beast and are marked with 
his mark. Jesus said in John 8 that Satan was a liar from the beginning and the father of lies. The 
truth is not in him. Those who worship the beast follow Satan and are like him, meaning they lie 
as part of their nature. The 144,000 follow the Lord Jesus and their character is like his. He is the 
Truth according to John 14 and they tell the truth like their Lord!

14:6-7 - John sees three angels each of which declare a message. They fly in midair or up in 
the air over the earth and the people of the earth. It appears that the angels speak to the people who 
are left who do not yet believe in the Lord Jesus.

The first angel flies in midair or directly overhead. The word literally refers to the 
meridian or zenith of the sun in the sky. That means the angel was at 12 o'clock high. He has the 
eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth, all peoples, tribes, languages and 
nations. This is a curious phrase because the gospel is proclaimed by Jesus' disciples in the
world. Angels sometimes assist those who preach the gospel in the New Testament but one never sees them share it with people. Jesus commanded his followers to go make disciples not his angels. Yet here John says "another angel" proclaims the gospel to the people of the world. The reference to another angel is simply a way to differentiate this angel from others who have spoken. We have not seen or heard from this angel before. From the rest of the New Testament we know there is not another gospel that is different than the one proclaimed by the apostles; the gospel of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and his work on the cross and in the resurrection. See Galatians 1:8-9. This is the only time John uses the word gospel in all his writings including Revelation, his gospel and his three letters. He typically uses the word message to describe the gospel. John says the angel had the eternal gospel which reinforces the idea this is not another gospel message, but the one and only gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps he is proclaiming the gospel in order to assist the saints in their work because they are being so severely persecuted by the beast and the false prophet.

The other thing that makes the angel's proclamation of the gospel curious is that his message is centered on worshipping the Creator. He calls people to fear God, give him glory and worship him who made the heavens and the earth. The hour has come for his judgment so the time is almost up. John has emphasized God the Creator frequently in Revelation, especially in chapter 4. Yet in the rest of the New Testament the focus of the gospel message proclaimed by the apostles is not on God the Creator but on the person and work of Jesus his Son. The angel's proclamation is different. We also must admit that John probably gives us only a small part of what the angel said. We hear the emphasis the angel puts on the gospel, the warning that the time is very short because the hour of God's judgment has come and now people must decide who they will worship. The way to the Creator and his presence is only through the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ as Lord. Its message never changes!

The angel calls for people to worship the Creator who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of fresh water. All these things will be affected when the seven last plagues are unleashed. This is a warning that even though people think the beast is all powerful he is not. Even though the beast and the false prophet have performed miraculous signs they have no power over heaven, earth, the sea and the fresh water. The Creator has sole power over his creation. When people see all these things being affected because of God's judgment they will know who they must worship. The false prophet, the beast and even the dragon are not God. The one and only Creator is God alone and must be worshipped through Jesus Christ alone!

14:8 - A second angel follows the first, presumably in midair as well. It proclaims that Babylon the Great has fallen. This is a pre-figuring of chapters 17-18 in which John portrays the judgment upon Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots. He identifies Babylon symbolically with Rome. Rome or Babylon represents godless human culture that seduces all the nations of the earth with its adulteries, specifically idolatry and greed. The beast will both rule over Babylon-Rome and will seek to destroy her as well. The kings of the earth, the merchants and sailors will all mourn her loss and fall because they have grown rich off of her. God will warn his people to come out of her and not share in her sins. John will reveal all of this in greater detail in chapters 17-18.

The angel says Babylon has made the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries. The whole world has been sucked into Babylon-Rome's idolatry and greed. Babylon represents the worst of human culture and is in total contrast to the Kingdom of God. Babylon-Rome is the
context within which Christ-followers must share their faith and live a life of witness to the Lord Jesus.

Peter in 1 Peter 5 refers to Rome as Babylon. To the Jews Babylon represented the power that destroyed their nation and tempted them to abandon their faith in Yahweh entirely. It was the place of exile. It is possible Peter and his good friend John use Babylon-Rome in the same way. The church will suffer at the hands of Rome yet the early Christians of the first century must still live in Rome because the empire ruled the only world they knew.

John gives us a contrasting view of human culture in Revelation 21:24-26. There the nations bring their glory and honor and all that is worthy into the New Jerusalem. In 22:1-2 the leaves of the tree of life that grow in the New Jerusalem are for the healing of the nations. Those images imply that not everything in human culture is so corrupted by evil that it must be abandoned. There is a godly part of human culture that God will preserve and save and bring into the new heaven and the new earth.

Why does John give us the warnings of the three angels? It appears they are all related to what is about to happen, namely the seven bowl judgments and the fall and judgment upon Babylon. John is showing us yet again that though believers might believe things are totally out of control in the world God is in charge and the reign of the beast and the dragon is only temporary. Their rule is about at an end because the Creator who is sovereign over his creation is going to make all things right. The Lord Jesus is about to return!

14:9-13 - John sees a third angel flying in mid-heaven proclaiming a warning to the people of the earth. The third angel declares that anyone who worships the beast and its image and receives his mark on their forehead or hand will experience full strength the fury of God's wrath over sin.
This statement continues to reinforce the idea that though the mark of the beast may have a physical manifestation its true nature is spiritual and has to do with who a person worships and to whom they owe allegiance; Christ or the beast. The angel warns people who worship the beast that they will suffer eternal torment in the presence of the Lord Jesus and his holy angels. He does not mention it will also be in the presence of the saints. Perhaps John is intentional in leaving out believers or it is simply an oversight. Once again we need to remember that details of apocalyptic visions are fluid and John's omission may not be significant. However, the meaning is clear. The smoke of those who worship the beast and their torment in the burning sulfur or brimstone will go up forever and ever. In Revelation 20 John call this place of torment the lake of fire and it represents hell. It is a place of eternal punishment for those who have rejected the Lord Jesus and chosen to worship Satan and the beast.

John does not support the idea of universalism that God will welcome all into heaven and save everyone. There are people who will reject God and the Lord Jesus and the consequences of that rejection will not only be eternal separation from their Creator's presence but eternal torment as a part of that separation. Whether God inflicts the torment upon them or the pain of hell is the inevitable consequence of being separated from the Creator John does not tell us. It is possible it is both but the torment of hellfire is clearly an expression of the holiness of God in his wrath over sin. John also does not support the concept of annihilation as punishment meaning God simply annihilates those who reject him instead of keeping them in eternal pain and torment. The lake of fire may be symbolic of hell but it is a real place and real people go there. Furthermore it is eternal and not momentary. John uses symbolic language to describe a place and situation for which we have no frame of reference nor can we even imagine what it would be like. He does the same thing with heaven and the New Jerusalem. The symbols however are clear. Those who
reject the Lord Jesus and worship the dragon and the beast will suffer eternal torment and separation from God.

John contrasts the fact that the worshippers of the beast will find no rest in hell with the rest believers will experience in heaven. Believers need to be patient in the time of the beast and his persecution because we will all receive eternal rest in heaven with the Lord. The author of Hebrews develops this concept in more detail in Hebrews 4. John says if we follow Jesus and obey his commands even if we die we will be blessed because we know the Lord. We need to have the patient endurance John outlined all the way back in 1:9. If we continue and persevere in the faith then we will rest from our labor and our deeds will follow us. John means the deeds we do in this life for the Lord Jesus will be a testimony in the life to come of his goodness and grace.

John uses the third angel's warning to repeat a theme he has stated already. In the final days before the Lord's return no one will be sitting on the fence when it comes to the Lord Jesus and the gospel. Either people will believe the gospel and follow Jesus Christ or they will believe the lies of the false prophet and follow the beast. There will be only two camps of human beings. All other human religions will be consolidated into the worship of the beast. Either one will follow God or follow Satan. Those who follow Satan will suffer Satan's fate; eternal punishment in the lake of fire. It is as if John is saying through the three angels, this is your final warning!

14:14-16 - This is another difficult passage to interpret because of the details and the identity of the "son of man" seated upon the white cloud. The cloud is white not a dark thunderhead, which implies holiness and grace not holiness and judgment. The one seated on the cloud was "like a son of man", or he looked like a man. John describes the Lord Jesus that way in his original vision in 1:13. Plus, Son of Man was Jesus favorite title for himself, including 12 times in the Gospel of John alone. The title is so significant it leads me to believe that John is referring to the Lord Jesus here. Acts 1 says he will come with the clouds of heaven when he returns. The difficulty with that identity here is the "son of man" receives a command from an angel who comes out of the temple in heaven. Why is the Lord Jesus taking a command from an angel? And why if he is Jesus does he not know when the time for the reaping of the earth has come?

However, in Mark 13 and Matthew 24 Jesus says the Son of Man will come with the clouds of heaven in great power and glory and gather his elect from the four winds of the earth. The time he says no one but the Father knows, including himself, is the time of both his coming AND the gathering of his people. Angels in Revelation are often intermediaries for God and communicate his messages. The other alternative is this is some kind of powerful angel. If it is an angel why does John describe him as a son of man wearing a crown? I think Son of Man is too important a title for this to be an angel. Despite the difficulties in seeing "the son of man" as the Lord Jesus it still makes the most sense of the text.

Angels often wear crowns in Revelation such as the 24 elders. The word for crown here literally means wreath like a victor's wreath in the games. A golden crown or wreath was what Caesar wore to represent his power and authority. The rider of the white horse in Revelation 7 wore a golden crown or wreath. The Lord Jesus at his return in Revelation 19 wears many diadems which is a different Greek word for crown than the word for wreath translated here in 14:14.

Another difficulty with this passage is determining exactly what the sickle in the hand of the Son of Man represents. A sickle was used to harvest the grain by cutting it and getting it ready for the threshing floor where the wheat and the chaff were separated. The Son of Man is told the time for the harvest of the earth has come so he swings his sickle over the earth and the
earth was harvested. Is this an action of judgment similar to gathering the clusters of grapes for the wrath of God in 14:17-20 or is this a positive image of the gathering or harvesting of God's people? Jesus told his disciples in John 4 that the fields were ripe for harvest and were even now being reaped. Jesus uses the harvest as a metaphor for evangelism. In the parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13 the Son of Man sends his angels to gather his people at the end of the age. The angels will separate those who are evil from the righteous among those who claim to be his people. Jesus uses the image of the harvest to describe that ingathering.

Some have tried to relate the Son of Man harvesting the earth as a mid-Tribulation rapture. That is possible but it seems like a stretch to interpret the passage this way. The details are too sketchy. I think a more likely interpretation is the two "harvests" are contrasting the gathering of God's people from all over the world and the gathering of the grapes of the wrath of God for his judgment because the seven bowls of God's wrath are about to be unleashed upon those who dwell upon the earth and who worship the beast. Like much of chapter 14 John contrasts what happens to God's people right before Jesus' return and what happens to those who oppose him and worship the beast.

14:17-20 - John sees yet another angel emerging from God's temple in heaven where God's throne is. See the notes on Revelation 11:15-19 for a further explanation of the relationship between God's temple and God's throne in Revelation. He too has a sharp sickle used to harvest grain similar to the one the Lord Jesus had when he gathered his people. A different angel whom John says has charge of the fire comes from the altar and calls out in a loud voice to the angel with the sickle.

The altar is probably the altar of incense before the Holy of Holies inside the temple rather than the altar of sacrifice in front of the temple. The word in Greek can refer to both altars but in the context of Revelation "the altar" is consistently the altar of incense because the Lord Jesus, the Lamb, has been sacrificed on the cross once and for all for human sin so there is no more need for the altar of sacrifice. In 8:3 when the seventh seal is broken after the silence in heaven an angel takes a golden censer and fills it with fire from the altar and hurls it at the earth. That altar is named the golden altar before the throne which identifies it as the altar of incense. It is related to the prayers of the saints. That is probably the case here in chapter 14 as well. When John says this angel has charge of "the fire" he is referring to the fire on the altar and implying the angel was charged with keeping the fire burning on the altar and servicing it. The angel is not in charge of all fire on the earth.

The angel over the fire on the altar commands the angel with the sickle to put in his sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine because the grapes are ripe. John uses the Greek word for send which is translated "take" both here in 14:18 and in 14:15 with the Lord Jesus using his sickle to gather his people. It is a curious word to use as it implies a sending forth or a commission to go rather than the idea of taking up. The word is related to the word for apostle, one sent forth. The NLT and NRSV translate the word, "use your sickle". The ESV reads "put in." The other curious detail about the fire angel's command is the angel with the sickle is to use it to gather the grape clusters. One did not use a sickle to harvest the grapes. One used a knife to cut the grape clusters off the vines and not a sickle. The sickle would have been too crude an instrument to use in a vineyard because one could not swing it like one did harvesting grain. John may be using the sickle here as a literary device in his vision to balance the two "harvests", that of God's people and that of the grapes of God's wrath.
The angel swings his sickle and the grapes of wrath are gathered from the earth's vine. This symbolizes the time is "ripe" for God's final wrath to be poured out on a rebellious humanity. God's wrath is symbolized here by the grapes of wrath and in chapters 15-16 by the seven bowls of wrath. Once the grapes were harvested the angel with the sickle threw them into the "great winepress of God's wrath." God's winepress is trampled outside the city and blood not wine flowed out of the press. The blood was as high as a horse's bridle and flowed that way for 1600 stadia, or about 180 miles. If one literally travels 180 miles in each direction from Jerusalem, north one would reach Damascus; south Ezion Geber on the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea; west one would be out in the Mediterranean Sea or slightly southeast one would be near the Wadi of Egypt and the western border of the Promisedland; east one would be deep into the Syrian Desert far past Jordan. In other words the blood will flow all over Israel!! It is symbolic of not only the terrible nature of God's judgment upon the nations but the huge number of pagan peoples who will come to attack God's people in Jerusalem.

The image for the winepress of God's wrath John uses here is borrowed from Joel 3:12-13. Joel sees the nations gathered in the Valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem ready to attack the city. They are outside the city walls just as John notes in 14:20. God says in Joel 3:13: "Swing the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes for the winepress is full and the vats overflow - so great is their wickedness." He is referring to the wickedness of the nations that have come to attack Jerusalem that God will judge. The image depicts the final battle between the nations and God's people before the walls of Jerusalem. There God will judge the wicked and pagan nations of the world. The image of the winepress is related to God's wrath over sin. John uses that image here in Revelation 14. This prophecy of the angel harvesting the grapes of God's wrath prefigures the 6th bowl of wrath and the Battle of Armageddon in chapter 16. In Revelation 19:15 John says the Lord Jesus treads the winepress "of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" when he returns. He will slay the godless nations who oppose him with the sword of his mouth, meaning the Word of God.

John gives us two pictures in the final two paragraphs of chapter 14 that contrast the fate of God's people and the world which follows the beast. Both use the image of the sickle and the harvest. God's people are "harvested" by the Lord Jesus and gathered to him. The nations are subject to the final wrath of God pictured in the harvest of the grapes of wrath. These two pictures pre-figure the final chapters of Revelation which contain the seven bowls of wrath, the judgment of Babylon, the wedding feast of the Lamb, the return of the Lord Jesus and the defeat of Satan, the beast and all God's enemies. The final interlude is now almost finished and John is ready to draw his visions to their climax in chapters 15-22.

Chapter 15:

15:1-4 - John sees "another great and marvelous sign in heaven." He uses similar language in chapter 12 in the vision of the woman and the dragon. That marked the beginning of the Great Interlude contrasting God's people with those who follow the beast. This "marvelous sign" sets off the seven last plagues or bowls of wrath. John is probably using the phrase as a literary device to show this is the beginning of the final visions that are separate from the interlude and its visions.

The word "sign" is significant in John's writings. He uses it frequently in his gospel to describe Jesus' miracles that verify or testify to who he is as Messiah and Son of God. In fact John describes seven miracles that verify Jesus as Messiah and Lord in his gospel. Even though the "sign" here might be a literary device to transition from one major vision to another one
cannot discount that John uses this very significant word to describe the vision in *chapter 12* and the vision at the beginning of *chapter 15*. The signs point to God's sovereignty over history and the completion of his plan for his Kingdom and his people.

The "sign" John sees are the seven angels with the seven last plagues of God. They are the last *because with them God's wrath is completed.* John says the seven plagues are the last plagues or the final plagues. There are no more to follow after these seven. The word he uses for completed means to finish or complete. Yet how is the wrath of God finished with these plagues? What is the lake of fire representing hell in *Revelation 20*? Is that not an expression of the wrath of God against sin and rebellion? I think the distinction lies in the purpose of the plagues. These are the last judgments God sends upon the earth to punish those who worship Satan and the beast. But they also have the purpose of moving people toward repentance. There is still the possibility however small during these plagues that someone may turn from the worship of the beast and follow the Lord Jesus. Once the judgment comes at the Great White Throne in *Revelation 20* there is no more possibility for repentance left. God's judgment confirms people's choice for him or against him. The lake of fire becomes the place of punishment for those who reject God. The last plagues are judgments to repentance. The lake of fire is judgment to punishment. The last plagues are the most severe yet in *Revelation* because those who are left alive when they come are the most rebellious and most sinful people of all. They are the most unlikely to repent. Therefore they both hold out the possibility of repentance and confirm a person in their sin. There will be no doubt of a person’s choice. At the final judgment in *Revelation 20* God declares a person's eternal destiny according to their deeds and their choice for him or against him.

John sees a sea of glass mixed with fire in heaven and standing beside the sea those who had been victorious over the beast, his image and his number. The sea of glass is probably the same as in *chapter 4*. There it is before the throne of God the Creator. See the notes on *chapter 4* for more details. That means that the saints who have been victorious over the beast are standing around God's throne in heaven. John does not specifically say these saints have been martyred but that is a distinct possibility. Some scholars use this scene as justification for a mid-Tribulation rapture of God's people. They interpret John's visions to mean that there are no more of God's people left upon the earth when the seven last plagues are unleashed. That is a possibility but is by no means certain. It is more likely these are saints who have been martyred by the beast for defying him and refusing his mark. The word the NIV translates victorious is the same word meaning to conquer John uses consistently in *Revelation*. It means to overcome, prevail or be victorious. John uses it as an expression of promise to those who persevere and are faithful to the Lord Jesus. The NIV translates the phrase "*those who had been victorious*" implying a past event. They have conquered. But in Greek the participle is actually present. A more literal translation would read: "*those who are being victorious.*" Is John saying God's people who resist the beast are symbolically in heaven with the Lord Jesus already; their future destiny secure? Or is he saying these are the martyrs who have chosen death rather than deny the Lord Jesus? There is no conclusive answer to these questions. The most likely answer seems to be these are martyrs who have died during the beast's three and one half year reign because they refused to worship the beast and receive his mark. They are in heaven singing before their Creator and Savior because they were marked and sealed with the mark of the Lamb.

The saints around God's throne hold harps in their hands given them by God. Harps are instruments of praise and they were used frequently in the temple worship to provide musical accompaniment to the singing of God's praises. At the beginning of *chapter 14* John sees the
144,000 singing praise to God and the Lamb and the singing sounded like harps. Here he sees many of the saints around God's throne and they are given harps to play and with which to sing. In Revelation 5 the twenty-four elders have harps in their hands when they fall down before the Lamb in praise. This is another of those places from which comes the popular image of God's people being like angels in heaven playing harps.

John tells us the saints in heaven sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. In chapter 14 the 144,000 sing a new song. In chapter 5 the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders sing a new song of praise to the Lamb. These songs are all related. Here in chapter 15 the saints sing the song of Moses God's servant and of the Lamb who is the fulfillment of Moses and the Old Testament. In Exodus 15 Moses sings a song of praise to God for defeating the Egyptians at the Red Sea. In Deuteronomy 32 he sings another song of praise to God outlining who God is and what he has done for Israel. It is also a song laying out the conditions of God's covenant with Israel and what happens if they obey or disobey the Lord. The song of the Lamb could be from Revelation 5 where the four living creatures and twenty-four elders praise the Lamb as worthy to take the scroll of God's plan and break its seals because he sacrificed himself so that he could create a people from every nation. These are the passages that specifically relate to the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

The actual song the saints sing is strung together from quotes from the Psalms and the prophets. The first line, "Great and marvelous are your deeds" is from Psalm 111:2. "Just and true are your ways" repeats Psalm 145:17. "Who will not fear you, O Lord" is taken from Jeremiah 10:7. "And bring glory to your name" quotes a line from Psalm 86:9. "For you alone are holy" reflects Isaiah 40:25. The line, "all nations will come" refers to Psalm 86:9 again. The final line of the song, "for your righteous acts have been revealed" is a combination of language in Psalm 71:15 and of the song of the twenty-four elders in Revelation 11 when the seventh trumpet is blown. Why all the elaborate quotations? John is showing us that God's final judgments upon a rebellious humanity in the seven bowls are fulfillment of all he has said in his Word. His saints get to observe God fulfilling his promises through his prophets in the bowl judgments and the coming of our Lord Jesus.

The song of Moses and the Lamb declares that the nations will come and worship the Lord who alone is worthy of worship. Parts of Revelation declare that the nations are all godless and wicked and follow Satan and the beast. Yet here the saints sing that the nations will come and worship the Lord. In John's vision of the new heaven and the new earth in chapters 21-22 the kings of the earth bring their wealth and glory into the New Jerusalem. The tree of life which grows down the street at the center of the city beside the river of the water of life is for the healing of the nations. These images are in sharp contrast to the rest of John's visions in Revelation. They hint at the fact that something of human culture and the nations of the world will be saved by God. Are the nations simply the Gentile peoples who follow the Lord Jesus? On one level that has to be the case because no one who does not know the Lord will be in the New Jerusalem. See Revelation 21:26-27. Yet John hints at something deeper here as well. God's redemption of humanity will be more than just individuals who make up a multitude. He will also redeem and preserve all that is good and wonderful in human culture. Nothing that is noble, beautiful, honorable and pure will be lost!

15:5-8 - John sees the temple of heaven opened. He describes it as the tabernacle of the Testimony. John uses the names of both structures in ancient Israel that were the center of worship for God's people. First was the tabernacle, the tent at which the Israelites worshipped the
Lord in the desert and then in Canaan up until the temple of Solomon was built. It is sometimes referred to as the tent of witness. It is specifically called the tabernacle of the testimony in Exodus 38 and Numbers 1. Solomon then built the temple, a permanent structure which replaced the tent or tabernacle during his reign around 950 BC. Hebrews speaks of a heavenly counterpart of the earthly temple or tabernacle in Hebrews 9:23-28. We have already seen the relationship between the temple in heaven and God's throne in heaven. See the notes above on 11:15-19 for an expanded explanation of the relationship. I commented there about John's use of the temple, the ark and lightning, thunder and hail in tying together the seven trumpet judgments, the Great Interlude and the seven bowls. There is an intensification of the judgments from chapters 8-15. In chapter 11 at the end of the trumpet judgments the ark is seen in God's temple in heaven along with lightning and thunder. Here in chapter 15 the temple is opened and out come the seven angels with the seven bowls. Then in 15:8 the temple is so filled with smoke from God's glory that no one could enter it and the ark is hidden. John uses the images of the temple and the ark to tie together the seven bowls and seven trumpet judgments.

The temple is opened and out from the presence of God come the seven angels with the seven plagues. Are these the seven archangels of Jewish tradition? It is possible but John does not identify them as such. The implication is these angels are different than any others John has mentioned. They have a specific purpose from God; to dispense his final wrath upon the earth. They are dressed in shining linen or bright linen similar to a priest in the temple in the Old Testament. God's people are given bright linen garments to wear at the wedding feast of the Lamb in Revelation 19. The angels also have golden sashes around their waists. The Lord Jesus had the same kind of sash around his waist in John's opening vision of Christ in Revelation 1. The fact the angels are dressed in priest-like robes that are similar to the dress of God's people in heaven; they have a sash which is like the Lord Jesus' sash and they emerge out of God's temple show they are completely identified with God, his people and his purposes. The seven angels are carrying out God's plan for his world, including his wrath against human sin.

One of the four living creatures gives them seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God. Golden bowls earlier in Revelation 5 represented the prayers of the saints. John adds the description of God as the one who lives for ever and ever. He is the eternal one, the Creator. The four living creatures surround God's throne and come directly from his presence. The bowls filled with the wrath of God are not an angelic plan or angelic wrath. They are given to the seven angels directly from God. The angels are simply God's messengers to carry out his wrath upon the earth.

After the seven angels are given the bowls of wrath, the temple is filled with smoke from God's glory and power. No one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the angels were completed. Does that mean everyone, including the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders and the saints around God's throne had to flee from his presence? That could be the case although John may simply be writing symbolically here and did not mean to be taken absolutely literally. The image however is very similar to God's presence filling the tabernacle in Exodus 40 and Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 8. In those two incidents the presence of God was so powerful the priests could not go in to the tabernacle or the temple. His presence as symbolized in the smoke that filled the temple represents his holiness. In Exodus and 1 Kings the smoke of the glory of God represented his holy presence among his people and was seen as a good thing. The symbol here in Revelation 15 is clear and chilling. God has turned his face away from a sinful human race. The time for grace has passed. Now humanity will only experience his holy wrath against sin. Is there no chance for repentance left? From other passages in Scripture we would
say no. John shows us here however that the closer one gets to the final return of Christ the more unlikely sinful human beings will repent. Except for the followers of Jesus there are no human beings left who have not submitted their lives to Satan and the beast. It is also possible, though not certain, that God has removed his church in these final days of the reign of the beast. That would mean a so-called mid-Tribulation rapture. There are hints in these late chapters of Revelation that God has removed his church but no direct passage that states it. The viewpoint is therefore based on speculation and inference which is never solid ground on which to develop an interpretation and doctrine.

Chapter 16:
16:1-4 - John hears a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels to pour out their bowls of God's wrath on the earth. John also heard loud voices from heaven in chapters 9, 10 & 11 declaring God's purposes either to him directly or to an angel or to the earth itself. Here he hears a voice from the temple around God's throne telling the seven angels to pour out their bowls. Is the voice God's voice? It is impossible to know though it seems likely.

The seven bowls have similarities with the 10 plagues in Egypt and the seven trumpet judgments but they are also different. The most obvious difference between the trumpet and bowl judgments is whereas the trumpet judgments caused damage to a third of the sea, fresh water, etc., the bowl judgments bring complete destruction. All of the sea and the fresh water are destroyed and the darkness over the beast's kingdom is complete. If one directly compares the plagues in Egypt, the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments one sees the similarities and differences. The plagues in Egypt in order of their occurrence are as follows: Water to blood; frogs; gnats; flies; pestilence; boils; hail; locusts; darkness; and the death of the firstborn.

The seven trumpet judgments are: Hail, fire and blood; the mountain in the sea and a third of the sea to blood; the falling star Wormwood that turns a third of the fresh water bitter; darkness that strikes a third of the sun, moon and stars; the demonic locusts from the Abyss; the war from the Euphrates River that kills a third of mankind; silence in heaven and God's victory declared.

The seven bowls in order are: Sores on those who worship the beast; the sea turns to blood; all the fresh water turns to blood; scorching heat from the sun; darkness; the drying up of the Euphrates River and the four frog spirits that gather the nations for battle at Armageddon; the great earthquake and 100 pound hailstones.

The first angel pours out his bowl on the earth and ugly painful sores or boils break out on all those who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. This plague is selective like the plagues in Egypt. Those who worship the beast get the sores but if there are any of God's people marked with his Spirit left on the earth they do not. This plague is similar to the sixth plague in Egypt.

The second angel pours out his bowl on the sea and it is turned into blood. John says it was like the blood of a dead man, probably meaning clotted and thick. Every living thing in the sea died. All the plankton, fish, shellfish and sea mammals all died. Can you imagine the panic that would ensue in the world? All nations that depend upon fisheries to survive would now be threatened with starvation and death. God who is the Creator of the sea and all of nature unleashes havoc on the nature he created in order to punish wicked and sinful humanity. The sea is now cursed because of mankind's sin! God destroyed the earth and all the creatures of the land in the Flood during Noah's time in Genesis 6-9 because of the sin of the human race. Now he destroys all the creatures in the sea for the same reason! Paul says in Romans 8 the creation itself...
groans in anticipation of the revealing of the children of God at the resurrection because it has been subject to decay. Here is a part of that final subjection.

The third angel pours out his bowl on the fresh water, and all the springs and rivers become blood. This is an intensifying of the third trumpet judgment when the falling star Wormwood caused a third of the fresh water to turn bitter. Here like Aaron striking the Nile with Moses’ rod in Exodus 7 the rivers turn to blood. Unlike the plague in Egypt this is worldwide. Not only is the sea dead because of the polluted waters now all fresh water is polluted. Humanity only has days to live because people cannot survive without fresh water to drink beyond a few days’ time.

Clearly the seven bowls happen in a very short time because even if they are symbolic in nature the calamities they bring would ensure that people would not survive them for long. They are God’s final judgments toward repentance which will confirm God’s judgment upon a sinful human race is right and just.

16:5-7 - The angel in charge of the waters is an intriguing phrase. Literally in Greek it reads "the angel of the waters." It most likely refers to the angel who poured out the bowl on the fresh waters of the earth turning them to blood because of the immediate context. However, there is another possibility. In J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle Earth the angelic powers, or the Valar, each had power and supervision over an element or area of Middle Earth. One had the air, sky and birds; another had the sea and all sea creatures; another had the green forests and plants, etc. If one takes John literally here it appears a great angel has power or supervision over all the waters of the earth under God’s authority and is declaring that even though his particular charge has been affected and spoiled God is more than just in his actions and judgment upon the waters. That is how the NLT translates the phrase. The great difficulty with that interpretation is that there is nothing else in Scripture that corroborates that understanding. This view has some similarities however with later Jewish rabbinical teaching and speculation.

The angel of the waters declares a song or statement of praise to God. This "song" restates themes that have been declared already in Revelation. The justice of God's judgment was stated in the Song of Moses and the Lamb by the seven angels with the seven bowls in 15:3. God is named who was and who is in 11:17 in the song of the twenty-four elders at the blowing of the seventh trumpet. He is called the one who was and is and is to come in 1:4, 1:8 & 4:8. God is called holy in 15:4 and the Holy One of Israel was the prophet Isaiah’s favorite title for God in his prophecy. In 6:10 during the fifth seal the souls of the martyrs under the altar ask God how long before he judges the inhabitants of the earth and avenges their blood. Here in 16:5-6 the angel declares God has judged those who shed the blood of his prophets and saints by giving them blood to drink. The angel declares they are getting what they deserve!

John hears a voice from the altar respond to the angel. It affirms God's judgments. God is named the Lord God Almighty which is similar to God's self-identification in 1:8. The altar is probably the altar of incense before the throne of God in his temple in heaven. However, in 6:10 I argue that the altar under which the souls of the martyrs are kept in the fifth seal is probably not the altar of incense but the main altar of sacrifice before the temple. Most of the references to the altar in Revelation are to the altar of incense because there is no more need for sacrifices for sin because the Lamb has been slain and sin has been paid for. The voice is either angelic or a symbolic voice from the altar representing God's angels and saints. They affirm what God is doing is just and true. That restates what the seven angels sang about God’s judgments in 15:3. It is also the declaration of the great multitude in heaven in 19:2 after the judgment upon Babylon
in *chapters 17-18*. John is showing us God cannot act outside of his character so even these terrible judgments are in concert with his holiness and his righteousness. Those who reject God and follow and worship the beast are getting exactly what their deeds deserve!

**16:8-11** - The fourth angel pours out his bowl on the sun. John said the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. Literally the words read: *and it was given to scorch (or burn) people in fire*. The point is, at present God restrains the sun and governs it so that it does not produce too much heat and radiation. *Psalm 121:6* says the Lord protects us so that the sun will not harm us by day. Here that restraining work of God the Creator is withdrawn. It is as if the sun is unleashed and massive solar storms erupt from it raining down intense radiation and heat upon the people of the earth to the point where they are burned severely. The sun erupts with violent solar storms that are so severe they overcome the ozone layer's ability to protect us.

When people are burned by the sun's heat they do not give God glory or repent of their wickedness and idolatry. Instead they curse the name of God. Those who reject God and follow and worship the beast are getting exactly what their deeds deserve! **16:8-11** - The fourth angel pours out his bowl on the sun. John said the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. Literally the words read: *and it was given to scorch (or burn) people in fire*. The point is, at present God restrains the sun and governs it so that it does not produce too much heat and radiation. *Psalm 121:6* says the Lord protects us so that the sun will not harm us by day. Here that restraining work of God the Creator is withdrawn. It is as if the sun is unleashed and massive solar storms erupt from it raining down intense radiation and heat upon the people of the earth to the point where they are burned severely. The sun erupts with violent solar storms that are so severe they overcome the ozone layer's ability to protect us.

Are God's people present upon the earth during these final seven plagues? It is difficult to say. John hints that they are not, yet he never specifically says God has taken us out of the earth and the plagues and brought us to heaven. If God's people are on earth during these final plagues do they experience the plagues the way the rest of the world does? Once again John does not specifically say, however it is probable that they do not. During the seven trumpet judgments God's people were protected from the direct consequences of the judgments. It is probable that something similar is happening here in the seven bowl judgments. God protects his people just as he protected the children of Israel during the plagues in Egypt. It is partly that protection that leads to the persecution of Christians by the beast and his followers.

The fifth angel pours out his bowl on the throne of the beast and his kingdom. It is plunged into darkness. This is the opposite of too much light from the sun that sears and scorches people. Now there is too little light and people live in darkness. The ninth plague in Egypt in *Exodus 10* was darkness. The fourth trumpet in *Revelation 8* took away a third of the light from the sun, moon and stars. Here the darkness is total. The darkness can be seen as literal but it also has symbolic implications. Isaiah prophesied in *Isaiah 8* about Israel consulting mediums and spiritists trying to inquire of the dead. He said they have no light. They will roam the land hungry and distressed and will curse God. They will be thrust into utter darkness. In *Isaiah 13* he prophesies about the Day of the Lord when God judges the world for its evil and the sun will be darkened and the moon will not shine. God will punish the wicked and will humble them, putting an end to their pride and arrogance. Jesus refers to that prophecy in *Mark 13* during his sermon on the Mount of Olives concerning his return. All these themes John uses here in *Revelation 16*. God is judging the wicked in their pride. They have worshipped the beast, the ultimate occult leader and now live in utter darkness. God will humble them in their pride and break their arrogance. The darkness is one of the final plagues God sends in judgment upon the earth before the Lord Jesus returns.
John reports that people were in agony and cursed God because of their pains and sores. The words John uses here in v.11 for pains and sores are the same words he uses in v.2 for the first bowl of wrath. Painful sores were given to all of those who worshipped the beast and had taken his mark. John says in the fifth bowl the beast's throne and kingdom were plunged into darkness. That means the bowl judgments happen in rapid order and are close together. People still have the sores from the first bowl judgment when the fifth bowl judgment of darkness is poured out. They suffer from painful sores; the sea is dead; all fresh water is polluted; they have been scorched with intense heat and radiation from the sun and now they can't see anything because of the darkness. The effect is cumulative. They continue to curse God and refuse to repent. They will not submit to God. John implies that they know the plagues and judgments are coming from God. They experience the impotence of the beast to stop God's judgments and overcome them. They can see God the Creator is stronger than the beast and his image but they will not repent. Logic and reason cannot overcome human sin and the pride of a stubborn and wicked heart. By his just judgments God confirms people's decision to follow the beast and worship Satan instead of the Lord God Almighty. Yet even in pouring out his wrath on a sinful and rebellious human race God is motivated by his desire that all people would repent and turn to worship him who made them. As God said in Ezekiel 18 he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but desires that they would repent and turn back to God.

16:12-16 - The sixth angel pours out his bowl of God's wrath on the River Euphrates. It dried up the river to prepare the way for the kings of the east. In John's day the kings of the east are probably the Parthians who ruled Persia during John's lifetime and were enemies of Rome. Their empire stretched from the Indus River in the east to the Euphrates River in the west. In fact the Parthians had invaded and taken Israel and much of Syria right before Herod the Great became king of Judea in the late first century BC. Drying up the river opened the way for invasion. Cyrus the Great when he conquered Babylon dammed the Euphrates upstream of the city and dried it up in 539 BC. His soldiers gained entrance to the city through the river culverts that channeled the flow of the river through Babylon. The Euphrates was always a natural boundary in northern Syria that invading armies like the Assyrians and Babylonians had to cross to gain access to Syria, Lebanon and Israel. It was also the boundary of the Promiseland according to Deuteronomy 1 and Joshua 1. God withdraws his protection from his land to allow invaders from the east to gather against God's people and the Lord's Messiah, Jesus Christ.

John sees three evil spirits or demons come out of the mouths of the unholy trinity: the dragon or Satan, the beast and the false prophet. They go out and perform miraculous signs in order to deceive the kings of the whole world and gather them for battle against God and his people. How the armies of the nations can even gather as they experience all the bowl judgments John does not explain. The people of the world would rather believe the lies of Satan and follow his deception than believe the truth they can see; God is sending all these horrible plagues and they need to repent. They are so deceived and so steeped in their sin and rebellion they believe they can win against the Lord God! Rather than repent they turn all their pain and rage against God and his people.

John says they gather for battle on the "great day of God Almighty." The Old Testament prophets called that day "the Day of the Lord." The Day of the Lord was the day God had reserved to punish God's enemies and the enemies of his people Israel. It was a day of darkness, judgment and wrath. It was also a day of deliverance and salvation for God's people. God would fulfill his promises to bring his Messiah and fully establish his Kingdom on the earth. Messiah's
Kingdom would bring peace to his people and paradise conditions back to the earth. John portrays a similar picture in the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ in Revelation 20. The sixth bowl expresses the judgment side of the Day of the Lord. Isaiah 13 says the Lord is mustering an army for war against Babylon in the Day of the Lord. Amos 2 says the Day of the Lord will be a day of thick darkness and not light. Obadiah 1:15-16 says on the Day of the Lord all the nations that have conquered and oppressed Jerusalem will be destroyed. They will drink the punishment their deeds deserve when they come against Jerusalem. Zephaniah 1:14-16 says the Day of the Lord will be a day when God will punish the nations who opposed him and his people Israel. It will be a day of darkness and battle, a day when God in the fire of his jealousy for his people will consume the whole world. Zechariah 12 says the nations of the whole world will come against Jerusalem and surround it to destroy it. God however will destroy them. In Zechariah 14 God says he will gather all the nations to attack Jerusalem and half the city will be plundered until the Lord himself will return and fight for his people. He will come and stand on the Mount of Olives which will be split in two by a great earthquake. When the Lord comes there will be no night and day again and water will flow out from Jerusalem west to the Mediterranean and east to the Arabah. God will be king over the whole world and people will worship him alone.

John tells us in verse 15 that the kings of the world gathered their armies at a place in Hebrew called Armageddon or the hill of Megiddo. Megiddo today is a tell, or a hill which contains the ancient ruins of a city that once overlooked the Valley of Jezreel on the southern side of the valley. It was a strategic city that Solomon fortified to guard the valley. The valley itself stretches west to east from the Bay of Haifa on the Mediterranean down to the Sea of Galilee where one gained access to the Jordan River Valley and the King’s Highway on the Golan Heights. That highway was the ancient caravan route that traveled north from the Red Sea up the eastern side of the Arabah or Jordan Valley on the highlands to Damascus and Syria. An army would not have to cross any mountain passes to move from west to east across Israel when they used the Jezreel Valley.

Megiddo or the Jezreel Valley was also the site of several historic battles in Israel's history. In Judges 4 the armies of the northern tribes led by Deborah and Barak defeated the Canaanites of Hazor in the Jezreel Valley between Megiddo and Mt. Tabor. In 2 Kings 23 King Josiah was killed at Megiddo trying to stop Pharaoh Neco of Egypt from joining the Assyrians in northern Syria against the new power of Babylon. Napoleon supposedly said all the armies of the world could gather on the Plain of Jezreel. The prophecies of the Day of the Lord point to the final battle as taking place in and around Jerusalem. John says in verse 16 the armies of the nations gathered at Armageddon. He does not say they fight the battle at Megiddo. It is possible that the nations stage their armies in the Valley of Jezreel in order to prepare for an attack and siege against Jerusalem. That would fit both John's prophecy here in Revelation 16 and the prophecies of the final battle between the nations and God in the Day of the Lord prophecies of the Old Testament. See especially Zechariah 12 & 14.

Verse 15 is a brief interlude in the sixth bowl prophecy spoken to believers exhorting them to stay awake. This is not an angel speaking but appears to be the words of the Lord Jesus himself before his coming. He says he is coming like a thief. This reiterates his words in Mark 13 and Matthew 24. The warning to stay awake because he is coming suddenly and surprisingly like a thief expresses a tension in New Testament prophecy. On the one hand one sees passages in Matthew 24 and other places that say pay attention to the signs and understand that the Lord's return is near. On the other hand one sees passages like this one that state he is coming like a thief when one least expects it. This is reinforced by Jesus when he says in Mark 13 and Matthew
24 that no one knows the day or the hour of his coming, not even he himself! Only the Father knows the day. The antidote to being surprised is to stay awake; watch and pray. We are to be ready for his coming! This verse also counters the idea that God's people are not present when the bowl judgments are unleashed upon the earth to give one final chance for repentance to a rebellious world.

The difficulty in verse 15 is the statement about keeping one's clothes so that he may not go naked and be exposed. The Lord says we will be blessed if we stay awake and don't sleep. There are two possibilities for this image. The first is a person does not sleep in one's clothes but in a nightshirt or even naked. If the Lord comes in the night we will be woken without any clothes on and embarrassed. The other possibility is more obscure. When the temple was still standing the officer on duty in the temple was to make sure the temple guards were awake. If he found a guard asleep the guard would be beaten for a first offense. The 2nd time he was caught sleeping on duty his clothes would be taken from him and burned in order to humiliate him. It is possible John is referring to this practice although doubtful because he writes to mostly Gentile Christians in Asia Minor who would not have been familiar with the practices of the Jewish temple some twenty-five years earlier. The best image is probably the idea of sleeping with one's clothes on so you don’t get caught naked and be shamed. The spiritual meaning and application of the phrase is related to Paul's statements to put on the Lord Jesus Christ or to clothe ourselves with Christ as in Romans 13 and Colossians 3. Jesus warns us to be in fellowship with him and be about his business when he comes or else we will be caught doing something that is not pleasing to him and be shamed at his coming. He is telling believers he is coming soon and to be prepared. In context he is telling us not to be focused on the massing armies of the beast and the nations but upon his coming which is now immanent.

16:17-21 - The seventh angel pours out his bowl upon the air. There comes the great earthquake and the awful plague of hail. The hail can be related to the air but the earthquake is not. In ancient Greek thought there were four elements: earth, air, water and fire. The first angel pours out his bowl on the land, the earth. The second pours his bowl on the sea, and the third on the rivers and springs; the water. The fourth angel pours out his bowl on the sun and it scorches people with fire. The fifth and sixth angels pour out their bowls on the throne of the beast and his kingdom and the River Euphrates. Those two don't relate to the four elements but the seventh angel pours out his bowl into the air. All the elements are affected by God's wrath. The creation itself is subjected to the wrath of God in order to judge a rebellious human race because of our dominion over the earth. See Genesis 1.

When the seventh angel pours out his bowl John hears a loud voice coming out of the temple from the throne of God itself saying it is done. John directly relates the temple and God's throne here in verse 17. He reinforces the picture of the throne of God being in the midst of the temple of God in heaven. That is similar to the Old Testament idea that the earthly temple was the footstool of God's heavenly throne. The declaration from the throne, which is probably from God himself, is similar to Jesus' cry on the cross in John 19, "It is finished!" The Greek words are different but the meanings are related. The word here in verse 17 literally means to be or become. The verb is a perfect active indicative, meaning a past action whose effects continue on into the present. In context it means to come about, originate or occur. The literal sense of the word and the verb form John uses imply a decree of God made in the past that is now being accomplished and fulfilled. It is possible John is referring to one of the prophecies in the Old Testament that God is now bringing to fruition. Zechariah 14 describes a great earthquake when...
the Messiah comes on the Mount of Olives that splits the mountain in two and divides Jerusalem. John may have Zechariah in mind when he describes the great earthquake that shakes the world in verse 18.

John says when the voice declared it is done there came flashes of lightning and peals of thunder and a severe earthquake, the likes of which had never occurred before in history. In chapter 6 at the breaking of the sixth seal there was a tremendous earthquake. John reports, "every mountain and island was removed from its place." After the seventh seal is broken in chapter 8 before the sounding of the seven trumpet judgments an angel takes a golden censor from the altar, fills it with fire and hurls it at the earth. There occurs lightning and thunder and a great earthquake. That scene is similar to Mount Sinai in Exodus 19 when Moses went up on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments. John repeats and intensifies those images in the seventh bowl judgment. He says the earthquake is greater than any earthquake in history since human beings have been on the earth. In verse 18 he says "every island fled away and the mountains could not be found." That is obviously poetic and symbolic language but it describes an earthquake for which we have no frame of reference. If every mountain collapsed and every island moved or sunk into the ocean who would be left alive in the world in the aftermath of such a quake? The word for flee away in context means to vanish. This language is even more severe than John's description of the great quake at the breaking of the sixth seal in chapter 6.

The immediate consequences of such a quake John makes known to us in verse 19. He says the great city was split into three parts. There are two possibilities for what he means by the great city. The first is Jerusalem. John used that description for Jerusalem in chapter 11 when he described the two witnesses and their deaths. Their dead bodies were left in the street of the "great city" which he identifies as Jerusalem. The other possibility is Rome or Babylon the Great. John will identify Babylon the Great as Rome in chapter 17. He refers to Babylon or Rome here in 16:19 in the same verse where he says the great city split into three parts. In context Babylon makes sense for the identity of the great city. John calls Babylon or Rome by the same title of great city in 17:18. Given the context I think he is referring to Rome in chapter 16 and not Jerusalem. John says the earthquake is God's judgment upon Babylon the Great and is the result of his wrath upon her.

The earthquake causes all the cities of the nations to collapse. Imagine every city all over the world in ruin! Every island is gone and every mountain leveled. This is apocalyptic language of the most severe kind! The earthquake splits Rome into three parts it is so severe. On top of all of that there comes a plague of hail more terrible than the one that struck Egypt in Exodus 9. The hailstones weigh a talent or about 100 pounds each! They fell upon the survivors of the earthquake. The hail was so severe people cursed God because of it. Hail of any kind comes from severe thunderstorms so not only is there hail of unprecedented size but the thunderstorms that spawned them must have also been massive. It is unclear whether the hail falls on the whole earth or it is concentrated in Babylon-Rome. The result however is clear. People curse God. They know it is God who sends the hail yet they curse him and do not repent. John does not even add that line as in 16:9 & 16:11. There is no repentance left for human beings and they have refused to repent even if they could. All that is left is God's final judgment and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Times up!

British scholar William Barclay wrote, "The most terrible situation in life is when Almighty God is powerless to gain an entry into the citadel of the human heart, for God has given men the terrible responsibility of being able to lock their hearts against him." John tells us those who have followed the beast and are left alive after all the bowl judgments have done just
that, locked their hearts against God and cursed him rather than worship him. Their eternal fate is now sealed.

Chapter 17:

17:1-2 - One of the seven angels with the seven bowls comes to John and tells him he will show John the punishment or judgment of the great prostitute, Babylon. He says she is seated on many waters. The beast of Revelation 13 emerges from the sea. In 17:15 the angel explains to John that many waters are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. In other words the many waters are the Gentile nations of the world who serve the beast and worship its image. They are opposed to God the Creator. The angel says the kings of the earth have committed adultery with the great prostitute and the inhabitants of the earth, the many waters, have become intoxicated or drunk with the wine of her adulteries. Many prophets of the Old Testament accused Israel of committing adultery when they worshipped and served pagan idols. See Jeremiah 31. Here the angel uses the metaphor to describe the idolatry of the pagan world without God. Chapter 18 details how the worship of idols, which is really the worship of demons (see 1 Corinthians 10), was combined with the world economy dominated by Rome to rule the world and seduce the nations to oppose God.

Chapters 17-19 present difficulties in trying to understand the chronology of the events described in these chapters. Chapter 17 is a description of the fall of Babylon. Chapter 18 is a lament by the world of Babylon's or Rome's fall. Chapter 19 outlines the wedding supper of the Lamb and the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. What comes when? If one looks at the literary outline of the three chapters a pattern emerges. Rather than thinking Greek and seeing John's narrative and vision as precisely chronological, if one thinks Hebrew a different picture emerges. The form of these chapters is: narrative; poetry-lament; poetry-rejoicing, narrative. John is continuing to contrast the fate of the beast and those who follow him with God's people and those who follow the Lord Jesus just as he has from chapter 12 onward. If one looks at these three chapters from a relational perspective there is a stark contrast. Notice how Babylon is destroyed and the relationship the kings and peoples of the earth have with her. John describes a love-hate relationship. Contrast that with the relationship the Lord Jesus has with his people! God's people, his church, are his bride! He loves her and she loves him! The two images could not be more different.

17:3-6 - John reports that the angel carried him away in the Spirit into a desert or wilderness. In Revelation 12 John sees the vision of the woman with twelve crowns, Israel, protected by God in a place in the wilderness. Here God takes John out to the wilderness to show him God's judgment on the woman Babylon. He is transported into the desert in his vision much like Ezekiel was transported in Ezekiel 37 to receive the prophecy of the valley filled with dry bones. The Greek word for wilderness can mean lonely or desolate place and is often used in the gospels to describe the places Jesus would go to pray. It means somewhere uninhabited and uncultivated. However, it is also used to describe the Wilderness of Judea where Jesus was tempted. That is a narrow strip between the Judean Mountains and the Dead Sea. It is very dry and desolate because it is in the rainshadow of the mountains. Around the Dead Sea it is so desolate that very little grows there at all. The word also describes the Arabah, the valley south of the Dead Sea that runs all the way to the Gulf of Aqabah at Elath. There is another possibility. In Jeremiah 50:12-13 the prophet gives a picture of God's judgment on Babylon and says: Your mother will be greatly ashamed, she who gave you birth will be disgraced. She will be the least
of the nations – a wilderness, a dry land, a desert. Because of the Lord’s anger she will not be inhabited but will be completely desolate. All who pass Babylon will be horrified and scoff because of all her wounds. John might be borrowing Jeremiah’s picture of Babylon becoming a wilderness because of God’s judgment upon her for all her sins. The difference between Jeremiah’s vision and John’s is that Jeremiah is talking about the Babylon of Mesopotamia; John is speaking of the Babylon which is also Rome.

The woman is seated on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns. The beast of Revelation 13 that emerges from the sea also has seven heads and ten horns. The dragon or Satan John reveals in Revelation 12 has seven heads and ten horns. The difference is the dragon has seven crowns on his heads, one for each head, and the beast or antichrist has ten crowns on his ten horns. They are related and the beast or antichrist is empowered by the dragon who lends it his power. The scarlet beast of verse 3 sounds like the beast of Revelation 13. However, in verses 9-14, John describes the seven heads as seven hills on which the woman sits. That is almost certainly a reference to Rome that was said to be built on seven hills. Then John says the seven heads also represent seven kings and the ten horns represent ten kings. It appears John is giving a double description of the scarlet beast. It is Rome and it is also the antichrist of Revelation 13. That means the beast rules Rome or some future manifestation of the Roman Empire. In John's day the Emperor Domitian ruled as a living god and demanded to be worshipped as such. The beast will also demand to be worshipped as God.

The woman is not the antichrist or a ruling power. She is dressed in jewels and the colors of royalty and power in Rome, purple and scarlet. She holds in her hand a cup filled with abominable things, meaning her idolatry and wealth which has corrupted the world and its people. In verse 18 John says the woman is the great city that rules over the world; which is Rome. The woman represents Rome not as a political and military power but as an economic and religious or social power. That becomes clearer in the lament in chapter 18 over Babylon's fall. Once again we are reminded that apocalyptic visions are fluid and John can refer to the beast with seven heads as Rome and the woman as Rome in the same vision.

The woman has a title written on her forehead: "Mystery Babylon the Great, Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth." Mystery refers to that which is revealed by God alone and cannot be understood apart from his revelation. It does not refer to a puzzle to be solved by human ingenuity. The gospel is often called a mystery in Paul's writings. See Ephesians 1 & Romans 16. In Jeremiah 50-52 the prophet outlines God's judgment against Babylon for destroying God's city, Jerusalem, and taking his people into exile. Even though God used the Babylonians to execute his judgment upon Judah God still held them accountable for their conquest and murder of his people. In Jeremiah 51:7& ff. God says Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord's hand and she made the whole world drunk on her wine. The nations drank from her and went mad but she will suddenly fall and people everywhere will wail for her. John uses that same image here in Revelation 17 to describe Babylon or Rome. Peter in 1 Peter 5 greets the churches in Asia Minor from "Babylon" which is almost certainly Rome. Babylon became a byword in Scripture for godless culture opposed to God and his people. It was the pagan culture of the world fueled by idolatry and wickedness; full of sexual immorality and greed, built upon human slavery. Even though Rome had many impressive accomplishments at its heart it was wicked and sinful, oppressing people and using them for its own profit. God calls Rome the mother of prostitutes who entices the nations to sin and corrupts them. In God's view Rome or Babylon is an abomination. That word means anything that arouses God's wrath and his rejection.
and is most often connected with idolatry and its practices. It means anything that is detestable to him.

John reports that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, those who bore the testimony of Jesus. In other words, the woman or Rome persecuted God's people and put many of them to death. This was the crisis of faith that John's readers were experiencing under Domitian that would intensify in the second century under Trajan and the other emperors who persecuted the church. It is what many Christians today experience, especially in the Middle East. In chapter 6 in the fifth seal the souls of the martyrs under the altar cry out to God and ask how long before he avenges their deaths. Here in chapters 17-18 God carries out his just wrath and vengeance on the Roman culture and state that has persecuted his people. Babylon represents Rome and all human powers and cultures that follow in its footsteps that oppose God and persecute and murder his people. Babylon is completely opposed to God! John shows us her day of reckoning will come and she will fall. God will bring her down never to rise again and his people will be vindicated! John is describing the Day of the Lord to which the Old Testament prophets looked forward.

17:6-8 - When John sees the woman he is astonished or amazed. The angel asks him why he is so amazed. He will explain the mystery to John of the woman and the beast upon which she rides, the beast with seven heads and ten horns. Beginning in verse 8 and all the way through verse 18 the angel outlines to John who the beast is and who the woman is. He explains the seven heads and ten horns in greater detail along with the origin of the beast. The scarlet beast here in chapter 17 is almost certainly the beast out of the sea in chapter 13 and following; in other words, the antichrist. The angel's more detailed explanation here helps clarify John's vision of the beast in chapter 13.

The scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns upon which the woman Babylon is seated is a completely Satanic-demonic creature. It is scarlet or red in color just like the dragon of chapter 12. While the word for scarlet is not the same as the word for red describing the dragon in chapter 12 the similarities are not coincidental. The beast is not the dragon but it resembles Satan in character and power. In chapter 13 John sees the beast emerge from the sea that is from among the nations which is similar to the many waters of 17:1 upon which the woman is seated. The beast in chapter 13 from a human viewpoint comes from the Gentile nations of the world. Here in chapter 17 the angel reveals the beast's true origin. He comes from the Abyss, the Bottomless Pit, the home or prison of the demons. See Revelation 9 and the fifth trumpet for more details about the Abyss. Also note that the Abyss is the prison of Satan during the thousand year reign of the Lord Jesus upon the earth in Revelation 20. This reinforces the fact that the beast is wholly Satanic in origin and character and anything it does that appears good or noble is only a deception. Its real nature is completely evil and opposed to God and his Kingdom.

The angel tells John that the beast "once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction." This is a difficult and cryptic phrase but it appears that the beast tries to mimic the power and being of God. In Revelation 1 God the Creator is described as the one who is, who was and who is to come. That is John's way of expressing the name of God, I AM or Yahweh in Hebrew. In 13:3 John tells us one of the heads of the beast appeared to have a fatal wound but it had been healed and the whole world marveled over the beast and followed it. In my notes on 13:16-18, I mention a legend current in Rome in John's day of Nero revived or come back from the dead. The legend stated the mad Emperor Nero would be revived and come
back to rule Rome again in his insanity. It is possible John is using that myth or legend here and is why he says the beast was, now is not and will come again. Nero was, now is not, but he is coming up out of the Abyss to rule again. That is speculation but it would fit the situation of the Christians in Asia Minor to whom John writes. Nero was the first emperor to persecute Christians and kill them, including the apostles Peter and Paul. Domitian was bad enough but John uses an image that is even worse for the beast, the insane and evil Emperor Nero come back from the dead! The ultimate meaning of the angel's description of the beast in verse 8 may have nothing to do with Nero revived. It may simply be a way of describing Satan's deception to make the nations believe that the beast is like Jesus, come back from the dead and resurrected. It is the counterfeit Christ!

The angel adds that the people of the earth whose names are not written in the Book of Life will be astonished by the beast and will believe its false resurrection and Satan's deception. How can they be so deceived? Paul says in Romans 1 when people abandon the worship of God they become fools and their minds are darkened. They end up believing things that are lies because they refuse to worship God. God in his justice hands them over to their delusions. This is what will happen to the people of the world when they follow the beast.

They will follow after the beast because they are not written in God's book nor are they sealed with God's seal and the name of the Lamb. John tells us that those whose names are written in the Book of Life, that is Christ-followers, were written there before the creation of the world. This is an almost exact repeat of language John uses in 13:8 in his first description of the antichrist. The people of the world who were not written in the Lamb's Book of Life from before the foundation of the world will receive the mark of the beast and follow and worship it. The phrase before the creation or foundation of the world expresses the idea of God's election and choice of his people from the dawn of creation long before they chose him. Jesus and the apostles use this language frequently throughout the New Testament. See Matthew 25, Luke 11, Ephesians 1, Hebrews 4, and 1 Peter 1. As John says in 1 John 4:19: we love because he first loved us. God sovereignly chose us before he created us and predestined us to know and love him. We for our part accept his choice and choose him in return. God is free to choose us and we are free to choose him. Both ideas must be held in tension to fully grasp the New Testament understanding of election. John is trying here to encourage and assure believers that their salvation is secure in the Lord Jesus no matter what happens to them here on earth. The whole world may follow the beast and be deceived and believers may even face death but their future in heaven is certain through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!

17:9-11 - The angel tells John that understanding the woman and the beast calls for a mind with wisdom. John was told the same thing in 13:18 when he was given the number of the beast and its name, 666.

The angel tells John the seven heads of the scarlet beast are seven hills or mountains on which the woman sits. The word the NIV translates hill can mean mountain or hill. The ESV translates it mountains. Rome was said to have been built upon seven hills and this is almost certainly a reference to Rome. John is being told the great harlot Babylon sits upon Rome. That means Rome is Babylon revived, not necessarily in territory but in its godless culture. It is the personification of pagan culture that resists and opposes God the Creator and that seduces the greed of humankind with its wealth and trade. This is more clearly seen in the lament for Babylon's fall in chapter 18.
Earlier in the New Testament Paul in his letters and in the Book of Acts was proud of his Roman citizenship and used it to his advantage. He told the Roman Church to obey the emperor in Romans 13 because the Roman government was instituted by God and derived its authority from God. However here in Revelation 17 John equates Rome with Babylon, the foundation and ally of the beast itself. There is nothing noble or good in Babylon-Rome. It is totally opposed to God and his purposes. Those who worship the beast and receive its mark are part of Babylon-Rome. In chapter 18 John will hear God’s call to his people to come out of Babylon and separate themselves from it altogether! The contrast between the earlier New Testament and this last book in the New Testament is extraordinary!

The seven heads are the seven hills of Rome but then John is told they also represent seven kings! There is a double meaning to the symbol. In chapters 12-13 both the dragon and the beast have seven heads which represents the fact that the beast comes from Satan or is Satan personified upon the earth. Now we are told the seven heads represent the seven hills of Rome and seven kings, presumably of Rome as well. The symbolism of the seven heads of the beast shows us how fluid apocalyptic imagery often is.

John is told five of the seven kings have fallen or have perished. The word is a synonym for died in this context. One king is, or now rules and one is yet to come. This is a very difficult phrase to interpret. Many scholars try and synchronize the Roman emperors with the seven kings. The problem is the numbers don’t match up just like the seventy weeks prophecy of Daniel 9. See Appendix One at the end of this commentary for more a more detailed interpretation of Daniel 9. The Roman emperors up to Domitian were: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, the three short term emperors after Nero, then Vespasian, Titus and Domitian. If one counts the three that ruled for only a few months at a time one gets 12. If one ignores the three one gets nine emperors counting Domitian. As in the prophecy of Daniel 9 I conclude the number is symbolic and not literal. The only way it works literally is to take the emperors after the death of Nero who was the last of the Julio-Claudian dynasty that began the reign of the Caesars. Then one would have the three short-term emperors, Galba, Otho and Vitellius which were followed by the Flavian dynasty of Vespasian and his son Titus. These five had died when John wrote Revelation. Domitian is the current emperor, the one who is. The one who is to come would be Nerva who succeeded Domitian who was assassinated, or a prophetic way of saying someone else who would succeed Domitian when he was killed. This is not a very satisfactory explanation if one is to take John literally. I must conclude the seven kings are symbolic of Roman kings or emperors.

The seventh king who is yet to come will only remain a little while, meaning his reign will be short. John is told in v.11 that the beast who once was, and now is not is an eighth king who belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. This is also a very difficult phrase to interpret. One would think that the seventh king would be the beast or the antichrist who will only reign for a short time. In chapter 13 we are told the beast will reign for 42 months or three and one half years. However, John says the beast is separate from the seven kings but is an eighth king who belongs to the seven. Who the seventh king is therefore is not clear. What then does John mean by the seven kings? I think the angel is telling John that Rome-Babylon as a power will continue to rule the world as it has in the earlier first century. There will however come an end to its power. Then in the last days before the coming of the Lord Jesus the beast will arise, the antichrist, who will belong to Rome-Babylon and will rule as the emperors once did with absolute power. Is John telling us there will be a literally revived Roman Empire with an emperor? Perhaps, or he may be saying that the beast will rule over the known world of John's
day in the same way as the Emperor Domitian ruled over it. The beast will take all political and religious power unto himself and demand to be worshipped and served as a god. He will be a tyrant just like the other Roman emperors had been, only he will be worse because he will be Satan personified.

The seven heads represent both Roman culture and economic power and like the Roman emperors, also represent the political and military power of Rome. Babylon-Rome will rule the known world. One can take that two ways. One can say the beast will rule over the Mediterranean world of John's day just as Domitian did or extrapolate John's writing and say the beast will rule the entire modern world of our understanding, including all of Asia and the Americas. I am not sure one can conclude that as John consistently has an Israel-centric view of the world. Viewing the antichrist as ruling over the Roman-Mediterranean world does solve certain problems concerning Asia and the United States. There is no clear solution however as to what John means. Therefore we need to be cautious when interpreting *chapter 17* and the meaning of the seven kings!

**17:12-14** - The angel continues to explain to John the meaning of his vision of the woman seated upon the scarlet beast; the vision of Babylon-Rome and the beast. He tells John the ten horns are ten kings that have not yet received a kingdom, meaning their reigns are in the future, specifically the time of the antichrist. The beast out of the sea in *Revelation 13* has seven heads and ten horns with ten crowns on its ten horns. The scarlet beast here in *chapter 17* is the same. The ten horns are ten kings who will give their power and authority to the beast at the final hour of history. In the lament over Babylon in *chapter 18* three times it is mentioned that Babylon was destroyed or fell in one hour. The kings of the earth, the merchants of the earth and all the sailors and captains of the ships mourn over fallen Babylon and exclaim that her doom came upon her in one hour. The image refers to the sudden judgment of God upon Babylon. It was swift and sure. Here in *chapter 17* the ten kings only reign and give power to the beast for one hour. Their reigns along with that of the beast are very short. They think they have ultimate power but the Lord Jesus will overcome them.

The angel tells John these kings have but one purpose; they will make war against the Lamb, meaning the Lord Jesus. In *chapter 16* during the sixth bowl of wrath the demonic frog spirits gather the "kings of the whole world" at Armageddon to wage war on "the great day of God Almighty" meaning the Day of the Lord, the final battle of history between the forces of evil led by the antichrist and the forces of good led by the returning Lord Jesus from heaven. Numbers in Hebrew symbology that are multiples of ten often simply represent descriptive numbers rather than literal numbers. Ten and one thousand are frequently used to describe situations or peoples. John used the number ten thousand times ten thousand to describe the unimaginable numbers of angels around God's throne in *chapter 5*. It is possible that the ten kings here in *chapter 17* represent "the kings of the world" gathered for Armageddon. If I am correct then it makes John's vision simpler to understand rather than trying to differentiate between the seven kings of *verse 10* and the ten horns or kings of *verse 12*. The meaning of the ten kings or horns becomes clear. They represent the allies of the beast who gather them to fight a final decisive battle for control of the world against the returning Lord Jesus Christ.

John makes it absolutely clear however that the beast and his allies have no chance whatsoever of defeating the Lord Jesus and overcoming him. As the wonderful bumper sticker seen in Prague during the overthrow of the Communist government there in the 1980's said: "The Lamb wins!" John says Jesus will defeat the beast and his allies because he is Lord of
Lords and King of Kings and his called, chosen and faithful followers will be with him. In other words the Lord Jesus will return in the final hour at the Battle of Armageddon and defeat the armies of the beast and his allies. With him will be his saints from all the ages. John will give more details of the Lord's return in chapter 19.

He uses three words to describe God's people in verse 14: called, chosen and faithful. God calls us and chooses us even before the foundation of the world as John observes in 17:8. Paul says in Romans 8 that those God foreknew he called to be predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. The concepts called and chosen represent God's side of the mystery of election. The word faithful describes us as believers and our part in election. We are to have faith in the Lord Jesus and remain faithful to him serving him all our lives. It is a synonym for the "patient endurance" of the theme verse of Revelation 1:9. John is pointing his readers toward the ultimate reward of the Kingdom of God which the Lord Jesus will bring with him when he returns. He continues the contrast in these last few chapters between the beast and his followers and the Lord Jesus and his saints.

17:15-18 - In verse 1 the angel showed John the woman seated upon many waters. Now in verse 15 he explains that the many waters are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. In other words the woman derives her power and wealth from many peoples and nations. She sits astride them and over them. As John will show us in chapter 18, the wealth and power of the world flows into Babylon-Rome.

However, the beast and the ten kings have a love-hate relationship with Babylon-Rome. They need her to gain their power but envy her and lust after her wealth so much so that they bring her to ruin. They destroy her! The angel says they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. The beast and his allies will consume Rome and leave her desolate. The angel says this is the work of God because God has put it into their hearts to do this and thereby accomplish his purpose to judge Babylon-Rome. In Jeremiah 50-52 Jeremiah prophesies about the ultimate destruction of Babylon. It would be laid waste and become a haunt for jackals never to be settled again. Literally that happened over the centuries following Jeremiah. Here in Revelation Babylon is revived in a symbolic sense in Rome. The great enemy of God's people will be judged by God and brought down by the very kings and peoples that worshipped it and built it up. God's purposes will not be thwarted. The implication here is that in the final hour of history the beast and his allies will destroy Rome. Perhaps they bring her down in defeat when the Lord Jesus subdues them at his return just like Hitler had plans to destroy Paris as the Allies closed in before the Germans abandon the city in 1944.

In verse 18 John is told that the woman is the "great city that rules over the kings of the earth." In 16:19 at the pouring out of the seventh bowl there was a great earthquake that split the "great city" into three parts. The angel confirms for John that Babylon the Great is Rome! The beast and his allies rule over a revived Roman Empire or an empire that resembles it but in the end it will fall and perish just like the beast. The Kingdom of God and his Christ will triumph!

Chapter 18:
18:1-3 - John sees yet another angel coming down from heaven. This one had great authority and its glory or splendor lit up the earth. The brightness of this angel's glory lights up the earth yet its glory is still nothing compared to God's.

The angel makes an announcement. He declares that Babylon the Great has fallen. He declares that the city has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil or unclean spirit.
Unclean and detestable birds live there as well. In the prophecies of Babylon's fall in Jeremiah 50-52 and Isaiah 13 the Lord says Babylon will become a haunt for the jackals, the desert scavengers. Vultures and owls will live there. The picture the prophets give is of a great city destroyed and in ruins reclaimed by the desert. Here in Revelation 18 the picture John gives is more spiritual in nature. It is not jackals that haunt Babylon-Rome but demons and unclean spirits. Vultures were the most unclean of birds in the Law of Moses and they are probably the birds to which John is referring. In Revelation 19 the birds gorge themselves on the dead flesh of the defeated army of the beast and the kings who are with him when the Lord Jesus returns. John reinforces the nature of Babylon-Rome being wholly demonic without any redeeming or noble feature. It is evil and unclean!

The glorious angel declares that the nations have drunk the wine of her adulteries and sexual immorality. The word translated adulteries here is *porneia* in Greek. It means any sexual intercourse outside of marriage and is applied in a more general way throughout the New Testament to mean any kind of sexual immorality and sin. It is a double-edged word here because it can literally mean sexual immorality and sin but also represent the adultery of idolatry, worshipping idols and things humans have made rather than God our Creator. It is important to note that in ancient Israel idolatry often led to the grossest kinds of sexual sins because of cult prostitution. John implies that the worship of idols in Babylon-Rome has also led to rampant sexual sins. Satan continually tries to undermine marriage and God's design for human sexuality. It is one of the chief ways he destroys relationships between men and women and separates us from God.

Not only have the nations of the earth become drunk on Babylon-Rome's idolatry and sexual immorality, the kings of the earth and the merchants of the earth have also grown rich from her "excessive luxuries." The Greek reads more literally: *the merchants of the earth out of the power of her sensual or luxurious living have grown rich."* The word for luxurious living implies sensuality and hedonism that feeds the greed of the merchants and rulers of the world. In other words, Babylon-Rome feeds all the basest instincts and desires of humans to indulge their sensual side not only in rampant sexual sin but also greed and materialism. When human beings abandon God and his worship and turn to idols this is what they become. The entire world has become like ancient Israel and Judah whom the prophets warned to turn back to God before it was too late. The glorious angel declares it is too late for Babylon-Rome!

18:4-8 - John hears another voice from heaven different than the glorious angel calling God's people to come out of Babylon-Rome so that they will not share in her sins. The voice is not God's because in verse 8 it refers to God in the third person. This is probably another angel or one of the living creatures around God's throne who has spoken before. See 12:10, 14:13 or 16:1.

The voice commands God's people to come out of Babylon-Rome. The command is followed by a result clause or a purpose clause in Greek, beginning with so that or in order that. The NIV translates the clause as a result clause. The NRSV and the NASB also translate the phrase as a result clause. A result clause shows what will happen if God's people do not leave Babylon-Rome. They will be caught up in her sins and the judgments or plagues God will send against her. The word for caught up is a compound word whose root is the Greek word *koinonia,* meaning to have in common with or to share together. It is often translated fellowship. God is telling his people do not fellowship with Babylon-Rome lest you share in her sins and her
judgment! The word translated plagues literally means blows or wounds but it is the word John has consistently used throughout Revelation translated plague.

In Isaiah 48 God tells his people to leave Babylon! Flee from it. Jeremiah 50:8 says to flee Babylon and in 51:6 God says: "Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins." In Jeremiah 51:45 God says to: "Come out of her my people!" Revelation 18:4 is one of the few times where John appears to directly quote an Old Testament passage.

In verse 5 the voice says Babylon-Rome's sins are piled up to heaven. Jeremiah 51:9 says Babylon's judgment reaches to the skies. The warning God gives his people here appears to be like the warning he gave Lot and his family in Genesis 19 when God had determined to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. He sent the angels to warn Lot to flee with his family because the city was about to be destroyed. If Babylon-Rome represents more than just the imperial city that ruled the world in John's day but also the pagan godless culture opposed to God then these verses serve as a warning for us today as well. God says to separate ourselves from the world culture opposed to him. Do not "share in her sins." Do not fellowship with the culture that opposes God that will welcome the beast and his rule and mark. The question for us is what does that look like today? How does one separate the technology of the modern world from the godless and immoral ideas that are current in the media and the universities and halls of power in our country? John is helping us to see that God takes very seriously the separation and holiness of his people. We are to be IN the world but not OF the world! If we are too close to the culture of Babylon we will be swept up in God's judgment and punishment of her. Therefore God gives us a warning!

God's warning raises another question as well. God is speaking here to his people. He warns them to come out of Babylon. That implies they are still on earth and some at least are alive during the reign of the beast and the judgment of Babylon. Dispensational scholars maintain God is speaking to people who have received the Lord Jesus during the Great Tribulation because the church has already been raptured up to heaven before all the judgments and plagues have taken place. That is possible but there is nothing in the text of this passage to suggest that the warning God gives his people is just for those who are living in the Tribulation period. It is more likely that God's warning is for all believers, including those in John's day. God will judge Babylon-Rome and its godless culture. We as Christ-followers are not to fellowship with it because it stands under God's judgment. Even if we are alive in the very last days of history we are to separate ourselves from it because its doom is sure.

The voice entreats God to pay back Babylon-Rome double for all of her sins. It asks God to give Babylon-Rome a double portion from her own cup! The martyrs under the altar in the fifth seal in Revelation 6 cried out to God for vengeance. Now the voice from heaven asks God to give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. Things in God's judgment are flipped from how they were in history. This reflects Jesus' words in Luke 6 in the Sermon on the Plain. Jesus said woe to the rich because they have had their fill. God will bless the poor and those who were left out in his Kingdom.

In her power and luxury Babylon-Rome forgot God and believed in her wealth thinking that she could do as she pleased and there would never be a reckoning. The voice from heaven exclaims she boasted in her heart that she was a queen and would never be a widow and mourn. God says he will bring down the pride of Babylon-Rome in one day! Suddenly the power of God will be sent against her. In a moment all her plagues will come against her. Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 47 of the fall of Babylon. He said Babylon thought it would continue forever like an eternal queen. In her pride she thought there was no one like her and she would never know grief.
or suffer the loss of children. God says in one moment, a single day, all those things will overtake her and will come upon Babylon in full measure. John is repeating themes the prophets had already stated in the Old Testament. He is showing us the ultimate fulfillment of God's judgment upon Babylon-Rome.

Babylon will be burned with fire by the very kings and peoples who supported her. The beast and his armies will burn her. See Revelation 17:16-17. God himself will cause them to do this in order to carry out his purpose! The beast and Babylon-Rome had forgotten who it is with which they have to deal; the Lord God Almighty! Jeremiah, speaking about the judgment of God upon Babylon in Jeremiah 50:34 said Israel's Redeemer is strong; "the Lord Almighty is his name." John restates what the prophets said over and over, God alone is Lord of history. He is sovereign! He is the judge to whom all are accountable because he is the Creator!

18:9-10 - The kings of the earth are the first to grieve over Babylon-Rome's fall. They grieve because they committed adultery with her, meaning they shared in her idolatry and worshipped her, and they shared in her luxury. The kings participated in her greed and wealth that resulted from her idolatry and wickedness. From the context of chapters 17 & 18 the kings who mourn her here in chapter 18 are probably not the ten kings who are close allies of the beast in chapter 17.

The kings of the earth weep and mourn over Babylon-Rome's fall. They stand far off and are terrified by her torment. This suggests that they were not part of the ten kings who were allied with the beast that carried out God's desire to destroy Rome and put her to the torch. If they had been they would have known what they were doing and would be in the city not far away from it. The main point however is the kings grieve Babylon-Rome's fall. They have participated in her idolatry and greed and now try and contemplate what life will be like without her. They have worshipped Babylon-Rome rather than worship God and their "goddess" is now in flames! It shakes them to their core.

They cry out in their grief. They express woe or great sorrow and pain at Babylon-Rome's fall. They call her the "city of power." The Greek word means strong, mighty or powerful. They cannot imagine her destruction, especially since it happens in "one hour"! God's sudden and terrible judgment upon Babylon-Rome has completely surprised them. They had worshipped her and thought her invincible. They had forgotten how great the Creator really is and who is truly in charge of history. Now because Babylon-Rome has fallen, their kingdoms have fallen as well. Their days are over. They grieve over Babylon's fall because it means their fall also.

18:11-13 - Much of the laments here in chapter 18 are summaries or restatements of the prophecies in Jeremiah and Isaiah concerning Babylon's fall. John uses those prophecies as his template to express the grief of the world over Rome's demise.

The next group that mourns and weeps over Babylon-Rome's fall is the merchants. They weep because no one will buy their cargoes anymore. In other words they may sing a song of grief over Babylon-Rome but they are really grieving over themselves because their business is now ruined! They are selfish as are all who practice idolatry because people worship idols for what they can get from them. That is the fundamental nature of pagan worship. Their worship might be very religious and devoted but it is ultimately selfish and self-focused.

John lists some of the cargoes the merchants would bring into Babylon-Rome or traded with her. There is everything from precious stones and metals to fine silks and cloth, to articles
made with rare woods and ivory. He says the merchants brought all kinds of metals and marble into Rome along with spices of every kind from all over the world. They traded wine, olive, oil and grain along with cattle and sheep, in other words foodstuffs that the city and the world would eat. All of these things are not evil in themselves. There is nothing inherently bad about trading for spices or gold or anything else. However, the context points to the merchants’ selfishness and greed. They traded with Babylon-Rome and mourn her fall because they can no longer make money and get rich which was their focus in life.

That is clear from the final “cargo” John mentions: the bodies and souls of men. The merchants were also slave-traders. This is one of the few times in the New Testament that the Bible directly comments on the morality of the slave trade. The New Testament tolerates it and recognizes it exists. But John helps us understand one day God will put a stop to it because in his sight it is despicable. Paul condemns slave traders as sinful and wicked in 1 Timothy 1:10. Here John says the merchants treated human beings made in God’s image like animals they bought and sold. Rome’s economy was built on slave labor. Estimates are that a full one third of its population was slaves. God will put an end to the slave trade when he judges Babylon-Rome. The merchants who had participated in it will be ruined along with the city they worshipped.

18:14-17a - Babylon-Rome represents not only the political power of Rome but her economic power as well. The woman seated on the seven hills symbolizes materialism and worldly wealth. That is why the merchants mourn over her. The wealth she helped create as they traded with her is now gone because God has judged her. They worshipped mammon or money, something Jesus said we could not do and worship God at the same time. See Matthew 6:24. The merchants’ treasure was in Babylon-Rome not in heaven. They grieve because all they had worked for is gone in a flash. God is going to destroy everything that human beings have worshipped as an idol, including materialism, represented by Babylon-Rome. God is a jealous God as he says in the second commandment in Exodus 20. We are to have no other gods before him!

The merchants stand far off from Babylon-Rome in terror at her fall and lament over her. They exclaim the fruit she longed for is gone from you, meaning all her wealth and riches have vanished. The merchants depended upon Rome for trade and therefore wealth. They depended upon her power and greed for more. Now God has judged her in an instant and she lies in ruins. They grieve because they do not know from where they will pursue the wealth they crave. Nothing else compared to Babylon-Rome! When God exposes and destroys our false gods we are left devastated and grieving because we have nothing else to put in their place, especially when we refuse to worship God!

John records the lament of the merchants. They cry over the "great city" dressed in purple, scarlet, fine jewels and gold. They are shocked at her sudden fall, something they did not anticipate because they declare in one hour Babylon-Rome's great wealth has been brought to ruin. Their shock is related to the context of John's visions and the situation he sees near the end of history. The beast is at the pinnacle of his power and has gathered his allies to fight against the Lord Jesus. The implication is no one in that army thought they would lose because the beast is so great and powerful. Babylon-Rome is at the height of her wealth and power as well. The world is not looking for the return of the Lord Jesus from heaven in judgment. Satan has deceived the world into believing that he is in control through the beast and the false prophet. They have allied themselves with Babylon-Rome and the world, including other countries represented by the kings of verses 9-10. The merchants or traders of the world represented by verses 11-17, all believe nothing can stop or compete with Babylon-Rome and the beast. They
are not even considering the possibility that God will intervene in history once again by sending his Son in glory to defeat and judge the beast. They did not anticipate that God would use the beast and his allies to bring down Babylon-Rome and destroy her. See Revelation 17:15-18. God's people are the only ones living in the world that are aware of what is coming. That is why the merchants are so shocked and appalled at Babylon-Rome's sudden fall. They did not know it was prophesied and that God is moving to fulfill everything he said he would do through the prophets. Jesus is coming back!

18:17b-19 - The third lament is given by all the sea captains, traders and sailors, everyone who earns their living from the sea. Rome in John's day depended upon the trade of the Mediterranean world to supply her with wealth and food. In turn those who sailed the ships of the Roman world grew rich. They will stand far off and grieve over Babylon-Rome's fall as well. John is referring in these verses to those who captained and sailed the ships. The merchants were the ones who owned them. The sailors are not wealthy people living in luxury yet they also mourn Babylon-Rome's fall because they gained their wealth and livelihood from her. Once again John is not saying that sailing a ship or trading goods is evil in itself. They are honorable professions. He is showing us that when we substitute something else in God's place, namely Babylon-Rome and her wealth, it corrupts everything we touch and even those things that are not evil become tainted with it. Idolatry spoils everything it touches.

The sailors cry out in grief and wonder if there was any city like "this great city." This is a similar cry to the lament of all the sailors who grieved over Tyre's fall in Ezekiel 27. They will put on sackcloth and pour dust over their heads because of Tyre's destruction. The sailors do the same thing here over the sudden destruction of Babylon-Rome. They lament that all the ships that traded with her and became rich now have lost their wealth. John repeats the theme of in one hour Babylon has been brought to ruin. God's judgment upon Babylon-Rome will be swift and sudden. All those who worshipped her and grew rich through her will be shocked at her fall because it happens so quickly and they never saw it coming.

18:20 - John has been recording the grief of the world over Babylon-Rome's fall and the laments of those who grew rich through her wealth. The scene now suddenly shifts to God's people who worship and serve the Lord Jesus. The voice from heaven in 18:4 which warned God's people to come out of Babylon-Rome and not to fellowship with her now speaks again. It calls all of heaven, the saints, apostles and prophets to rejoice over God's judgment of Babylon-Rome. It declares God has judged Babylon for the way she treated God's people!! This is only the third time in Revelation that John uses the word apostles. The first instance is in 2:2 in reference to false apostles in Ephesus that the church has exposed as false teachers. The other is in 21:14 in reference to the New Jerusalem which has the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb on its foundations. Early church tradition reports John was the only surviving apostle when he wrote Revelation around 95. All the others had been martyred. This statement in verse 20 reinforces God's vindication of the martyrs from the sixth seal in Revelation 6. The contrast could not be starker between the grief and laments of the kings, merchants and sailors over Babylon-Rome's destruction and the joy and rejoicing of heaven over the same events! God will pay back anyone who persecutes and murders his people. His justice will vindicate them.

18:21-24 - John sees a mighty angel or powerful angel pick up a boulder the size of a large millstone and throw it into the sea. He then declares that with such violence Babylon will be
threw down never to be found again. John intensifies Jeremiah's prophecy of Babylon's fall in Jeremiah 51:59-64. Baruch's brother Seraiah, a staff officer in King Zedekiah's army was to go to Babylon and read Jeremiah's prophecy of Babylon's fall in Babylon. The prophecy was all that Jeremiah had said about Babylon in chapters 50-51. He was then to declare, "O Lord, you have said you will destroy this place, so that neither man nor animal will live in it; it will be desolate forever." Then he was to take the scroll and tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates River and say, "So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall." The angel is clearly remembering Jeremiah's words. God will fulfill his prophet's words in the last days and will apply them to eschatological Babylon-Rome.

All that made Rome attractive to people will be taken away. The things the angel lists are not evil in themselves. Musicians, tradespeople, a millstone grinding grain, the light of a lamp, a wedding with bridegroom and bride; all these things will be silenced or extinguished. These are signs of normal human life. They will perish. The angel's description of what will happen to Babylon-Rome is similar to Jesus' description of his Second Coming in Matthew 24:36-39. Jesus said his coming will be like the days of Noah. People will be eating and drinking, and marrying just like they were right up to the time Noah and his family entered the ark. Noah knew the flood was coming; everyone else was unprepared. That is the picture John gives us of Babylon-Rome. God's people know his judgment is coming and the Lord is near. Everyone in the city is unprepared for its sudden downfall. There was no panic or attempts to flee. People were going about their normal routines.

John's picture also points out to us that not everything human beings do is sinful and evil, even those who follow the beast. Total depravity does not mean we are as evil as we can be. It means every part of human life has been tainted and corrupted by sin. We can still do good things but because of sin we are separated from God and prone to do evil. The beast is as depraved as he can be because he is Satan personified. What about the flute player or workman or bride and bridegroom in Rome? They were following the beast yet still doing normal human things. It is their choice of who to worship that determines their eternal future and destiny. They chose poorly and rejected the Lord Jesus Christ!

The angel declares that the merchants of Babylon-Rome were some of the world's great men but they were deceived and led astray by the "magic spell" of Babylon. The word for merchant is the Greek word emporoi from which we get the word emporium. It is the same word John uses earlier in 18:11-17 in the merchants' lament over Babylon-Rome's fall. The word for "magic spell" is pharmakeia, which the ESV translates sorcery. The word means magic arts or sorcery. The verb form means to mix potions and cast spells and is related to our English word pharmacy. John is telling us even the great men of the world; the richest and most powerful people were seduced and deceived by the sorcery of Babylon-Rome. They could not break away from her seduction and so were led astray to the evil of Satan and the beast. Worldly power and intelligence is no defense against the deception of Satan. Only the Holy Spirit in the Christ-follower is a defense against the attacks of spiritual evil. Without him all human beings are vulnerable!

The angel's final pronouncement against Babylon-Rome is the most chilling. In her was found the blood of God's prophets and saints, along with the blood of all who have been murdered or slaughtered. I am reminded of the victims of the genocide in Rwanda or the slaughter of the unborn here in the United States through legalized abortion. For all its power, wealth, culture, fame and worship by the world, underneath it all Babylon-Rome was filled with the blood of the innocent. Hers was a culture of death and murder. She was the cause of the
murder and martyrdom of God's people. She was our enemy! God will wreak his just vengeance upon her for all her violence so that she will never rise again!

Chapter 19:

19:1-2 - The scene now shifts from the earth to heaven. If I am correct that chapters 17-19 are a literary unit contrasting those who follow the beast and Babylon-Rome with God's people, those who follow the Lord Jesus, then the events of these three chapters are not necessarily in chronological order but in theological order. John is showing us the judgment and grief of those who follow the beast and Babylon-Rome with the joy and eternal relationship the Lord Jesus has with his saints. The literary order is as follows: a narrative concerning the judgment of Babylon-Rome in 17:1-18; a lament over the fall of Babylon-Rome in 18:1-24; the rejoicing of heaven and God's people at Babylon's fall and the marriage of the Lamb in 19:1-10; the narrative of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus from heaven and the final defeat of the beast and false prophet in 19:11-21. Since the introduction of the beast in chapter 13 John has consistently been contrasting those who follow him with those who follow the Lord Jesus. Chapters 17-19 are the climax of that contrast.

John hears a great multitude in heaven shouting out praise to God. They cry out the first of three choruses all beginning with "Hallelujah" or praise God. These are in direct contrast with the three laments over Babylon-Rome's fall. The first Hallelujah in verses 1-2 is a three-fold praise that is similar to other songs or statements of praise in Revelation. See 4:11, 7:10 and 12:10 for examples. Here the voices ascribe salvation, glory and power to God. The multitude is probably a mixed group of God's people, his saints and all the angels; all creatures who worship and serve God in contrast to those who follow the beast and worship Satan and his demons.

The multitude praises God because his judgments are true and just. The Lord God has condemned Babylon-Rome, here referred to like in chapter 17 as the great prostitute. God's just judgment is two-fold. He has condemned Babylon-Rome for corrupting the whole earth with her adulteries, meaning her idolatry and greed, and the wickedness that followed from it. And God has avenged the blood of his servants the prophets and martyrs. In the sixth seal in Revelation 6 the souls of the martyrs under the altar had cried out to God asking how long before their blood was avenged. Their question has been answered. Babylon-Rome has been judged. The beast, false prophet and all the kings of the world who follow them and have gathered at Armageddon are also about to be defeated and judged as well when the Lord Jesus returns to earth.

19:3-5 - John hears the great multitude of saints and angels shout a second time. They shout Hallelujah or praise the Lord and observe that the smoke of the ruin of Babylon-Rome goes up for ever and ever. In the narrative of chapter 17 John tells us the beast and his allies who hate Babylon-Rome will bring her to ruin and destroy her with fire. This is all according to God's purpose to bring about the judgment of Babylon. When the saints of heaven declare that the smoke of her burning goes up for ever and ever are they speaking literally or symbolically? It is difficult to take their declaration literally because even after decades of burning the fires would eventually run out of fuel and go out. A more likely possibility is that John links the judgment of Babylon-Rome and her burning with the lake of fire introduced in chapter 19 and the defeat and punishment of the beast and false prophet. In other words the beast and his armies might have destroyed Babylon-Rome in a literal sense but spiritually she is judged for ever and ever. The idolatry and wickedness she represents are permanently judged and punished!
In answer to the Hallelujah shout of God's people in heaven the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fall down and worship God seated on his throne in heaven. They respond with "Amen, Hallelujah!" For further details on the identities of the elders and living creatures see the notes on chapters 4 & 5. The elders and living creatures are great angelic beings that represent God's court around his throne. Since they respond separately from the rest of the multitude in 19:1 it is likely that the multitude represents God's saints. It is also possible that it includes angels who serve God's people and carry out his instructions on the earth but not these powerful angels directly in his presence. Furthermore, John may not be consistent and logical in such a highly symbolic and poetic passage. The elders and living creatures may simply be responding to what all the saints and angels have said with their own reply. Apocalyptic language can be inconsistent as we have seen many times in Revelation.

John then hears a voice from the throne calling God's servants, Greek doulai meaning bond-servants or slaves, to praise God. The voice is probably not God himself because if calls all his servants both small and great to "praise our God." It is most likely angelic in nature. In 19:10 the angel who shows John the wedding supper of the Lamb names himself as a fellow servant along with John and his fellow believers who keep the testimony of Jesus. It seems likely that the word "servants" here refers both to Christ-followers and to the angels who do the Lord's bidding. They all fear God or give him reverence and honor. The call for all God's servants to praise the Lord is similar to many of the Psalms. See Psalm 22, 113, 134 & 135 for examples.

19:6-8 - John hears the third Hallelujah. This time he hears a great multitude like the first Hallelujah but it sounds like a waterfall or huge rapids and peals of thunder. The multitude shouts, "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns!" The verb for reigns is an aorist active indicative, which communicates a once for all accomplished fact. God reigns and Satan is defeated. That is why all of heaven is shouting Hallelujah. In Revelation 11 at the sounding of the seventh trumpet loud voices in heaven declared that "The kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign for ever and ever." In 11:17 it reads, "We give thanks to you Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign." John implies here in chapter 19 that God now reigns completely. The word translated "Almighty" in Greek is pantokrator, which means all powerful, almighty or omnipotent. John uses the name, "the Lord God Almighty" seven times in Revelation and twice he uses, "God the Almighty" as a name or description of God. He is highlighting the Lord's power and authority over his creation and over human history. God has all power and Satan and the beast have none!

The multitude shouts out to rejoice and be glad and give God glory. The verbs for rejoice and be glad are in the subjunctive mood in Greek meaning they are an invitation to rejoice not a command to rejoice. The attitude of the saints and angels in heaven is in marked contrast to the laments of the kings, merchants and sailors over the fall of Babylon-Rome. The beast and his allies hate Babylon and want to destroy her. The Lord Jesus has a different attitude towards his people; they are his bride! The cause of the joyful invitation to celebrate and give God glory is the wedding of the Lamb.

The word translated wedding in the NIV is translated as marriage in the ESV. Literally it means the wedding banquet or celebration. It denotes more than a simple wedding ceremony. In the context of John's day a wedding was the ceremony followed by a feast and celebration.
among the friends and family that might last a week or more. See Genesis 29, the wedding of Jacob and Leah, and John 2, Jesus' miracle of water to wine at the wedding feast in Cana for examples. Another example is Jesus' parable of the royal wedding banquet in Matthew 22.

John sees the consummation of the relationship between the Lord Jesus and his people in Revelation 19. In the Old Testament Israel is frequently called the wife of God and the Lord is her husband. Hosea 2 & 3 describe Israel as God's unfaithful wife comparing her to Gomer, Hosea's wife who had been a prostitute. In Hosea 3 the Lord says he will seek out Israel once again for his own. In the New Covenant prophecy of Jeremiah 31 God says Israel had been the Lord's wife and he had been her husband but she had broken their marriage covenant. God will make a new covenant, a new relationship with his people and will remember their sins no more. This covenant will never be broken. In the New Testament Paul in Ephesians 5 sees Christian marriage as an analogy to the relationship of Christ with his church. She is his bride. Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to a wedding feast in the parable of the royal wedding banquet in Matthew 22.

In chapter 19 the bride is clearly God's people, his church. However, in chapter 21 the bride is the New Jerusalem, the eternal dwelling of God with his people. In 22:17 the Spirit and "the bride" call for the Lord Jesus to come soon. That appears to be God's people again. The image of the bride is fluid in Revelation. Perhaps it is similar to Zion in the Old Testament. Zion was Jerusalem yet many times it was God's people personified, represented by the city. John may be using the picture of the bride in the same way.

In the marriage passage in Ephesians 5 Paul says the Lord Jesus gave up his life for his church, his bride, in order to present her to himself in splendor and without blemish, holy and pure. In Revelation 19 John says the church, the Lamb's bride, has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean was given her to wear. The fine linen stands for the righteous deeds of the saints. The verbs are important here. The fine linen, the righteous deeds, is given to the bride to wear. She does not produce them she is given them. See Isaiah 61:10 where God gives his people garments of righteousness to wear like a bridegroom or a bride. John paints a picture for us of the Lord working through his people. In Ephesians 2:10 Paul says we were saved by grace and created by God for good works that God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. John implies the same thing here about the church in the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The most profound insight John gives us in Revelation 19 is the consummation of the Lord's relationship with us his people. We will be married, as husband and wife. The Lord Jesus is the husband and we, his people, will be his wife. There is no question of who is greater; Jesus is! Yet, John pictures us as God's people, not even his willing servants or slaves but his wife! There is no way that we can say we are the Lord's equal, yet we will be his partner for eternity. The purpose of God declared over Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:24 now comes to its ultimate fulfillment: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." Paul quotes that same passage in Ephesians 5 and says it expresses the profound mystery of Christ and his church. When the Lord Jesus returns we will become not his betrothed but his bride. We will become one with him. What that will be like I cannot say, but that is exactly what John seeks to portray in chapter 19 with the wedding supper of the Lamb. The beast both loved and hated Babylon-Rome and destroyed her. The Lord Jesus loves his bride and marries her. The Messianic Banquet the prophets foretold (see Isaiah 25) will be a wedding banquet between God and his people. We will go into eternity in a relationship of such joy, oneness and intimacy with our Lord that human marriage is only an
analogy and a picture. The reality will be beyond our comprehension. That is our future destiny as the people of the Lord Jesus Christ!

19:9-10 - An angel tells John to write down a blessing for those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb. The verb for invited is a perfect passive which means the invitation came in the past and its effects are still going on in the present. It is a passive verb which emphasizes the action done to the subject. We didn't invite ourselves or earn an invitation it was given to us by grace! God's invitation is so amazing and so incomprehensible that an angel has to tell John it's true! This is the fourth of seven blessings given in Revelation. Who are those who have an invitation? They are those who hold to the testimony of Jesus, the gospel, from verse 10. The word for hold means to have something or hold on to it and in context means to keep or preserve. It is a present participle which implies continuous action. We are both the invited guests of the Lord Jesus to his wedding banquet and we are the bride herself. We the many are one body with Jesus. The two will become one flesh Genesis 2 says.

Given the picture of the wedding feast and marriage as the description of our relationship with the Lord Jesus I have often thought of Holy Communion as the rehearsal dinner for a wedding. The Lord's Table is not the wedding but a pre-figuring of the wedding. The wedding party is gathered. The ceremony has been rehearsed. We celebrate as family together with the bride and groom to be. Everything is now ready. We only await the day of the wedding itself. In many respects communion communicates the same picture for us. God invites us to share his supper and the relationship we have with him now and will have in eternity. Communion is eaten in faith in God's promise that one day we will be united in marriage with him at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

I heard a Bible teacher teach on the image of the bride in Revelation 19. It is a feminine image as well as a corporate image. We the many are the one bride of Christ. However, half of Jesus' church is male. How do Christian men know what a bride is supposed to do? We learn how to be a bride from our wives. It is the God-given task of a Christian wife to teach her husband how to be a bride because in eternity all of us together will be the bride of Christ. I like that image because it tries to express as Paul says the profound mystery of Jesus and his church!

When John hears the angel's command to write down the blessing for those invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb he is so overcome he falls down at the feet of the angel to worship him. The angel immediately tells him to get up. He is a fellow servant or bond-servant with all who keep the testimony of Jesus or follow Jesus. The word for servant is the same word used in 19:5 which invited all God's servants both small and great to praise him for all the Lord has done. That reinforces the idea that servant in the context of chapter 19 means both Christ-followers and the angels who serve God. The angel tells John worship God! He alone deserves our worship. Why did John fall at the angel's feet? My guess is he is so overcome by both the Lord's invitation to the wedding feast and the Lord's vindication of his people he loses perspective and forgets who it is who is speaking to him. Plus John doesn't just hear this angel proclaim something the angel addresses him directly. That must have been an overwhelming experience. It must have been unsettling to have such a creature of holiness and light speak to him and call himself a fellow servant!

The angel tells John the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. That is a curious phrase. The word for testimony means witness and is related to the word for martyr. The spirit of prophecy must be the Holy Spirit because prophets are filled with the Spirit and gifted by him to speak the Word of God. That is true in both the Old and New Testaments. I think what the angel
is communicating is what the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 1:1-2: In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe. The testimony of Jesus is God's revelation of himself and the way of salvation. It is in keeping with the Spirit of prophecy, the Holy Spirit who guided the prophets and now guides the apostles. Their testimony or witness became the basis for the Bible!


John sees heaven standing open. Ezekiel saw the heavens opened in his vision of God and his throne in Ezekiel 1. Isaiah cries out in Isaiah 64:1-2: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you!" Matthew 3, Mark 1 and Luke 3 all record the heavens opening and the Spirit of God descending upon Jesus at his baptism. Stephen saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God in his vision right before he died in Acts 7. It is interesting to note that if one takes Ezekiel's vision as God the Creator or God the Father, the visions of Matthew, Mark and Luke at Jesus' baptism as God the Holy Spirit, and Stephen's vision in Acts 7 and John's vision here in Revelation 19 about God the Son, then all three Persons of the Trinity are referred to in Scripture when the "heavens opened."

When heaven opened John saw a white horse and a rider on the horse. This is the Lord Jesus. Some identify him with the rider of the white horse in the Four Horsemen passage of Revelation 6. See the notes above on Revelation 6:2 for the identity of the rider on the white horse. For the reasons stated there I do not believe the white horse of the first seal is the Lord Jesus. The white horse John sees the Lord Jesus riding is probably symbolic of a conquering Roman general riding in a triumphal parade through Rome to celebrate his victory. In ancient Israel in peacetime the king would ride a donkey. In war he would ride a war horse and that image is also a possibility here. The King comes not in peace but for war to vanquish God's enemies, specifically the beast and false prophet. There is no other significant reference to a white horse in Scripture that applies here in Revelation 19.

The Lord Jesus has a name; in fact John gives us four names for Christ. The first is Faithful and True. The second is the unknown name written on him that only he knows. The third is the Word of God. The fourth, written on his robe and thigh, is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Jesus is named the faithful and true witness in the letter to Laodicea in 3:14. He is referred to as the faithful witness in 1:5. Jesus told Pilate he came into the world to bear witness to the truth in John 18. He names himself the Truth in John 14. Paul lists faithfulness as part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. John uses the same word here in Revelation 19. Faithful and
True communicate that the Lord Jesus is the one true revealer of who God is and of what God's plan will be. John is saying what Paul said in Colossians 1 that all the fullness of God dwells in him. Hebrews 1 says Jesus is the exact representation of God's being.

The second name is written on the Lord Jesus and no one knows it but him. John is telling us that even though the Lord Jesus truly reveals who God is there will always be something of God that we cannot know. He will remain a mystery to us. We are creatures and though we will be united with him in a relationship that is like a marriage there will always be a part of Christ that we will never fully understand. In the letter to Pergamum in chapter 2 the Lord tells those who are faithful to him that he will give them a new name that only they themselves will know. The concept is similar yet different because the faithful believer is given that new name by the Lord whereas his name that only he knows was not given him but it is his alone.

The third name is the Word of God. John 1 begins with a picture of the Word or logos in Greek. He is with God and is God. John describes Jesus the Son, the Word become flesh, the incarnate one. In John 1 John describes the first revelation of the Son, the Word of God, when he became a human being and lived among us. His mission was to die and rise again for the sins of the human race and draw all people to himself. Revelation 19 describes the second revelation of the Son, the Word of God. Now he comes to judge the world in righteousness and to finally and completely defeat Satan and all who oppose the Lord God. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that he did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save it. Here at his Second Coming there is no more chance for salvation. Jesus comes to judge!

The fourth name is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Handel used this phrase in his famous Hallelujah Chorus in the Messiah. This name is written on the Lord's robe and on his thigh. Paul names God himself as King of Kings and Lord of Lords in 1 Timothy 6. John gives that title to Jesus. The Lord Jesus is God! King of kings and Lord of lords is a title given to God in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 10:17 says God is God of gods and Lord of lords. In Psalm 136 people are told to give thanks to God, the Lord of Lords. In Daniel 2 Nebuchadnezzar tells Daniel that the Lord God is God of gods and Lord of kings. Jesus tells his disciples in Matthew 28 that all authority has been given to him. In Acts 10 Peter tells the Roman centurion Cornelius and his family that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. Paul says in Philippians 2 that God has given the Lord Jesus the name above every name that at his name every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. That phrase repeats what God said in Isaiah 45. He is the Lord and there is no other God. Before him every knee will bow and every tongue swear by the Lord alone. John leaves no doubt; Jesus Christ is the Lord God Almighty!

John also describes Jesus' appearance. The Lord's eyes are blazing fire like in John's vision in chapter 1. He has many crowns or diadems on his head in contrast to the dragon or Satan in chapter 12. Jesus is dressed in a robe that is dipped in blood and John says he treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. In Isaiah 63 the Lord comes in anger and wrath with his garments spattered in blood because he has trodden the winepress of his wrath against the nations. He alone comes to judge the world. John may be borrowing Isaiah's image to describe the Lord Jesus' coming here in Revelation 19. The armies of heaven follow after the Lord riding white horses themselves and dressed in fine white linen. The word for armies can also mean soldiers which leads me to conclude these are angels that come with the Lord. However, they are clothed like the saints at the wedding feast of the Lamb in 19:8 which could mean the armies are God's people. Perhaps John means both since angels and saints are both
called fellow servants of the Lord Jesus in 19:10. However, Jesus himself said in Mark 8 & 13 that the Son of Man would come with his holy angels and they would gather his elect from the four winds. Daniel 7 says ten thousand times ten thousand mighty angels serve the Son of Man and stand before him. I lean toward the armies of heaven being God's angels but that is by no means certain. Out of the Lord's mouth comes a sharp sword with which he will strike down the nations. This is the same image John used of Jesus in chapter 1. In Ephesians 6 Paul calls the Word of God the sword of the Spirit. Jesus is the living Word of God but he also speaks the powerful Word of God. It is his word which will defeat Satan, the antichrist, the false prophet and the nations gathered against him. John then quotes Psalm 2, a Messianic Psalm about the Messiah ruling the nations with an iron scepter. In Revelation 2 in the letter to Thyatira John quotes the same passage in describing the Lord Jesus and his rule.

John's entire description of the Lord Jesus at his return is in marked contrast to the Lamb who was slain in Revelation 5. To his people Jesus is our Savior who died for us and now reigns with God in heaven. He is our husband and we are his bride! To the world and those who oppose God he is an overwhelming figure who comes to judge and wage war on God's enemies. He strikes terror in the hearts of all those who follow the beast and worship him.

19:17-18 - John then sees an angel standing in the sun crying out to all the birds that fly. The birds are the unclean birds such as vultures and eagles that eat carrion. In 18:2 an angel singing about the fall of Babylon-Rome declared that Babylon had become the haunt of every unclean bird. The angel refers to the same birds here. John describes the angel as "standing in the sun." That is a curious phrase which I take to mean the angel was standing so as to be right in front of the sun rather than in the midst of the sun or within it. If one would have looked at the angel one would not have seen many details of its face because of the radiance of the sun behind it.

The angel invites the birds to gather for the great supper of God. They will feast on the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, along with horses and their riders. The great battle at the end of history when the Lord Jesus with all his angels will defeat the beast and all his armies is about to take place. God invites the carrion birds to feast upon all the dead bodies. This is in sharp contrast to the wedding supper of the Lamb that God invites his people to celebrate. The angel says the birds will feast upon the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great. "All people" means the entire army of the beast and the kings who gather with it to fight the Lord Jesus will be slain. I do not think John means the entire population of the world who follow the beast. One could interpret the phrase that way but that creates more problems and unanswered questions in chapter 20. I think what John is trying to say is that the beast and his army are utterly defeated when the Lord Jesus returns.

This invitation to the birds of the air to gather for the great supper of God is very close to the prophecy in Ezekiel 39:17-20. There God invites the birds to gather to feast on the defeated armies of Gog and Magog. Magog attacked God's people Israel living in the Holy Land and God defeated the armies of Gog the prince of Magog. God invites all the birds and wild animals to feast on the bodies of the dead, a great feast God has prepared for them on the mountains of Israel. Ezekiel prophesies against Gog the prince of Magog in chapters 38-39. See Appendix Two for my commentary on those chapters. They portray an eschatological attack by Gog of the land of Magog against Israel when the people of Israel are living in safety and peace. God will utterly defeat Gog and his armies. John specifically names Gog and Magog in chapter 20 where they are two nations allied with each other rather than Gog being the prince of Magog. However, John uses the picture of the feast of the carrion birds in Ezekiel 39 after the defeat of Gog and his
armies to describe the birds feasting on the slain after the Battle of Armageddon and the defeat of the beast and his armies.

19:19-21 - John now returns to the sixth bowl of wrath where the demonic spirits gathered the kings of the earth to support the beast in his battle against the Lord Jesus and his angels. In chapter 16 they gather on the Plain of Megiddo or Armageddon in the Valley of Jezreel in Galilee. However other prophecies like Ezekiel 38-39, Zechariah 14, and Zephaniah 2-3 all imply that the final battle between God and Israel's enemies will be fought in Jerusalem. In Revelation 20 after the Millennium when Satan is released from prison he gathers the nations he has once again deceived and attacks Jerusalem and God's people. John goes backwards in sequence to describe the final battle between the Lord Jesus and the beast or antichrist. That lends credibility to the viewpoint that chapters 17-19 are not in chronological order with chapter 16 and the seven bowls of wrath. Rather they are contrasting the fate of God's people with the fate of those who follow the beast.

The Lord Jesus and his heavenly army which is probably made up of angels defeats the beast and his army of the ten kings who are his allies, representing all the nations opposed to God and the Lord Jesus. See chapter 17 for more details. The beast is captured along with the false prophet who performed signs and wonders to deceive the nations so that they would worship and follow the beast. The two of them are thrown into the lake of fire or the lake of burning sulfur. In chapter 20 Satan is thrown into the lake of fire after his final defeat. The dead whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life are also thrown into the lake of burning sulfur at the last judgment. The lake of burning sulfur or lake of fire is John's picture of hell, the place of eternal separation from God and punishment for rebelling against him. Jesus in Matthew 25 said hell was prepared for the devil and his angels but those who rebel against God are also consigned there at the last judgment. John follows Jesus' description. Burning sulfur is often called brimstone in Scripture and native sulfur occurs naturally in the volcanic areas around the Dead Sea, especially to the south. In Genesis 19 Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed when the Lord rained burning sulfur or brimstone down upon them. In Revelation 20:10 John reports that Satan, the beast and the false prophet are tormented in the lake of fire forever and ever. The implication is the dead who do not follow Christ are also tormented forever in the lake of fire. That means hell is not annihilation as some have suggested but a place of eternal torment. Jesus implies the same thing in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16. The worst torment of all is to be left in one's sin and rebellion, eternally separated from the Creator and a relationship with him for which we were all made. John's meaning is clear. The antichrist and the false prophet who deceived the world are utterly defeated and eternally punished by the Lord Jesus Christ!

John says the rest of the armies of the beast are slain with the sword that comes out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus. See the comments above in 19:11-16 concerning the sword. If the sword represents the Word of God then the armies of heaven don't even fight because the Lord Jesus slays the entire army of the beast with a word. God speaks and it is so just like at creation in Genesis 1. The slain are so great that all the carrion birds feast on the corpses of the dead. The angel's invitation to the birds in 19:17-18 is accepted.

Chapter 20:
20:1-3 - John sees another angel coming down from heaven with the key to the Abyss or bottomless pit holding a great chain. John has mentioned the Abyss already in chapter 9 as the
home of the demonic locusts of the fifth trumpet. There the demons were released by the angel over the Abyss, Abaddon or Apollyon, meaning the destroyer. See the commentary on chapter 9 for more details. Abaddon was given the key to the Abyss in order to release the demons. The Abyss in Jewish thought was the prison or holding cell for demons before the last judgment. Now Satan will be imprisoned in the Abyss for 1000 years.

This paragraph describes the completion of the defeat of the unholy trinity. 19:19-21 described the final defeat and punishment of the beast or antichrist and the false prophet. Here at the beginning of chapter 20 Satan who led them is also defeated. His ultimate defeat is yet to come but he is first bound for a thousand years to keep him from deceiving the nations. This binding does not refer to Jesus’ power over demons or the authority he grants his church over the demonic. That is a once for all situation that has already taken place. This binding is related to the fulfillment of God's plan for his Kingdom. The angel from heaven seizes the dragon or Satan, throws him into the Abyss and locks it! There is no war or battle. John's words imply there was hardly any struggle for the angel to bind and imprison Satan in the Abyss! This is the fate of the devil that people wanted to believe was stronger than the Lord God Almighty and the Lord Jesus Christ! His true nature and strength are exposed in these verses. The Lord Jesus doesn't even have to bind him; a fellow angel is given that task.

John says in verse 3 that Satan is imprisoned to keep him from deceiving the nations for a thousand years. At the end of that time he will be released for a short time. John's order is difficult. The Lord Jesus returns and Satan is bound for 1000 years. The saints are resurrected and reign with Christ on earth during that time, often referred to as the Millennium, from the Latin word for 1000. Satan is then released to deceive the nations once again and the nations represented by Gog and Magog come against the Lord and his people in Jerusalem. Fire reigns down from heaven and destroys them all and Satan is finally cast into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet are already being punished. God then judges the human race at the last judgment followed by the creation of the new heaven and new earth as the final dwelling of God with his people. John's chronology begs the question why is it necessary for Satan to be bound for 1000 years and then released? Why isn't his defeat final at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus? The answer may lie in the fact that the prophet Ezekiel follows a similar pattern. God gathers his people from all over the earth and restores them with David their king ruling them in Ezekiel 37. Israel dwells in safety and peace fulfilling a part of God’s covenant with David from II Samuel 7. Then in chapters 38-39 Gog of the land of Magog leads a great army of the nations against God's people who at the time are dwelling in safety. God utterly defeats Gog and all its army is destroyed. At the end of chapter 39 there is a re-statement of God's punishment of Israel for her sins and God's future restoration of his people. Chapters 40-48 describe the eschatological temple and a renewed Holy Land. The prophecy ends with a description of a renewed Jerusalem whose name is changed to "The Lord is there!" God dwells with his people! The details are different but the program is the same in Revelation 19-22. I believe John is following Ezekiel's chronology and plan. Thus Satan is bound so that God's people may dwell in safety and the world will have peace. He is loosed for the final attack on Jerusalem by Gog and Magog and then God judges the human race and creates a new heaven and earth where he will dwell with his people forever!

The question of the 1000 years also needs to be answered. Is it literal or symbolic? Plus, if after the 1000 years are ended and Satan goes out to deceive the nations to attack the Lord Jesus and his people in Jerusalem, who are the people he is deceiving and where did they come from? One of the great problems with this text and the interpretation of the 1000 years is that too
many scholars and Bible teachers shape their entire understanding of the end times based off of this passage! They take it along with the 70 weeks prophecy of Daniel 9 and construct an end time scenario using two passages that are notoriously difficult to interpret. Prophecy teachers reverse the normal way to interpret difficult passages. One takes the plain passages and uses them to interpret the obscure or difficult ones and not the other way around. Why is it Bible teachers can use that core principle of Biblical interpretation for everything else in the Bible but when it comes to end time prophecy they turn the principle on its head? There are five main ways scholars use to interpret the Millennium or the 1000 year reign of Christ and the binding of Satan. I discuss these ways in the Introduction of this commentary on pp.4-5.

Dispensational scholars insist the 1000 years is a literal time that fulfills the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament to God's ancient people, the Jews because Dispensationalism teaches there is a separate program for the Jews and the church. Therefore God must literally fulfill all his promises to the Jews in the prophets. Those promises are not taken up into God's plan for his church. They must be kept separate. They teach that Jesus will reign with the resurrected saints over a renewed earth, headquartered in Jerusalem. The temple will be rebuilt and some even insist the temple sacrifices will be started again. Paradise conditions will prevail on the earth. I agree with some of this interpretation but have great difficulty with other parts of it. Based upon other highly symbolic passages that use numbers in a Hebrew symbolic style in Revelation I believe the 1000 years is a symbolic number representing the Messianic reign of Christ on earth. Rather than a precise 1000 years the Millennium stands for a long period of time. It is 1000 years not 7 or three and one half! The difficulty is that other passages that speak of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus (see the references in the comments on chapter 19) give no hint of an imprisonment of Satan before his final utter defeat like John does here in Revelation 20. The implication from Jesus’ statements in the gospels as in Matthew 24 or Mark 13 is that when the Lord Jesus returns the defeat of evil, the salvation and resurrection of God's people and the ultimate reign of the Messiah all happen at the same time. The Kingdom of God is established once and for all. John's program, which appears to follow Ezekiel's prophecy, has an earthly Kingdom established during the Millennium followed by the final defeat of Satan and the ultimate purpose of God; the creation of a new heaven and a new earth where all effects of sin and Satan are wiped clean. There is absolutely no hint in the text of Revelation 19 or 20 that gives credence to the idea that the Jews have once again begun animal sacrifices in a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem! In fact the focus in chapters 19-20 is not on the Jews at all but on his saints, both Jews and Gentiles that make up his church!

Why then does John follow Ezekiel's pattern and have a time of peace and security for God's people and the nations during the Millennium followed by the loosing of Satan, his deception of the nations and his final defeat by God? The answer lies in John's repeating theological themes throughout Revelation like the themes of a symphony. Satan is bound for 1000 years or 10 cubed a significant symbolic number that means a long time. Plus in Luke 4 and the temptation of Jesus Satan told the Lord that the nations belong to him and he gives their rule to whomever he wants. In the Millennium the nations belong completely to the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan is not even allowed to deceive them for the 1000 years. All of this expresses a major theme of Revelation of the sovereignty of the Lord God and the Lamb and the final complete defeat of the dragon or Satan. The attack of Gog and Magog in 20:7-10 intensifies the complete depravity of the human race. Even after paradise conditions and perfect government for 1000 years there are still people who allow Satan to deceive them and fight against God. No one
can claim their environment led them to rebel against God. See the notes below for a more complete commentary on verses 7-10.

**20:4-6** - John sees thrones set up and people seated upon them given the authority to judge. Who are those seated upon the thrones? This is an important question to answer. John sees the souls of the martyrs who had been executed for their testimony to Jesus coming alive and reigning with Christ for 1000 years. They are those who did not receive the mark of the beast or worship his image during the reign of the beast. Some have implied that it is only the martyrs who are resurrected at this time and when verse 5 refers to the rest of the dead being resurrected after the 1000 years John is referring to the rest of believers. That viewpoint has major problems, not the least of which is Jesus' promises to the seven churches that believers who overcome and persevere will reign with him and be resurrected like him. They will share in his Kingdom. Not all those believers will be martyred for their faith. Plus Jesus told his disciples in *Matthew 19* that when he restores all things and sits on his throne the disciples will also sit on thrones and judge the 12 tribes of Israel. Clearly Jesus was speaking about his Kingdom. We know from early church tradition that not all of the Twelve were martyred for their faith. John survived and died an old man.

A far more likely interpretation of those who sit on the thrones alongside the Lord Jesus is they are all God's people, his saints. John gives special attention to the martyrs and their resurrection in order to reassure those who had already lost loves ones in the persecution of the church and to encourage those who were facing persecution and death. Even Caesar cannot take away one's share in the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ! Paul in passages like *1 Thessalonians 4* and *1 Corinthians 15* clearly states that when the Lord Jesus returns we shall all be resurrected. There will be no more delay nor will there be two resurrections of God's people. The second resurrection John speaks about in verse 5 is the general resurrection for judgment so that the entire human race faces God its Creator at his Great White Throne. Here in verses 4-6 John is speaking about the resurrection of God's people when the Lord Jesus returns and reigns upon the earth.

What then does John mean by "given authority to judge"? The ultimate judgment of the human race takes place at God's throne in 20:11-15. The judgment John mentions here must therefore be different. The word for judge is the normal word for a judge rendering a decision in a court case. It is the noun form of the verb for judge that John uses in 20:12 to describe God judging the entire human race. In the context of reigning with Christ in the Millennium judging refers to ruling or deciding with Christ over disputable matters between people. The picture John paints is of God's people assisting the Lord Jesus in the government of the world during his 1000 year reign. This is not the final judgment for sin which God reserves for himself. This is the judgment of every day matters that take place in people's lives. We reign and govern with the Lord Jesus!!

John states that the rest of the dead, meaning all those who have died who do not follow Christ will be resurrected for judgment after the Millennial reign of Jesus. The resurrection of believers is the first resurrection. Believers receive a resurrected body like the Lord Jesus. See *1 Thessalonians 4* and *1 Corinthians 15* for Paul's explanation. John says over those who are resurrected when Jesus returns the second death or the lake of fire, meaning hell, has no power. We are exempt from it. John then gives another of the seven blessings of *Revelation*. He says those who are resurrected when the Lord returns are blessed because the second death or lake of
fire has no power over them and they will be priests of our God and Christ and will reign with him during the Millennium.

Some have argued that the Millennium and the new heaven and earth of chapters 21-22 are the same things. John is simply recapitulating the theme of the defeat of Satan and the consummation of the Kingdom of God where God dwells with his people forever. That is certainly possible and solves some problems with the text. But it also creates others. For instance Satan is bound during the 1000 years then freed for a limited time after the Millennium. He is not judged and punished forever. Second, the Millennium clearly takes place on earth and is not a new creation but a redeemed and renewed one. How then does one deal with a passage like 2 Peter 3 which states that the present universe and creation will be destroyed and consumed by fire when the Lord returns? One possible explanation which Dispensational scholars give is that the Millennium is God keeping his promises to ancient Israel about Messiah's rule and Kingdom. The church is included in those promises. The ultimate future of the Kingdom of God however occurs in the new heaven and new earth when all vestiges of sin are removed and we dwell with God directly in a brand new creation where even heaven is remade. That seems the best interpretation of the text but one is still left with the difficult issue of the release of Satan and his final deceiving of the nations in 20:7-10.

20:7-10 - As I stated above John follows Ezekiel's order of the coming of the Messiah with Israel dwelling in peace and then Gog invades with the nations. John may also have another reason to follow Ezekiel. Romans 1:20 says: For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Romans 3:19 says: Now we know that whatever the Law says it says to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Ephesians 2:8-9 says: For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves - it is the gift of God - not by works - so that no one can boast. One can debate whether John is describing a literal or symbolic event in the loosing of Satan and his final deception of the nations to oppose God and his people. However, the ultimate meaning is clear. At the judgment human beings will have no excuse. Even after 1000 years of perfect conditions and government Satan is able to deceive the nations into believing that rebellion against God is a good thing and needs to happen. After all of human history, the Millennial reign of Christ, the resurrection of God's people and perfect, paradise conditions on earth, human beings will believe the same lies Adam and Eve believed in the Garden of Eden. As Jeremiah 17:9 says: The human heart is deceitful above all things, who can understand it? No one will be able to say at the last judgment, it's not my fault! It was the environment. It was my parents. I was at a disadvantage. I didn't know! People without faith in Christ will have to face God at the judgment and admit they rejected Christ, God's way of salvation, because of their own sin and rebellion. They did not want to submit to God! I think that is the underlying message John tries to convey in this passage.

There are however problems with this section. As I noted above Satan is only held in prison during the Millennium he is not finally defeated and punished in hell. John's chronology conflicts with Jesus and the rest of the New Testament which implies that Satan and evil is utterly defeated when the Lord Jesus returns. The Second Coming of Christ ushers in the end of the age and the beginning of the Age to Come. There is no provisional time like the Millennium. A second problem is exactly who are the nations that Satan deceives? These are all people who have lived during the Millennium. Did they survive Armageddon? Have they lived for 1000
years? Passages like Isaiah 65 describe a new heaven and a new earth where people live a very long time and no one dies young, yet that long life only applies to faithful people. Isaiah does not yet imagine a resurrected eternal life in heaven. John implies that some unbelievers survived Armageddon and the Lord's return. Perhaps there were nations that were not part of the antichrist's alliance. That means there are more human beings left alive after the Lord returns than just believers. Think of their experience. The Lord Jesus rules with perfect justice and righteousness assisted by human beings who are basically super-humans no longer subject to death or sin and with supernatural capabilities other people simply do not possess. Why in the world would anyone having lived in such conditions convince themselves that Christ and his saints could be opposed and should be opposed? John shows us that human sin is illogical and rebellious!

Satan is freed when the 1000 years are ended. He goes out to deceive the nations from all over the world. The implication is there are people alive during the Millennium who do not believe or follow Jesus as Lord even though they have lived all their lives under his rule. John names the nations Gog and Magog. Ezekiel 38-39 describes an eschatological attack by Gog the prince of Magog who gathers allies from among the nations and attacks Israel as they are dwelling in safety and peace. John's reference to Gog and Magog can hardly be coincidental. The difference here is that Gog and Magog both represent the nations that oppose the Lord Jesus and his saints. In Ezekiel Gog is the prince of Magog and Magog is the nation. If Scripture interprets Scripture then John expands upon and clarifies Ezekiel's vision. John says the size of the army of the nations led by Satan is like the sand on the seashore. In other words, it is beyond count. God promised Abraham in Genesis 22 that his descendants would be like the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. John has already shown us a picture of God's people in heaven in chapter 7 where he saw a great multitude from every nation that was beyond count. John is showing us that the human race is divided between Satan and Christ. Those who follow Satan are like the sand on the seashore, yet those who follow Christ are a multitude beyond count. Human beings have a choice concerning which Lord they follow: Satan or the Lord Jesus Christ. Those that choose Satan will be destroyed along with him.

Satan and the armies of Gog and Magog come from all over the world and surround the "camp of God's people." It is unclear to what John is referring. He implies that the saints are living in tents around Jerusalem. Then in the very next phrase he says Gog and Magog surround the city God loves, which is Jerusalem. Are the saints camping or are they living in the city? One explanation might be that both images describe God dwelling with his people. In the wilderness Israel lived with God in their midst in the tabernacle. When they conquered the land and the temple was built God dwelt in their midst in Solomon's temple before it was destroyed. Rather than trying to make sense of both pictures by trying to take them literally it makes more sense to see them as representative of God living among his people. Gog and Magog and all the nations of the world gathered with them appear like a tremendous threat to the saints. But God dwells with his people! They have nothing to fear from the devil and his army. Fire comes down from heaven and destroys Gog and Magog and all who followed them just as in Ezekiel 39. Satan himself is then captured once more and thrown into the lake of fire that Jesus said in Matthew 25 was made for the devil and his angels. He is not brought before God's throne for judgment because it has already taken place. Jesus said in John 12 that Satan will be cast out or cast down at the cross. John showed us a picture of Satan being cast out of heaven and thrown down to the earth in Revelation 12. He is already judged! The devil joins the beast and the false prophet in the lake of fire and the unholy trinity will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Their
punishment is absolute and final. It will never end. John says after the judgment those who followed them will incur the same fate. Satan is now finally, forever defeated, never again to deceive and tempt the human race!

20:11-15 - John now describes the last judgment. He sees a great white throne and the Lord God seated upon it. Earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them to escape from God. The old order of creation has been marred by human and demonic sin; therefore it flees from the Creator. In Daniel 7 Daniel sees the Ancient of Days seated on his throne and the books are opened. The scene is similar here in Revelation 20. The Old Testament affirms God will judge the human race and condemn the wicked. See Isaiah 11 and 66, and Jeremiah 25. The New Testament also affirms God will judge the human race. See Matthew 13 & 25, 1 Corinthians 3 & 6, 2 Corinthians 5 and Hebrews 9. In Hebrews 9 and Matthew 25 it is the Lord Jesus himself or the Son of Man who executes judgment. It is unclear here in Revelation 20 whether John means the Lord Jesus is the judge or God the Creator. It appears to be God the Creator meaning God the Father, but John has already shown his understanding of the Trinity is fluid so it could be either God the Father or Jesus the Son who sits on the great white throne. Paul speaking to the philosophers in Athens said it would be the Lord Jesus who judges the world. In Acts 17:31 he says: For he (God) has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

The dead, both great and small, stand before the throne. The whole human race will be judged by God. No one will be exempt. They are judged according to their deeds done in life. That is the meaning of "the books were opened." The picture is of a book with all one's deeds recorded so that nothing is hidden from God. If all my deeds are recorded both good and bad, and the standard is the holy righteous God, then my sinful deeds condemn me before him. As Paul shows in Romans 3 no one is righteous before God; all have sinned and fallen short of his glory. What hope has any human being before God? John says another book was opened, the Book of Life. This is the book which records the names of those who have believed the testimony of Jesus, John's name for the gospel, and follow him as Lord. They are God's saints by faith in Jesus Christ and they are forgiven of their sins. As Paul says in Romans 8 there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. John states in 1 John 1, the blood of Jesus God's Son cleanses us from all sin!

Believers do not have to fear condemnation and damnation at the last judgment but the question remains what the last judgment will be like for Christians. John gives the impression in chapter 20 that believers will go through the experience of having God examine their deeds but will be acquitted of any punishment because they believe in Jesus. Some scholars argue based on Paul's statement in Romans 8 that no one can bring any charge against God's elect because it is God who justifies that believers will appear before God but when their names are found in the Book of Life they are exempted from God's examination unlike an unbeliever. Others say believers will go through a judgment of their deeds but it will be a judgment for rewards done for serving Christ which Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 3. The New Testament states we are saved from the wrath of God, what John describes as the second death or the lake of fire. Whatever our specific experience at the last judgment as a believer it is clear that we will not be punished for our sins or condemned for them because we have trusted Christ. Our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life!
John says the sea gave up its dead. In ancient times to die at sea was a terrible thing because it was thought one's soul could not be at rest because one's body could not be buried in the ground. It is possible John is referring to that understanding here or he is simply stating that those who died at sea are now resurrected in some state and brought before God at the judgment. He says death and Hades gave up the dead in them. John is being very Hebrew here because Hades was thought to be the place of the dead. He repeats himself, like saying death and death gave up their dead. In Greek mythology Hades was the underworld. In Hebrew thought it was the Greek name given to Sheol, more specifically the punishment side of Sheol, the Hebrew place of the dead. See Jesus’ description in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. Paradise was the name given the heaven or good side of Sheol. That is why Jesus told the thief on the cross in Luke 23 that he would be with him in Paradise that very day because he had believed in Jesus. John makes the point that all human beings who have died, whether on land or sea, will stand before the judgment of God their Creator. There are no exceptions.

John then tells us that death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire. They are personified and are punished by God forever. Everything sin touched and corrupted will be disposed of in the new creation that God is about to make. Death itself will die in the second death, the lake of fire. Hades will be destroyed as well because there will be no more death or need for a place of the dead. No one whose name is not found in the Book of Life will be allowed to enter God's new heaven and earth. Their fate will be the same as the lords they worshipped, the beast, the false prophet and the devil himself. They will be thrown into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone, the smoke of which goes up forever and ever. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will be invited to share in the new heaven and new earth.

There are some theologians who argue hell does not exist but John makes it clear that there is an eternal place of punishment where the devil and all those who followed him will be sent. John calls it the second death or the lake of fire. It burns forever and its smoke goes up forever. John paints a picture of eternal pain and torment, an existence that is beyond our comprehension. The torment in hell or the lake of fire is both the eternal separation from the God who created us and the just punishment for our sin and rebellion against our Creator. If people refuse to surrender to God and follow him God confirms their choice and casts them into hell.

C.S. Lewis said that everyone who is in hell wants to be there because the alternative would be to submit to God and that they will not do. Human sin therefore mirrors satanic sin. John's lake of fire reflects Jesus' language in the gospels about a place of eternal torment and burning. See Luke 16. Jesus also used another metaphor for eternal separation from God. He called it the "outer darkness", a place of darkness and terrible cold where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth. See Matthew 8, 22 & 25. The outer darkness is the opposite picture of the lake of fire that John gives us in Revelation 20. Both images are trying to give us a picture of an existence that is beyond our imaginations. Both images also imply an eternal separation and punishment. Some theologians have argued that hell means annihilation, a sudden and complete cessation of being. God simply destroys the wicked. They do not live on in hell. Both the outer darkness passages from Jesus and the passages that describe hell like John does here in Revelation 20 do not support that concept. Unbelievers who reject God and are condemned eternally bear the consequences of their rejection and rebellion. Hell, the lake of fire or the outer darkness, is a real place and real people will be sent there, forever regretting their choice. Only the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ can save human beings from such a fate.
Chapter 21:

21:1-4 - The first two chapters of the Bible tell how God created the heavens and the earth. The last two chapters of the Bible tell how God creates a new heaven and a new earth. God says in verse 5 that he is making all things new. The old earth was subject to the consequences and decay of sin and death from the fall of mankind. See Romans 8 and Genesis 3. Even heaven itself was marred due to the rebellion of Satan and his angels. See Revelation 12. God will re-create both heaven and the earth freed from the damage sin has caused and free from death.

John observes that in the new earth there will be no more sea. This is not because God hates the ocean! John expresses the radical newness of God's new earth. To the ancient Hebrews the sea represented the primordial forces of chaos in nature that could not be overcome. God creates the earth out of those waters in Genesis 1. The earth was formless and void and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. The new earth is not formed out of the waters of chaos it comes down from God out of heaven. The first heaven and earth have passed away completely. No more chaos! There is nothing in the new heaven and earth that will be a threat to humankind! That is why there is no more sea.

The whole concept of a new heaven and a new earth is like a do-over for creation. It is as if all of human history and even all of cosmic history was a false start because of Satan's fall and human sin. C.S. Lewis says in the final phrases of his Narnia Chronicles, "All their lives on this earth and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page. Now at last they were beginning the great story which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before."

Isaiah in Isaiah 65 has a vision of a new heaven and a new earth. Isaiah says God will create a new heaven and earth and the former things will not be remembered. He will create Jerusalem to be a delight. Isaiah then paints a picture of people living long and full lives. Jerusalem will be a place where no infant dies as a child. It will be the home of God's people and they will flourish there. In Isaiah 66 Isaiah says when God creates this new heaven and earth all mankind will come and worship the Lord. John uses images from Isaiah's prophecy to describe his new heavens and new earth. John adds to the vision and fulfills it. For a Jew raised with the Old Testament after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 by the Romans there would be no better ultimate symbol of restoration and renewal than a New Jerusalem!

John sees the Holy City, the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth. He describes it as a bride which is also how he described the church in chapter 19 at the wedding supper of the Lamb. Here it is the dwelling or home of God with his people, the church. John hears a loud voice from the throne declare God's purpose for the New Jerusalem. The dwelling of God is now with his people and he will live among them. The word John uses for dwelling can mean dwelling of a general kind but specifically it means a tent like the tabernacle in the wilderness. The verb translated "live with them" in the NIV; the ESV translates "He will dwell with them." Literally it means to pitch one's tent and is the same word John uses in John 1:14 to say "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Some translate that phrase "the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us." The image is taken from the wandering in the wilderness in Exodus and Numbers. God dwelt in the tabernacle among his people. Here in Revelation 21 John sees God providing a new dwelling where all of his people will live with him in perfect harmony and the desire of the Lord expressed in many places throughout the Bible will be finally fulfilled. We the church will be his people and God will be our God. All the covenants God made with his people and all his promises to them will be finally and completely fulfilled!
In the New Jerusalem there will be no more cause for crying because death, mourning and pain will be gone. The old order of things that was marred by human and demonic sin has passed away. The verb for passed away is an aorist active indicative implying a once for all action. The old sinful order is no more, never to return! Imagine a world where there is no temptation, no sin, no death, no grief, and no loss. We cannot even fathom what that would be like because we are so used to sin and its consequences. God will have removed all grief from us.

What about grief over those we love who have rejected Christ and are now in hell? John's implication is that God will have removed that grief from us. Do we remember them? I cannot say. But if one takes John's words seriously it points to an act of grace by God that is beyond imagining. If God removes all grief from us and all pain then we do not mourn those who are lost eternally. Who remembers the lost? God does. He bears the grief for us eternally and mourns those who could have chosen him but instead rejected his offer of salvation in Jesus. He is the source of all joy for us but he also takes all the grief and pain we might feel over lost loved ones who rejected God and bears that pain forever on our behalf. We will experience joy in his presence in heaven. The only one who will feel any grief is the Lord himself. He does it for us so that we will not have to bear the pain. It is the final act of grace for a God who loves us beyond our comprehension!

21:5-8 - John now hears God himself speak. He is making everything new. The verb is a present active indicative. God's words imply that the newness of the New Jerusalem is not a once for all action by God, a static creation. Instead it is continuous and ongoing. The word for new means both that which is unused or never been used like a package that has never been opened or that which is unknown, strange or remarkable. It carries with it the idea of something marvelous and better. The New Jerusalem is marvelous and wonderful and is better than the old creation in every way imaginable.

God tells John to write down what he says because it is trustworthy and true. God is not trying to remind John that he is telling the truth. He understands that the vision of the New Jerusalem is so overwhelming and wonderful that it would be easy for John and his readers to doubt it. God wants to affirm that this is indeed the future that he has in store for his people! You can trust it!

God continues to speak. He declares it is done. The verb in Greek means to be or become or to come about, to be made or created. It is a different word than Jesus' cry on the cross in John 19, "It is finished!" The meanings however are similar. It is a statement of accomplishment. The surprising thing is the verb is in the perfect tense, which indicates a past action whose effects continue on into the present. I think God expresses his timelessness here. To the Lord God Almighty the New Jerusalem is an already accomplished fact. We do not need to doubt whether God will create it or not. It is done!

God then repeats a title he used in Revelation 1:8. He is the Alpha and Omega. Those are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. God clarifies his meaning by saying he is the Beginning and the End. Everything begins and ends with God the Creator. Paul says at the end of Romans 11, "For from him and through him and to him are all things." The Lord God is the origin, the agent and the goal of creation. Paul also speaks of the Lord Jesus in the same way in Colossians 1. John affirms the same thing in Revelation 22:13 when the Lord Jesus says he is the Alpha and Omega. Jesus is God the Creator!

God contrasts the benefits of knowing him and being a citizen of the New Jerusalem with the consequences of rejecting the Lord Jesus and his salvation. To those who follow the Lord
Jesus and are thirsty God will give them water from the spring of the water of life without cost. 
We see the river of the water of life in 22:1, in the midst of the New Jerusalem flowing down from the 
throne of God. It is possible John sees the spring of the water of life coming from the 
throne of God itself or more precisely from the one who sits on the throne, the Lamb of God, 
Jesus Christ. He told the woman at the well in John 4 that he could give her living water that 
well up like a spring inside of her to eternal life. Jesus told the crowds gathered in the temple on 
the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7:37-38: If anyone is thirsty let him come to me 
and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow 
from within him. John adds that Jesus was speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit to those 
who would believe in him. Isaiah said in Isaiah 55:1: Come, all who are thirsty, come to the 
waters.

God promises to the one who overcomes, who remains faithful, God will give them a 
share in the New Jerusalem. This will be their inheritance. God himself will be their God and 
they will be his son. God uses the specific Greek word for son here, not the more generic word 
for child. God is not being sexist or exclusive. This is language that relates specifically to the 
Messiah and our being joint heirs with the Lord Jesus. In the Covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 
God tells David that when a son of his sits upon his throne God will be his Father and the king 
will be God's son. That adoption language was used in the Messianic prophecy in Psalm 2:7: 
You are my Son, today I have become your Father. The great prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7 says: For 
to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he 
will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the 
increase of his government and peace there will be no end, He will reign on David's throne and 
over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on 
and forever, the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. Paul affirms in Romans 1 that 
Jesus was descended from David and declared to be God's Son through the Holy Spirit by his 
resurrection from the dead. In Romans 8 Paul says we have received the adoption as sons 
through the Holy Spirit given to us when we cry, "Abba, Father!" Paul goes on to say in Romans 
8:12: Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. In 
Galatians 3 Paul says we are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. In Galatians 4:7 he 
says: So you are no longer a slave but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an 
heir. The Lord Jesus tells the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:21: To him who overcomes, I 
will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father 
on his throne. God restates here in Revelation 22 a theme repeated many times in the New 
Testament; we are joint heirs with Christ and have been adopted by God as his children and 
have been given the status of sons along with our Lord Jesus. We are heirs with Christ!

The consequences of rejecting God's offer of salvation however are too horrible to 
contemplate. John says the place or share of sinners who do not repent, who continue in their 
rebellion and sin will be the lake of fire; hell. This is the second death. They will be eternally 
separated from God and completely cut off from his presence. John lists specific sins or types of 
people who practice specific sins as representative of those who will be in hell. This is not an 
exhaustive list but is similar in type to Paul's list of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5. John's 
list relates to all of those who have followed Satan and the beast. The cowardly are those who 
have little faith and would not believe in Jesus and overcome. The unbelieving are those who 
refuse to have faith. The Greek word is apistois, with an alpha privative as a prefix to the word 
pistis which means faith. In Greek an alpha privative negates the word to which it is attached. 
They are anti-faith or they negate faith. The unbelieving don't lack courage they are rebellious
and refuse to surrender their lives to the Lord Jesus. The vile are those who practice things that are detestable to God, many of which God lists in the Holiness Codes in Leviticus 18-19. A similar word is used to describe the "abomination of desolation" the sacrifice by the antichrist which defiles God's temple in Daniel 9 and Matthew 24. Next are the murderers, those who have violated God's sixth commandment in Exodus 20:13. They take human life with malice and without cause. The sexually immoral are excluded from being an heir with Christ. The word is porneia in Greek and specifically means all sexual intercourse outside of marriage but in more general terms means any kind of sexual immorality or perversion. We get the word pornography from this Greek word. Those who practice magic arts are excluded from the New Jerusalem. The word in Greek is pharmakos and means anyone who uses spells and makes potions. It also positively means someone who mixes medicine but it is used most often in a negative way. It is frequently translated sorcery. In a general sense it means all those who dabble in the occult. They seek power from Satan and not the Spirit's power through surrendering their lives to the Lord Jesus. Idolaters are literally those who worship pagan idols, which was the entire Roman world in John's day. In a general way the word means worshipping anything people put in the place of God. Paul says in Ephesians 5:5 that the greedy are idolaters because they worship money and things rather than God. Finally God says all liars are excluded from the New Jerusalem. Liars are those who practice falsehood and refuse to tell the truth. They violate God's ninth commandment from Exodus 20. Jesus said in John 8 that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. Those who lie habitually follow Satan and not God because God is the Truth! All those who practice sins such as these receive the lake of fire, the second death, or hell as their inheritance. They are outside of God's grace forever!

21:9-14 - One of the angels with the seven bowls of wrath becomes John's tour guide and he takes him to see the New Jerusalem. He tells John he will show him the bride, the wife of the Lamb. In chapter 19 the bride of Christ is the church, God's people. Here it is the dwelling of God's people and the Lord God, the New Jerusalem. Why John changes who the bride is he does not tell us. Perhaps there is no significant distinction since the New Jerusalem is where God and his people will dwell forever. The New Jerusalem frames God's relationship with his church, his bride. We will be his "wife", his partner and intimate friend forever.

The angel takes John in the Spirit, meaning in a vision, to a great high mountain. In Isaiah 11 & 25 Isaiah describes God's Kingdom or God with his people as a great mountain. In Isaiah 25 he describes the Messianic Feast that he will host for all people on the mountain of the Lord. In Daniel 2 Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great image made of gold, silver, bronze and iron. A stone not cut out by human hands smashes the image and it falls to pieces. The stone then becomes a great mountain that fills the whole earth. The stone that becomes the mountain symbolizes the Kingdom of God. The mountain John is shown here also symbolizes God's Kingdom and his rule over the whole earth.

It appears that the city sits on top of the great high mountain but John does not specifically say that. The city itself comes down out of heaven from God. It is not built by human hands but is wholly God's creation for his people. It is not of the earth but of heaven. It does not belong to the old order of sin and death but to the new heaven and new earth. John says the city shown with the glory of God. Like the glory of God filled the tabernacle in Exodus 40 and Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 8 so the glory of God fills the whole city. It shone like a precious jewel like jasper clear as crystal. When John saw a vision of God the Creator on his throne in
heaven in *Revelation* 4 he described him as appearing like a precious jewel, like jasper and carnelian. The city is not God but it reflects God's splendor and beauty.

The city had a great high wall not for protection but as an expression of majesty and power. The wall had twelve gates with twelve angels standing at each of the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. It is interesting to note that John says all twelve tribes are named. In *chapter* 7 in his vision of the 144,000 the tribe of Dan is left out and the tribe of Joseph is named one and a half times. Here no such omissions are made. There are three gates on each side of the city wall totaling twelve gates in all. John reports that the wall had twelve foundations and on each of the foundations are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus. This too is an interesting detail. In *Acts* 1 the apostles draw lots to replace Judas and the lot falls to Matthias who is then enrolled as one of the Twelve. However, in the rest of *Acts* he is never mentioned again and Luke frequently calls Jesus' apostles the Eleven. What is the name of the twelfth apostle on the foundation of the New Jerusalem? Is it Matthias? Is it Paul or perhaps James the Lord's brother? John does not tell us but I do not believe it is Judas Iscariot because the Gospels say he was filled with Satan and cast out. Despite the questions the symbolism of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the Lamb is clear. God's Old and New Testament saints dwell together with the Lord in the New Jerusalem. There is only one people of God made up of Jews and Gentiles; the church of the Lord Jesus Christ!

21:15-21 - The angel with John had a gold measuring rod with which he measured the city, its gates and walls. John reports that the city was as long as it was wide, meaning it was laid out as a square. Yet when he measures the walls they are as wide and high as they are long which means the city is a cube. The angel measures the length of each wall as 12,000 stadia. That translates into approximately 1400 miles or more accurately 1380 miles in our measurements. John pictures a city shaped like a cube 1400 miles on a side sitting on top of a high mountain. That is the New Jerusalem! From a Middle Eastern perspective 1400 miles would be the distance between Jerusalem and Rome. In fact on a straight line it is 1380 miles from Jerusalem to Rome. Is that a coincidence? I do not know but it is intriguing. The wall itself was 144 cubits thick, meaning it was 65 meters or 216 feet thick. In contrast the walls of Babylon in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's day were 21 feet thick about one tenth the width of the walls the angel measures. To the people of John's day the city is unimaginably huge! It would be this in our day too! Why so huge? If this is the home of God and all his saints from all the ages it would have to be gigantic.

John says the wall of the city was made of jasper, a semiprecious stone. In 21:17 John described the glory of God in the city shining like jasper, clear as crystal. Now he says the very walls of the city were made of jasper. In antiquity jasper could refer to any opaque precious stone and not necessarily the specific modern stone of jasper. John says the city itself was made of pure gold as pure as glass. The ESV translates the phrase, "like clear glass." The Greek word translated pure and clear is the same word, *katharos*. In a physical sense it means clean and pure, the finest, purest gold. It can also be used in a moral or ritual sense in which it means clean or without sin, ritually pure. I don't think John means the gold was ritually pure but it is an interesting connection. I think John means that the gold was as shiny and reflective as glass not transparent like glass. There were no impurities in it.

The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. John gives us the names of twelve stones. He implies that each foundation stone was decorated with the twelve different kinds of precious jewels. The precise identification of all these stones is
difficult because ancient names do not always correspond with modern meanings. Understanding that, the twelve stones are similar yet different from the twelve stones of the breastplate of the high priest in Exodus 28. There they represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Exodus says the twelve stones were: ruby, topaz, beryl, turquoise, sapphire or lapis lazuli, emerald, jacinth, agate, amethyst, chrysolite, onyx and jasper. In Revelation 21 the stones are: jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth and amethyst. John may be contrasting the Old Covenant priests with the New Covenant people of God who are all priests. The stones decorating the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem upon which are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are similar yet different from the priests of Israel who failed and broke God's covenant at Mt. Sinai. The New Testament people are redeemed by the great High Priest our Lord Jesus Christ. They have conquered and have not failed.

Another possibility for the various stones is John reflects the language of Isaiah 54:11-12 referring to a rebuilt Jerusalem which says: I will build you with stones of turquoise, your foundations with sapphires. I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of sparkling jewels, all your walls of precious stones. John takes Isaiah's picture and gives it more detail relating it to the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem.

John says the twelve gates of the city were made from twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. That must have been some oyster! This is of course not naturally possible and if John is being literal the pearls are direct creations of God because no oyster in existence could make a pearl that big. A gate made of a single pearl would be an overwhelmingly beautiful sight! Here is literally the pearl of great price! John's description is the origin of the saying about the pearly gates of heaven. Literally John is not describing heaven but the New Jerusalem, the dwelling of God and his people that comes down from heaven.

The streets of the city were also made of pure gold, like transparent glass. The verb form of the Greek word for transparent means to shine through. The image is that the gold is so pure one can see light through it or literally see through it. John may be trying to make a distinction between the gold from which the city itself is built and its streets or he may simply be using the same words to describe the golden streets of the city. Either way the New Jerusalem is more beautiful than we can fathom. It is made from the finest, most expensive and most precious materials on earth. It is a place beyond imagination. Perhaps we should not try and make John be literal in describing the City of God. Think of it another way. The city contains more wealth, treasure, gold and precious stones than all the kings of all the ages of human history combined. That is just the building. The greatest treasure of all is who lives within it; the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb with his people!

21:22-27 - John does not see a temple in the New Jerusalem because the Lord God and the Lamb are its temple. That raises an issue for those who teach the Jewish temple is rebuilt during the Millennium. What happened to it? If it was rebuilt why isn't it in the New Jerusalem? One could argue that apocalyptic literature is fluid and John simply changes the details of his vision. However, those who teach a rebuilt temple tend to have a very literal interpretation of Revelation and teach that it is in chronological order. I simply raise the issue to demonstrate that some Dispensational and Evangelical interpretations of Revelation still have many difficulties. No one interpretation answers all the questions this book raises!

The Lord God and the Lamb are the temple in the New Jerusalem. In the Old Testament it was thought that the temple and specifically the Ark of the Covenant was the footstool of
God’s throne. At least part of God dwelt with his people even though his true throne was in heaven. John says God now dwells with his people directly. When Jesus became incarnate as in John 1:14 his glory as God’s Son was veiled. Paul says in Philippians 2 he emptied himself of his divine power and privileges and took on the form of a servant, meaning a mortal human being. There is no veiling of God’s glory in the New Jerusalem. John says the glory of God in the city is so great there is no more need for the sun and moon because the glory of the Lord gives the city its light. The Lamb, Jesus Christ himself is our lamp. John speaks of a new order of creation that is totally different than the universe in which we live. This IS a totally new creation! He says God's glory gives his people all the light they need and they no longer even need the sun and moon to see but we can't even begin to imagine what that would be like! Everything is totally new!

Verse 24 raises some difficulties. The nations will walk by the light of God's glory and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into the New Jerusalem. They will bring the glory and honor of the nations into the city. Who are the nations? What does John mean? Are there people who are not part of God's people still left alive in the new heaven and earth who live outside the New Jerusalem? If one takes John absolutely literally that is what one is led to believe. I do not think however that John is implying there are people alive in the new heaven and earth who are outside God's people. John is using the picture in Isaiah 60:11 where Isaiah says: Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut, day or night, so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations - their kings led in triumphal procession.

I think the image of the kings of the earth bringing their splendor into the city and the nations bringing their glory into it is a picture of a redeemed humanity bringing what is best about human culture, art and technology into the New Jerusalem. Whatever is good that can be redeemed is redeemed. God is the Creator and he made us to create as well. Paul said in Philippians 4 that we are to think about whatever is good, noble, pure and beautiful. Sinful humanity is twisted by evil. But we are still made in the image and likeness of God. I think John is saying all those things human beings have made that reflect God's image are brought into the New Jerusalem. They are cleansed of any vestiges of sin and fully redeemed in order to add to the glory of the city and the glory of God. Like the twenty-four elders who cast their crowns before the Lord and his throne in Revelation 4 so the kings of the earth offer that which is noble from their reigns to God for his glory. God remakes his creation but what is good and noble and beautiful from the old creation is saved and brought into the new. Not everything will be lost!

The gates of the city will never be shut because there is no night there. In the ancient world where there were no streetlights and any light at all during the night was dim the night was a time of fear and danger. There will be no danger and fear in the New Jerusalem. There is no need to lock the gates to keep evil out and the people safe. The world has changed!! The difficulty of John's image however is that he implies that people come and go from the New Jerusalem. One could take that to mean someone lives out in the world outside the city. That idea leads to the concept that there might be people living in the world who are not part of God's people. I do not think that is what John is implying or wanting to say. A better explanation is that the city is the home of God's people and they come and go as they please out into a world that has been remade and is free from sin and death. The idea of the gates never being shut is John's way to illustrate the city’s safety. God's people experience his shalom!

Nothing impure will ever enter into the city even though the gates are never shut. No one who does what is shameful or deceitful will come into the city. The word for impure also means unclean. The word is related in the Old Testament to ritual purity and holiness. The term
shameful also means those who practice anything that is detestable to God or is an abomination. This is related to the list of vices in Revelation 21:8. The word for deceitful means someone who practices falsehood. As we have seen Satan is the father of lies and someone who acts falsely follows Satan. All those who have followed Satan are excluded from the city. John has already shown us at the last judgment that all those who have rejected Christ are cast into the lake of fire. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life are allowed to live in the city and go and come from it. In other words the only people alive with God in the New Jerusalem are his people. All others experience the second death; hell.

Chapter 22:
22:1-5 - The angel that was measuring the city and showing John the New Jerusalem now shows him the river of the water of life. It was clear as crystal and flowed from the throne of God and the Lamb down the middle of the street of the city. In Ezekiel's vision of the eschatological temple in Ezekiel 47 he sees a river flowing from the temple that grows deeper and deeper the further it flows from the temple. It flows down into the Arabah (the southern Jordan Valley near the Dead Sea) and makes it a fertile place again. In Zechariah 14 Zechariah sees living water flowing from Jerusalem half to the Mediterranean and half to the Dead Sea.

On either side of the river flowing from the throne of God stands the tree of life. The tree reappears here in the final chapters of Revelation. It is mentioned in Genesis 2 & 3 in the Garden of Eden account. It is used as a metaphor in several places in Proverbs and is mentioned in the letter to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2. It is a single tree in the Garden of Eden representing the eternal life of God. Here in Revelation 22 it is at least two trees, one on either side of the river. In Genesis 3 after the fall of humankind God guards the entrance to the Garden to keep Adam and Eve from eating from the tree of life and living eternally in their sin. God protects them lest there is no chance for repentance and salvation. In Revelation 22 anyone who lives in the New Jerusalem may eat freely of the fruit of the tree. It is no longer guarded but available to all! The eternal life of God is for all of God's people.

John observes that the tree bears a crop of fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. In Ezekiel 47 Ezekiel sees many fruit trees growing on either side of the river that flows from God's temple. The fruit of the trees is for food and the leaves are for healing. John borrows that image and expands it so that the fruit trees are the tree of life itself. The leaves have medicinal properties and bring healing. Unlike Ezekiel's vision which concentrates on Israel John sees the tree of life as healing the nations of the world. This relates back to his statements in 21:22-27 that the nations will bring their glory into the city to add to its glory and the glory of God. God's purpose is the uniting and healing of the human race through his Son Jesus Christ. Both the river and the tree of life emphasize God's plan for the nations. In Ezekiel and Zechariah the water flowing from Jerusalem is for the healing of the land of Israel. In Revelation 22 John expands their vision and sees God healing the nations and not just Israel. It should be noted however that the nations are Gentiles who are part of the people of God and follow the Lamb, Jesus Christ. They are the ones along with Jews who follow Jesus as their Messiah and who inhabit the New Jerusalem.

John says no longer will there be any curse. There are three possibilities for what he means. The first is the curse of sin that Jesus bore in his body on the cross. Paul says in Galatians 3:13 that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. He is talking about God's judgment against human sin. That curse has been wiped out because of what Jesus did on the cross. A second possibility is God will no longer hold Israel accountable to
the covenant curses for disobedience outlined in Leviticus 26 & Deuteronomy 28, many of which John uses as a type for the judgments in Revelation. The third and most likely possibility is God will remove the curse upon the ground itself defined in Genesis 3 at the fall of humankind. Adam (man in Hebrew) sinned and because of his sin the ground out of which God formed him, the adamah in Hebrew, was cursed. In the new heaven and new earth that curse has been removed. The earth itself is no longer subject to the curse of human sin. Paul expands that idea in Romans 8 when he says the creation itself was subject to decay but will be liberated from it when the glory of the children of God is revealed. He is speaking of the resurrection of God's people and the new heaven and earth. John may have in mind all three examples of the curse in the Old Testament. There will be no more sin and its consequences and the new creation will be free from all the effects of sin. All judgment for sin will have taken place and since God's people will be redeemed and completely free from sin there will be no more fear of judgment in the New Jerusalem!

The throne of God and of the Lamb, which John has pictured in heaven earlier in Revelation, will now be in the New Jerusalem. It will be among God's people and he will dwell with them directly. In the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2 & 3 God's throne was never in the Garden. John's vision is greater than Paradise because now God will dwell in the midst of his people. We will directly serve the Lord. The Greek word generally means service but in the New Testament it is only used to describe worship. The NIV and NASB translate the word as “serve him.” The NRSV, NLT and ESV all translate it “worship.” We will join the picture John gives us in Revelation 4 & 5 of the angels surrounding God's throne and giving God worship. What "work" we will have to do in heaven we cannot say with any certainty. We can say however that a major part of that work will be the worship and praise of our God. Worship here on earth is a dress rehearsal for heaven. The object of our worship is God. The purpose of our worship is to give God honor and glory. Worship is not for us. In it we serve God! We need to remember that when we worship him here on Sunday mornings!

God's people will see the Lord's face! Theologians call this the Beatific Vision meaning the most beautiful sight one could ever imagine; the face of God himself. Jesus said in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 that the pure in heart would see God. In the New Jerusalem all his saints are pure because sin has been forgiven and we are holy to the Lord. Paul comments in 1 Corinthians 13 that now we see in a mirror dimly, then we will see face to face; meaning we will see God directly being personally present with him. In the Old Testament there are conflicting passages on seeing God's face. The norm however is that God's face is too holy to gaze upon and would destroy anyone who sees it. Moses asks to see God's glory in Exodus 33. God shows him his back in Exodus 34 and declares his name and his glory to Moses when he hides him in the cleft in the rock. He does this because as God tells Moses in Exodus 33:20, You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Isaiah cries out in fear in Isaiah 6 when he sees his vision of God in the temple. He says, "Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!" Ezekiel sees the throne of God and the cherubim that surround the throne but cannot see any details of God's face in Ezekiel 1. Yet, in the priestly blessing of Numbers 6 God tells Aaron to bless the people and say, "May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you." There is a desire in the Old Testament to see God face to face but also fear of that because humans are sinful and God is absolutely holy. To see God directly would undo us because of his holiness. John tells us that when he and the disciples saw Jesus they were seeing God, yet the Lord had veiled his glory by taking on human form in the incarnation. Here in Revelation 22
there are no more barriers. We will see God face to face and live! Now we are holy even as God is holy. Now all consequences of sin have been healed and wiped clean. God's purpose from the very beginning of creation, to have a people for himself, has finally been fulfilled. As Revelation 21:3 says: They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

The Lord's name will be on our foreheads, meaning we will be marked as God's and be under his protection and authority. We are the Lord's! In 3:12 Jesus promises to write his name, the name of God and the name of the New Jerusalem, on the believers in the church in Philadelphia. In 7:3 the 144,000 are sealed upon their foreheads marking them as God's. In 9:4 those who are sealed upon their foreheads by God are protected from the plague of demonic locusts in the fifth trumpet. In 14:1 the 144,000 stand before the Lamb on Mt. Zion. They have the Lord's name and the Father's name written on their foreheads. John confirms in 22:4 the ultimate fate of those who are faithful to the Lord Jesus. They will be in the New Jerusalem with the Lord forever!

Night will be no more. The ancients feared the night because any lamps they had were weak and unable to illuminate much beyond a room in a house. There were no streetlights. I think of how dark it is in some towns in Uganda or Rwanda at night. Predators hunt at night. Thus the night was something to be feared. Now all reason for fear is past. The night is chased away by the presence of the Lord God and of the Lamb. There will be no more need for sun or moon to light the skies because the Lord God will give God's people the light of his presence. John describes an existence that we cannot even begin to understand. Our days are marked by the rising and setting of the sun. We are made with biological clocks that respond to that rhythm. In the New Jerusalem, in our resurrected state that existence completely passes away. We will have permanent day in the presence of the Lord. John implies the need for sleep is now gone. Zechariah 14 describes the Day of the Lord. It will be a unique day without daytime or nighttime. It is a day known only to the Lord. Isaiah 60 says in the Day of the Lord the sun will no longer light our day or the moon shine at night. The Lord will be our everlasting light and the glory of his people. In Genesis 1 God created the sun to rule the day and the moon and stars to govern the night. The creation itself was marked by the rhythm of evening and morning. In the new heaven and new earth God will create a brand new reality unlike the old creation. The best John can do to describe that new creation is give us hints but what it shall be like to dwell directly with God in a timeless eternity we cannot imagine!

We will reign with the Lord Jesus for ever and ever. In Galatians 4 and Romans 8 Paul says we will be joint heirs with Christ and share in his glory. Isaiah 9 says the Messiah will reign on David's throne with justice and righteousness forever. Daniel 7 says the Son of Man will be given power, authority and dominion over all peoples and his dominion will be an everlasting one that will never pass away. Paul says in 2 Timothy 2 that if we endure or persevere with Christ we will also reign with him. Revelation 20 describes the Millennial reign of the Lord Jesus. His saints will be resurrected and reign with him for 1000 years. Chapter 22 intensifies that picture. Satan is not bound; he is cast into the lake of fire to be punished forever. The earth is not restored to paradise conditions it is totally recreated in a new heaven and earth. No one is left alive on earth that does not worship the Lord Jesus and is not resurrected. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life live in the New Jerusalem with God. Even heaven itself is recreated. There is no person, whether demon or human, who opposes God and his reign. We, God's people, will share in that reign and God himself will live among us. Nothing that is evil in heaven or earth will exist anymore. God will reign in peace and joy forever and ever.
Augustine described the New Jerusalem and God's people living and reigning with him this way: “And that seventh age will be our Sabbath, a day that knows no evening, but is followed by the day of the Lord, an everlasting eighth day, hallowed by the resurrection of Christ, prefiguring the eternal rest not only of the spirit, but of the body as well. Then we shall have holiday and we shall see, we shall see and we shall love, we shall love and we shall praise. Behold, this is how it shall be at the end without end. For what else is our end, but to come to that kingdom which has no end?”

22:6-9 - In 21:5 God told John the words he said about the New Jerusalem were true. In 22:6 the angel that measured the city and showed John God's throne, the river of the water of life and the tree of life repeats God's statement. The vision or the words John has heard are trustworthy and true. Why the reassurance to John that what he is seeing is true? I think it is because it is so amazing and overwhelming. It isn't just a vision or what John's imagination wants to happen. This is what God will do for his people!

The angel adds that the Lord who is the God of the spirits of the prophets sent his angel to John to show him what must soon take place. The spirits of the prophets is really the Holy Spirit. In Revelation 4 & 5 John calls the Holy Spirit the seven spirits of God and uses the plural to describe the fullness of God's Spirit. The angel may be using the same language here in chapter 22. I do not think John is talking about the individual spirit of each prophet. He is describing the same Holy Spirit who resides in each prophet and who reveals God's future to his prophets. The vision John is shown of the New Jerusalem is the future that God will bring for his people.

In verse 7 the Lord Jesus speaks and declares that he is coming soon. He repeats the phrase in verse 12. Despite the repetition this does not appear to be any sort of literary device setting off verses 8-11. The two statements simply repeat a very important statement of the Lord Jesus. He repeats it a third time in verse 20 almost at the very end of the book. The Lord declares one of the central doctrines of the church; Jesus Christ is coming back. See Acts 1, Hebrews 9, 1 Thessalonians 4 and John 14 for other examples. John has already shown us a picture of Jesus' Second Coming in Revelation 19.

The Lord Jesus adds another blessing to his declaration of his return. Blessed are those who keep the words of the prophecy. The word for keep means to keep watch over, guard, obey, preserve or pay attention to. It can mean both not to lose something by guarding it or to obey it and do what it says. Both meanings may be present here. Jesus uses the exact same language in the letter to the church in Philadelphia in Revelation 3:10. He says because they have "kept" his word he will "keep" them from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world. It is interesting to note that in the very next verse, in 3:11 Jesus says he is coming soon. In the context of Revelation 22 to keep the words of the prophecy means to stay faithful to the Lord Jesus and endure patiently the suffering that is coming in order to overcome and be victorious. These are the same themes that have repeated themselves throughout the book.

This is the sixth of seven blessings in Revelation. They are in order: blessed are those who read aloud the words of the book in 1:3; blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on, in 14:13 given right before the seven bowls; blessed are those who stay awake in 16:15 right after the sixth bowl and before the seventh; blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb in 19:9; blessed are those who share in the first resurrection in 20:6; the blessing given here in 22:7, blessed are those who keep the words of the prophecy; and the
seventh blessing, blessed are those who wash their robes who have a share in the tree of life and the New Jerusalem in 22:14.

John adds his testimony like a signature to the prophecy. He declares he is the one who saw and heard these things. He says something similar at the end of his gospel in John 21:24 and at the beginning of his first letter in 1 John 1:1-4.

Once again John is so overwhelmed by the vision the angel shows him he falls down at its feet and begins to worship the angel. The angel tells John to stop it! Don't do that! He is just a fellow servant along with all John's fellow believers, his brothers the prophets and all who keep the words of the book, the prophecy. Then the angel commands John, worship God! Worship is an aorist active imperative. The angel turns John's adoration or honor to God alone. That is the first and greatest commandment!

22:10-11 - The angel tells John not to seal up the words of the prophecy because the time is near. The word for seal is the verbal form of the word for seal that has been used throughout Revelation. It can mean to secure of fasten something like the stone that sealed Jesus' tomb or to mark with a seal in order to identify something or someone, to show ownership. This is the primary meaning in Revelation. In context here in 22:10 it means to seal something in order to keep it secret. The verb is an aorist active subjunctive which is curious because one would expect an aorist imperative here. It is possible that John uses the aorist subjunctive as an imperative which sometimes can be used in that way. The point is he is told not to keep the prophecy secret because the time is near. The word for time is kairos and not chronos. Kairos is related to the timing of God's plan whereas chronos is the simple passage of time or a point in time. Kairos is often used to describe the last times or the last days which may be the case here. The angel is telling John the church is in the last days so don't seal up the prophecy because God's people need its message. The kairos - time is now!

This is in marked contrast to Daniel and the instructions he received. In Daniel 12 he is told to go his way because the words are closed up until the time of the end. John is told not to seal up the book because the time of the end is near! This is further reinforced in Daniel when the angel says in 12:10: Many will be purified; made spotless and refined but the wicked will continue to be wicked. John is told in Revelation 22:11: Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy. The statements are similar and express the idea that people will be both good and sinful as we approach the time for the prophecy to be fulfilled. In Daniel's case it was many centuries in the future for even the events of Antiochus Epiphanes and his persecution to unfold. For John the events are unfolding even now.

In what sense however are we, the church, in the last days or the last time? Even though John writes in symbols it is very difficult to declare that much of Revelation has been fulfilled already or during the centuries since John wrote. There is much that is yet to be fulfilled, especially in these final chapters of Revelation. John's understanding is the New Testament's understanding. We are already in the last days and have been since Jesus came into the world. The Messiah has come. The Holy Spirit has been given. He is coming back soon! We live in the brief interval between the lightning of the resurrection and the thunder of Jesus’ Second Coming. From a human historical perspective the end times are a long time coming. From God's perspective they are already here but not yet fulfilled. It is in that tension the New Testament says we must live and witness to the Lord Jesus.
John uses words in verse 11 that repeat in a Hebrew fashion. I do not think he is giving two categories of evil people and two categories of righteous people. I think he is repeating himself in Hebrew poetic fashion in order to emphasize his point. The Greek word for wrong is *adikeo* which is the root of the word for righteousness with an alpha privative in front of it which negates its meaning. Righteous becomes unrighteous. Specifically it means any violation of God’s Law, to do wrong. The word for vile is related more closely to that which is defiled or filthy in a moral or ceremonial sense. What is curious about this verse is that John puts the verbs in the aorist imperative mood. These are written as commands. Literally the first part of the verse reads: *The doing wrong one do wrong still and the filthy one be filthy still*. He uses the same construction for the positive words, do right and be holy. The word for do right is *dikaios* and holy is *hagios*. Those are the most common words in Greek in the New Testament for those two terms. Why does John use commands here? One would expect he would use the mood of contingency, the subjunctive mood and not the imperative. It is possible that John is reinforcing the idea that there are only two kinds of people in the world: the vile and unrighteous and the righteous and holy. The meaning of the words implies peoples’ destinies are already fixed. Where then is the possibility for repentance? From the rest of Scripture we know God always welcomes people who repent of their sin. John shows us that as we get closer and closer to the fulfillment of his prophecy the two kinds of people in the world will get more and more apparent. The distinctions will increase.

22:12-16 - The Lord Jesus now speaks in verses 12-16. The ESV has Jesus speaking in verses 12-13 & 16. It has verses 14-15 spoken by someone else. The NIV takes the whole section as the words of Jesus.

Jesus declares he is coming soon. He repeats the declaration he made in 22:7. This time he adds that when he comes he will bring a reward and give to everyone according to what he or she has done. He states again the theme of judgment for our deeds that occurs throughout Revelation. The emphasis here is on the positive, of rewards. The ESV translates the word recompense, which means reward or wages. The angel who has been speaking to John had just told him that those who do wrong will continue to do wrong and those who act righteously will continue to act righteously. Now the Lord Jesus speaks of bringing his reward with him when he comes. The implication is he will reward his followers with eternal life and the right to live in the New Jerusalem with him forever. That is reinforced in verses 14-15 which state that those who wash their robes have the right to the tree of life but outside are all those who are wicked and false.

Jesus says he is the Alpha and Omega, the First and Last and the Beginning and the End. In 1:8 the Lord God says he is the Alpha and Omega. The two statements cannot both be true unless Jesus is God as well. The Jehovah’s Witnesses deny Jesus’ divinity but these verses in Revelation prove just the opposite. Isaiah declares in Isaiah 44 that the Lord God is the first and the last and apart from him there is no God! Jesus has already claimed to be the first and the last in Revelation 1:17. Furthermore God names himself the Beginning and the End in 21:6 in his invitation to his people to come to the New Jerusalem. Jesus identifies himself in the same way in 22:13. He takes three titles God uses and applies them to himself. See the notes above on Revelation 21:6 for further information. The Lord Jesus must therefore be God because he claims to be precisely who God is! Jesus declares his divinity to show John and his readers that he has the authority to accomplish what he says. He is the judge of all and he will bring with him his reward when he comes.
The Lord Jesus then once more describes the two different classes of the human race. There are the blessed, those who have washed their robes and have the right to the tree of life and to enter the New Jerusalem. The phrase "washed their robes" was used in Revelation 7:14 to describe the great multitude that came out of the Great Tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white "in the blood of the Lamb." It is a metaphor for faith in the Lord Jesus and the forgiveness that he brings. John means the same thing here. Those who trust their salvation to the Lord Jesus have access to the tree of life or eternal life. They will live with God forever in the New Jerusalem. Revelation 7 pictured the great multitude worshipping the Lord in heaven. Jesus confirms that vision in these verses in chapter 22.

The other class of human beings however the Lord calls “the dogs." This is a difficult phrase. Paul uses the same title in Philippians 3:2 when he warned the church in Philippi to watch out for the dogs, the evildoers, and those who mutilate the flesh. He was describing the opponents of the gospel. In John's day, especially in Judea and Galilee, Gentiles were often referred to as dogs by the Jews. It was a demeaning name that showed contempt. Jesus is not using dogs as a racial slur here. He is identifying those who have rejected him. The implication is they are now less than human. They have become like animals. Theologically that agrees with the idea that human beings are made to be in a relationship with God and when we reject that relationship we diminish and become less than human. We can never be who we were created to be!

The Lord Jesus describes "the dogs". He uses basically the same list of sins as in Revelation 21:8. There are those who practice magic arts or sorcery. The word is pharmakos. The sexually immoral are next and the word he uses is pornos from porneia. Murderers and idolaters are listed next and go together. The last group is those who practice falsehood. The Greek word he uses is pseudos. Jesus said in John 8 that Satan was the father of lies. Those who practice falsehood and lying follow Satan and therefore have no share in the New Jerusalem. The Lord God was the one who spoke in 21:8 inviting those who follow Jesus to come into the city and excluding those who refuse. He uses basically the same list to describe those who are cast into the lake of fire and experience the second death. Here in Revelation 22:14-15 it is the Lord Jesus who offers a blessing to those who have faith in him and declares that those who do not are outside the New Jerusalem. They are outside his grace. The list of sinners is very close to the same as in 21:8. Jesus shows by his self-identification, his blessing and his declaration of judgment that he is God himself. When he speaks God speaks! There can be no doubt; the Lord Jesus Christ is God!

Jesus affirms that he has sent his angel to give this testimony, meaning the prophecy, to all the churches. He literally says, "to give you this testimony for the churches." The "you" in Greek is plural. John is the primary messenger but the message is for you all; the seven churches in Asia Minor. At the beginning of Revelation in 1:1 it says: The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John. John addresses his prophecy in 1:4: John, to the seven churches in Asia. Jesus’ statement here at the end of Revelation repeats what was said at the beginning.

The Lord Jesus then identifies himself again as the Messiah. He says he is the Root and the Offspring of David. Jesus is identified the same way in 5:5: See, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David has triumphed. The Root of David is language that is similar to the prophecies in Isaiah 11 and Jeremiah 33 that speak of the Branch from David's line, the shoot out of the stump of Jesse, David's father. The Greek word can mean a root or a shoot that sprouts from the root which is the picture Isaiah and Jeremiah paint concerning the Messiah. He will
sprout from the root or stump of David's line. Jesus tells the churches he is not only God himself he is the Messiah; the direct descendant of King David and fully human. John reinforces the doctrine of the incarnation with Jesus' words here just as he introduced the idea in the prologue to his gospel in *John 1; and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*

The bright morning star is another Messianic image. In *Revelation 2:28* Jesus told the church in Thyatira that to those who were faithful he would give them the morning star. He means he will give them himself. The figure of the star goes back to Balaam's prophecy about Israel in *Numbers 24.* Balaam saw a star arising out of Jacob and a scepter in Israel that will crush the nations. In other words there is a king coming from Israel that will subdue the pagan nations around it. This is a prophecy of David and his kingdom but also by extension a prophecy of the Messiah from David's line. Isaiah said in *Isaiah 60* that the light of the glory of God would come to the nations and they would flock to the Lord. In *Matthew 2* the Magi saw the star that announced the birth of the new king of the Jews. They had come to worship him. Peter calls the Lord Jesus the morning star rising in our hearts when we heed the message of the prophets in 2 *Peter 1:19.* The difficulty with Jesus identifying himself as the bright morning star is that is also what Isaiah calls the king of Babylon in *Isaiah 14.* He declares that the morning star, the son of the dawn, has fallen. Son of the dawn in Latin is Lucifer and many apply this prophecy to the fall of Satan. John is showing us that the Lord Jesus is the true morning star and Satan or Lucifer is the false one. The world worshipped Satan and has been cast into the lake of fire. God's people worshipped the true morning star, Jesus Christ, and have been invited into the New Jerusalem! Jesus is the true Messiah!

**22:17** - The Spirit and the Bride say come. The verb for come is in the imperative mood, but I don't think this is a command to the Lord Jesus. I think this is an invitation like the Hebrew jussive mood which can be either a command or a wish. John uses the singular, Spirit, here. He has used the singular before in the seven letters and the command to listen to what the Spirit has to say to the churches. He has also described being in the Spirit and God or an angel showing him a vision. However, in his visions he has most often identified the Holy Spirit as the seven spirits of God before his throne. He links the Spirit here with the Bride, which can be either the New Jerusalem or the church, the Bride of Christ. In the context of *Revelation 22* I think John is referring to the church. The city is not filled with the Spirit, the church is. Plus in his vision of the New Jerusalem the Lord Jesus has already come and he is dwelling directly with his people. Here in 22:17 the Holy Spirit and the church together invite him to come. Like the rest of the New Testament John affirms the Spirit is present in his church.

John says let the one who hears invite the Lord Jesus to come. The verbs are in the imperative mood again. Who is the one who hears? To hear is in the present imperative denoting a continuous process and not a completed event. John's implication is those who hear are not yet in the church. He is speaking of people who hear and believe the gospel. That idea is reinforced by his next invitation which is to those who are thirsty for the water of life. They may come and drink. The water is free because the gospel is free. It is the gospel of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which is the phrase with which John ends *Revelation.* It is freely given to all who will believe and surrender their lives to the Lord. That belief and surrender is summarized in Thomas' great confession of faith after he sees the risen Jesus in *John 20.* He falls at Jesus' feet and says, "*My Lord and my God!*"

The water of life has already appeared in 21:6 in God's invitation to anyone who is thirsty for eternal life. This repeats an invitation that is seen throughout Scripture. God in *Isaiah 55*
invites those who are thirsty to come to the waters. Jesus told the woman at the well in *John 4* that he would give her living water so that she would never be thirsty again. Jesus in *John 7* told the crowds in the temple at the Feast of Tabernacles that if anyone was thirsty let them come to him and drink and streams of living water will flow from Jesus. The invitation is given once again to anyone who desires eternal life. God wants to give it, in fact it is freely offered. Jesus, the Lamb of God, has paid the price so that those who believe in him can have eternal life.

22:18-19 - John gives a warning to those who "hear the words of the prophecy" of his book. It is curious that he uses hear and not see or read, yet in 1:3 the first blessing of *Revelation* is given to those who read aloud the words of the prophecy, hear it and take it to heart. *Revelation* was meant to be read aloud and heard!

    John warns anyone who adds to the words God has spoken that God will add to him the plagues described in the book. And if anyone takes away any of the words God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and the holy city, the New Jerusalem. In other words God will strip him of eternal life! Both warnings are things no one wants to happen! Moses warns Israel not to add or subtract anything to the laws God is giving Israel in *Deuteronomy 4:2 & 12:32*. John's warning here is similar and his meaning is clear. He presents his prophecy as Scripture on par with the Law of Moses in *Deuteronomy*! As my study Bible notes say, "The revelation of God is not to be altered, tampered with, or distorted, for it is an extension of God himself." *Revelation* is the word of God and the word of Jesus Christ to his church. We need to read it, study it and apply it in that manner. A corollary to that fact is we need to read it, study it and apply it as we do all other Scripture and not impose one particular viewpoint upon the text but rather study the text and let it speak for itself as we interpret it.

22:20-21 - The Lord Jesus speaks for the final time in *Revelation*. He confirms his testimony and then declares for the third time in chapter 22 that he is coming soon. Whenever the rabbis repeated things they did so to emphasize the importance of the statement. You see Jesus frequently using this practice in the gospels. He uses it here in *Revelation* 22 as well. The little Greek word translated “yes” is an emphatic particle used to denote affirmation or emphasis. To Christians facing persecution and even martyrdom the promise of Jesus coming soon is comforting and encouraging. This dark time will not last forever. Things are terrible now but Jesus is coming soon!

    Jesus' words are followed with an Amen! Let it be so! Then John says, "Come, Lord Jesus." Come is in the imperative mood like in 22:17. The imperative is used to express a strong desire or wish rather than an actual command here. The phrase is very similar to the Aramaic phrase "maranatha", meaning our Lord come, that the early church used. Paul uses it in *1 Corinthians 16:22*. It was often used at the end of worship to express the desire of the believers that Jesus' coming would be soon. In some senses it was similar to the Jewish phrase, "next year in Jerusalem" said at the end of the Passover to express the hope of the Messiah's coming. Christians knew the Messiah had already come. Maranatha was an expression of the tension of the New Testament, the already and not yet. The lightning of the resurrection has struck now we await the thunder of his Second Coming. "Come, Lord Jesus!"

people”. The ESV translates it “with all.” Other translations show the same discrepancy because there is a textual variation with the verse. The meaning however is clear. The Bible ends with the promise and blessing of the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to his people. Ultimately that is what the Bible is all about!

Maranatha!
Appendix One:
Excerpts from the Relevant Sections of My Commentary on Daniel 7, 9 & 12

Chapter 7:
7:1-8 - Verse 1 marks the beginning of Daniel's dreams and visions and the apocalyptic section of Daniel. The language in this verse is written from a third person perspective, reporting on what Daniel saw and said. This is clearly the mark of a later editor of Daniel's prophecy, most likely an unknown Jewish editor in the Persian period. Liberal scholarship wants to place the editor and even the writing of the book all the way into the later Greek period after the Maccabean Revolt. The problem is the Septuagint contains the Book of Daniel and was translated around 200BC, earlier than Judas Maccabaeus who cleansed the temple in 163BC. It makes the most sense that an unknown Jew in the Persian era gathered the stories of Daniel's exploits and visions and edited them into the final form we have today. It should also be noted that chapter 7 is still written in Aramaic. The Hebrew text of Daniel does not begin again until 8:1.

Verse 1 gives the time of this first vision as the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon. This is probably the first year of his co-regency with his father Nabonidus when Belshazzar governed the empire in Babylon and Nabonidus was campaigning and then in exile in Arabia. That would have been 556, thirty years after the fall of Jerusalem. The editor reports that Daniel had a dream and visions during the night and he wrote down the substance of his dream. The rest of the chapter deals with the dream and its interpretation and is one of the central prophetic passages in Daniel. It introduces us to the figure of the Son of Man, the last great prophetic-messianic figure in the Old Testament and one that Jesus would use as a title for himself.

Daniel writes down his dream or vision. He said he saw the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea and four great beasts came up out of the sea in front of him. The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. Daniel saw that its wings were torn off and then it was lifted from the ground to stand on two feet like a man and the heart of a man was given to it. The second beast was like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, meaning one side was higher than the other and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told by a voice in his vision to get up and eat your fill of flesh. The third beast was like a leopard and it had four wings like a bird's wings on its back. It also had four heads and was given authority to rule. Then Daniel looked and there in front of him was a fourth beast that was terrifying to see and very powerful. It had large iron teeth and crushed and devoured its victims and ground underfoot whatever was left. It was different than all the other beasts and it had ten horns. Daniel does not say how it was different only that it was. The obvious difference is he does not tell us that the fourth beast looked like any particular animal only that it had iron feet and ten horns. While Daniel is pondering the horns there was a little horn that appeared before him which came up from among the ten horns. Three of the first horns were uprooted before it. The little horn had the eyes and mouth of a man and spoke boastfully. The NLT reads it was boasting arrogantly.

One thing we need to remember when we begin to try and figure out Daniel's visions is that Daniel has a Jerusalem-Holy Land centric viewpoint throughout his prophecy. The center of the world is Jerusalem not Babylon or Persia. The events of his visions at some point all have to do with what happens to Jerusalem and the Jews. Daniel is not interested in the entire world and its history. He is interested in God's people and their land.
Daniel is given the interpretation of the dream in 7:15-27. However, there are things to note before we look at those verses. The churning sea is an image that reoccurs in Revelation 13 in describing the Antichrist. The sea represented the forces of chaos in the ancient Hebrew mind. It was also a symbol for the nations. The four beasts come from this chaos. They are not from God even though God is Lord of history. It is unclear how Daniel's vision here in chapter 7 relates to Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 of the great image. There were four or five nations represented in the king's dream, depending on how one interprets the feet of iron and clay. Daniel sees four beasts, the lion with wings, the lopsided bear, the four-headed leopard with wings and the fourth beast with iron teeth. The fourth beast is curious because Daniel does not say it looks like any animal. The only characteristics of its appearance he gives are it had iron teeth, was frightening and very powerful and had ten horns. He does not say it had ten heads just ten horns.

Most scholars interpret the beasts as the lion is Babylon, the bear is Persia, the leopard is Greece and the ten-horned beast is Rome. Some say the ten-horned beast is Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid king who persecuted the Jews. Some argue that the little horn is Antiochus. One current prophecy commentator claims that all the beasts have current interpretations. He says the lion with eagle’s wings that were torn off is Great Britain and America. The bear is Russia. The leopard is Germany and the ten horned beast is a reprisal of the Holy Roman Empire that will become the empire of the Antichrist or beast of Revelation 13. That interpretation is ingenious on one level, as one can match the symbols. On another level it is ludicrous and violates so many principles of sound exegesis, not the least of which is that the dream would have no meaning whatsoever for Daniel or the people of his time! That is not how apocalyptic writings work! His argument is we are in the last days and he then proceeds to prove it by showing how Daniel's vision is now unlocked because we have the key to match the four beasts to four current or soon to be revealed nations. It is a convenient, circular argument! In interpreting apocalyptic visions one must do the best one can to take the text as it stands and try and figure out what the symbols meant in Daniel's time and then apply them to ours. Just because something is written in the apocalyptic style does not mean we get to suspend all the principles of sound exegesis in order to fit some scenario of the last days that we have invented!

See below in 7:15-18 for a more specific interpretation of the four beasts.

7:9-10 - Daniel looks and sees a different setting that appears to be in heaven. Thrones are set in place and the Ancient of Days or God took his seat. God is ready to sit in judgment on the nations, including the four beasts of Daniel's dream. This is Daniel's picture of the Lord of History!

His clothing is white as snow as is his hair. Daniel does not describe his face. Could he see it? It is unclear. John in Revelation 1 describes Jesus’ hair as white as snow and bright like fire, which is John's way of affirming that Jesus is God! God's throne is like fire and it has wheels that are also on fire. The fiery throne with wheels is similar to Ezekiel's vision of God's throne in Ezekiel 1 & 10. A river of fire is flowing from the throne. The fire may represent God's holiness similar to the burning bush in Exodus 3 or the fire in Exodus 19 when God appeared on Mt. Sinai to give Israel his covenant. Daniel sees a great multitude standing before God's throne, ten thousand times ten thousand which is literally one hundred million. I don't think Daniel is being literal with the number. He is expressing the fact that there are so many angels before God's throne that they are a number too great to count. Those standing before the throne are almost certainly angels. The other possibility is that they are God's saints, his people who are
alive and serving him in heaven. I think the more probable interpretation is that they are angels. The court is seated, meaning God and his most powerful and holy angels who will pass judgment on the nations. Other parts of the Old Testament speak of God and his heavenly court. Genesis 1 hints at it. Some of the Psalms also speak of it. The books are opened. Daniel does not tell us the contents of the books. John in Revelation 20 in his vision of the last judgment says there are two books that are opened at that time. The first is the book of deeds that God uses to judge the human race by what they have done in this life. The second is given a name, The Book of Life, which contains the names of God's saints; all those who have put their faith in God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Daniel is told that the saints will inherit the Kingdom of God in 7:17 it is reasonable to assume that Daniel's books are the same two John describes in Revelation 20.

When one is dealing with apocalyptic visions one needs to let Scripture interpret Scripture which is sound exegesis. We need to also understand that visions are fluid. They are not always consistent. Think of dreams. Dreams are rarely consistent in their details even within themselves. They are fluid. It should not surprise us that visions God gives to his prophets in the night are fluid and sometimes inconsistent in their details as well.

7:11-14 - Daniel sees that at the same time the books are opened in heaven and God has sat down on his throne to judge the nations the little horn has continued to boast in its pride. Daniel watches as the fourth beast with the ten horns and the boastful little horn is slain. Its body is thrown into the blazing fire which was probably the river of fire coming from the throne of God, the Ancient of Days. This is Daniel's name for Yahweh, the eternal one, just as John in Revelation 1 and other places calls Yahweh the one who was, and is and is to come. In Revelation 19 when the Lord Jesus returns to the earth with his saints, the beast and false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire as punishment. The boastful horn of the fourth beast thinks it is great and powerful when it is not. That is the irony of any human ruler who becomes arrogant in their power. God alone is Lord of History and decides who rules and when. The beast in Revelation and the little horn in Daniel thought they were in control when all along God was. They thought they could do whatever they wanted and no one could stop them but had not realized they are accountable to the Creator of the universe, the Lord God Almighty! This prophecy of the boastful horn may be referring to Antiochus Epiphanes who tried to wipe out the Jews and destroy their worship of God in the 2nd century BC. Many prophecy writers contend this is a prophecy of the antichrist which it could be and Antiochus is a type of the antichrist. Certainly when he fell to Rome the Kingdom of God was not fully established and even now awaits the return of the Lord Jesus in the clouds of heaven. See Acts 1. God is reminding the Jews and us through Daniel's visions that no power is greater than God and even if circumstances become intolerable God is still in charge and has not forgotten his people. They need to stay faithful to him. That was a lesson the Jews living in the Persian and Greek eras needed to remember. God was preserving his people in the coming centuries so that they would be in the land and he could bring the Messiah into history, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man.

Daniel comments in verse 12 that the other three beasts had been stripped of their authority but were allowed to live for a period of time. He does not say what that period is nor does he explain how their authority was stripped or what that means. The most logical meaning would be they had their time of empire and then their power and authority waned and another nation took the place of supremacy and domination. However, the previous power or beast still existed they simply were not in control any longer. This is difficult if one holds to the traditional understanding of the four beasts: the lion is Babylon, the bear is Persia, the leopard is Greece and
the iron toothed beast is Rome or the Seleucid Empire and the boastful horn is Antiochus. He becomes a type of the antichrist of Revelation 13. The interpretation is difficult because Babylon became a province of Persia after Cyrus conquered it. Persia fell to Alexander and became part of his empire. The Seleucids constantly fought the Ptolemies and then succumbed to Rome and were absorbed into the Roman Empire. Once each empire fell they were no longer even a nation and were simply absorbed into the next empire that took its place. The people remained as a people but the empire disappeared. Perhaps one cannot press the details of Daniel's vision too far but one must be careful in doing that because then one is vulnerable to fanciful interpretations like the one prophecy preacher who says the lion is Great Britain and the eagle's wings torn off of it are the United States. The bottom line is that none of these great empires are truly in charge of history and none of them will ultimately reign.

Verse 13 introduces the one who will reign over human history; the Son of Man. Daniel sees one like a Son of Man in his vision, meaning this person looks like a man. But he comes with the clouds of heaven. His origin is heaven and not the earth. He is led into the presence of God, the Ancient of Days and is given authority, glory and sovereignty over all the nations by God. All peoples of every language worship him and his dominion is an everlasting one that will never pass away. His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. One must remember that God's first fundamental commandment to Israel was to worship no one else but God alone. Here the Son of Man is worshipped by all peoples, including Israel. He is given a kingdom and authority by God over the entire world. God does not give his glory or worship to anyone else. Therefore the Son of Man must be God in human form. John, Paul, Peter and the gospel writers would use this prophecy to describe the incarnation of God in human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus himself would use the title Son of Man to describe himself. At times he used it like God uses it in Ezekiel, simply as a name for a human being, a man. At other times it is clear he is using it like Daniel uses it here, as the ultimate Messianic title, claiming to be God himself. He used it in this way in Mark 14 during his trial before the Sanhedrin when he claimed to be the Son of Man who could come with the clouds of heaven.

Jesus is the Son of Man who brings the Kingdom of God, the rule of God, and his Kingdom is eternal and will have no end! Jesus combined in himself the great prophetic streams of the Old Testament: the king from David's line, the Messiah; the Suffering Servant of Isaiah who would die for the sins of the people; the prophet like Moses from Deuteronomy, the new lawgiver; and the Son of Man from Daniel 7, the heavenly figure who comes from God and is worshipped as God. He is God become man, the incarnate Son. Daniel provides us with the last piece of the prophetic puzzle so that the New Testament picture of Jesus can be completed and the gospel can be preached.

Daniel 7 also expresses a central theme in apocalyptic writings. The Son of Man comes from heaven and establishes his Kingdom on the earth. He is not from the earth. History is dominated by powerful empires that God's saints cannot overcome. If history is to be redeemed no human effort can save it. Only a direct ultimate act of God can establish the Kingdom of God. In some respects this is an admission of failure on Israel's part. They were to be God's kingdom of priests and a holy nation so that the world would come to Yahweh and worship him. In apocalyptic writings the only way that happens is by a direct and final intervention in human history by God. God comes and ends human history as we know it to set up his Kingdom that will have no end. Then and only then will the nations worship God alone and turn from their pagan wicked ways. In the earlier prophets the Messiah would come and redeem Israel, set up his earthly kingdom and the Gentiles would come to God. History could be redeemed from within if
God's people would repent. Now history cannot be redeemed no matter what God's people do. Only God can save it. God's people must be faithful and wait for God to intervene. History is moving towards the climactic coming of the Kingdom of God which will once and for all usher in God's rule and save his saints. That is the difference between Daniel's viewpoint and the other prophets of the Old Testament.

7:15-18 - Daniel is disturbed by the vision so he approaches "one of those standing there." Daniel does not explain who this is or where he comes from or where he was when Daniel questions him. One needs to remember, this is his report of a vision. Things appear and disappear in dreams and are often unconnected. Such is the case here. The person, probably an angel is presumably one of the myriads around God's throne that he saw. Daniel asks for an explanation and the angel gives it to him.

The four beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. Already we can see how Daniel's vision is fluid and not always consistent in its details. He is told the four beasts will rise from the earth but in 7:3 the four beasts come up out of the sea. Why is that significant? Prophecy writers want to take Daniel literally and use the details and timing of his images to construct a scenario of the end times. But visions by their nature are not literal or consistent; instead they are highly symbolic and fluid. That is apparent from the contrast between verse 3 and verse 17. Whether the four beasts emerge from the sea or the earth seems like a minor issue and detail but one cannot take both things literally. So how is one to interpret Daniel? Why is this particular detail unimportant but other details are critical and must be taken literally as if Daniel is giving a precise outline of what is to come? For instance, the angel tells Daniel that the four beasts "will rise" from the earth. At face value that indicates that these four kingdoms are all ones who are to come; they are all kingdoms that will occur in the future. The implication being that none of them have come to power as yet. Why is the timing of the beasts in Daniel's vision literal and critical to understand but the inconsistency about whether they come from the sea or the earth is irrelevant? How does one tell what is important and vital to understand and what are simply details that change due to the fluid nature of visions and dreams? We all want to take the Bible at face value and interpret a passage in its context, beginning with what it meant to its original audience and then apply it to our lives today. That process is more difficult with apocalyptic dreams and visions. It seems to me that many prophecy writers forget the difficulties and declare certainty about what a passage means and how to apply it when they need to be cautious instead!

With that in mind, what does the angel's interpretation of the four beasts mean? The four beasts represent four kingdoms that "will rise." One of the things that can help us to interpret this particular vision is to link the other visions of Daniel with this one to see if there are any similarities. In Daniel 2 Daniel has already told Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of the dream of the great statue. In that dream there were four parts to the statue that represented four kingdoms. The gold was Babylon, the silver was Persia, the bronze was probably Greece and the iron and iron and clay was probably Rome. Most scholars agree on these identities for the four parts of Nebuchadnezzar's statue. In Daniel 8 Daniel dreams of a ram and a goat. The ram is Persia or Medo-Persia and the goat is Greece. The ram has two horns one larger than the other, the larger of which grew up later than the smaller horn. This describes the ascent of the Medo-Persian Empire. The Kingdom of the Medes was stronger in the beginning and then the Persians absorbed it and became the dominant power in the empire. The goat representing Greece has a large horn that is broken off and replaced by four horns, which represent the four generals that
succeeded Alexander the Great. If one uses the other two visions in Daniel that speak of four successive empires as a baseline one can apply them to begin to understand Daniel's vision here in chapter 7. One must also remember that Daniel is always concerned about the Jews and the Holy Land first before anywhere else. Thus his visions will be centered on the Holy Land before he tries to describe events across the Mediterranean world.

The first beast was a lion with eagle's wings that were plucked off. The lion was lifted up like a man and set on two feet and given the heart of a man. The winged lion was a common image used in both Assyria and Babylon. One possible interpretation is that the winged lion represents the Mesopotamian empires of Assyria and Babylon. The wings that were plucked off represent Babylon's conquest of Assyria and Assyria's fall. The lion standing on its feet like a man and the heart of a man given to the beast could represent Nebuchadnezzar. He was the central figure in the Babylonian Empire and after he died the empire began to lose power and influence. The heart of a man could represent Nebuchadnezzar's recognition of God's power and majesty and his humbling before God that Daniel describes in chapter 4. This assumes that Daniel's statement that these kingdoms "will rise" from the earth is not to be taken literally. It should be noted that Babylon still existed during the first year of Belshazzar's regency when Daniel was given this vision.

The second beast is the bear that was raised up on one of its sides and had three ribs in its mouth and was told to rise up and eat its fill of flesh. Most scholars view the bear as Persia. Daniel emphasized Media and Persia and Persia's superiority to Media in the dream of the ram in Daniel 8. That is probably the meaning of the one side of the bear being raised up higher than the other. As for the three ribs in its mouth my best guess is that Persia dominated the Middle East for three centuries. Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to the Holy Land in 538. Alexander conquered Persia and Judea in 333. That is approximately three centuries. Persia ruled the region during those centuries and was able to do as it pleased with no one to oppose them.

The third beast is the leopard that had four wings and four heads and it was given authority to rule. The goat of Daniel 8 has four horns which grow up after the large horn is broken off. A leopard is quick and powerful similar to how Alexander seized all of Persia in a few short years. He was succeeded by his four generals who split his empire into four parts. It makes historical sense to see the leopard as Greece and it is consistent with Daniel's other visions. Daniel notes this beast was given authority to rule. Alexander may have been a military genius and conquered the whole of Persia in what seemed an almost impossible amount of time but behind his conquests stands the Lord of History and no kingdom in this world comes to power without God allowing them to rule. Even the most powerful of rulers are still accountable to God! The Jews needed to remember that lesson.

The identity of the iron-toothed beast is problematic. Daniel notes that this beast is different than the other three. There is no animal that this beast resembles. The only animal like features it has are ten horns and teeth that are large and made of iron. Iron was the hardest metal known in the ancient world and would defeat all other weapons. Daniel says this beast with its iron teeth crushes and devours its victims and then tramples underfoot what is left. It is powerful and very frightening. Daniel's description here does not imply that this beast will conquer the whole world. However, in the interpretation of Daniel's vision given to him by the angel in 7:23 the angel states this kingdom will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. From the description here in 7:7-8 and the interpretation in 7:23-25 there are many details that fit Antiochus Epiphanes the Seleucid ruler who tried to wipe out the Jews which led to the Maccabean Revolt. However, when Antiochus persecuted the Jews he had just been subdued by
Rome and had to pay a massive tribute to the Romans. He stripped the temple of its gold to pay off what he owed and used it as an opportunity to punish the Jews and get rid of them because they continually resisted adopting Greek ways. Antiochus was the king of the Seleucid Empire at the time but Seleucia was weak and in no way had conquered the whole earth. They did however rule Judea.

How should one identify Daniel's fourth beast? Many scholars say this is a picture of Rome itself using Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel 2 as a reference. Some say this is a picture of the beast of Revelation 13, the antichrist of the last days. Both interpretations have some merit. It is clear from 7:9-10 and the angel's interpretation to Daniel in 7:26-27 that the vision has something to do with the end of history and the final triumph of the Kingdom of God. It seems to me that one can combine all three interpretations. Visions are fluid enough that more than one interpretation can be used to explain a part of the vision. If one takes a Holy-Land centric view then Antiochus Epiphanes was a ruler who crushed and devoured his victims and brought the most terrible persecution to the Jews when the temple was defiled with a pagan altar and he forbade the teaching of the Torah and circumcision. He sought to wipe out the Jewish religion and completely Hellenize the Jews. Yet he did not rule the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern world; Rome did. Rome fits the description of the kingdom that subdued the whole earth. But one must relate the final part of Daniel's vision and its description to the end of history and the final establishment of the Kingdom of God and the return of the Lord Jesus to the earth. Perhaps Daniel's vision is flexible enough to allow for all three interpretations.

The ten horns and the little horn that comes up among them is probably a description of Antiochus Epiphanes and his rise to power. Many prophecy writers say that the antichrist will be part of a revived Roman Empire in the last days that will have ten kings. The antichrist will depose three of those other rulers and seize power. If one uses the interpretation that the ten horns and the little horn are Antiochus Epiphanes and that Daniel is describing the time of Greek persecution of the Jews before the Maccabean Revolt some of the details fit. However, many do not. Antiochus was not the tenth in succession of the Seleucid kings, he was the eighth. The larger problem is that the Seleucid Empire did not have just ten kings. It had thirty-one from its founding until the Roman general Pompeii the Great finally absorbed the kingdom into the Roman Empire in 63 B.C. Antiochus did depose at least two and one could argue three others of the royal family in order to seize the Seleucid throne. Again, some of the details fit Antiochus and his time and some do not. Is Daniel being literal here?

Must the ten horns be ten literal, historical kings or is ten a symbolic number? Often in Hebrew thought ten is a good round number that is simply descriptive of many rather than a literal ten as in Western arithmetic. Ten however is not remotely thirty-one which is the literal number of the Seleucid kings. Yet the details like the four heads and wings of the leopard fit the four generals of Alexander's empire. That seems to be a literal description. The problem is no interpretation fits all the details of the vision. That is the difficulty with apocalyptic visions. The first three beasts dovetail with empires in Daniel's day and can be reasonably interpreted as such. The fourth beast has some similarities with the Greek Seleucid Empire but it does not completely fit. One detail of the vision does fit Antiochus well. He started to mint coins that named him Antiochus Epiphanes, meaning God manifest. He wanted to be identified as the presence of Zeus on earth. He was the god made manifest. This fits the boasting of the little horn and the reason for his judgment and destruction by God. Antiochus becomes a type of the antichrist who will proclaim himself God and demand worship from the people of the world. God will judge him and triumph in the end.
In verse 18 Daniel is told the most important thing about his vision. God's people, the saints of the Most High, will receive "THE" Kingdom and possess it forever and ever. The angel is speaking of the Kingdom of God and God's reign over his world. God's people, in Daniel's case the remnant of Israel, will reign with him when he rules over all. The Kingdom of God is in direct contrast to the kingdoms of this world. They come and go and pass from history. God's Kingdom will never pass away. When God finally rules all evil will be conquered and God's people will live in peace free from their enemies and those who seek to persecute them and rule over them. Daniel is not told when God's Kingdom will come only that it will. Jesus made it clear that God's Kingdom is not about territory and conquest. It is about God's rule in people's hearts. He came to usher in that Kingdom and invite any who would follow him as Lord to join it. Someday he will come like the heavenly Son of Man that Daniel saw and bring his Kingdom in all its fullness. When he does all the forces of this world that oppose God will be defeated and his saints, the church, will be vindicated. The church will be made up of Jews and Gentiles that serve the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of Man!

7:19-22 - Daniel says he wanted to know about the true meaning of the fourth beast that was different than the other three. Then he re-describes it. It was terrifying with its iron teeth and bronze claws. It crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot what was left. The image he gives here is of a power that none can resist. It was too powerful and if one got in its way it would crush and destroy anyone who opposed it. It is important to remember that Daniel has a Holy-Land centric view and wants to focus on God's people, the Jews. He is not as interested in international politics except as it relates to what is happening to the Jewish people and their land. It is possible that his description of the fourth beast as one that was too powerful to resist has more to do with the inability of the Jews to resist this power than it was the most powerful empire ever seen. Persia ruled over Judea when Daniel saw his vision, yet for most of that time the Jews were allowed to worship God as they saw fit and Jerusalem was protected as a temple city. Alexander, when he came through Judea, continued the same policy. It was Antiochus Epiphanes that totally changed the policy of tolerance and tried to force the Jews to Hellenize. Those that did not he had executed. That led to the Maccabean Revolt. Under the Romans the Jews were free to worship as they chose and Jerusalem returned to the status of a temple city. That continued until the Jewish Revolt in 66 AD. Basically, the powers that controlled the Middle East from the end of the Old Testament to the Jewish Revolt against Rome let the Jews worship and follow God as they chose as long as they obeyed the governing authorities, which most did until the Zealot Revolt against the Romans. The only exception during that time was the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes in the 160's BC. From an historical perspective the only candidates that make sense are Antiochus, the Romans during the Jewish Revolt, and the eschatological government of the antichrist prior to the return of the Lord Jesus. If the fulfillment of Daniel 7 is eschatological and not historical then none of the empires of history fit. One can only say they are types of the antichrist that is to come but they do not fulfill the vision.

Daniel is also curious about the ten horns on the head of the beast and the other horn that comes up before whom three fell. This horn he describes as more imposing than the others that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. Eyes in the prophets often symbolize wisdom and intelligence. In Ezekiel the cherubim around God's throne have eyes all around symbolizing their knowledge of God's ways and their understanding of events on the earth. In Revelation 5 Jesus the Lamb has seven eyes which stand for the seven-fold Spirit of God and his all-knowing
nature. The "other horn" spoke boastfully, meaning in its pride it spoke of its own power and glory, making itself out to be God.

Daniel sees in his vision that the "other horn" makes war on God's people, his saints or holy ones. This is a reference to the Jews. Not only does the horn make war on the Jews he defeats them. In fact the implication is that unless God intervened the Jews would be wiped out. But in verse 22 Daniel says the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of his people and the time came when they possessed the Kingdom. God will intervene and though the persecution will be terrible and the Jews will be threatened, they are not to give up hope. God himself will come and put a stop to the "other horn's" war against his people.

This is classic apocalyptic imagery. In Isaiah 44 he prophesies that God will use Cyrus the Great to free his people from exile and rebuild Jerusalem. God will use a ruler from within history to bring his people back to their land. Here in Daniel 7 God himself will intervene from outside history to save his people and when that occurs his people will possess the kingdom. I do not believe Daniel is referring to the Hasmonean kingdom that followed the Maccabean Revolt against the Greeks. That kingdom, which began with great expectations for the Jews, quickly degenerated into corruption and petty squabbling that led to the Romans putting an end to it and absorbing Judea into their empire. The Kingdom that Daniel speaks of here is the Kingdom of God. God will pronounce his judgment in favor of his people and they will possess the Kingdom. Daniel's readers would look forward to that time when God would intervene and vindicate them. They thought God would pronounce judgment upon the nations that opposed the Jews and God. They did not understand or see that God was going to pronounce judgment upon a sinful human race by placing his entire wrath upon his Son, the Son of Man, upon the cross. Only then would God give the Kingdom to those of his saints who followed the Son of Man, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. The Kingdom of God would not be the territory of Judea or the Land of Promise. It would reign in people's hearts who followed and served the Messiah. Daniel’s vision hints at this reality but the Jews did not understand it. Only a handful did who followed Jesus and who received the Holy Spirit. The Jews were looking for the Kingdom of God but even as they read Daniel and believed his vision, they misunderstood it. When it finally came the majority rejected it because they could not understand it. They did not see two comings of the Messiah and Son of Man; one to deal with sin and invite people into his Kingdom and the second to deal with the powers of this world once and for all and bring the reign of God forever.

7:23-25 - The angel gives Daniel an explanation of the fourth beast which had ten horns and the little horn that grew up out of the ten horns. The basis of the interpretation is from 7:7-8 and Daniel's description of the fourth beast from his dream. The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth, in other words it will emerge out of the other nations and kingdoms of the world. This kingdom will be different from other kingdoms in that it will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it.

This is a very difficult verse to interpret and relate to the other three kingdoms and to the history of the Middle East and Judea in Daniel's day. Many scholars say Daniel is describing the Seleucid Empire and the little horn that boasts and attacks the Jews is Antiochus Epiphanes. Many Dispensational scholars say Daniel is speaking of the eschatological kingdom of the antichrist here and he is speaking about the Great Tribulation period right before the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus. The difficulty with bringing Daniel's vision in sync with Middle Eastern history is the phrase "will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it." From a military-political standpoint it is very difficult to see the Seleucid Empire as devouring
the whole earth. It had influence and power in the eastern Mediterranean and the Mesopotamian Valley. However, during the time the Seleucids are exercising power in the east Carthage and Rome are fighting the Punic Wars in the west for supremacy of the Western Mediterranean. Furthermore, also during this time the Seleucids were constantly in conflict with the Greek kingdom of the Ptolemies in Egypt for supremacy in the east. From an historical point of view Daniel's vision cannot be literally true because the Greek Seleucids did not devour the whole earth. That leaves the eschatological interpretation as the only reasonable one. However there are enough similarities with the Seleucids, Antiochus Epiphanes and the crisis that led to the Maccabean Revolt that it seems unlikely that Daniel is ignoring it in his vision of the fourth beast. Plus the previous three beasts have logical interpretations which coincide with historical references to the empires in Daniel's day. It seems likely that the fourth beast also refers at least in part to a kingdom in Daniel's day.

There is another possibility to explain the idea that the fourth beast devours the whole earth. One must remember Daniel has a Holy Land centric viewpoint. The fourth beast may indeed represent the Seleucid Empire. It is the personification of Greek civilization and culture. The Seleucids carried on Alexander's policy of Hellenization all across their territory and even when they were not the strongest militarily the process of Hellenization was inexorable throughout the Middle Eastern world. It was the threat of forced Hellenization from Antiochus Epiphanes that finally led to the Maccabean Revolt and allowed the Jews to gain their freedom from the Greeks and establish the independent Jewish Hasmonean state that lasted a century. If one interprets the process of Hellenization as the way the fourth beast devoured the whole world the Seleucid Empire could be Daniel's fourth beast.

That however, leads to another problem. Daniel says the ten horns are ten kings from this fourth kingdom and after the ten kings another king will arise. Many scholars interpret this to describe the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes who persecuted the Jews. The difficulty is how to reconcile Daniel's statement the ten horns are ten kings with the historical record and still say that the boastful horn is Antiochus. Antiochus IV who became known as Antiochus Epiphanes was the eighth king in the Seleucid succession. There were not ten kings before Antiochus but seven. There are only three possibilities. First, Daniel's ten horns and ten kings are not to be taken literally meaning the number is simply symbolic and not a literal ten, or second Antiochus must be eliminated as a possibility. The third possibility is that the true meaning of the little horn is an eschatological one probably referring to the antichrist but Antiochus Epiphanes is a type of the antichrist and so Daniel's vision fits some of his reign but not all of it. That seems to me to be the most likely interpretation especially given 7:26-27 and the triumph of the Kingdom of God and his saints.

Daniel says after ten kings of the fourth kingdom another will arise. He will subdue three kings. I take that to mean he will subdue or kill three rivals for the throne in order to seize power. Antiochus' brother succeeded their father on the Seleucid throne but he was assassinated by a usurper named Heliodorus. Antiochus in turn assassinated Heliodorus and seized the throne. A few years after he gained the throne he had his nephew killed, the heir of his older brother Seleucus who had ascended the throne and had been assassinated as well. That convoluted history may be what Daniel is speaking of when he says the little horn subdued three other horns to take power.

The most significant detail Daniel tells us is that the "other horn" would speak against the Most High and oppress the saints, the Jewish people living in the Holy Land. He would try to change the set times and laws and this persecution would last for a time, times and half a time.
That is a vague timeframe but most scholars agree it stands for three and one half years. These details fit Antiochus' persecution and his forced Hellenization of the Jews. Below is an edited excerpt from my class syllabus for *The Bible* dealing with the events leading up to the Maccabean Revolt and the persecution of Antiochus:

“Antiochus, after invading Egypt and defeating the Ptolemy king was ordered to leave Egypt and pay a heavy tribute to Rome in 168 BC. On his way through Jerusalem he stripped the temple of its gold in order to pay the tribute he owed to Rome. The Jews protested and Antiochus in retaliation forbid the Jews to keep the Sabbath, ordered the destruction of copies of the Torah, suspended the sacrifices in the temple and forbid the Jews to circumcise their children. Antiochus had decided he was going to force the Jews to adapt Greek ways. Many Jews resisted Antiochus nonviolently and died as a result. They were called the Hasidim or “pious ones.”

Things came to a head in December of 167. Antiochus set up a pagan altar to the Greek god Zeus on top of the altar of God in the temple. He then sacrificed a pig on that altar to Zeus defiling the temple. This is the “abomination of desolation” that Daniel speaks about in Daniel 9:27 and 11:31. Jesus also references it in Matthew 24:15. Many Jews took up armed resistance against Antiochus and the Greeks. They were led by a priest named Judas Maccabeus, or “The Hammer.” Judas led the Jews in a guerilla war against the Greeks and in December of 164 BC, his forces succeeded in recapturing Jerusalem and rededicating the temple. The menorah of the temple was relit and the feast celebrating that event came to be known as Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights. Jesus spoke in the temple during Hanukkah in John 10:22-24. The Jews still celebrate Hanukkah today in December of each year.”

The duration of Antiochus' forced Hellenization of the Jews was three and a half years. I do not believe that timeframe is coincidental. If Daniel's vision is ultimately about the rise of the antichrist right before the return of the Lord Jesus then Antiochus and his persecution of the "saints", meaning God's people, is a type of that great persecution in the last days. God will allow his people to be persecuted by their enemy just as he did in the days of the Seleucid Empire that almost saw their destruction in the Holy Land.

7:26-28 - The "other horn" would persecute and oppress the Jews for three and a half years. But God would intervene and judge this last king of the fourth beast. "The court will sit" is the angel's description of 7:9-10 meaning the Ancient of Days taking his seat for judgment. The image is of the elders of a city coming to the city gate and sitting down to render judgment. It is very Middle Eastern. We tend to picture it as a judge mounting the bench and sitting down while the bailiff calls for all to rise. Here Daniel pictures God along with his most powerful angels sitting in the place where the elders would sit at the main gate of a city to render judgment. However, the judgment does not take place at a city gate but in heaven itself.

God will take away the power of the little horn and completely destroy it forever. In Revelation 19 the Lord Jesus Christ defeats the beast, the antichrist, and his army and throws the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire. Their power and rule are completely destroyed and they are eternally judged. Daniel says the same thing here. If the "other horn" is an eschatological picture of the antichrist then Daniel declares he is totally defeated by God himself through a direct intervention of God in history. If this is Antiochus Epiphanes Daniel still declares that God will intervene in history and bring his reign of terror over the Jews to an end.
He will be destroyed. Antiochus died sometime in 164 BC, probably on a campaign against the Parthians in Mesopotamia. The Seleucid Empire survived another century until Pompeii annexed it and made it the Roman Province of Syria. Following the Maccabean Revolt the Jews gained their independence for the next century under the Hasmonean Kingdom. The Greek persecution of the Jews was halted. It seems best to take Daniel's description of the "other horn" and its judgment as a combination of Antiochus Epiphanes and the eschatological enemy of God's people, the beast of Revelation 13, the antichrist.

The angel tells Daniel that at the time of the little horn's judgment and destruction all the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms of the world will be handed over to God's people and God will reign in his Kingdom forever. All rulers and peoples will worship him and obey him. The Kingdom of God will be established. This detail is one of the reasons Daniel's prophecy has to be about more than just the defeat of Antiochus. No one reviewing the historical records or the apocryphal books of the Maccabees that detail the story could see the Maccabean Revolt and the establishment of the Hasmonean Kingdom in Judea as the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Daniel must be talking about the eschatological victory of God over all his enemies. As John says in Revelation 11, "the kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign forever and ever." God will one day bring his total rule and reign over his world. The New Testament tells us that will occur when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth. The Son of Man will come with the clouds in great power and glory and establish his Kingdom.

Verse 28 closes the vision. Daniel comments that he was greatly troubled by it and he kept the matter to himself. God showed Daniel that before God's ultimate victory many kingdoms would rise and fall and his people would have to undergo persecution and oppression once again. Even though God showed him his ultimate victory, I don't think Daniel, living in exile in Babylon under Belshazzar's rule, was comforted. I think he realized there was a long time to come before God would bring his Kingdom and deliver the Jews. His people had much yet to suffer.

The 70 Weeks Prophecy of Daniel 9:
9:20-23 - Daniel says that while he was still praying and confessing the sins of his people and pleading with God for Jerusalem or God's holy hill, Gabriel came to him as he had before in chapter 8. Daniel's description of Gabriel's coming to him is curious. The NIV reads, "came to me in swift flight." The NLT reads, "came swiftly to me." The NASB reads, "came to me in my extreme weariness." Two textual notes give alternative readings and provide further insight. "Came to me" can mean reaching or touching. And "in my extreme weariness" literally means "worn out with weariness." The word translated swift in Hebrew literally means weary, however the phrase here in Daniel 9:21 is an Aramaism that means wearied from exertion, meaning Gabriel was tired or weary from coming swiftly to Daniel. The NASB therefore wrongly interprets whose weariness Daniel is describing. He is describing Gabriel's not Daniel's as the NASB implies. The image is fascinating. Gabriel is sent to Daniel while he is praying and he comes with such effort that he is weary with weariness when he arrives. The NLT and the NIV therefore translate the phrase he came swiftly to Daniel. He comes at the time of the evening sacrifice which would have been around 3pm.

God answers Daniel's prayer by sending one of his great angels who stands in the presence of God. That shows how important Daniel is to God and how important his prayer was! Gabriel tells him he has come to give him insight and understanding. That is a curious phrase
because Daniel's prayer is a prayer of confession, asking God to restore Jerusalem and forgive his people. It was precipitated by Daniel's understanding of Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years of captivity for his people, or as Daniel puts it in 9:2; "the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years."

The seventy years Jeremiah mentions is a clue as to the nature of Gabriel's message to Daniel. As I have shown in 9:2-3 and in my Jeremiah commentary Jeremiah's usage of seventy years to describe the exile of the Jews in Babylon is a symbolic number. The only historical date that comes close enough to match is the time between the destruction of the temple in August 586 and the dedication of the second temple in March of 515. That works out to 70 years and 7 months. I do not think the time between the destruction of Solomon's temple and the dedication of the second temple is coincidental but it does not literally describe the time of the captivity of the Jews which is what Jeremiah was describing when he said 70 years. The historical time of the Jewish captivity was from 586 to 538, from the destruction of Jerusalem to Cyrus' decree that the Jews could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. That is 48 years. Even if one starts the captivity clock eleven years earlier with the capture and captivity of King Jehoiachin in 597 the time of captivity is still only 59 years! Gabriel is sent to explain to Daniel an already symbolic time frame that Daniel read in Jeremiah's prophecy. It seems reasonable to assume that any explanation Gabriel gives of the 70 years to Daniel would also be in symbolic and not literal time. One needs to approach Gabriel's explanation to Daniel with caution and not try and force a too literal interpretation upon Gabriel's words.

In verse 23 Gabriel tells Daniel that he was dispatched as soon as Daniel began to pray and God answered Daniel's prayer. That is why the Lord sent Gabriel to tell Daniel God's answer. God knows our prayers even as we are praying them and moves to answer them. In fact God moves swiftly to answer. He does not always send one of his angels to tell us a message directly but we can trust God is answering even as we are praying. We need to also remember this is prior to the cross and resurrection of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit. Today we have the Holy Spirit living in us who can communicate with us directly. God may still send angels to tell us things as he did in the Gospels, the Book of Acts, and Revelation but those are extraordinary circumstances and not the normal way God answers prayer or communicates his answers to us. Gabriel tells Daniel he is highly esteemed and since Daniel is being inspired by the Spirit to write down his visions God sends Gabriel to answer him. This was an extraordinary circumstance and the Lord wanted to make sure his prophet understood what God wanted communicated. As terrible as the exile was God's people would have to go through another time of great trouble and another and another. The end they were looking for and the founding of the Kingdom of God was not yet but many years in the future. In fact it would be far more than seventy!

Gabriel tells Daniel to consider the message and understand the vision. Gabriel then describes in verses 24-27 a vision about Jerusalem and God's plan that answers Daniel's prayer about the seventy years of Jerusalem's desolation. The two ideas are connected. Daniel prays for God to forgive his people's rebellion and sin and restore his city. Gabriel's answer speaks to when atonement will come and when Jerusalem will be restored.

9:24 - Gabriel begins his answer to Daniel's prayer. He summarizes God's plan concerning the Jews and Jerusalem. He says seventy sevens, or weeks, are decreed to complete God's plan. Most scholars, including Dispensational scholars, interpret the seventy weeks as years and say Gabriel is telling Daniel that in 490 "years" God will bring his plan for his people and Jerusalem to
fruition. I tend to agree with the seventy sevens as 490 years but I see them as symbolic and not literal. However, even though seeing the seventy sevens as 490 years it should be noted that the words do not literally mean years and there is nothing in the text that specifically says they are to be taken as years. From a practical standpoint literal weeks makes no historical sense and years works much better, but even this simple problem points out the complexities of this passage.

This is a passage that prophecy scholars and most Dispensational scholars view as THE key passage to interpret biblical prophecy. I hear and read a lot of scholars talking with great certainty about the meaning of Gabriel's words to Daniel and very little caution and humility about exactly what this passage means. If a cardinal principle of biblical interpretation is we use the plain passages to interpret the obscure or difficult then why do so many prophecy scholars use this difficult passage as the center of their interpretations? I have great difficulty with the seemingly forced interpretations that many scholars find in Daniel 9:24-27. The most difficult is the Dispensational contention that the seventieth week is completely separate historically from the first 69 and that God's time clock for Israel stops when the church is born and finally starts again when the Rapture occurs because the church and Israel are completely separate. Dispensational interpretation teaches that separation based on Daniel 9. However, there is nothing in the text that suggests in any way that the 70th week is separated from the other 69 or the gap between the 69th and 70th is hidden in the New Testament. In my opinion the Dispensational view is artificial in nature and imposes a viewpoint upon the text that is not supported by the text itself or the rest of Scripture. It is important therefore to carefully examine what Daniel does say and try and understand it in his context before we bridge to our day and the larger prophetic plan of God as he reveals it in Scripture. In other words we interpret Daniel's vision in exactly the same way we interpret all the rest of Scripture!

Gabriel tells Daniel seventy sevens or 490 years are decreed for your people and your holy city, meaning the Jews and Jerusalem. They were the focuses of Daniel's prayer to God and Gabriel is now going to explain God's answer to Daniel's prayer. The root of the word for decreed means to cut. It can mean marked out, determined or decreed. The sense of the word is of something cut out or marked out. The shape is determined by someone cutting it out. When that is applied to time or a plan it means it is fixed by God. Gabriel is telling Daniel God has cut out his plan for the Jews and Jerusalem. The shape of that plan is seventy sevens, 490 years. Heaven has determined the plan not any earthly power. The Jews and Jerusalem have been at the mercy of the Babylonians and now the Persians, and as Daniel has seen in chapter 8 someday the Greeks. It is God however who truly sets out what will happen to his people. It is cut out, determined or decreed by God and no power on earth can alter the plan or stop God from carrying it out on behalf of his people.

What is the nature of that plan? Gabriel tells Daniel. He says seventy sevens are decreed to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. We need to examine each of these phrases in order to gain more clarity as to what Gabriel is telling Daniel.

Finish transgression can also be read as restrain transgression. The NLT reads "to put down rebellion" and the NASB reads "to finish the transgression", adding a definite article making transgression more specific rather than general as the NIV reads. The Hebrew verb means to shut up, restrain or withhold. The noun form of the word means confinement or imprisonment. The basic meaning of the root is to restrict the flow or movement of a thing or person. It indicates the interruption of what is in progress or would naturally be in progress. Here in context it would mean to interrupt or restrain transgression or sin. Another pointing of the
Hebrew vowels yields a different word which means to complete, finish or bring to an end. That is why one gets the different translations of the word in the various versions. The word for transgression does have the Hebrew definite article so the NASB reads literally "finish THE transgression." It is most often translated transgression but it can also mean rebellion against authority or rebellion as a breach in a relationship. That meaning often refers to Israel rebelling against God. How does one take the entire phrase? It seems to me there are two possibilities. First, this refers to God intending to stop the transgression against his people, meaning their persecution. This could refer to the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes as Daniel saw in his vision in chapter 8 or some future ultimate persecution of God's people by the antichrist in the last days. A second possibility is that Gabriel is referring to God once and for all putting a stop to his people's rebellion against him. Daniel had specifically confessed his people's rebellion against God in his prayer; however the word for rebellion in his prayer is different than here in 9:24. In Daniel 8:13 in his vision of the persecution of Antiochus the phrase "the rebellion that causes desolation" uses the same Hebrew word with the definite article for "the rebellion" which is translated simply "transgression" here in 9:24 or "the transgression" in the NASB. The reality is both interpretations are valid and Gabriel's answer to Daniel may be deliberately ambiguous so as to encompass both ideas. It is impossible to tell which is correct. The next phrase is to put an end to sin. The NLT reads "to bring an end to sin" and the NASB reads "to make an end of sin". An alternative reading in the NASB reads "seal up sins". The Hebrew word for bring an end to means seal up or seal like putting a seal on a document. The picture is of an official document being sealed so that it is securely closed. The noun form means a seal like a king sealing a document. The translation to put an end to sin is an interpretation of the word. It means sin has been put under a seal, presumably God's seal symbolizing a covenant. The phrase points to the New Covenant established in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The word for sin is the most common word used for sin in the Old Testament. Its root means to miss the mark. It is the same root word Daniel uses for sin in his prayer of confession in the first part of Daniel 9. The feminine form of the noun can mean sin or sin offering, the sacrifice in the temple that was used to atone for a specific known offense or sin. In the context here it probably refers to sin or sins since the noun is in the plural form. This phrase points to God redeeming and forgiving his people which is what Daniel was specifically asking for in his prayer. I think it points to the New Covenant God will establish when he offers the once for all sacrifice of his Son on the cross. That idea is reinforced when one considers Daniel uses the idea of sealing up sin, which points to a document sealed with the king's seal, in this case God himself. I don't know of any historical information that links sealing away sin with the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes. The closest thing would be the rededication of the temple in 164 but that seems a stretch given the language of this phrase in Daniel 9. The interpretation of sealing up sin as the New Covenant is reinforced in the next phrase which is parallel with it; "to atone for wickedness." The word for atone is the normal word used many times in Leviticus and means to make atonement for, to appease or propitiate sin. Animal sacrifice was God's way of granting the Hebrews forgiveness through the substitution of the life of an animal for the sin of a person or family. Sin brought death and demanded life in payment. The sacrifice substituted for the sinner and accomplished atonement for the sin. God accepted the sacrifice and the person was forgiven. The word translated wickedness in the NIV is the common noun in Hebrew that means iniquity. The root means to be twisted, distorted or crooked. It gives the picture of sin as distorting or twisting that which God designed us to be. The NLT translates this phrase "to atone for guilt" and the NASB translates it "to make atonement for iniquity." The
NIV translation of wickedness is slightly misleading. The word associates the twisting or distorting of iniquity with guilt so the NLT and NASB translations more accurately reflect the precise meaning of the Hebrew terms. The word for iniquity or guilt is singular which implies in context a broad atonement for sin rather than a specific sin or set of sins. This is parallel with the idea of sealing up the sins of the people and once again points to the New Covenant and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. The implication of these two phrases is that God is going to forgive sin and atone for it not in the once a year ritual of the Day of Atonement but once and for all. Daniel had asked God to forgive his people. Gabriel is telling Daniel God will deal with sin once and for all. He will make atonement for it. This is a remarkable prophecy of the Servant-Messiah's mission to the world and points to the first coming of the Lord Jesus rather than to his second coming and the end of history.

The New Covenant interpretation is further reinforced by the next phrase: to bring in everlasting righteousness. Both the NLT and NASB translate the phrase the same way. The verb to bring in is one of the most common verbs used in the Hebrew Bible and means simply to go or come. The form here uses a special Hebrew causal form that is often associated with Yahweh's Word and him guiding the events of history to fulfill his will in the world and for his people. Righteousness is the common word for righteousness and means right living and conduct as well as expressing a right relationship to God. Everlasting is used over 300 times in the Old Testament and most often means an indeterminate continuation of something into the distant future; thus everlasting or eternal. The question is what these common words strung together mean here in the context of Gabriel's explanation to Daniel. Given Gabriel's references to atonement and putting an end to sin which point to the New Covenant God wants to establish with Israel, bringing in everlasting righteousness is also related to the New Covenant. If atonement for sin is the negative side of the covenant then everlasting righteousness is the positive side. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel declare that in the New Covenant God will make with his people he will forgive their sins. He will take out of them their heart of stone and put his Law or will within them and give them a heart of flesh when he gives them his Spirit. Gabriel tells Daniel when God makes atonement for sin he will also cause everlasting righteousness to be brought to God's people and to his world. This points to not only the justification of the sinner but also to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. The phrase is general in nature but looking at Daniel's prophecy through New Testament eyes we can see how Jesus' work through his cross, resurrection and sending of the Holy Spirit accomplishes what Gabriel tells Daniel God is going to do in the future. Gabriel says God is not going to bring a period of righteousness but everlasting righteousness. There is no other event in the Bible or in history that even comes close to fulfilling Gabriel's declaration here except the saving work of our Lord Jesus.

Gabriel tells Daniel that the seventy sevens are to "seal up vision and prophecy." The NLT reads "to confirm prophetic vision." The NASB reads, "to seal up vision and prophecy" or literally prophet. The Hebrew word for seal up is the same word Gabriel uses in the phrase "to put an end to sin", which means sin will be sealed in the New Covenant God is going to make with Israel. Here the word is used in its more common form to refer to someone sealing an official document. Some have taken the phrase to mean God is going to keep secret and not reveal the meaning of the prophecy. Some Dispensational scholars use that interpretation to teach that only in the generation of the last days (usually meaning our own) will Daniel's prophecy become clear. However, a better translation of the phrase in context is the NLT's; to confirm prophetic vision. The word for seal or seal up carries the sense of confirming a message because
it now has the king's seal upon it. It is genuine and authentic. I believe that is what Gabriel is telling Daniel here. The ESV translates the phrase "to seal both vision and prophet." It uses the literal translation of the word the NIV translates prophecy. What does Gabriel mean when he says the seventy weeks will seal vision and prophet, or vision and prophecy? I think he means God will confirm his prophets and their visions of God's plan in history. He will bring their prophecies to fulfillment. God will put his seal on all his prophets' messages and fulfill them, showing the Jews and the world that they were true prophets of God.

The final phrase in verse 24 is also a difficult one. The NIV reads, "to anoint the most holy." The NLT reads, "to anoint the Most Holy Place" or Most Holy One. The NASB reads, "to anoint the most holy place." The ESV reads, "to anoint a most holy place" or thing or one. There is some discrepancy in the translations and ambiguity in their meaning. That makes it difficult to translate the phrase with any certainty and thereby know how to interpret it. The word for anoint is the normal word to describe the anointing of a priest, king or object. Its noun form is Messiah or anointed one. That's the easy part of the phrase. The difficult part is what follows. In Hebrew the phrase literally reads "to anoint holy the holy ones." The word holy is repeated and what's more the second holy is plural and not singular like the first. In other places in the Old Testament both in the Pentateuch and in Ezra and Chronicles this construction stands for the holy of holies or most holy place. That is the most likely translation here. However, it can also mean the most holy things or altar like some of the articles used in the temple. Given the context of 9:24 and Daniel's other reference to God's plan to make atonement for sin once and for all it seems best to translate the reference here as the most holy place or simply the most holy as the NIV does. The problem is what does that mean and to what is Gabriel referring? If it is to the most holy place or the holy of holies then it sounds as if he is referring to the temple which in Daniel's day lay in ruins. Is this a prophecy of the rebuilding of the temple? Gabriel has already referred to God's final plan to deal with sin once and for all through an atoning sacrifice. We know from the gospels that sacrifice was the Lord Jesus' death on the cross when the veil of the temple was torn in two exposing "the most holy place!" The rest of Gabriel's summary in 9:24 points to God's plan that will be carried out apart from the temple and the animal sacrifices that had been halted in Daniel's day and would cease their efficacy after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore I do not believe the anointing of the most holy here in 9:24 is speaking of the temple. I think it is referring to Christ. He is the Messiah, the anointed one of God, who will make atonement for the sins of the world and by his resurrection be declared the "Holy One of God." That is what the demon called Jesus in Mark 1. It is the title Peter gives Jesus in John 6 and what Stephen called him in Acts 3. It was a title for the Messiah. I believe that is what Gabriel is telling Daniel here. The seventy weeks will bring about the revealing of the Messiah and the salvation and forgiveness he will bring to his people the Jews and the whole world.

Taken together, Gabriel's description of God's answer to Daniel lays out God's plan to save his people from their sins by making a New Covenant with them that will be accomplished through the work of the anointed Holy One, the Messiah. This is a remarkable prophecy of God's plan and one that the Jews did not readily apply to the Lord Jesus and his work. In fact, the New Testament does not quote Daniel's prophecy of the seventy weeks as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus quotes the "abomination of desolation" in 9:27 but not the seventy weeks and Gabriel's outline of God's plan. If I am correct in my interpretation it is curious that New Testament writers did not use the seventy weeks prophecy as proof that Jesus is the Messiah and fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. Daniel's prophecy is only included in a general
way in New Testament passages like *Romans 1* and *Hebrews 1* that speak of Jesus and his death and resurrection fulfilling what the prophets had said.

One more comment is worth noting about verse 24. The seventy sevens can be broken down in several ways. The most obvious way is to see them as 490 years. However, the number 70 is an important symbolic number in the prophets, especially in *Daniel*. In the introduction to his prayer in 9:2 Daniel says he had been reading the prophet *Jeremiah* and understood that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. This is based on Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles in *Jeremiah* 29. He had said their exile and captivity would last 70 years. Historically that is a symbolic number because it was only 59 years from the exile of Jehoiachin in 597 to Cyrus’ decree to rebuild the temple in 538. However, if one takes 70 years as a starting point or seventy weeks as Gabriel says, then there are 7 seventies that make up the 490 years or weeks. That could possibly correspond to a normal solar week which would make the last 70 a Sabbath seventy, which seems to indicate that the final seventy would be the most important. This is only speculation about the numbers and their symbolism however and may not relate in any way to the actual meaning of Gabriel’s answer to Daniel. Yet it does indicate that many fanciful and intriguing possibilities exist as we try and understand the answer to Daniel's prayer and the interpretation of the 70 sevens.

Various sources confirm that the normal Hebrew year of twelve lunar months had from 353 to 355 days depending on the particular year. It was 11 days short of the standard solar year of 365. In post-exilic times a leap month was added based on a complicated formula about every 19 years in order to bring the lunar monthly calendar in line with the solar calendar to keep the Hebrew feasts at the right time of year, especially Passover. There is no evidence whatsoever after consulting multiple sources that the ancient Hebrews calculated their years using 360 days. Some Dispensational prophecy scholars use that calculation in order to try and precisely align Daniel's seventy weeks or 490 years with the dates of Jesus' death and resurrection. The reality is it is impossible to align the dates and make the 490 years a precise, literal prophecy because of the fluid nature of the Hebrew calendar. Furthermore the practice of leap months to align the lunar and solar calendars was not adapted until post-exilic times far later than the first year of Cyrus' rule in Babylon or 539 BC when Daniel is given the prophecy of the seventy sevens. That leads me to conclude that the numbers must be symbolic and not literal in nature.

Furthermore the Hebrews most often dated something by an event like the number of years in a king's reign and not a date on the calendar. Thus Daniel says his prayer and Gabriel’s answer to it came in the first year of Darius the Mede or Cyrus’ rule over Babylon which would have been 539 BC. That is why even if Daniel would have known how to use our modern calendars he would not have said in 539 BC but in the first year of Darius the Mede. That Hebrew way of dating things makes it even more difficult to make the seventy sevens perfectly fit an exact set of dates. This is further complicated by the approximate date of Jesus' birth and death. It is very difficult to pin down the precise dates when both events occurred. We know he was born before Herod the Great died in 4 BC but we do not know how long before. We know he was “about 30 years of age” according to *Luke* when he began his ministry but we do not know whether he was 28, 29, 30, 31 or even 32 or 33. The dates are all approximate. Taken all together it seems to me the best way to interpret Daniel's prophecy of the seventy sevens is symbolically because we cannot interpret it literally with any kind of certainty.

**9:25-27** - According to my Study Bible notes there are three main interpretations of this prophecy. The first is the Historical. Gabriel is outlining the period from *Jeremiah* and the
destruction of Jerusalem in 586 to Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 BC. The anointed one is Cyrus, Zerubbabel, or Joshua the High Priest. The first 7 weeks end with the return of the exiles in 538. The intervening period of the 62 weeks ended with the murder of Onnias, the High Priest, around 170. The last week was from 171-164 when Antiochus desecrated the temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar. The second interpretation is the Messianic. The period in view is from 538 BC to 70 AD. The anointed one is Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The numbers are symbolic and not mathematical or historical. The first 7 weeks are from 538 to *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*. The 62 weeks were from *Ezra* to Christ. The last week was Jesus' life climaxing in the tearing of the veil of the temple. *Verse 26* refers to the destruction of the temple by Titus in 70. The third interpretation is the Dispensational Premillennial. The starting point is Cyrus' decree to restore the temple in 538 or from the decree of Artaxerxes to restore Jerusalem in 444 BC. 69 weeks were completed at the time of Christ's death. The 70th week is seen as the Great Tribulation period of 7 years or a week of years. The present church age is a gap or parenthesis between the 69th and 70th weeks which God did not reveal through his inspired prophets. In this view the future seven year Tribulation period will be divided at its midpoint. The focal point of the Tribulation is seen by many Dispensational scholars to be the Jews in Jerusalem with a restored temple. Covenant protection will be given them by the antichrist for the first 3 and one half years. The Jews will be favored by the world ruler named the antichrist or the beast of *Revelation 13*. However, the latter three and a half years will see the antichrist break his covenant with the Jews and usher in a time of unprecedented tribulation and persecution of them. All three views understand that the ultimate fulfillment of Daniel’s vision is found in Jesus Christ. That ultimate fulfillment has not yet occurred and waits the Lord Jesus' final return.

Like the introduction and setting of the prophecy in *verse 24* we need to examine each phrase of these verses to best determine what Gabriel is telling Daniel about the fulfillment of God's plan in history for his people. That is necessary because there are so many interpretations of this prophecy and it has often been used as the key passage to interpret biblical prophecy, especially the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and Revelation.

Daniel is told to know and understand or to comprehend what Gabriel is telling him. Then he is told, "from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem..." The NASB reads, "from the issuing of the decree (or word) to restore and rebuild Jerusalem... " The NLT reads, "from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem..." The first question to answer is: to what is Gabriel referring about a decree to restore Jerusalem? The word for issuing or going forth is a rich word in Hebrew. It is often related to the exodus and God leading his people out of slavery like the going forth from Egypt. It can be used of God's Word as in *Isaiah*, going forth from God to accomplish his purposes in history. Thus even if Gabriel is using it to describe the decree of a Persian king behind that decree stands God who is using the Persians to accomplish his purposes for his people. There are two possible historical references that make sense. The first is Cyrus the Great's decree in 538 BC that the Jews could return to Jerusalem from exile and rebuild God's temple. The second is Artaxerxes granting permission for Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem with the king's assistance in 444 BC. Dispensational scholars prefer the latter date as it more closely fits what they view as a precise timeline and a literal interpretation of the prophecy. Cyrus' decree makes the most sense from the standpoint of the language of the text and of history. The return under Zerubbabel in 538 was viewed as a second exodus (see Isaiah 40 and ff.) and was sanctioned by a royal decree from Cyrus as King of Persia. That matches the language of the text. The problem is it was not strictly a decree to rebuild Jerusalem but to rebuild the Lord's temple. Nehemiah's commission as governor of Judea
and the king's permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem more closely matches the language of the text to rebuild Jerusalem. However, Artaxerxes' permission to Nehemiah can hardly be called a royal decree proclaimed throughout the Persian Empire like Cyrus' decree. Plus, Zerubbabel's return was viewed by the Jews with much greater significance than Nehemiah's. I tend to see Cyrus' decree as the starting point of Daniel's seventy sevens or 490 years. However, if we start there then there is no chance Daniel's prophecy is a literal prophecy of the Messiah and the end times. The math simply does not work out.

The next phrase in the NIV is, "until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven sevens and sixty-two sevens." The NASB reads, "until Messiah (or an anointed one) the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks." The NLT puts seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven before the phrase about Jerusalem and then reads, "until the Anointed One comes." The ESV ends the sentence at seven weeks and puts the sixty-two weeks at the beginning of the next sentence about Jerusalem being rebuilt. Those are four separate versions with four significantly different translations of the text. That shows the difficulty in understanding what Daniel is being told. The Hebrew literally reads "an anointed one a prince seven sevens." The difficulty is what does Daniel mean by an anointed one, a prince? Should one translate this: the Anointed One, the ruler, or the Anointed One, the Prince or even an anointed ruler? All are possible, although, there are no definite articles in Hebrew so properly the phrase should read AN anointed one rather than THE anointed one. But the Hebrew word for anointed one is Messiah. From a New Testament standpoint it makes the most sense to take the Anointed One, the Prince, as the Lord Jesus but that is by no means the only valid interpretation of the phrase. Haggai and Zechariah both name Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest, the leaders of the exiles who returned following Cyrus' decree, as anointed ones. That is one possibility. Isaiah names Cyrus the Great as the Lord's anointed one! That is another possibility. Some, trying to tie Daniel's entire prophecy to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, have said the anointed one here is Onnias the High Priest who was killed right before Antiochus' persecution broke out. The problem with that view is high priests are rarely if ever called princes, and the word means ruler. The High Priest during the Greek period was not a ruler but a religious figure. Given the context of Gabriel's overview of God's plan in verse 24 it seems to me that Anointed One, the ruler or prince is most likely the Lord Jesus and the prophecy is describing his full Messianic work of securing atonement for God's people and the restoring of Jerusalem. Gabriel says that is what his answer to Daniel's prayer is about. After all is considered this is a prophecy of the Messiah and the events surrounding his mission.

The next difficulty to unravel is the seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. There is a connective particle in Hebrew between the seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. It does literally read seven sevens and sixty-two sevens. So the NIV reading, supported by the NASB and the NLT, is probably correct even though the ESV separates them. The question is why doesn't Gabriel just say 69 sevens rather than separating the two numbers? The most likely reason is he is telling Daniel that there will be two distinct times within the 69 weeks, namely seven and then 62. The probable meaning is that the rebuilding of Jerusalem will be within the seven sevens and the coming of the Anointed One, the ruler, will be 62 sevens after that. This makes the most sense of the text and is the way the NIV translates the phrase. It should be noted that even though the ESV differs from the other three translations its ultimate meaning is still the same.

Gabriel tells Daniel that Jerusalem will be rebuilt during the time of the 69 weeks until the coming of the Messiah, most likely in the first seven weeks or seven sevens. It will be rebuilt "with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble." The NLT reads, "with streets and strong
defenses (a textual note reads and a moat or trenches) despite perilous times." The NASB reads, "it will be built again, with plaza (or streets) and moat, even in times of distress." The ESV reads, "it shall be built again with squares and moat but in a troubled time." The word for build can also mean rebuild which fits the historical context of Jerusalem in Daniel's day. The city needed to be rebuilt if it was to be inhabited again. The word translated streets in the NIV literally means a broad open place which is why some translations read plaza or squares. The picture the word paints is of wide and broad plazas or streets within the city. When Jerusalem is rebuilt it will not have narrow closed in streets where people cannot congregate but wide open plazas and boulevards where many people and animals can walk. The implication is it will be a beautiful and open city like Babylon where the exiles lived during Daniel's lifetime. The word for trench is a difficult word and means literally to cut or decide. The idea is of a ditch or moat dug around the city as a defensive measure. It is used in this way only here in Daniel 9:25 which makes it difficult to interpret precisely. That is why the NLT softens the phrase and makes it general in nature rendering it as strong defenses. The historical problem is Jerusalem never had a moat. It had a strong wall but not a ditch built around it. Nehemiah never refers to digging a moat around the base of the wall when the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt during his tenure as governor in Jerusalem. During New Testament times there was no moat around the walls of the city. It is impossible to know to what Gabriel is referring unless the word is to be taken more generally as the NLT does and simply refer to the strengthening of the city's defenses, especially the walls.

If there are two distinct periods in the 69 weeks, a shorter one of seven sevens and a longer one of sixty-two sevens before Messiah comes then Gabriel is most likely referring to the rebuilding of Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah around 444 BC. Nehemiah successfully led the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in 52 days all the time facing stiff opposition from the Samaritans and other enemies of the Jews around Jerusalem. The seven sevens should be read as a symbolic number expressing God's plan to use Nehemiah to restore and rebuild Jerusalem soon after Cyrus' decree to allow the Jews to return. Further during those seven sevens the temple was rebuilt before the walls, also during difficult times. Daniel is being told within a short time after the Jews are allowed to return to Jerusalem the temple and the city will be restored and rebuilt and the people will once again be able to live in the city in safety. All of that was accomplished within 94 years of Cyrus' decree. The 49 years of the seven sevens is therefore symbolic and not literal in an historical sense.

Verse 26 starts with another difficult phrase. The NIV reads, "After the sixty-two sevens, the Anointed One will be cut off and have nothing." The NLT reads, "After this period of sixty-two sets of seven, the Anointed One will be killed, appearing to have accomplished nothing..." The NASB reads, "Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah (or anointed one) will be cut off and have nothing (or no one)." The ESV reads, "And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing." The fact that there are significant differences in the translations of this verse shows there is uncertainty about exactly what the words mean in context. That means we should be cautious in any interpretation we give taking into account the uncertainty involved.

Anointed One literally in Hebrew reads an anointed one, but it seems the meaning is clear that Gabriel is speaking of the Messiah. The verb for cut off is a rich word. It can mean literally killed or figuratively excommunicated, meaning someone is "cut off" from the covenant or the community of Israel. The verb form is used in the phrase "to cut a covenant." Gabriel has already told Daniel in his introduction to this prophecy in verse 24 about God's plan to secure permanent
atonement for his people through a New Covenant sacrifice. Given the rich Hebrew meaning of this verb this becomes a remarkable prophecy of Jesus' mission in his first coming. Jesus is the Messiah but he will be cut off, meaning killed, but also meaning he will be cut off from his community, Israel. When Christ was nailed to the cross according to the Law in Deuteronomy 21 he became cursed of God and was excluded from the covenant community. Plus, he himself became the sacrifice that established a New Covenant through his blood. He himself was "cut" in order to redeem God's people and open the way for God to justify the sinner based on Jesus' sacrifice of himself. Gabriel is telling Daniel the plan of the New Testament! He is giving him the reason for the Messiah's first coming that the Jews did not understand. In fact they rejected his mission and rejected him as Messiah because they could not reconcile their understanding of the prophecies of the Messiah's mission with the cross and resurrection of Jesus. The best evidence of this is Saul of Tarsus' opposition to Christians and Jesus as Messiah! If I am correct this sentence becomes one of the greatest prophecies in the Old Testament of the plan of God for the salvation of the human race. The curious part is the apostles and gospel writers do not use it at all! It is possible they ignore it because of its apocalyptic nature and the difficulty in translating the prophecy. However, they are not shy in applying many other equally difficult passages to Jesus, his life and ministry.

It is clear that when Messiah is "cut off" he will have nothing. The disciples were completely defeated after the crucifixion. Jesus could not be the Messiah. He was dead. He had nothing. He literally could not be the Messiah because now he was cursed of God and cut off from his people. What Gabriel does not reveal to Daniel here is anything about Jesus' resurrection that would prove he was in fact the Messiah even though he had been cursed of God because of his crucifixion. Paul put it all together and understood what the resurrection declared about Jesus and his death. Did he examine this prophecy? We do not know but it is possible. We do know he does not quote it directly nor does he allude to it in any of his letters. Despite no clear references to this prophecy by the apostles in the New Testament it still remains one of the most remarkable and important prophecies of God's plan of redemption in the Old Testament. Gabriel told Daniel what was going to happen! Jesus the Messiah would not to take up his kingly reign but to be "cut off" to secure atonement and bring in everlasting righteousness.

The next phrase in the NIV reads, "The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary." The NLT reads, "and a ruler will arise whose armies will destroy the city and the Temple." The NASB reads, "and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary." Gabriel tells Daniel that the people of the ruler or prince who will arise in the future will attack and destroy the city after the sixty-two sevens and the death of the Messiah. The word for sanctuary means literally the holy place or holy one. Here in context it is describing the temple. This cannot be a reference to Antiochus Epiphanes because he only stopped the sacrifices in the temple and defiled it; he did not destroy it nor did he destroy Jerusalem. Plus in Gabriel's timeline the destruction of Jerusalem takes place after the death of the Messiah and the sixty-two sevens. The best interpretation of this phrase is the Romans under Titus who destroyed the city and the temple in the first Jewish Revolt in 70 AD. If that is correct then the ruler who will come emerges out of the Romans or Rome. The language of the text is clear however in that the city and temple will be destroyed once again by the people of the ruler who will come and not by the ruler himself. He will emerge later in history. John in Revelation 13 says the antichrist or beast will come from Rome. Gabriel is giving Daniel a prophetic-symbolic picture of the events surrounding the first coming of the Messiah in these verses. He is also telling Daniel that even though Jerusalem will be rebuilt and resettled after the seven sevens,
after the sixty-two sevens and the first coming of the Messiah the city and the temple will once again be destroyed. Remember Gabriel tells Daniel in verse 24 that the seventy sevens will finish transgression and bring in everlasting righteousness. The completion of God's plan for his people and his city is still a long ways into the future. That must have been difficult for Daniel to hear just as it looked as if history was going to turn for the Jews and there was hope they would be able to go home again. Daniel is told they will go home and Jerusalem will be rebuilt but it won't last. The same thing will happen again. All this must take place before God finishes his plan. It's as if Daniel is asking God when will all this be finished and God replies through Gabriel, "Not yet, not yet."

Jerusalem will be destroyed again. The NIV reads, "The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed." The NLT reads, "The end will come with a flood, and war and its miseries are decreed from that time to the very end." The NASB reads, "And its (or his) end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined (or, war will be decreed for desolations)." Once again this is a phrase in this prophecy about which there is some disagreement as to how to precisely translate it. The ESV reads, "Its (or his) end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed."

There is some question as to the pronoun at the beginning of this phrase. Is it he or it? "He" would refer to the ruler who is to come in the previous phrase. "It" would refer to Jerusalem and the temple. In the context of the phrase it makes the most sense to see this as still referring to the city and temple. Jerusalem's end or destruction will come like a flood or with a flood. Flood here is metaphorical. Gabriel is not saying there will be a literal flood that will destroy the city. That is clear from the phrase that immediately follows that says war will continue until the end. A flood is a powerful, inexorable force that cannot be stopped. Gabriel is describing the Roman armies as they breached the walls of Jerusalem and poured into the city in 70 AD. The root verb of this noun for flood means to overflow or engulf. That describes the invading Romans quite literally. Josephus reports the legions poured into the city, slaying, raping and pillaging everything they could find. The Jews were overwhelmed! The Hebrew that follows literally reads, "and to the end war." The various translations add the understood future verb. From an historical standpoint Gabriel's language makes sense. The Romans destroyed the city and burned the temple in 70. Less than a century later they once again attacked the city in the Second Jewish Revolt. Jerusalem was largely deserted for a time after that, though Jews still came to the Western Wall to grieve. Over the next 2000 years Jerusalem has known some times of relative calm but always those times of peace have been interrupted by battle and war all the way up to the present. The threat of war always hangs over Jerusalem. Gabriel tells Daniel the city will be destroyed by the Romans but even after that it will always live under the threat of war. The second half of the phrase casts the finish of this prophecy far into the future after Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans.

Desolations are decreed is also a difficult phrase. Desolation means devastated, abandoned, deserted, which is exactly what happened to Jerusalem after the Romans destroyed it. The word in the Old Testament is most often used in connection with God's judgments in history. A city, country or people are left desolate because of God's wrath and justice. Today Jerusalem is resettled. However, the word is used in verse 27 to describe the abomination that causes desolation, a type of which is Antiochus Epiphanes sacrificing a pig on the temple altar to Zeus. Titus also defiled the temple in 70. If the desolations Gabriel describes are spiritual in nature then he is saying the temple will be physically destroyed but also spiritually devastated and
abandoned. Today the Jews pray at the Western Wall but there are no more sacrifices made to God on Temple Mount. The temple itself is desolate and abandoned.

The word for decreed means to cut, sharpen or decide. The sense here is that desolations for Jerusalem have been firmly decided. A related word is used in the phrase about Jerusalem being rebuilt with a trench or moat in verse 25, meaning something that is dug or cut. The sense of the decision or decree here is that it cannot be altered. It is firm, like Daniel's earlier descriptions of the Laws of the Medes and Persians that cannot be altered. The question is who is making the decree? Given the context I think this is a reference to God sovereignly deciding Jerusalem's future. It will be rebuilt, destroyed and made desolate before the end finally comes. If desolate is not only physical in nature but also spiritual it could mean that the temple and its altar will remain desolate until the end. The end is not only the end of Jerusalem or its destruction but also the end of history, the finishing of God's plan for his people. This would suggest that Gabriel in this last phrase of verse 26 is telling Daniel what will occur in the 70th week or seven. War will continue and desolations will occur. Jerusalem will be destroyed but that is not the end. More war and desolation will follow.

Verse 27 begins in the NIV, "He will confirm a covenant with many for one seven." The NLT reads, "He will make a treaty with the people for a period of one set of seven." The NASB reads, "And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week." The ESV reads, "And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week."

There are several questions to answer in this phrase. First, who is "he"? From the context it seems likely that Gabriel is referring to the ruler who will come whose people will destroy Jerusalem. The best historical interpretation of the people of the ruler who will come is the Romans. That means the ruler who will come is somehow related to Rome. Many scholars including most Evangelical and Dispensationalist scholars see this as a reference to the Antichrist or the Beast of Revelation 13.

He makes a covenant with "many". The word in Hebrew is the noun without the definite article of the word for many or much or great. Some prophecy scholars see this as the Antichrist making a covenant with Israel in the last days. The problem is the word for "many" often refers to the nations and the Gentiles. It would be a stretch to interpret it as meaning just the Jews in this context. It more likely refers to the ruler who is to come making a covenant or a treaty with many peoples and nations, including the Jews, for one seven. Covenant is the normal word for covenant which can describe the relationship and agreement God has with his people but in this context it means some sort of treaty or agreement between nations. The verb to make means to make strong or confirm, to demonstrate strength. The implication of the verb form in this sentence is that the ruler who will come will make a covenant or confirm a treaty with many nations and peoples and that treaty will come about because of his strength. One gets the impression that he will impose his will on the nations in this covenant. He is the stronger party to the treaty and gets what he wants. There is no sense here of a treaty of peace that came about through mutual good will between equals but a treaty the ruler has imposed on many nations. Since Gabriel has already said war and desolations will come and will be related to Jerusalem, this phrase means at some point the ruler will force an end to conflict on his terms. The text implies people will be relieved the fighting has stopped but not with the terms of the treaty. Conquerors in history have often brought peace through conquest but the result is often oppression and not freedom. Given the rest of Daniel 9:27 that appears to be the case here as well.
Another difficult question to answer from this first phrase is the time-frame of the seven in which the ruler to come makes his treaty with many nations. Is this following the sixty-two sevens, or sixty-nine sevens or is it during the same period? It appears this final seven Gabriel mentions is the 70th seven and not a time during the 69 sevens, although that is by no means certain. When does this seven that Gabriel talks about in verse 27 occur? The 69 sevens between Cyrus' decree to rebuild the temple and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus in 70 AD appear to happen in sequence. The numbers may be symbolic but the fulfillment dovetails with history and is in chronological order. Dispensational scholars teach that the seven in verse 27 is the 70th week and is completely separate from the rest of the 69 week chronology of Daniel 9. They teach there is a large gap between the 69th and 70th sevens because the 70 sevens or weeks are part of the age or dispensation of Israel and not the church. The two dispensations are completely separate and do not relate. Further the church age was kept hidden in the Old Testament and so was not understood by the prophets. Therefore the prophetic time clock stopped when Jesus was crucified and resurrected or soon after when the Jews as a people rejected their Messiah. It will not start up again until the church is taken out or raptured and then the final 70th week will occur.

This interpretation tries to explain the obvious time gap between the historical fulfillment of the 69 weeks and the unfulfilled 70th week of Daniel's prophecy. The problem is it has several major flaws. First, there is nothing in the text that says there is a 2000 plus year gap between the 69th week and the 70th week that is hidden from Daniel and awaits the rapture of the church. People conclude that because of historical events and their partial fulfillment of the prophecy but the prophecy itself does not say this. Second, the Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah, argued that when Messiah came God would invite the Gentiles into his people Israel. Paul saw his mission as a fulfillment of those prophecies. See Romans 15. Since one of the first tenets of good exegesis is that Scripture interprets Scripture, the apostles confirm that God's plan through his Messiah is being fulfilled with the conversion of the Gentiles and their inclusion into Israel as God's people. See Romans 9-11. The church is one people under the Messiah made up of both Jews and Gentiles just as God had declared through his prophets. That can hardly be said to be something hidden in prophecy and that the prophetic time clock stopped after Jesus' resurrection. Plus, that view completely ignores God sending his Holy Spirit upon all who believe in the Messiah, both Jew and Gentile, as prophesied by Joel and Ezekiel. That was fulfilled at Pentecost in Acts 2 and in Acts 10!

Is the seven Gabriel refers to in verse 27 the 70th seven or can it be understood to occur during the 69 weeks or sevens of verses 25-26? Most scholars infer that the seven Gabriel speaks of in verse 27 is the 70th seven because it follows verse 26 and the events of the 69 sevens. There is however another possibility. In verse 26 Gabriel describes the destruction of Jerusalem by the people of the ruler who will come. That is most likely the destruction of the city by the Romans in 70 AD. He then tells Daniel that war will continue until the end. Either that means the end of the 69 sevens or the end of the entire 70 sevens. It is possible it means the end of the 70 sevens because he has already said the Messiah will be killed and Jerusalem and the temple destroyed at the end of the 69 sevens. If that is the case then it is possible that the seven of verse 27 is not the 70th seven but a seven or week within the 69. If Gabriel is backtracking in verse 27 then the events of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes closely fulfill the description of the abomination that causes desolation. There are still problems with this view however. What does Gabriel mean by a covenant or treaty with many for seven years or one seven? There is no historical evidence that Antiochus made a treaty with many nations three and a half years before
he halted all sacrifice in the temple and persecuted the Jews. Even if the seven is a symbolic number the treaty with many does not fit the historical data. He did forbid the worship of Yahweh and halted the temple sacrifices trying to force the Jews to Hellenize beginning in 167 BC. That was halted when Judas Maccabeaus led his forces into Jerusalem and cleansed the temple in December of 164, three and a half years later. That part does fit the historical record. As attractive as it is to see verse 27 as referring to a seven within the 69 sevens and prophesying the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes there are too many problems with this view to conclude that this is what Gabriel is telling Daniel. That means we are left with the more traditional view that the seven in verse 27 is the 70th seven. That view however also has problems.

How then does one explain the obvious time gap between Daniel's 69th and 70th weeks? We have already shown that the 69 weeks are not 483 literal years from Cyrus' decree in 538 BC to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The math simply does not work out. The problem with the gap is often related to trying to make the 70 sevens out to be a literal 490 years. No matter which reasonable starting place one uses historically for the 70 weeks one cannot make the chronology fit in a precise manner. In a general way it does but not literally. Given that fact, I conclude that the gap between the historical fulfillment of the 69 weeks and the eventual fulfillment of the 70th week is also meant to be taken symbolically and not literally. This view allows for the gap without having to agree with the Dispensational view of prophecy which I believe is a forced and artificial interpretation of Scripture and does not deal with the text as it stands. If that is the case then the 70th week and the fulfillment of God's plan will happen in God's timing and not human historical time. This is further reinforced by the final description of the 70th week which points to the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes but which the Lord Jesus said would be ultimately fulfilled at his Second Coming. See Matthew 24 and Mark 13.

Gabriel tells Daniel that in the middle of the final, 70th seven, the ruler who will come will put an end to sacrifice and offering. That is, after 3 and one half years the ruler will stop the sacrifices and worship of the temple. The NLT reads, "but after half this time he will put an end to the sacrifices and offerings." The NASB reads, "but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering." The ESV reads, "and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering." The different versions essentially agree on this phrase. The difficulty is in understanding the meaning and timing of the phrase.

Sacrifice and offering relate to the temple and its rituals and worship. The word for sacrifice is the common word used to describe the animal sacrifices for the feasts and the daily morning and evening sacrifices of the temple. Offering can be used in a general way to describe grain and animal offerings but is also the word used for the grain offerings of the daily sacrifices in the temple ritual. The difficulty in interpreting this phrase is that Gabriel is saying the temple rituals were suspended by the ruler who will come half way through the covenant he had made with the many or the nations. The obvious conclusion is that the temple is standing and functioning. From an historical standpoint this produces many problems. Gabriel has already shown Daniel the temple will be rebuilt, which it was by the returning exiles under Zerubbabel. He has also shown that the rebuilt temple will be destroyed after the death of the Messiah, which it was by Titus and the Romans in 70 AD. Is Gabriel telling Daniel that the temple will be rebuilt again in or before the 70th week? It appears so. One reaches that conclusion if one takes the seven with the covenant as the final seven. Three and a half years into that final covenant the ruler who will come will suspend the worship in the temple and then defile it with "the abomination of desolation." Historically Antiochus Epiphanes suspended temple worship during the roughly three and a half year period between 167 and 164 BC until the Jews under Judas
Maccabaeus recaptured the temple and cleansed it. This is the origin of the Jewish feast of Hanukkah. The historical events surrounding Antiochus are too coincidental to be an accident. The problem is how to relate those events in the 160's BC to Daniel's prophecy here? It appears that the persecution of Antiochus is a type of the final persecution of the "ruler who will come." If it is a type then the temple must be rebuilt in the final days of history before the return of the Lord Jesus. Jesus' description in Mark 13 can be applied to Titus and the Roman destruction of the temple in 70 but it can also refer to conditions when he returns. It can be both, like many other prophecies which have an immediate historical meaning and a final fulfillment in the end times. Perhaps we should apply that usage here. If Jesus applies the abomination of desolation in Daniel 9:27 to both Titus and the Antichrist then since Scripture interprets Scripture it makes sense to apply this sentence to both Antiochus and a future world ruler who will come.

If we do that however, then we are led to the conclusion that the Jewish temple will once again be rebuilt before the rise of the Antichrist. That conclusion presents many difficulties theologically. The Book of Hebrews argues that there is no other sacrifice available for making atonement other than the cross of Jesus Christ and that to go back to the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant is useless and in fact holds up the Son of God and his work to ridicule! Why would God allow such a thing to occur? I have great difficulty with the interpretation of many Evangelical and Dispensational scholars who teach that the temple must be rebuilt during the Great Tribulation and the final seven years of Daniel's prophecy, yet I cannot escape that conclusion here in Daniel 9:27. If the temple is rebuilt during or right before the final "seven" whenever that takes place, given New Testament teaching, I am led to the conclusion that God allows it to happen but he does not sanction it. Meaning, it may be the focal point of worship for the Jews during the final seven but it will be an insult to their Messiah and demeaning to his sacrifice on the cross. God will not approve of it except as a fulfillment of prophecy and so the rebuilt temple will not have his protection. It will be a product of the rebellion of God's ancient people who have rejected their Messiah. However, the Book of Revelation teaches that when the final persecution of the Antichrist comes against the Jews they will finally see the error of their ways and recognize the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. Zechariah 12 will then be fulfilled. They will look on him whom they have pierced and mourn what they have done.

There is still the final phrase of verse 27 to understand and apply before we finish this more detailed examination of Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks. Gabriel tells Daniel that during the final three and a half years of the 70th week, after the ruler who will come has stopped the temple sacrifices, the ruler will do something terrible. The NIV reads, "And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." The NLT reads, "Then as a climax to all his terrible deeds, he will set up a sacrilegious object that causes desecration, until the end that has been decreed is poured out on this ruler." The NASB reads, "And on the wing of abominations (or detestable things) will come one who makes desolate (or causes horror), even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." The ESV reads, "And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator." As you can see there are significant differences between versions due to the fact that the meaning of the Hebrew words in this final phrase of verse 27 is uncertain.

Literally the Hebrew words read "the wing or extremity or corner of detested things." What does Gabriel mean by wing? The NIV interprets it as referring to the temple in some way. The NASB tries to take it literally as, the wing of abominations, but that makes no sense. I think the NIV is closer to the meaning. It makes the most sense to understand the phrase as the...
extremity or corner of something which in context probably refers to the temple or the altar. It could refer to the corner of the altar which then would mean one of the horns of the altar where the priests would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifices. It appears the picture Gabriel is painting is that the ruler that will come will sacrifice something on the altar, sprinkling its blood on the horns of the altar that will be detestable. Since abomination is plural that seems to imply it will happen more than once, abominations or detestable things. From an historical perspective Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 set up a statue of Zeus in the temple and instituted pagan sacrifices to it along with temple prostitution. These actions defiled the temple in the eyes of faithful Jews and according to the Law of Moses. This is the first historical instance of abominations that cause desolations or desertion of the temple. The Roman general Titus would be the next historical example in that he sacrificed a pig on the altar after the sack of Jerusalem before he destroyed the temple in 70 AD. It should also be noted that in Daniel 11:31 Daniel writes about the abomination of desolation and the reference is in the middle of a prophetic passage that deals with the time of the Seleucids and the Ptolemies and specifically Antiochus Epiphanes. That is a specific reference to the time of Antiochus. This appears to be a reference to either the ultimate abomination of desolation or one who will bring that sacrilege to the temple, as Jesus refers to it in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. This passage then describes the ultimate climax of evil against God's people in history and Antiochus and Titus and their defiling actions become a type of the actions of the one who brings desolation. The word can also mean horror, appalled or stunned. The picture is of such evil and sacrilege that God's people are stunned and appalled at it and the temple is left desolate and deserted because of it.

Gabriel says God's temple will be defiled by the ruler who will come but he will not triumph; God will. His future and end are already determined by God. The word for "end" in Hebrew means completion, and even more specifically, complete destruction or annihilation. God will pour out destruction upon the desolator. It is possible to take the word for desolator as "the desolated one" and apply it to the temple or Jerusalem but every major version translates the Hebrew participle as meaning the one who makes desolate, meaning the ruler who will come. It is "decreed" which is the same word Gabriel used at the end of verse 26 to say that desolations are decreed upon Jerusalem. The word literally means to cut. Future events concerning the ruler who will come are already cut; they are already decided by God. The word for poured out describes molten metal being poured out of the furnace and is often used to describe God's wrath. In other words God has decided that his wrath will be poured out on the one who brings this appalling desolation. Even though the Jews may be shocked and appalled by what occurs and think things are completely beyond redemption, yet God has already decreed this future ruler's fate. He will face the righteous and jealous wrath of God for his people. He cannot win. Gabriel is telling Daniel that even when things look as bad as they can be for his people and for Jerusalem do not despair. God will triumph and the enemies of the Jews will face God's judgment. He will save them. That same message John uses to comfort the seven churches in the Book of Revelation. Even though God's people may face unprecedented opposition and persecution they are not to give up hope and faith. God will triumph in the end and those who persecute God's people will be judged. As the bumper sticker in Prague said during the Czech revolution at the fall of communism, "The Lamb wins!"

Finally, if Scripture interprets Scripture then one must note that John in Revelation uses this prophecy in Daniel as a reference point to describe what scholars have called the Great Tribulation. John uses the symbol of seven years and especially three and a half years as the time of the Great Tribulation. Whether that is a literal or symbolic three and a half years is open for
debate. The point is the final New Testament book picks up Daniel’s time frame as a reference point to describe the final battle between God and the forces of Satan in the world, including the rise of the antichrist or the Beast. John’s interpretation needs to inform any interpretation we give of Daniel’s prophecy here in Daniel 9. Daniel may be looking ahead specifically to the persecution of the Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes but the ultimate meaning of the 70 weeks prophecy is found in the events surrounding the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth. There is a gap between the 69 sevens and the fulfillment of the final 70th seven. However, it is not because the church age is hidden in the prophets as Dispensational scholars teach. Daniel gives us a hint of the already-not yet eschatology of the New Testament. There would be an historical gap between the first coming of the Messiah when he would secure atonement for the human race through the sacrifice of himself and his ultimate return when he would be acknowledged as Lord of all and finally defeat all of his enemies, including the antichrist. When he returns he will rescue his people from persecution and they will be with him forever.

Chapter 12:
12:1-4 - The angel has given Daniel great detail about the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and his persecution of the Jews in chapter 11. Now however the time frame shifts to a period even farther into the future and the final days of human history as we know it. This is clear because Daniel is told about the resurrection of the righteous which has not yet taken place and did not take place in the 160’s BC and the days of Antiochus. However, certain details of this chapter do refer to the time of Antiochus. Daniel is doing what many of the prophets do and what the Lord Jesus did in his sermon on the Mount of Olives about the time of the end. He telescopes events, now speaking of something that is about to happen now talking about something that will happen far into the future. Daniel does that here with the persecution of Antiochus. The time of "distress" is a type of the time of the greatest distress that will come before the Lord Jesus returns. The angel is referring back to the 70th week of Daniel’s vision in Daniel 9. Whether that is literal seven years is debatable but Daniel is given in chapter 12 a glimpse of the final chapter of history before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the resurrection of his saints.

Daniel is told "at that time". One would assume that the time frame is the days of the persecution of Antiochus. However, the angel describes the "time" as a time of distress such has not occurred from the beginning until now; meaning this is the worst time in history, never to be repeated. The persecution of Antiochus was a time of great distress, but it was not the worst time of all. The Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was worse. Far more Jews were slaughtered or enslaved by the Romans than during the time of Antiochus. Plus, Antiochus defiled the temple but he did not destroy it. Titus did both. Therefore, from an historical and biblical perspective the time of Antiochus cannot be called the Great Tribulation. There is a worse time coming of which Antiochus' time is a type or pre-figuring. We need to also note that the angel's explanation to Daniel means that God's people are not exempt from times of great distress and persecution. They are not protected from them but they are delivered out of them and saved. Times of distress do not threaten to destroy our salvation. They are times of testing so that we may learn to be faithful. God who is always faithful will preserve us and save us! He did during the exile of the Jews. He did during the persecution of Antiochus and the Roman destruction of the temple and he will do it again during the reign of the Antichrist.

The angel tells Daniel that at this time of great distress Michael, the archangel who fights for the Jews, will arise to defend Daniel’s people. There will be human war and trouble on earth that will be mirrored by angelic battle and war in the heavenly places. See Ephesians 6 and the
armor of God. The Jews will be delivered, every one whose name is found written in the book. The reference is probably to the Book of Life which John refers to in Revelation 20 & 21. Verse 2 describes the resurrection and eternal life. Here in Daniel 12 is the only time it is specifically mentioned in the Old Testament (see also Daniel 12:13). It is alluded to many times but this is the only specific time. The difficulty is the phrase "multitudes who sleep". Other translations read many who sleep. The reference is to those who have died. The problem is multitudes or many are not all. This appears to refer to the general resurrection at the end when Christ returns but the literal words say only some, granted a huge sum, will rise again. What does Daniel mean? In Revelation 20 John writes of the first resurrection, meaning the resurrection of Jesus' saints when he returns. They are exempt from the Second Death which is the complete resurrection of all human beings for judgment before God's throne; some to eternal life and some to eternal punishment in hell. John's Second Death is hell, or the lake of fire. Given John's interpretation in Revelation 20 we can apply that here and take Daniel to mean both the resurrection of God's saints to eternal life and the resurrection of the damned to eternal punishment and shame for their sins. Here is one of those places where Scripture needs to interpret Scripture. Revelation 20 can help clarify and interpret what Daniel means here by multitudes will awake.

Daniel is told that the wise, meaning those who are faithful to God and do not give up their faith, will shine like the stars. They will shine because they lead many to righteousness. This refers both to those Jews alive at the time of the end but also to faithful Jews who will lead others to follow the Lord and not lose their faith during the persecution of Antiochus. Daniel is told no matter whether one lives in the exile in Babylon, during the persecution that will come during Antiochus' day, or the ultimate persecution at the end, the task of every believer is to stay faithful to God and lead others to righteousness. If we do that we will shine like the stars in the heavens for ever and ever!

Daniel is commanded to close up and seal the words of the vision until the time of the end. What does this mean? Does it mean the scroll was not to be released until a later time? Does it mean that when the time of the visions drew near God's people would understand them? This is often the Dispensational argument and therefore since modern prophecy writers understand Daniel (a dubious proposition) we must be near the time of the Great Tribulation and Jesus' return. Isaiah told his disciples to seal up his prophecy. In Isaiah's case it is obvious chapters 40-66 apply during and after the exile a century and a half after Isaiah wrote them. John in Revelation 22 is told not to seal up the words of his prophecy and visions because the time is near. Scripture interprets Scripture so Daniel's vision is better understood or unsealed because of John's visions in Revelation. That would mean that John's time was the time of the end and that the church has always existed in the "last days." Here Daniel is told to seal up the vision until the time of the end. The word for seal in Hebrew means to hide, stop up, or shut up and carries the idea of hiding the vision and not letting it be known. Keep it secret. The time of the end has to be a prophetic phrase that refers to both the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes and the ultimate time of the end right before and during the return of the Lord Jesus. That will be the Great Tribulation, the time of distress such has not happened in history. That means that the time of Antiochus is a type of the persecution of the Antichrist against God's saints. Otherwise the angel's instructions to Daniel here make no sense. In that case four centuries in the future after Daniel when the persecution of Antiochus begins the Jews of that day will understand some of Daniel's vision and take strength and comfort from it. It will take John's visions in Revelation and finally the coming of the Lord Jesus and his ultimate return to unlock all of Daniel's vision that he was told to seal.
The final phrase about many will go here and there to increase knowledge is difficult. The word for knowledge is the normal Hebrew word *yada*. The angel implies that general knowledge will grow as people travel, learn and interact with others. The Greeks especially prized knowledge and philosophy. However, that knowledge will not be able to reveal to people God's plan for his people and for his Kingdom. That is sealed up in Daniel's vision that will only be revealed at the proper time to those who need to know it. Human earthly knowledge will increase but all the knowledge people will gain will not bring them any closer to God. Only he can reveal himself to people. They cannot discover him on their own. Understanding how to do things and how things work is important but only the knowledge of the Creator can bring eternal life. For all our science and technological knowledge today we are further away from the God who made us than ever before. Human knowledge, science and philosophy cannot save us. Only the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ can rightly relate us to God and give us eternal life!

**12:5-7** - The angel has been speaking to Daniel telling him the meaning of his vision and revealing to him the future of his people. Daniel looks and sees two other angels standing on either side of the river. The river is the Tigris according to 10:4 and the beginning of Daniel's final vision. One of the angels on the bank of the Tigris speaks to the "man clothed in linen" who was above the waters of the river. The man clothed in linen is the angel who has been speaking to Daniel. It is possible that this is Gabriel who had spoken to Daniel about the vision of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9, but it is not certain. In 10:5-6 Daniel describes the man in linen. He was bright and shone like lightning and molten metal. It seems from his description that he is standing on the bank of the Tigris River. Here Daniel says he is in the air above the waters of the river. The NLT translates the phrase, "who was now standing above the river," to clarify the apparent change in position from 10:4-5. The fact that the angel is now standing in the air also confirms that this is no human being, but an angel who has come to Daniel.

One of the angels on the bank of the river asks the angel dressed in linen and floating in the air how long it will be before all these astonishing things are fulfilled. The Hebrew word translated astonishing means wonder and is most often related to God's actions that are beyond human comprehension, like miracles. It is clear when God acts in a "wonderful" way that the event is something in which God himself is working and so it elicits awe in people. The angel's question implies that all the vision of the future of God's people that Daniel has been given is wonderful; it is miraculous and awe-inspiring because it is all a product of God acting on behalf of his people in history to work out his plan for them and for his Kingdom. This includes the statements about resurrection, which occur here plainly in the Old Testament for the first time.

The angel in linen above the waters lifted up both his hands toward heaven. This was the common posture of prayer among the Jews. Here he lifts up both his hands and swears by him who lives forever, namely God, that it will be a time, times and half a time. In Revelation 10:5 the angel speaking to John lifts up just his right hand and swears by God. The Hebrew word for time or times means an appointed time. Literally the words read, for a set time, times and one half; meaning three and one half appointed times. This is one half of the prophetic week of years in Daniel 9. Most prophecy scholars immediately jump to the interpretation that the angel is meaning three and one half years. However, most versions translate the phrase as times, including the NLT, to show the ambiguity of the Hebrew words. It is probable the angel means three and one half years. But it is also possible that he is literally saying three and one half appointed times, leaving it deliberately cryptic as often happens in apocalyptic literature. This phrase of the three and one half times relates Daniel's vision of the 70 weeks to his vision here in
chapters 10-12. The statement about the three and one half times in 12:7 indicates that this longer vision of Daniel's vision specifically relates to the one half week, or three and one half times of the final seven "times" in Daniel 9. The vision in chapters 10-12 mostly speaks of the time of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes that was coming four centuries in the future from Daniel. The details of the final half week in Daniel 9 however are difficult to tie directly to the persecution of Antiochus. If the final half week in Daniel 9 is about Antiochus' persecution then it would be after the mission of the Messiah to bring atonement. That puts the final seventh week in Daniel 9 after the coming of Christ. Almost all of the visions of chapters 10-12 deal with events prior to the coming of Jesus of Nazareth focusing on the history of the Jews during the competing Greek empires of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. Only the final part of the vision in Daniel 12 fast forwards to events of the final end times and the resurrection of the righteous when the Lord Jesus returns. Perhaps the best that can be concluded here is that like many other prophetic passages there is an immediate historical meaning of the passage and an ultimate meaning that relates to the events of the end time and the final return of the Lord Jesus Christ. The meaning of the angel's words is deliberately cryptic and ambiguous.

The angel clothed in linen hovering above the waters of the river further defines the time of fulfillment of Daniel's vision by saying it will come when the power of the holy people, meaning the Jews, has been finally broken. When that happens, all these things will be completed. The NLT translates the phrase, "when the shattering of the holy people has finally come to an end." The NASB translates, "as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people all these events will be completed." The ESV translates the phrase, "when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished." Literally the Hebrew words read, when the shattering of the hand of the holy people is accomplished or comes to an end or is finished. The words remind one of Jesus' cry on the cross that it is accomplished or it is finished. The question is, when in the history of the Jews has their hand, or power or strength, been finished or come to an end? The word for "has been finally broken" and "will be completed" is the same word; meaning accomplished, finished or come to an end. Is this somehow a reference to Jesus on the cross? The power of the Jews to supposedly affect their own salvation through the Law came to an end on the cross. The veil of the temple was torn in two at that time. The Old Covenant was set aside and the New Covenant begun. However, Daniel has not been talking about the events of Jesus' life and death in chapters 10-12 at all. Furthermore at the close of Antiochus' reign Judas Maccabaeus led a revolt against the Greek kingdom and regained the temple and Jerusalem. The power or strength of the Jews was hardly broken at that time. From an historical standpoint their power was almost completely shattered at the end of the Jewish Revolt in 70 AD when Titus and the Romans destroyed the temple and killed, enslaved or scattered the Jews. Yet they survived and exist to this day, many having returned to their land once again. One is forced to conclude that the ultimate fulfillment of the angel's words has yet to occur. Spiritually Jesus' death on the cross accomplished the end of their ability to obtain salvation under the Old Covenant. Historically the Romans almost accomplished their destruction. We are still looking for the angel's words to be completely fulfilled. That means the time, times and half a time have not yet come about.

The final seventh "appointed time" of the 70 weeks vision is yet to occur. It also means that the interpretation of "year" for "appointed time" is most likely mistaken. It is not literal but symbolic! The first coming of the Messiah shattered the Jews ability to save themselves. The events leading up to the second coming of the Messiah Jesus will shatter their ability politically
and militarily to defend themselves. They will be totally dependent upon their Messiah to save them!!!

12:8-13 - Daniel hears the angel's explanation about the three and one half "times" and is still confused. One of the angels on the bank of the Tigris had asked the angel in linen when all these things would be fulfilled. The angel in linen told him. Daniel hears his answer but doesn't understand at all. He asks the angel in linen basically the same question the angel on the bank of the river asked him. What will the outcome of all this be, meaning what is going to happen to my people?

Daniel is told to go his way. He is given the same command in verse 13. The Hebrew word for go means simply go, walk, travel, or take a journey and is the common word for go or walk. The words "your way" are not in Hebrew but are added by many translations being understood from the context. Basically the angel tells Daniel to go on about his life because the words are sealed until the time of the end and therefore he will not be told specifically what they mean at the present time.

The words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. In 12:4 Daniel was told to close up and seal the words of the vision. Here the angel tells Daniel the words have been closed up and sealed until the time of the end. The words used in both verses are the same. 12:4 is a command to Daniel and 12: 9 is a statement of accomplished fact. It sounds as if the angel tells Daniel that the words are already sealed by God or by the angel yet Daniel is told to seal them in 12:4. The two verses take place at the same time so the command to Daniel and the statement to Daniel about sealing the words are confusing. Perhaps as George Ladd of Fuller Seminary observed, apocalyptic literature is often inconsistent in its details. The word for closed up and sealed is the same word in Hebrew, here repeated in order to emphasize the action. See the comments above in 12:4 for possible explanations for what the sealing means in this context.

The angel tells Daniel many will be purified and refined but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand the meaning of the vision but the wise will understand. The angel implies that as Daniel "goes his way" there will be times to come outlined in the vision where the righteous will be refined and purified by the persecutions to come. The wicked however will not repent and change. They will continue to do evil. They will not understand what is happening to them and to the Jews or why. The wise will understand as the time of the end nears and the meaning of the vision is unlocked. They will gain insight and take strength from it. The Hebrew verb forms in verse 10 for purify and made spotless mean to purify oneself and to make oneself white. They are reflexive. The verb form for refined is a passive verb, meaning the righteous will be put through a refining process. The angel implies the righteous will take action themselves to purify themselves and at the same time God will be putting them through a process of refinement to become pure and holy. The word for purify means to smelt metal and refine it in a furnace. Daniel is told that the future of his people from his time until the time of the end will be a process of refining the righteous and confirming the wicked in their wickedness. History and life itself will confirm what is in the hearts of his people.

Verses 11-12 are once again references to the three and one half "times" but here are put in literal days and related to the time of Antiochus and/or the ultimate time of the Antichrist. The angel says from the time the daily sacrifice is abolished to the abomination of desolation will be 1290 days or 3.53 years, approximately three and one half years. The description of the beginning and ending of the 1290 days is difficult because the historical records are not clear as
to the elapsed time between Antiochus' cessation of the temple sacrifices which coincided with his plan to Hellenize the Jews and his erecting the pagan altar to Zeus in the temple, the first type of the abomination of desolation. It was approximately three and one half years from the time of Antiochus' defilement of the temple in 168 to Judas Maccabaeus' capture of Jerusalem and cleansing of the temple in December of 164 BC. That time frame is hardly coincidental and at the very least the 1290 days or three and one half years refer to the time of the temple being defiled under Antiochus as a pre-figuring of the ultimate defilement under the Antichrist before the return of the Lord Jesus. Some scholars have linked the 1290 days to the capture of Jerusalem and defilement by the Romans under Titus in 70 AD. The invasion of Judea, siege of Jerusalem and defilement of the temple by Vespasian and Titus took approximately three and one half years. It is possible they are a second "type" or foreshadowing of the time of the Antichrist. The Lord Jesus declared that the abomination of desolation that Daniel spoke of is a future event related to the end times in Mark 13 and Matthew 24. The abomination of Antiochus' must therefore be a type of the ultimate abomination of desolation.

1290 is three and one half years plus 30 days if one uses 360 days for a year. As I have shown earlier in this commentary using 360 days as a standard Hebrew year to compute the prophetic timeline is a futile effort because of the periodic additions of days to the Hebrew calendar by the Jewish elders and rabbis in the Persian and Greek periods. Plus there is no reliable evidence that Jewish rabbis ever used 360 days as a standard year. 360 days for a year does work in this circumstance but that does not mean that it should be the standard throughout Daniel and the prophets for calculating the number of days in a Hebrew year and applying them to prophetic predictions. Even if one assumes the prophecy of the 70 weeks in Daniel 9 must be taken literally, using 360 days for a year cannot make the math fit the historical record. The numbers simply do not add up. 360 days in a year do not fit the Dispensational interpretation of Daniel's symbolic numbers!

The angel then tells Daniel that blessing awaits the one who waits for and reaches the 1335 days. This is three and one half years or 1290 days plus 45 days. Some scholars maintain the extra time could refer to the time between the defiling of the temple by Antiochus and the death of Antiochus. The difficulty is Antiochus died sometime in 164 campaigning against the Parthians and the king of Armenia. Judas Maccabaeus re-dedicated the temple in December of 164. There are not enough days in December to accommodate that theory. The 1335 days are probably related to the time of Antiochus' persecution but ultimately related to the time of the Antichrist. A precise understanding of what the angel means here cannot be determined. Presumably "the wise" will understand when the timing is right.

Daniel is once again told to "go his way" until the end. The angel promises Daniel he will rest and then at the end of days he will rise again and receive his inheritance or reward. The angel tells Daniel to live out his life. He will die someday but when he does he will enter into God's rest. Then when the end finally does come about which Daniel's visions refer he will rise again and receive his inheritance from the Lord. The Hebrew words literally read "you shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days." This is one of the most explicit promises of rest and resurrection in the Old Testament. This pre-figures the New Testament understanding of death as rest for God's saints and resurrection as the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises to his people. Resurrection day will not come when Daniel dies. It will come at the time of the end when God's Messiah will fulfill all of God's promises and evil will be finally and completely beaten and eradicated. In the meantime Daniel will rest in God's care. The details of that rest are not fleshed out here. That is left for the New Testament to do.
At the end of Daniel's remarkable and detailed visions of the time following the exile of the Jews and the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, four centuries from his own time, the Book of Daniel ends with the promise of the resurrection and the life to come. Ultimately that is the greatest gift Daniel gives his people. Prophecy scholars can debate the details of Daniel's visions and build their scenarios about what will happen during the 70 weeks and what the abomination of desolation actually means, but Daniel ends his book with a promise. As Paul will write to the Romans 594 years in the future, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Daniel's counsel to his people and to us as God's people today is to go our way, live our lives. Harsh times may come during our lifetimes but take heart. God triumphs in the end and in his triumph we will be victorious as well. Nothing will ever separate us from God's love and purpose for us.
Appendix Two:

Excerpts from the Relevant Sections of My Commentary on Ezekiel, Chapters 38-39 & 47-48

Ezekiel’s Prophecy of the Attack of Gog and Magog, Chapters 38-39:

38:1-6 - *Ezekiel* 38-39 describe the eschatological attack by Gog of the land of Magog from the north. Except for Shishak's invasion in the early days of Judah, all attacks by foreign nations on Israel and Judah came from the north. 38:10-14 says this attack will take place when Israel is dwelling in the land in safety and peace. It is unclear whether that time is the same time as Ezekiel describes in 37:15-28, when David their king reigns over them again and God has brought the exiles back to the land. The point is this eschatological attack is after God has fulfilled many of his promises to Israel. This could even be after the coming of the Messiah. Gog represents all the enemies of Israel who have opposed God’s people and the Lord God himself. In *Ezekiel* Gog is the king or prince of Magog which is the nation. In *Revelation* 20 Gog and Magog are nations which represent the eschatological enemies of Israel who invade from the north. The LXX agrees with that identification in its Greek translation of *Ezekiel* that Gog and Magog are nations. John in *Revelation* 20 follows Ezekiel's timeline in that the attack of Gog and Magog is after the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ. They gather all those opposed to God and come against the Lord Jesus and his people in Jerusalem. God sends fire down from heaven and destroys them. However, Gog and Magog in *Revelation* 20 are not the beast or Antichrist of *Revelation* 19. He has already been judged and destroyed by the return of the Lord Jesus. Here in *Ezekiel* 38-39 the time frame seems to be after the return and renewal of the exiles and after David their king begins to reign. It is tenuous to use the order of *Ezekiel* in these last chapters and say it is absolutely chronological. Visions are notoriously fluid at best. The timeframe of this eschatological attack needs to be established from evidence in the text and not the order the vision occurs in Ezekiel's prophecy.

Ezekiel says Gog is the chief prince of the land of Meshech and Tubal. Literally the Hebrew words read the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. The NIV along with many other modern translations uses chief prince, rendering Rosh as referring to Gog and not naming a nation. Other translations render Rosh as referring to a country in the north along with Meshech and Tubal. Famous Old Testament scholar Gesenius suggested Russia but that identification seems unlikely due to the fact that Ezekiel and the Jews were not aware of Russia's existence at all at this time plus as another well-known Old Testament scholar Delitzsch noted, there is an Assyrian word *rasu* which refers to a people on the northwest of Assyria which were the Medes. This fits the history and context of *Ezekiel* far better than a speculative Dispensationalist interpretation that tries to justify the scenario that in the Tribulation Russia and her allies will attack Israel, which is what many modern prophecy scholars teach.

Meshech and Tubal are mentioned in *Ezekiel* 27:13 in the lament against Tyre as allies or nations related to Greece. That could locate them north of Greece such as Macedonia or modern day Romania. Assyrian inscriptions indicate Meshech and Tubal were peoples from the north of Assyria. Other ancient evidence suggest Meshech and Tubal were Indo-European peoples who had migrated from the steppes around the Caspian Sea and settled Armenia and Anatolia in northern and northeastern Turkey. See the note on 27:12 for more details. The fact that Ezekiel links Gog, Magog, Russ, Meshech and Tubal together and they all describe peoples who were at
the limits of Ezekiel's knowledge and world suggest that these nations are to be seen as eschatological figures rather than historical nations and kings. This is the interpretation of John in Revelation 20 and it was also the interpretation of the later Jewish rabbis. As the New Bible Dictionary says, “The popular interpretation of Rosh with Russia, Meshech with Moscow and Tubal with Toblosk in Siberia has nothing to commend it from the standpoint of hermeneutics.”

God tells Ezekiel to prophesy against Gog and tell him God is against him. He will turn him around and put hooks in his jaws like a fish and bring Gog out of the north with his whole army, all his great horde to attack Israel. Persia, Cush, which is the southern Nile region modern day Sudan or Ethiopia, and Put which is North Africa or Libya, will be with Gog as allies. Gomer too will be there along with the other nations. Some Dispensational scholars and writers say Gomer is modern day Germany but ancient sources point to the Cimmerians which were an Aryan people who settled in Armenia in northeast Turkey. This would put them near the possible locations of Meshech and Tubal. Beth Togarmah is most likely the city of Togarmah which was located near Carchemish in the northern Euphrates Valley on the main trade route to Mesopotamia. The point is all these allied nations with Gog come from the north of Israel from which invaders always came.

God says he will turn around Gog and with a hook in his jaw lead him to attack Israel. That implies that Gog was going another way or did not want to attack Israel but God stirred him up. It is not clear from the text what Gog was intending to do at first. What he did was attack Israel along with many other nations from the north. This is all part of God's plan to settle with the enemies of his people!

38:7-13 - God tells Gog get ready and gather all your armies, your hordes. God will call Gog to arms after many days, in future years. This puts the timeframe of Ezekiel's prophecy a long ways into the future, and most likely in the last days. God says in future years Gog will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel. The reference to the mountains of Israel and the Jews being gathered back to the land puts this prophecy after chapters 36-37; after God has gathered his remnant, put his Spirit in them and given them David to reign over them. Ezekiel says God's people will be living in safety not anticipating any invasion from any foreign power. Gog however will gather all his troops and advance on an unsuspecting people.

God tells Gog that on that day, the day God has set; it will come into Gog's mind to devise an evil scheme. He will decide to invade a peaceful people who are living in safety. Their villages have no walls, or gates or bars. They have resettled the ruins of a former time and now prosper by the Lord's hand. The picture of living without walls, gates or bars is one that would be strange to any of Ezekiel's readers. Ancient people built walls and gates for protection from invaders. Without them they were vulnerable to attack and destruction. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls so that the people could be safe and truly resettle the city. In the days before cannons, and mechanized warfare with tanks, strong walls were the surest guarantee of safety and defense for any city or town. That is why Constantinople stood for so many centuries. Its walls were impregnable until the Turks used cannons against them. Ezekiel describes an existence that was unheard of in the ancient world. It is during this time of peace and security that Gog will attack.

Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish ask Gog if he has come to plunder. They want to know if Gog's armies have come to carry off the gold and livestock because they want to share in the plunder. Ezekiel shows that the nations were jealous of Israel's prosperity after God
has brought them back to the land and restored them. Sheba and the rest are not part of Gog's armies but they see an opportunity to gain wealth. Sheba is most probably an area in southwest Arabia identified with the Sabaeans who were camel traders on the spice route from Africa. Dedan was in northwest Arabia that also lay on the spice-incense route from Arabia to Syria to the Mediterranean. The fact the caravan route connected to the Mediterranean links it with Tarshish and the Phoenician traders that benefitted from the spice trade. That route from Arabia up the Arabah on the King's Highway to Damascus then to the coast was controlled by Israel in the days of the kings. It allowed Solomon, and later Jeroboam II and Uzziah to become incredibly wealthy because they could impose tariffs on the caravans for safe passage through their territory. Here Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish see Gog's invasion as an opportunity to make money in the chaos following an invasion and the lowering of the tariffs. Israel may be dwelling in safety living in a renewed faith in Yahweh with David's Son as their king but the nations all around are still filled with violence and greed. Paradise conditions have not been restored to the whole world as yet.

38:14-23 - God tells Gog that he will attack Israel in a day when God's people are dwelling in safety in the land. He will come with his hordes, a mighty army from the far north and the many nations who are his allies. His army will all be riding on horses which would have been totally out of the ordinary for ancient armies. They used cavalry but not as the main attack force. Even Alexander who used his cavalry to great effect only used them to attack the flanks of enemy formations because most ancient armies relied on mass infantry formations and frontal charges to break an enemy's line. Having a whole army all riding horses would have been unheard of and would have struck terror into any people. God tells Gog that he will bring Gog against "my land" so that all the nations may know Yahweh when he shows himself holy through Gog's attack. At this point there is no hint that Israel will be slaughtered when the attack comes. This attack is not an attack of judgment on a sinful nation for their idolatry like the prophecies of the Babylonian attack on Jerusalem earlier in Ezekiel. This attack is designed to show God's holiness and to render judgment on the nations who would attack his people. God is going to use Gog to carry out his holy purposes in the world!

God says his prophets have spoken in former days of Gog and his armies and their coming attack on Israel. God says they prophesied for years that Gog would attack. The question is where in the prophets are those prophesies? There is no other mention of Gog and Magog in any other prophetic scriptures. The name only occurs as a nation attacking God's people here in Ezekiel and in Revelation 20. It appears that Ezekiel is saying Gog and Magog represent Assyria and Babylon and that the prophets before Ezekiel when they prophesied about the two great Mesopotamian powers attacking Israel and Judah to carry out God's judgment on them were talking about Gog. If that is the case then Gog is definitely representative of all of Israel's enemies who attacked her from the north and is NOT a specific country or nation. This is the eschatological attack against God's people when they are dwelling in the land in safety and peace. This prophecy of Ezekiel represents the final settling of accounts with Israel's traditional enemies and the enemies of God.

God says when Gog attacks his anger will be aroused against Gog and God will bring a great earthquake to the land of Israel to express his wrath against Gog for daring to attack his land and his people. This great eschatological earthquake is mentioned several times in Scripture especially in Revelation 6:12, 11:13 and 17:18. Zechariah 14 describes a massive earthquake that will split the Mount of Olives in two when the Lord himself comes to save his people when
the nations surround Jerusalem to attack her. In Zechariah that attack will result in half the people killed or carried into exile but the other half God will save. The difference here is that Ezekiel indicates that even though Gog attacks, God's people will be spared. When the great earthquake occurs every living creature, including the fish, the birds, the beasts and all people will tremble at the mighty power and presence of God. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs crumble and every wall will fall down. God says he will summon a sword against Gog at that time and execute his judgment against Gog. Every man's sword will be against his brother. In other words the armies of Gog will turn on themselves just like the armies of Midian did in Gideon's day in Judges 7 or the Moabites and Ammonites in Jehoshaphat’s day in 2 Chronicles 20.

God says not only will he send a great earthquake against Gog and set his army to fight against itself he will also pour down torrents of rain and hail, which sounds like a massive thunderstorm, and also burning sulfur or fire and brimstone. He sent the same kind of judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. John says in Revelation 20 that when Gog and Magog and all the nations with them who oppose God come to attack the Lord Jesus and his people in Jerusalem God sends fire and brimstone from heaven and destroys them. Ezekiel says when Gog attacks and God destroys his army along with the armies of all the nations who have come to attack God's people with him, the Lord will show his greatness and holiness in the sight of many nations. Yahweh will show that he alone is God and he alone is the Lord.

Chapter 38 of Ezekiel relates much more closely to the Gog and Magog account of Revelation 20 than it does Jesus Second Coming as detailed in other places in Scripture and especially in Revelation 19. There are similarities to the Messiah's coming in other prophetic passages like in Zechariah 14, yet the fact that Israel has been restored to the land, the Davidic Messiah reigns over them and they dwell in safety and prosperity, points to a different attack than the eschatological battle of Messiah's return against the Antichrist. Revelation calls that battle Armageddon. Therefore this prophecy has a lot more to do with the final post-Millennial attack of sinful humanity following the Millennial reign of Christ in Revelation 19 and 20 than it does a Tribulation attack of Russia and her allies against Israel that will trigger Armageddon. I think Hal Lindsey and other prophecy writers have it wrong!

Chapter 39:

39:1-8 - Ezekiel continues his prophecy against Gog. He makes it clear that it is the Lord himself who is behind Gog's attack on Israel. God is the one who will drag Gog from the far north and send him against the mountains of Israel. Ezekiel does not mean that God fosters evil or participates in it. He means that God is in control of the events of history. He will be the one that motivates Gog to attack so that the Lord's name might be lifted up and honored among all the nations. Gog will come in his pride thinking to take Israel, a land without defenses and walls. But he has forgotten that Yahweh, the Lord, is Israel's defense. God will cripple Gog's army and on the mountains of Israel they will fall, Gog and all the troops of the nations with him. Their dead bodies will be food for the wild animals and all the carrion birds to feed upon. John in Revelation 19 says that God calls all the carrion birds to feast on the defeated army of the Antichrist when the Lord Jesus returns. He says the birds gorged themselves on the dead. That could lead one to think that Gog's attack here in Ezekiel is really Armageddon and not a post-millennial attack of the enemies of God. However, one must remember prophecy can be very fluid and passages do not always fit together in a perfect puzzle. As an example Ezekiel says in verse 4 Gog will come against the mountains of Israel and fall there yet in verse 5 he says Gog will fall in the open field.
God says he will send fire on Magog. God said in 38:22 he would send burning sulfur, brimstone from heaven, against Gog. In verse 1 Ezekiel says Magog is the chief prince of Gog, Meshech and Tubal. Here in verse 6 it sounds as if Magog is a nation along with Gog. It could also be that Magog as the king or prince of Gog represents Gog. Again, prophecy is fluid.

Fire from heaven or from the Lord in the Old Testament is a manifestation of the power and judgment of God. Fire from God consumed Nadab and Abihu when they burned unauthorized incense before God in Leviticus 10. Fire from the Lord consumed some of the people when they complained against the Lord in Numbers 11 and again in Numbers 15 when the 250 tried to offer incense to the Lord in opposition to Aaron. Fire from heaven consumed Elijah's offering in his contest with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18. Here in Ezekiel fire from heaven consumes Gog and all his armies. It also consumes those who live in safety in the coastlands. The term only appears in the exilic prophets, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. It describes the people who live far away across the Mediterranean Sea. It is sometimes linked with Tyre and Sidon and the peoples with whom they trade. It generally describes people on the other side of the Mediterranean like the Greeks, those in North Africa like Carthage or even Italy. To an Israelite these would be peoples a long ways away. Some Dispensationalists like Hal Lindsay have suggested that this is a reference to the United States and that the fire from heaven is a nuclear exchange. That interpretation is pure speculation and has no basis in the text.

God says through his judgment on Gog and the nations who have joined him the Lord will redeem his holy name among the nations. It will no longer be profaned but honored. All people will know that the Lord is the Holy One of Israel! God says the day is coming and will surely take place. This is the day of which the Lord has spoken. Ezekiel is referring here to the Day of the Lord; God's day when he will save his people and destroy his enemies. Often it is linked to the coming of the Messiah. Here in Ezekiel 38-39 and the attack of Gog there is no mention of the coming of the Messiah or him leading his army to defeat Gog. The context suggests the Messiah is already reigning in Israel and the people live in the land in peace and safety. God's deliverance of his people from Gog and his hordes is his final vindication of his name and demonstration of his justice to his people and all the nations. That concept is often linked to the Day of the Lord in the prophets. Once again prophecy is fluid and can't always be put into a precise scenario with every piece fitting precisely with every other. It is more like a symphony with various themes which form a whole but various parts are able to stand on their own as well.

39:9-13 - God says after he defeats Gog, those who live in the towns of Israel will gather up all the weapons of the soldiers of Gog, all the spears, shields, bows and arrows, anything that will burn and they will use the wood for fuel. There will be so many now useless weapons that they will not even have to gather wood with which to cook. They will not have to cut any trees in their forests. There will be enough abandoned weapons for seven years' worth of fuel for their cook fires! The people of Israel will also plunder and loot the armies of Gog who had come to plunder them.

On the day of the Lord's defeat of Gog, he will set aside a valley to bury all the soldiers of Gog. There is some confusion in the various translations as to the exact location of the valley. The NIV reads, "in the valley of those who travel east toward the Sea (meaning the Dead Sea)". A footnote reads "of" instead of "toward". That changes the location. The first implies the valley going down from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea. The variant implies a valley on the plains of Moab on the eastern shore, perhaps one of the wadis along the eastern shore that come down from the
Mountains of Moab. The NLT reads, "in the Valley of the Travelers, east of the Dead Sea." The NASB reads, "the valley of those who pass by east of the sea." It seems the best location is a valley to the east of the Dead Sea, one of the many wadis that flow down to the shore of the Dead Sea. God says there will be so many bodies it will block travelers from going through the valley and it will be renamed, the Valley of Hamon Gog or the Valley of the Hordes of Gog.

God tells Ezekiel that the Jews will take seven months to bury all the dead soldiers of Gog in order to cleanse the land. It also makes sense that the valley is east of the Dead Sea because then the Promiseland proper is not defiled by the graves of the dead soldiers of Gog. Everyone who lives in the land of Israel will help in the cleansing and burial of Gog's dead army. God declares that the day the Lord is glorified when he defeats Gog will be a memorable day for the people of Israel. They will know that God is their God and all their enemies are now defeated! They will live in safety! The seven years' worth of wood from the abandon weapons and the seven months to bury all the dead soldiers of Gog support this conclusion because the number 7 is the number of completion of God's plan in the world. He has finally defeated all the enemies of his people!

39:14-20 - God tells Ezekiel that in the aftermath of God's defeat of Gog and its allies, men will be hired to go throughout the land and mark bodies for burial. Then the grave diggers will come and haul the bodies away for burial in the Valley of Haman Gog east of the Dead Sea. In this way the land will be cleansed from Gog's defilement. God says in verse 12 that the process will take seven months to complete there will be so many dead soldiers!

God then tells Ezekiel to call all the birds and wild animals to come from all around to feast on the great sacrifice that God is preparing on the mountains of Israel. God promises they will eat the flesh and drink the blood of the fallen of Gog. The birds and animals will eat the bodies of princes and mighty men as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls. They will be fat for the taking like animals from Bashan, the Golan Heights where prime cattle were grazed in the time of Israel's prosperity. God tells the birds and beasts they will eat until they are glutted and drink blood till they are drunk. God invites them to "my table". The soldiers, horses (which every soldier in Gog’s army rode, see 38:15), and mighty men will all be served up for them.

The picture here is a horrific one of so many dead that the carrion birds and wild beasts feed on the bodies of the slain. It is also a logical picture given the scope of the slaughter. If it will take seven months to bury all the slain there is simply no way that the gravediggers can bury the dead fast enough to keep the bodies from being eaten. Eventually the bodies of Gog’s dead soldiers are buried, yet because they have lain in the open and been consumed by animals their shame is all the greater. In the Middle Eastern culture of the time burial took place soon after the person died. There was no long wake as in later European cultures. For a body to lay exposed to the elements was a great shame. Dead bodies were not ceremonially clean and could not be touched or the person became unclean. Thus they were buried quickly in order to maintain ritual purity. The bodies of the soldiers of Gog would take seven weeks to bury and gravediggers would be hired to mark bodies for burial and to haul them to the Valley of Haman Gog for burial. Many in Israel would be unclean for weeks. The land with lots of corpses mutilated by animals as they feasted on them would be unclean. God tells Ezekiel it would take a long time to cleanse the land and make it clean again from the slaughter of Gog. Yet the greater shame and uncleanness would be visited on all the nations and their soldiers who had joined with Gog to attack Israel. God does not imply that the land will be unclean forever because of the dead from Gog’s army. He says Israel will be clean again because God will see to it.
John in *Revelation 19* says when the Lord Jesus returns and defeats the armies of the Antichrist at Armageddon God will invite the birds and beasts to "the great supper of God." There they will eat the flesh of kings and generals, mighty men and horses and the flesh of all people both slave and free. The picture is the same as here in *Ezekiel*. However, in *Ezekiel* the timing of the feast is after the defeat of Gog when Israel was living in the land in peace and safety. It appears to be after the Messiah has begun to reign. In *Revelation 19* the feast of the animals is right as the Lord Jesus has returned and begun to reign. The final attack of Gog and Magog in *Revelation 20* is after the Millennium. There are similarities and differences between when Ezekiel and John say God's great feast for the birds and beasts of the enemies of God and his people takes place. This is another instance where prophecy is fluid and not always consistent.

**39:21-29** - God says throughout the attack and defeat of Gog he will display his glory among the nations through the punishment he inflicts upon them. From that day onward Israel will know that the Lord is their God without a doubt. The implication is they will know because God himself will defeat Gog. The armies of Israel will not even have to fight. Yahweh will fight for his people as he did when he brought them out of Egypt and defeated the Egyptians at the Red Sea.

All the nations will know that the Lord sent his people Israel into exile because of their sins. He punished them because of their unfaithfulness and he dealt with them justly as their deeds deserved. God turned away from them. However, God will bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on him and the Lord will be zealous for his holy name. Israel will forget her shame and all her unfaithfulness and sin against the Lord. When the Lord restores them and they once again live in safety in their own land they will live in peace and no longer fear anyone. When the Lord brings them back to the land he will demonstrate his holiness to his people in the sight of all the nations. They will know that it was the Lord who sent them into exile because of their sin and it was the Lord who brought them back to the land from exile because of his grace to them. The Lord will bring them back and reveal himself to Israel for he will pour out his Spirit on them when he gathers them back to the land.

These two paragraphs summarize Ezekiel's prophecies of God's just punishment on Israel, his gathering the remnant back to the land, his giving them his Holy Spirit and his deliverance of Israel from all their enemies. When all of this will happen Israel will live in the land with shalom and safety. God's promise to them and to David and his line will be fulfilled. Some of what God promised through Ezekiel has already taken place and is already fulfilled in the return of the Jews, the first coming of the Lord Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Some it appears is being fulfilled in our day in the further return of the Jews to their land. Much is still to be fulfilled because the Jews as a people do not yet recognize the Lord Jesus as their Messiah. They certainly do not live in the land in safety and peace. There are enemies all around Israel that would see them destroyed. Ezekiel's prophecy is already being fulfilled but is not yet complete, just like the New Testament prophecies of the return of the Lord Jesus. The task is to try and integrate Ezekiel's prophecies with the rest of the prophetic passages in both the Old and New Testaments. A clearer picture will emerge from that process but it will not be a precise scenario because prophecy is too fluid and imprecise. May God give us the wisdom to understand his Word!
Ezekiel’s Prophecy of the Renewed Temple and Land, Chapters 47-48:

47:1-12 - The angel-man who has been guiding Ezekiel through the temple brings him back to the entrance of the temple where he sees water coming out from under the threshold of the temple flowing to the east. The water was coming out from under the south of the altar and flowing from the south side of the temple to the east. The south side today would be where the Al Aqsa Mosque is situated!

The man measured off 1000 cubits, about 530 meters or 1750 feet using the long cubit as per the rest of Ezekiel's vision of the temple. The water was ankle deep in those first 1000 cubits of the stream. He measured off another 1000 cubits and the water was knee-deep. In another 1000 cubits it was waist deep. He measured off another 1000 cubits and the water was a river so deep Ezekiel could not cross unless he swam the river. He was now 4000 cubits from the temple or 2120 meters or 7000 feet. He was about one and a quarter miles to the east of the temple. The point is in Ezekiel's vision the geography of Jerusalem has radically changed. Today if one walked one and a quarter miles from the temple one would be on the backside of the Mt. of Olives. It is only around 500 meters from the eastern edge of the Temple Mount to the top of the Mt. of Olives. No river could flow uphill to the east in today's Jerusalem. Ezekiel has said in chapter 40 that he saw the temple standing on top of a very high mountain. Ezekiel sees Jerusalem standing above everything else and water flowing straight down to the Jordan. In Zechariah 14 when Zechariah sees the Lord coming down to fight for his people on the Mt. of Olives the mountain is split in two forming a great valley, half to the north and half to the south. Perhaps Ezekiel's vision is related and the waters from the temple flow down to the Jordan through the great valley in the Mount of Olives. Ezekiel however does not mention any great earthquake or the mountain splitting in two.

The angel-man takes Ezekiel to the bank of the river. There he is shown fruit trees that grow along the banks on each side of the river. He is told the waters flow down to the Arabah or the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. When they empty into the Sea the water is made fresh and swarms of living creatures including fish now live where nothing lived before. The land is renewed. Fishermen will fish from the shores of the Dead Sea from En Gedi to En Eglaim. The springs of En Gedi are about halfway down the western shores of the Dead Sea. There is no other reference to En Eglaim. Its location is unknown. Presumably it was somewhere to the south of En Gedi or perhaps on the opposite eastern shore. Ezekiel is picturing the Dead Sea as fertile fishing grounds where fishermen fish from the shore; they don't even have to go out in boats. All kinds of fish will be found there like the fish in the Great Sea or the Mediterranean. The swamps and marshes will not become fresh they will remain salt marshes for the creatures and birds that live there. The fruit trees will grow on both sides of the river and their leaves will not wither and their fruit will never fail. Every month they will bear because the water from the temple flows to them. Their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing.

Ezekiel sees a Promised land remade where God has turned that which is dead into living waters and changed the very nature of the Arabah into fertile ground with abundant fish. The Dead Sea now lives and teems with life. John in Revelation 21 & 22 picks up Ezekiel's vision of the river of living water flowing out from the presence of God. Here in Ezekiel it flows from under the altar in the temple. In Revelation it flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. John says the fruit trees are the Tree of Life as in the Garden of Eden. They bear every month and the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations. It is clear from this part of Ezekiel's vision of the new temple that the setting of Ezekiel's vision is in an eschatological future of Israel.
and the Promiseland. There can be no historical fulfillment of Ezekiel's vision of a renewed Israel. It can only happen in the Age to Come with the return of the Messiah. The problem of the Messiah verses the prince and his successors remains but the timeframe is now clear. John's reinterpretation of Ezekiel's vision in Revelation 21 & 22 confirms this.

47:13-23 - In Ezekiel's vision of a renewed Israel in some future eschatological time God has given them a rebuilt and enlarged temple in which to worship and now he reiterates his promise to Israel to give them a land in which to live. He outlines the boundaries of the new Promiseland to Ezekiel. He specifically mentions the promise that the tribe of Joseph will receive two shares of the land, one for each of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. At the time of the Babylonian exile when Ezekiel received his vision the half tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh no longer existed. They had been captured, killed and taken into exile by the Assyrians a century and a half before. God however, still knows who and where they are! God tells Ezekiel he made a promise to his people to give them the land and he will keep it.

God then outlines the borders of the new Promiseland for Ezekiel. The northern border runs from the Mediterranean Sea to the road past Hamath, Berothah and Sibraim. These towns are all in northern Syria near the Orontes and Euphrates Rivers. King David received tribute from them after he came to power and consolidated his empire. When Solomon came to the throne of Israel he ruled directly or received tribute from Damascus and all of central Syria below the Euphrates. From a biblical perspective Syria has always been part of the Promiseland! It is in Ezekiel's vision too! The eastern border runs down to the east of Damascus along the Jordan River between Gilead and Israel down to the Dead Sea to Tamar which was on the western side of the Arabah south of the Dead Sea in the Negev Desert. The southern border will run from Tamar to Kadesh in the Sinai Peninsula to the Wadi of Egypt, a wadi on the eastern side of the Sinai. The western border will be the Mediterranean Sea all the way to Hamath in northern Syria. That means all of Lebanon and the fertile parts of Syria, excluding the desert were to be parts of the new Promiseland. God gave Israel the entire middle section of the Fertile Crescent and Canaan from the Euphrates to the borders of Egypt! The only significant difference between Ezekiel's description and that of the rest of the Old Testament is that the lands east of the Jordan River along the Golan Heights in Bashan and Gilead are not included here. In Numbers and Joshua the Lord grants those lands to Reuben, Gad and Manasseh. Otherwise the description of the borders is essentially the same.

The land is to be distributed according to the tribes of Israel and everyone will receive a share of the land along with the aliens who have settled among the Israelites. That means that Gentiles will receive their share of the Promiseland as well if they have settled among the Jews! God says they are to be considered as native-born Israelites and receive a share of the Lord's inheritance! Their share will be allotted depending upon where they settle, in which tribal area. In a veiled way this is a picture of the New Covenant. Ezekiel doesn't even say these aliens have converted to worship Yahweh only that they have settled in the land among the Israelites. The Gentiles are part of the new covenant times of Ezekiel's vision!

Chapter 48:

48:1-8 - Ezekiel is given the order of the tribes and their portion of the Promiseland. In Joshua the order is approximately this from north to south: Dan, Naphtali, Asher, Zebulun, Issachar, Manasseh, Gad, Ephraim, Benjamin, Reuben, Judah, and Simeon. Dan was originally given the area of the Gaza Strip but could not conquer it because of the Philistines so they took the
territory in the northern section of Israel at the foot of Mt. Hermon just to the south of Lebanon. In Ezekiel's vision all the tribes receive an inheritance in the land but the order is different. He outlines the tribal portions from north to south. Dan is first and is given the territory of Syria at the far northern border of the renewed Promised Land near Hamath. Each tribe receives an equal portion and Ezekiel describes them as from east to west, the western edge presumably being the Mediterranean Sea. He does not say how large the portions are from north to south. Dan is first followed by Asher, then Naphtali, then Manasseh, then Ephraim, then Reuben then Judah.

On the southern border of Judah will be a special territory that Ezekiel calls a gift. It will be 25,000 cubits wide from east to west and will be the same width as the other tribal portions. The temple will be in the center of it. 25,000 long cubits would be 8.33 miles. This temple strip would be 8.33 miles in depth and as wide as the other tribal portions. It would be a strip running across the entire width of Israel, the same width as all the other tribal portions but not as deep. In the center of it will be the temple.

48:9-29 - The special portion of the land where the temple will be located is also the allotment for the priests and Levites. Rather than a few cities of refuge spread throughout the land Ezekiel envisions the priests and Levites being given a special portion of the land around the temple. The temple portion will be 25,000 long cubits by 10,000 long cubits or 8.33 by 6.66 miles in area. This will also be the sacred portion for the faithful priests, the Zadokites who stayed faithful in serving the Lord and the faithful kings of Judah. The Levite territory will be beside the priestly-temple portion. The Zadokites receive the temple portion because they stayed faithful while the Levites went astray.

The Levite portion will be next to the priestly-temple portion and will be the same size, 8.33 by 6.66 miles in area. This is a special gift to the Levites and will be a most holy portion that they are never to sell or exchange because it is holy to the Lord. God says this is the best of the land. Today in Israel the land around Jerusalem is rocky with tree lined hills and valleys. It is not the most fertile land in Israel. It is the best of the land from God's perspective because it is nearest to his temple, his throne and dwelling place in earth! Once again Ezekiel's vision is temple-centric!

The remainder of the sacred temple portion an area 1.23 miles by 8.3 miles, will be for the city of Jerusalem, its houses and pastures. The renewed and rebuilt city will be in the center of it and will be 4500 cubits square on each side, or 1.5 miles per side. A buffer of pastureland 150 meters in width will surround the city on all sides. The remainder of the sacred portion 10,000 cubits on all sides or 3.3 miles in length will supply the food for the city and will be dedicated to farms for the workers of the city of New Jerusalem. The workers who farm the land around Jerusalem will be from all the tribes of Israel because the temple is for all the tribes and not just Judah. John in Revelation 21 sees the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven as a cube 1400 miles on each dimension. Obviously his vision of Jerusalem is far larger than Ezekiel's yet there are some similarities. Both are very precise in their dimensions for the city; Ezekiel's as a square and John's as a cube.

What remains of the sacred portion that is not taken up by the temple, the city and the farmland around it will be for the prince. It will be 25,000 cubits or 8.33 miles in width beginning at both the eastern and western borders of the temple portion. The temple portion will be on either side of the prince's portion of the most sacred section of the Promised Land, Jerusalem. The priestly share, the Levites' share and the city will lie in the center of the prince's share between the portion of Judah on the north and Benjamin on the south.
The remaining tribal portions will start on the southern border of the temple portion and will be the same width and depth as the tribes to the north of the temple portion. Benjamin will be first, followed by Issachar, then Zebulun, then finally Gad. The southern border of Gad will run from the waters of Tamar to Kadesh then to the Wadi of Egypt, which Ezekiel has already said is the southern border of the new Promiseland.

Seven tribes will have their portion on the north side of the central temple portion and five tribes will receive their portion to the south of the temple and city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be in the center of the tribal portions and Judah and Benjamin will be to the north and south of it. Ezekiel's order except for Judah and Benjamin being the closest to Jerusalem seems random. It does not follow the order of the tribal allotments in Joshua nor does it follow the birth order of the sons of Jacob. He allots the tribal portions according to his own pattern but it is unlike any other Old Testament list. However, every tribe is listed and the tribe of Joseph, represented by Ephraim and Manasseh, receives a double portion as it did in Joshua. In Ezekiel's vision even Levi receives a portion of the land. They receive the most sacred portion around the temple in Jerusalem. John in Revelation 21-22 borrows from Ezekiel's vision for some of his details of heaven. His vision of the 144,000 in Revelation 7 is completely unique to Revelation and now that I have examined Ezekiel's in detail, I am more convinced than ever that John's vision is symbolic and does not represent a literal Israel.

48:30-35 - Ezekiel describes the gates of his renewed Jerusalem. There will be 12 gates, one for each of the 12 tribes. The city was 4500 long cubits square or 1.5 miles long. The three gates on the north were for Reuben, Judah and Levi. The three on the east were named for Joseph, Benjamin and Dan. The three gates on the south were named for Simeon, Issachar and Zebulun. The three on the west were named after Gad, Asher and Naphtali. The tribal order of the gates follows no other pattern in the Old Testament. Once again Ezekiel's pattern is independent. The distance to walk all around the city was 18,000 long cubits or 6 miles. John in Revelation 21 says the New Jerusalem will have 12 gates, one for each of the 12 tribes of Israel and 12 foundations, one for each of the 12 apostles of the Lamb.

Ezekiel gives the name of his new Jerusalem. From that time on it will be called "The Lord is there." The name is a promise of God's presence because when Ezekiel wrote his vision in 572 Jerusalem had been destroyed, the temple burned and its walls torn down. It would be another 57 years until the second temple would be finished and 127 years until Nehemiah would lead the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and restore the city. Ezekiel had seen the glory of the Lord depart from the temple in chapter 10 before the temple was destroyed in 586 by the Babylonians. God was not there! He closes his prophecy with a vision that shows God would not only rebuild the temple and the city but he would restore Israel, all of Israel to the land he had promised them. He would dwell in their midst and would be with them forever. In that sense Ezekiel's vision of God dwelling in the midst of his people forever is fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah Jesus. John says in his gospel in John 1 that the Word, God, became flesh and dwelt or tabernacled among us and we beheld his glory. With the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 the Lord Jesus promises to be with us through his Spirit forever. Paul says in Ephesians we are to be built into a spiritual temple where God will dwell through his Spirit forever. Perhaps that is the best way to see Ezekiel's vision fulfilled because otherwise it does not fit into the other prophecies of the coming of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament.

Ezekiel sees God dwelling in the midst of all twelve tribes of Israel not just Judah and Benjamin. Remember by Ezekiel's day the ten northern tribes which formed the nation of Israel
had been scattered in exile and had lost their tribal identities for 150 years. Ezekiel wrote down his temple vision in 572; Samaria had been destroyed by Sargon II of Assyria in 721. By Ezekiel's day only Judah, Benjamin and Levi had any tribal identity. This is a total remaking and restoration of God's ancient people. The dry bones live! Therefore the 10 northern tribes are not lost to God. They are only lost to history! One day Israel will be one reunited people again. God will see to it and he will dwell in the midst of his people forever!