

# Revelation

## Author

- John (1:1, 1:4, 1:9, 22:8). Which John? Justin Martyr (110-165), Irenaeus (120-202), Clement of Alexandria (153-217), Tertullian (145-220), Origen (188-254), Hippolytus (170-236), and Victorinus (d. 303) all quote Revelation and attribute it to the apostle John.
- Some have claimed that Papias (70-155) attributed the book to an elder John. However, after closer reading, Papias called John an apostle and an elder in the same paragraph. And, Papias did not refer to Revelation in the same writing. So the claim that the author was an unknown elder John is without foundation.
- Some have tried to make linguistic arguments to show that the authors of John, 1 John, and Revelation were different. But such arguments are exercises in selective reasoning. There are more similarities than differences.

## Date

- See 11:1-2. The Temple seems to be standing at the time of writing.
- Irenaeus (120-202) and Victorinus (d. 303) wrote that Revelation was written during the reign of Domitian (91-96). They are the only external sources. No early author gives any other date.
- Claims are made that Laodicea (3:14-22) could not have fallen away so quickly, that Ephesus could not have fallen away so quickly (2:1-7), that the souls under the altar (6:9-11) would not be impatient so soon. However, Corinth fell away in 6 months; Galatia in a few years.
- Claims are made that Nero's persecution was not severe enough, and that Domitian's persecution fits the descriptions in Revelation better. But, since the descriptions are so figurative, such a distinction is purely conjectural.
- Claims are made that Nero did not start an official persecution, whereas Domitian did. First, we simply have no record if Nero instituted an official persecution. Second, the book of Acts shows plenty of persecution even without systematic government intervention.

## Place

- Patmos (1:9), an island of 50 square miles, 24 miles west of Asia Minor, 70 miles southwest of Ephesus, a salt mine to which prisoners were sent to work until they died. Clement of Alexandria (183-217) wrote that John was released from Patmos "when the tyrant died." The tyrant is not named.

## Reason for Writing

- “To show His bondservants the things which must shortly take place” (1:1). The short time frame is repeated at the beginning and end of the book (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:7, 22:10, 22:12, 22:20).
- Judgment Day is beyond ‘shortly.’ The fall of Rome was beyond ‘shortly.’ Any kingdom in which Jesus would reign on earth is beyond ‘shortly.’ The fall of Jerusalem, however, happened in 70 A.D.

## Reason for Figurative Language

- Many reasons have been given, but no explanation is based on facts, only supposition. No reason is given in the text for the type of language. Ezekiel and Zechariah are figurative as well, but God gave no particular reason.
- Some have supposed it was to conceal the meaning from the Roman officials, since the Roman empire is condemned in the book. But God did not find it necessary to conceal the condemnation of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Syria, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, or Egypt.
- Some have supposed that it was to conceal the meaning until a later time, when it could be better understood. This explanation is usually followed by a claim to having a new understanding. However, John was told “not [to] seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near” (22:10).

## Numbers

- Many schedules for interpretation have been published based on the meanings of certain numbers. All of them find some correspondence in the Old Testament to make a certain point. However, none of those comparisons is unique, but rather the product of selective reading. Let the context determine the importance of the number. Sometimes a four is just a four.

## What is the meaning for today?

- Some object that, if Revelation refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, that it has no meaning for today. Therefore, it must refer to something future. The same claim could be made for most of the New Testament and all of the Old Testament. History is not worthless. Isaiah’s prophecies about the Messiah are still profitable.
- Most have understood the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as the fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel 9:24 – 27, as the culmination of the Messianic era, putting a physical end to the practice of the Law of Moses. Although this is true, the picture is much larger. Gentile Christians would be interested academically in the end of the Law, but the personal importance to them would be marginal. However, this destruction is described again and again in the New Testament as being vitally important to all Christians. Jesus described that time as the worst of all history before or since, and that “unless the Lord shortened those days, no flesh would be saved” (Mark 13:19 – 20 and parallels). As will be shown, the cause for celebration by all Christians is not that Judaism would be destroyed, but that Satan would be deposed as king of this world, and

that he would be prevented from deceiving the nations any longer. This is a message of tremendous importance.

- Most people go wrong because they try to make it say what they have heard and already believe.
- Revelation contains a lot less than has been attributed to it. John intended to be understood (1:3, 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13, 3:22, 22:6, 22:7, 22:16, 22:19).

## John's Introduction to the Book

1:1 **Revelation.** This word is used to mean the coming of Jesus (Rm 2:5, 1 Pt 1:13), or a message from God (Rm 16:25, 1 Co 14:6, 1 Co 14:26, 2 Co 12:1, 2 Co 12:7, Gal 1:12, Gal 2:2, Eph 1:17, Eph 3:3). God gave this message to Jesus to pass along to us. While on earth, Jesus often claimed to speak from the Father (Jn 7:14-17, 8:28, 12:48-50, 14:23-24, *et al*).

**Shortly.** The majority of the book concerns things that occurred within a few years of the writing of this book. John repeated this assurance seven times (1:1, 1:3, 22:6, 22:7, 22:10, 22:12, 22:20). Perhaps one who finds interpretation in numbers would find that significant. However, an eighth reference is in 12:12.

**Angel.** Angel (messenger) has been used to refer to humans, spiritual beings, spiritual beings in human form, and at least one musical instrument. John mentions several modes of communication in this book (1:10, 4:1, 7:13, 10:8, 11:1, 17:1, 21:6, 21:9, 22:6, 22:9).

1:3 **Blessed.** John pronounced seven beatitudes in this book (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14).

**Read/hear and heed.** The same connection between hearing and doing may be found in many places (*e.g.*, Jn 13:17, Jm 1:22)

## Introduction to the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia

1:4 **Seven churches of Asia.** Asia was a Roman province in what is now southwest Turkey. The seven churches will be named in 1:11, and again in chapters 2 and 3. All of the locations named were substantial cities in that time. Each is given a specific message in chapters 2 and 3. However, one may assume from Acts 19:10-11 that there may have been several other congregations not named specifically (*e.g.*, Miletus, Acts 20:17). Perhaps these are representative. However, to claim that seven signifies completeness is speculative, since the numbers 3, 4, 6, and 7 are all used in that manner by various prophets (*e.g.*, Amos and Proverbs). **Grace and peace** is used as a salutation in most of the letters of the New Testament. The **seven spirits** have been described in many fanciful ways. All that can be said for certain is that it corresponds to the number of churches. And, since each church in chapters 2 and 3 has an "angel," it seems that the messengers (angels) to the churches were spiritual rather than human beings. All other references are exercises in selective reading, ignoring all passages that would contradict the chosen application.

1:5 Jesus is described as a **faithful witness** (as in Jn 18:37, 3:32, 8:14). “**First-born of the dead**” is not implying that Jesus was the first to rise from the dead, since that is obviously not true. The term, first born, was also a figure of speech meaning most important or pre-eminent, as used in Rm 8:29. Some have used this verse to prove that Jesus did not exist in the beginning, since He is described here as “born.” “**Ruler of the kings of the earth**” has been used by some churches to claim authority over civil government. However, passages such as Rm 13:1, Titus 3:1, and 1 Pt 2:13-14 give authority to civil governments. So, Jesus’ form of rule over kings of the earth must be of some other form. That type of reign is further referenced in 1:7. Jesus will give up this reign to the Father when Death is abolished (1 Co 15:24-28). **Released us from our sins by His blood** is a particularly plain and direct description.

1:6 **Kingdom of priests** has been translated variously, but in every case, the implication is that all Christians are priests. The same description is promised to Israel (Ex 19:5-6). Although Israel had a priesthood ordained of God, the nation in general would be priests to the rest of the world if they would keep the Law. In the same way, all Christians are priests to the rest of the world.

1:7 **Daniel 7:13** is quoted. Jesus used the same verse to describe Himself (Mt 24:30, Mk 13:26, Lk 21:27), and predicted that it would be fulfilled before the generation of that time passed away (Mt 24:34, Mk 13:30). Jesus also applied it to Himself (Mt 26:64, Mk 14:62, Lk 21:32) to the High Priest. The Messianic interpretation was generally accepted in Jesus’ time. Daniel’s point in that vision was to announce the establishment of the eternal kingdom. Daniel’s explanation continues to the end of his chapter 7. By some means, **every eye will see Him**. John has twice written that these things would take place shortly (1:1 and 1:3), and Jesus predicted its fulfillment in Himself before a generation passed, so the description must not be of Judgment Day. When Jesus applied it to Himself, it was in conjunction with the destruction of Jerusalem. So, people ‘saw’ Him in the fulfillment of His prophecy, even those who pierced Him – likely referring to more than just the guard who pierced Him with a spear (Jn 19:37 quoting Zech 12:10). Those mourning are similar to those mourning in Zech 12:10.

1:8 **Alpha and omega** are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. The speaker here is the Father (see 1:4), as in 21:6. The speaker in 22:13 where the same phrase appears again is not clearly given. Although Jesus is not given as speaking these words, in 1:17, He calls Himself ‘the first and the last.’

## **Background to the Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia**

Having established Jesus’ position, John proceeds to describe the speaker using images that will be repeated in each of the seven letters. Many of the images are borrowed for the Old Testament in order to tie this profile of God into all of the Scriptures.

1:9 John considers himself to be in a time of tribulation, as did Paul (2 Co 7:4 *et al*). He also considered himself to be in the kingdom, as did Paul (Col 1:13, *et al*). But the quotation in 1:7 seems to place the kingdom in the future. The kingdom seems to be coming and being at the same time during the period from the resurrection of Jesus to the destruction of Jerusalem. But this is reasonable, since the kingdom did not come to all people of the world at once, but rather

over a period of about 40 years. At the destruction of Jerusalem, the last prediction of Jesus was fulfilled, the Law was ended by divine power, and the everlasting kingdom was fully established for all places and times.

1:10 **“In the Spirit”** is used 14 times in the New Testament (not at all in the Old Testament). In two places (1 Co 6:11 and 1 Tm 3:16), the implication is far different than the others, ‘in the Spirit’ being an accident of the sentence construction. Four of the occurrences are in Revelation (1:10, 4:2, 17:3, and 21:10) with reference to John *receiving* a message from God. David (Mt 22:43), Simeon (Lk 2:27), and prophets in general (Eph 3:5) were said to be ‘in the Spirit’ when *delivering* a message from God. However, five times (Rm 8:9, Eph 2:22, Eph 6:18, Ph 3:3, Col 1:8) Christians are said to be ‘in the Spirit’ in their daily lives. However, since John receives a vision in the next verse, this ‘in the Spirit’ must be related to the work of a prophet. **The Lord’s Day** is identified as Sunday only in writings outside the Bible. This is the only time the term is used in the New Testament. However, all Christian writers, several of whom knew the apostles personally, wrote that the Lord’s Day was Sunday.

1:11 The seven churches of 1:4 are named here. The same seven will be repeated individually in chapters 2 and 3.

1:12 These lampstands may be imagined as being similar to the seven-branched candlesticks of the Temple. The Tabernacle had one. The Temple had 10. All of them were made of gold. In 1:20, Jesus tells John that these lampstands represent the seven aforementioned churches.

1:13 **One like a son of man** should be taken as a part of quotation in 1:7 (from Dn 7:13). The attire sounds like that of a priest, but is not like that described in Ex 28.

1:14 The description has been dissected and allegorized many ways. Most of the time, it’s better to leave the background as background. The hair, eyes, feet, and voice are described this way because that’s what John saw in his vision. No interpretation is given by the author, so any that could be offered would be speculation.

1:16 Jesus later tells John (1:20) that the seven stars are the seven angels of the seven churches, probably the same as the seven Spirits of 1:4. The sword brings to mind Hb 4:12 and Eph 6:17.

1:17 The speaker is Jesus because He describes Himself as one who was dead, but is alive forevermore, having the keys to Death and Hades (1:18). The reason for John’s falling is not given. Among the options are fear and awe. Or, God could have caused it.

1:18 **Key** is used only figuratively in the New Testament (Mt 16:19, Lk 11:52, Rv 1:18, 3:7, 9:1, 20:1) to mean power over a thing (the kingdom, knowledge, death and Hades, or the abyss). **Hades** is the ‘unseen’, or the realm of the dead from Greek mythology. Being in Hades does not imply good or bad; Gehenna is used to describe the abode of the wicked.

1:19 Jesus notes that some of what John will write past, some present, and some future.

1:20 **Mysteries** mentioned in the New Testament are always in the process of being revealed (Mt 13:11, Mk 4:11, Lk 8:10, Ro 11:25, 16:25, 1 Co 2:7, 4:1, 13:2, 14:2, 15:51, Eph 1:9, 3:3, 3:4, 3:9, 5:32, 6:19, Col 1:26, 1:27, 2:2, 4:3, 2 Th 2:7, 1 Tm 3:9, 3:16, Rv 1:20, 10:7, 17:5, 17:7).

## Ephesus

2:1 Each of the seven letters that follow begins with a reference to the scene described in 1:12-20. In this letter, the seven stars and seven lampstands refer to 1:12, 13, 16, and 20. Thus, each letter can be ascribed to Jesus. The church at **Ephesus** was established by Paul (with Priscilla and Aquila, and probably Timothy and Silas) in Acts 18:18. He returned to Ephesus in Acts 19:1, staying more than two years (Acts 19:10). Upon his final trip toward Jerusalem, Paul by-passed Ephesus so as not to spend too much time there, instead meeting with the elders of Ephesus at Miletus (Acts 20:17). Timothy remained in Ephesus at Paul's request (1 Tm 1:3) due to the strange doctrines that were arising even at that early date. The letter to the church at Ephesus probably was written during Paul's imprisonment at Rome, between 4 and 8 years before this revelation.

2:2 The means of distinguishing **false apostles** is not given. Although it would be convenient to differentiate on the basis of the ability to perform miracles, this may not have been possible, since the other side had powers, too. While some false signs certainly were illusions, some were real (*e.g.*, Acts 16:16-18, 19:13-16, 2 Th 2:1-12).

2:5 The nature of that **first love** is not given, although it was within their memories and could be found by comparing their present deeds to those of the past. **Removing the lampstand** would seem to indicate the demise of the congregation as a whole, not the individuals. The lampstand image is that of casting the light of God onto the world, as a kingdom of priests (1:6). The image in this place is stronger than just that the church will lose its effectiveness. The threatened '**coming**' is different than the 'coming' of 1:7 and 22:7. Here, the 'coming' was the result of a particular congregation failing to repent. The other 'coming' was prophesied more certainly, and was not conditional on the behavior of Christians.

2:6 The identity of the **Nicolaitans** is uncertain. Several traditions and theories exist, but no facts. Their deeds were rightly hated, so their problem was more than teaching a strange theory.

2:7 Each of the seven letters has the same line about **hearing** as the last or the second to last sentence. Jesus used this line several times (*e.g.*, Mt 11:15, 13:9, 13:43), although Jesus always used the plural. The promise of the **tree of life** in paradise recalls the one to which access was removed (Gn 3:22-24), and looks forward to the same tree in the future (Rv 22:2 and 14).

## Smyrna

2:8 The origin of the church in **Smyrna** is unknown. It is 38 miles north of Ephesus, so perhaps the church began during Paul's long stay in Ephesus (Acts 19:10-12). The '**first and last, dead and alive**' refers to 1:17-18.

2:9 Some have compared this '**synagogue of Satan**' to Jesus' description of Jews who opposed Him (Jn 8:44). However, the behavior described here seems to be more extreme than Jewish opposition in other cities, or it could have applied to all seven churches. Most unbelieving Jews were described sympathetically, as Paul described his relatives as having a zeal for God, just not according to knowledge (Rm 10:2). Therefore, this group probably was much worse for a different reason. The '**poor but rich**' theme may be found in several places (2 Co 6:10, 1 Tm 6:5-6, Jm 1:9, 2:5).

2:10 Although the **devil** would be capable of throwing these Christians in prison personally, the reference seems to describe the activities of the synagogue of Satan, rather than Satan himself. **Imprisonment** due to false charges by unbelieving Jews happened to several church leaders in Acts. However, the tribulation probably is not limited to imprisonment, since the letter is part of vision that contains many figurative pieces. This, too, could be a figure of speech representing many types of difficulties. Similarly, it is unlikely that their **testing** would last only **ten days**. Rather, this seems to represent a period of unknown but short duration. Some have tried to relate this to ten major periods of Roman persecution, but the selection of those ten periods is arbitrary and could be enumerated with any total from 5 to 25. Those who **remain faithful** through this tribulation will attain to eternal life. The implication is that those Christians who do not persevere will not receive the same **crown**.

2:11 Those '**not hurt by the second death**' are those who receive 'the crown of life.' The sentences are parallel. The second death is described in more detail in 20:1-14 and 21:1-8. Similar crowns may be found in 1 Co 9:25, 2 Tm 4:8, Jm 1:12, and 1 Pt 5:4.

## **Pergamum**

2:12 **Pergamum** was located 30 miles north of Smyrna. The city is mentioned only here in the New Testament, so the origin of the church is unknown. The '**two-edged sword**' refers to 1:16.

2:13 Many theories have been advanced as to the nature of '**Satan's throne**,' most with reference to the emperor worship cult that had a major temple there. All is speculation. What may be said is that the agents of the evil one were strong in this place. Nothing is known of **Antipas**, either.

2:14 **The teaching of Balaam** is unknown in this context. The historical account of Balaam and Balak may be found in Nu 22-24 and 31:16. The latter reference seems to apply better to John's ideas. Balaam apparently convinced a substantial number of Israelites to take foreign (pagan) wives. Perhaps believers in Pergamum were being enticed to idolatry through marrying unbelievers (pagans). Immorality seemed to accompany paganism. Eating things sacrificed to idols was addressed by Paul in 1 Co 10:14-33. Being unequally yoked to unbelievers is addressed in 2 Co 6:14-18. A synagogue of Balaam has been excavated in Jordan.

2:15 The identity of the **Nicolaitans** is uncertain (2:6).

2:16 This **‘coming’** is different than that of 1:7 and 22:7, but like that of 2:5 because it is directed at a specific group of people. The **‘quickly’** time frame would likely occur before the **‘shortly’** and **‘near’** of that larger coming. The sword would seem to represent the Word, as in Eph 6:17 and Hb 4:12.

2:17 The images at the end of the verse are parallel with the reward of eternal life in 2:7 and 2:11, so these should be understood to represent the same general idea. Each letter has several parallels with the others to aid in separating literal from figurative. **Hidden manna** is Jesus (Jn 6:30-58). (Also see Ex 16.) The **white stone** is more obscure, but probably relates to the stones on the ephod of the High Priest, each of which represented a tribe, and the two shoulder stones on which were engraved the names of the twelve tribes (Ex 28:6-21). The faithful will be priests with ephods with stones and new names: an image of heaven. In 3:12, the image is repeated with the variation of writing a new name on the believer, which fits with the ephod image.

## **Thyatira**

2:18 **Thyatira** is mentioned here, and is the home town of Lydia, the first convert of Europe (Ax 16:14). The **eyes as flames of fire** and the **feet like burnished bronze** refer to 1:14-15.

2:19 These Christians had not fallen back in enthusiasm like those of Ephesus (2:4-5).

2:20 The identity of Jezebel is unknown. The name is from 1 K 16 – 2 K 9. When selecting a name for children, two names are avoided: Judas and Jezebel. The problem introduced by this Jezebel is similar to that of Balaam in 2:14. Queen Jezebel made Baal worship the state religion in the Northern Kingdom. Immorality often accompanied idolatry, and immorality was often used as a figure of speech for idolatry.

2:21 The patience of God is illustrated. Also, this Jezebel was not a part of the plan, although God had used evil in the past in order to accomplish His purpose.

2:22 This sentence has been explained in many ways. Jesus says He will cast her into a **bed**. The figure may imply sickness, or it may be a piece of the **adultery** image that represented idolatry. Whatever the exact nature of her difficulty, it shows that Jesus is in control. Those who followed her would have a very difficult time. But, they, too, have the opportunity to avoid this **tribulation** by **repenting**.

2:23 The threats extend to her **‘children’** who will be killed with **‘death.’** The word, death, is used in the New Testament for both spiritual (1 Jn 3:14, 5:16-17, Jm 1:15, 5:20, and many others) and physical death (Hb 7:23, 9:16, Col 1:22, Ph 2:30, and many others). This may be taken either way, or perhaps both ways. The **‘kill’** is likely figurative, as in “I will dispose of this idolatrous movement through death.” Whatever Jesus had in mind, it would be obvious to the churches in the area. He extends the warning to all the readers at the end of the verse. Literally, John wrote that Jesus would search the **‘kidneys.’** That was a figure of speech of the time representing the deepest emotions and affections.



2:24 The false teaching has not spread to everyone. The false teaching is characterized as ‘the **deep things of Satan.**’ No further explanation is given, and little remains of the history of the time and place.

2:27 The quotation of Ps 2:8-9 began back in 2:26. Ps 2 is the passage often quoted in the New Testament (Ax 4:25-28, 13:33, Hb 1:5, Rv 19:15, 19:19). The pope used this verse to claim authority over the kings of the earth. The future tense written by David is present tense for the Christians of Thyatira, as seen in the change to the past tense in the last part of the verse. Jesus was already reigning (Mt 28:18, Eph 1:20-23). This promise was made in reference to the eternal kingdom that is now in reality. So, in some real way, Christians have authority over the ‘**nations**’ and ‘**rule them with a rod of iron.**’ We have this authority because Jesus has passed it on to us (Eph 2:6, Rm 5:17). This must also harmonize with the passages concerning obedience to civil governments (Rm 13:1, Titus 3:1, 1 Pt 2:13-14). See comments on Rv 1:5-7. By being obedient to civil government, we are in control. We may have a hard time seeing this ‘**rod of iron.**’ As a comparison, we can say with confidence that God has authority over all people on earth, yet most of them do not acknowledge His authority.

2:28 The ‘**morning star**’ is of uncertain interpretation. Later in this book, Jesus identifies Himself as the morning star (Rv 22:16). The other places where a star is meaningful are Nu 24:17, the star in the east of Mt 2, and 2 Pt 1:19.

## **Sardis**

3:1 Sardis was the capital of the ancient nation of Lydia. The **seven stars** and **seven spirits** refer to 1:4, 16, and 20, identifying the speaker as Jesus. The problem with the church in Sardis was complacency brought on by a good reputation.

3:2 Jesus warning is that complacency kills.

3:3 The image is repeated in 1 Th 5:2, 2 Pt 3:10, Rv 16:15, Lk 12:39, and Mt 24:43. This image may or may not be that of Judgment (the time of which no one knows, not even Jesus: Mt 24:26). It could be a specific visitation upon these people.

3:4 Note that individual humans are found ‘**worthy.**’ (2 Th 1:5, 11). The image of **white** clothing stands for purity. In the New Testament other than in Revelation, white garments are seen only on angels and the transfigured Jesus. However, two prophets used the image of white garments to represent purity. (Dn 12:10, 11:35, Is 1:18)

3:5 The action of **erasing** (blotting out, wiping away, Ax 3:19, Rv 7:17, 21:4) implies that the names were in the **Book of Life** (Rv 21:27, Rv 20:12-15, Rv 17:8, Rv 13:8, Ph 4:3) at a prior time. Therefore, some Christians in Thyatira were in danger of losing their place in that book. They had secured entry into heaven, then lost it by their complacency. Jesus will **confess the names of the faithful** on that day (cf. Mt 10:32-33, Lk 12:8-9). Moses refers to the same book in Exodus 32:32.

## **Philadelphia**

3:7 Unlike the other letters, this one begins with a description of Jesus that is not an exact quotation from chapter 1. Having a **key**, as in 1:18 and all the references at that place, is a symbol of power over whatever the key fits. Although the **key of David** is not used elsewhere in the New Testament, a similar usage may be found in Is 22:22. It would seem to be the power over the house of David, a reference to Jesus claim to the eternal throne of David. The image in Mt 16:19 of possessing the keys to the kingdom of heaven may also be a part of this. The image of opening and shutting a door is also from Is 22.

3:8 The nature of the **open door** that is before them is not given. Paul used that metaphor three times (1 Co 16:9, 2 Co 2:12, Col 4:3) and Luke once (Ax 14:27) to indicate an opportunity to spread the gospel.

3:9 The **Synagogue of Satan** (2:9) appears again, but with different results. Whether the Jews in Smyrna repented is not given. But these Jews in Philadelphia apparently were about to become believers. Like the Christians of Smyrna, Jesus has no rebuke for the Christians of Philadelphia. If this image is of repentance, then the door in 3:8 should be a door of opportunity for the gospel and the keys would be the keys of the kingdom to which these Jews laid claim (Lk 11:52).

3:10 The **coming** in this verse is the same as the one in 1:7 because it was the one that would affect the whole world. This is another of the places where John echoes the prophecy of Jesus (Mt 24:1-34, Lk 21:5-28) that this tribulation would come in the latter half of the first century (1:1, 1:3, 3:11, 22:6, 22:7, 22:10, 22:12, 22:20). These Christians would be spared that tribulation.

3:11 The **crown** they could lose is likely the same one as in 2:10-11, another clear image that a Christian may have the crown of life and lose it, or be written in the Book of Life and be erased.

3:12 These pillars are in the church, the New Jerusalem.

## **Laodicea**

3:14 The **faithful witness** recalls 1:5. The **beginning of the creation of God** has been used to make a case for Jesus being created, rather than having always existed. Those who wish to prove that Jesus was created turn to the eight places where Jesus is called 'begotten' (Jn 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, Ax 13:33, Hb 1:5, 5:5, 1 Jn 4:9). But in the same passage in John where Jesus is called the 'only begotten,' He is also said to be the one through whom all things were made (cf Col 3:16). The argument cannot be settled because each side tries to make a case on too little evidence. The point of the figure of speech in this place is indicating that Jesus has first place (all power) over this world.

3:16 Put simply, lukewarm Christians make God sick.

3:17 This sounds like the church in the United States, especially those who believe that our prosperity is a blessing from God. The Christians of Laodicea allowed their prosperity to

deceive them that they were doing well spiritually. Christians are not promised health or wealth (note the medical and financial conditions of the major characters of the New Testament). Having either or both may be a blessing, or may be a temptation.

3:18 The money, clothing, and medicine offered by Jesus must be figurative, since He chastised them for trusting those things in the previous verse. The **white garments** are purity (3:5). The **eye salve** is for understanding (that you may see, as in John 9:41 and Rm 11:8). The **gold** is less specific (1 Pt 1:7, Zech 13:9, Ps 19:10, Ps 119:72, Pr 8:19), perhaps wisdom or the knowing God.

3:19 The Christian is nowhere promised health or wealth. Prosperity is more likely the reward of the other side than the blessing of God. Adversity is to be our teacher and our reminder (Hb 12:5-13, 1 Co 11:32).

3:20 Jesus **knocks** and calls, but we are required to answer in order to be part of the dinner.

3:21 The Twelve were promised **thrones** (Lk 22:30, Mt 19:28). The throne of Jesus was referenced in 1:7 from Daniel 7:5-14, and in Hb 12:2.

## The Throne of God

The following vision illustrates that God has a plan (written on a scroll) that no one is worthy to open (reveal) it until the Lamb (Jesus) returns to heaven. The opening of the scroll begins in 6:1 and continues through 8:1. While on earth (before this vision), Jesus said that no one knew its contents except the Father (Matthew 24:36). When Jesus returns to heaven, the mystery is revealed for all to see.

4:1 Jesus was the **first voice** John heard (1:10). The description that comes next was to follow the events described to the seven churches. So, this next scene is after whatever tribulation was described in, for example, 3:10, 3:3, 2:23, 2:16, and 2:10. So, the opening of the scroll that is described from chapter 5 through chapter 8. The time would be after something that was to happen quickly (2:16 and 3:11). John uses the description, “after these things,” again in 7:1, 7:9, 15:5, 18:1, 19:1, and 20:3.

4:2 John is now experiencing a vision within a vision, since he was already “in the Spirit” in 1:10.

4:3 Jasper is probably diamond. Sardius was probably red. Emerald is green. One may imagine many applications for each gemstone. However, no inspired writer has offered any correlations. Most likely, this is just as close as John could come to describing what he saw.

4:4 The Twelve were promised twelve thrones from which to judge Israel (Lk 22:30, Mt 19:28). No other inspired writer used 24 as a figurative number. **Elders** judge. The **white robes** again are for purity. The **gold crowns** are for authority. These 24 elders will appear a few times through chapter 19.

4:5 The seven spirits were first mentioned in 1:4. Thunder and lightning often has characterized a scene in which God appeared (Ps 18:13, Ex 20:18, Ezek 1:13).

4:6 The glass is description. The four creatures will appear with the elders several times through chapter 19. Despite their appearance and unfortunate characterization as beasts in the KJV, they are servants of God (see 4:9). Three prophets have reported animals and objects with many eyes that were sent from God (2 Chr 16:9, Ezek 1:18, 10:12, Zech 3:9, 4:10), indicating their all-seeing nature.

4:7 These are like the creatures of Ezek 10, with some of Isaiah 6:2-3.

4:11 This is a description of heaven. If it doesn't sound like what you would like to do for an eternity, there is only one other choice.

## The Seven Seals

Each seal represents a facet of the plan of God. The first seal is victory, telling the outcome at the first, probably because the other seals represent difficulties: war, economic problems, death, martyrs, fearsome justice, and silence. These adversities are a part of the victorious plan, not evils to be overcome. These are events that are to take place shortly to the original audience.

5:1 The book (scroll) is similar to one in Ezek 2:9-10. It was packed full and well sealed. Each seal would be of wax, easily removed (not a Herculean task), but reserved for the one with the authority to do so.

5:2 A strong angel would have the ability to open the seals, but did not.

5:4 John wept over the mystery that was sealed and might not be known. (1 Pt 1:12, Eph 3:3-13)

5:5 The Lion of the tribe of Judah prophecy is from Gn 49:9. The Root of David prophecy is from Is 11:1 and 2 Sam 7:11-14.

5:6 The Lamb recalls Is 53:7, 1 Co 5:7, 1 Pt 1:19, and Jn 1:29, 36. But this odd lamb has horns (power) and eyes. The eyes are the same seven spirits found in 1:4, 3:1, and 4:5. These same eyes are said to go out into all the earth (2 Chr 16:9, Ezek 1:18, 10:12, Zech 3:9, 4:10).

5:7 Not only does this lamb have eyes that can travel without Him, this lamb has at least one hoof that can grasp a book. This is a reminder not to take visions too literally.

5:8 Generally, **falling down** before someone is a sign of worship (1 Co 14:25, Ax 10:25, Jn 11:32), but not always (Ax 16:29, Lk 24:5, Mt 18:26). The **incense** in the Temple represented the continual prayers of the faithful (Rv 8:3, Ps 141:2). This explanation of the symbolism of the incense is not given elsewhere. The rules of incense are in Ex 30.

5:9 Paul wrote several times about a ‘**mystery**’ being revealed (Rm 11:25, 16:25, 1 Co 2:7, 15:51, Eph 1:9, 3:3-9, 6:19, Col 1:26, 2:2, 4:3). The contents of this **scroll** are called the mystery of God in Rv 10:7, as it is being unrolled and revealed. Jesus was worthy to reveal this mystery. Until He opened the **seals**, no one but the Father knew the mystery. Since Paul and others knew the mystery when they wrote, this scene should be placed just after Jesus’ return to heaven, which would be the same scene as referenced in Rv 1:7 (Dn 7:13). This mystery that had been revealed to the first century church is unrolled in chapters 6 through 10 of this book. So, these chapters are in the past to John, in keeping with Rv 1:19.

5:10 The kingdom of priests idea is from 1:6. The fact that Christians **reign** on this earth was described in 2:26-27. This scene confirms that this authority was in existence in the first century. The fact that they *will* reign up on the earth (future tense) must be explained in light of John’s many references to ‘shortly’ and the fact that these chapters (through chapter 10) must be completed before Paul wrote his letters.

5:11 There are a lot of angels.

6:1 The first four seals are the “**four horsemen of the Apocalypse**.” Similar horses may be found in Zech 1:8-10 and 6:1-8. The four living creatures are in 4:6.

6:2 To this point of Revelation, **white** has been a good color, so this conqueror may be interpreted as good. The bow represents a weapon, the crown, victory (based on the Greek word for victory wreath). Perhaps this first stage of the mystery being revealed is the gospel message.

6:4 Although this **second** rider has a weapon, the overall impression is of literal war. Jesus said that He came not to bring peace, but a sword (Mt 10:34). Perhaps this rider represents the opposition caused by the first rider, the gospel.

6:6 The significance of **black** is not given, but it is certainly ominous. The importance of the scales is not revealed until the prices of some common goods are given. A **denarius** was the daily wage of a laborer. The measure of **grain** given for wheat was about enough to feed one person, and was about twelve times higher than normal. **Barley** was poorer food, and cheaper, but still eight times higher than normal. The more luxurious common foodstuffs, **oil** and **wine**, were untouched. This is a strange period of shortage, discriminating against the common laborer. Perhaps this rider represents the economic adversity brought by the gospel.

6:8 The classical adjective is the ‘**pale**’ horse. The description quite clearly announces widespread death due to war, famine, pestilence, and wild animals. Jesus predicted a similar period that would precede the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (Mt 24:7-10, 21-22, 34, Lk 21:9-12, 20, 24, 32).

6:9 The **fifth** seal (of seven) reveals those killed for their faith. This scene does not specify Christians. It probably includes those who faithfully prepared the way for the gospel, like the Old Testament prophets. The location of this altar is not given, although it is likely that it is meant to be in heaven where the scene began in chapter 4.

6:10 The apparent slowness of justice was an argument made against the gospel (2 Pt 3:8). Several Psalms have included similar questions (Ps 6:3, 13:1-4, 35:17, 74:9-10, 94:3-7).

6:11 After Jesus returned to heaven (5:6), these who were under the altar were given **white robes**. This implies that they did not already have them. So, despite being slain because of the Word of God, they were not ‘clean.’ Perhaps they could not be made clean until the sacrifice of Jesus had been completed. This would reconcile the concept of Paradise as in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). They lived before that sacrifice, so Lazarus had to wait (comfortably) in Paradise until he could move on to heaven. The duration of this wait for justice is described here as ‘**a little while longer**.’ Explanations that make this more than ‘a little while’ use the argument that those in eternity have no concept of time. However, those under the altar are described as being aware of time (“How long?”). Therefore, the number of martyrs, as far as this scene is concerned, has a definite end, probably ending with the destruction of Jerusalem. Those who died later for their faith are not in this particular group. The fulfillment of the promise to those under the altar is in chapter 7. These same people will appear again in 20:4.

6:12 The **sixth** seal describes the beginning of that promised justice for those under the altar. The rest of the description is in chapter 13.

6:13 Similar images of God’s wrath upon the wicked on earth may be found in Is 13:10, 29:6, 50:3, Joel 2:31, and Nahum 1:6. Each of the figures of speech from the prophets borrowed by John here, were fulfilled in war and its associated devastation, not in supernatural displays. The destruction of Jerusalem and the widespread tribulation that preceded it as predicted by Daniel (Dn 9:24-27) and Jesus (Mt 24:1-34 and parallels) was one such seemingly natural tribulation that had been orchestrated by God to execute His judgment on certain wicked people. The general Judgment at the end of the earth is a different event.

## **An Aside**

Chapter 7 answers the question posed in 6:17, “Who is able to stand?”

7:1 The seventh seal is not opened until chapter 8. This chapter fills in some details concerning those under the altar and the faithful on the earth in the first century as the counterpoint to the devastation visited on the wicked. However, the faithful on earth did not escape the effects of this tribulation (Mt 24:22, Rm 5:3, 8:35-39, 12:12, 2Co 1:4, 1 Pt 4:17) except for the church in Philadelphia (3:10). The four corners of the earth and the four winds are both figures of speech that have been used several times to describe the whole earth (Is 11:12, Jer 49:36, Ezek 7:2, 37:9, Dn 7:2, 11:4, and Mk 13:27).

7:2 This angel has authority (the seal).

7:3 The **faithful** on earth are sealed in the same way as the faithful of Jerusalem were to be spared at its destruction (Ezek 9:4). This seal may be compared to Paul’s description of Christians be sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13, 4:30, 2Co 1:22).

7:4 Not all **Israel** is sealed, but a remnant (Rm 9:6). The tribe of Dan is missing, which was the first tribe to be assimilated into the surrounding cultures in the Old Testament. The tribe of Ephraim is missing, although Joseph (the father of Manasseh and Ephraim) is included. Those who are to be sealed are on earth, not in heaven.

7:9 A great multitude of **Gentiles** is also present.

7:10 Since it would be unnecessary to pray for salvation for the Father and the Son, the words translated 'salvation to' should be taken as 'victory to.'

7:14 This is the first connection in this book of the white robe and the blood of the Lamb. It would seem to be unfair to leave the souls under the altar (6:9) while these were allowed into the presence of God, so one may assume that they are included in this group. However, the avenging of their blood has not yet been described. This large group came out of a great tribulation, probably the same one predicted by Jesus (Mt 24:22). Apparently, many Christians lost their lives in that tribulation, since they now appear in heaven. The 'survival' through tribulation was the survival of the spirit, not necessarily the body, as evidenced by the faithful who died between 30 AD and 70 AD (and until this day). When Jesus promised that this tribulation would be cut short for the sake of the elect (Mt 24:22), I suspect He had reference to the promise that we will not be faced with temptation more than we can endure (1 Co 10:13).

7:15 This is similar to the promise in Isaiah 4:5 – 6.

## **The Seventh Seal: The Mystery is Fully Revealed**

8:1 The seventh and last seal is broken, so the whole plan of God is now revealed.

## **Introduction to the Seven Trumpets**

The Seven Trumpets re-tells the story of the seven seals, as evidenced by 10:7, that the mystery is finished. The major difference between the two accounts is that the victory is described at the end instead of the beginning, and the specific object of that victory is revealed: Satan is deposed (11:15).

8:2 The explanation of the last part of the plan will continue to be explained until 10:7. These seven angels are not the seven angels of the seven churches (1:20), but rather are a different group, not higher or lower, but with a different job. Each will announce a calamity similar to the 10 plagues announced by Moses.

8:3 This extra incense added to the prayers of the faithful may be compared to Rm 8:26.

8:5 The same censer that held the incense (prayers of the saints) is used to initiate ominous natural events. From the events that follow, the thunder, lightning, and earthquakes have a negative effect on the inhabitants of the earth. Perhaps this is in response to the prayers of the saints, like the request by those under the altar (6:10).

8:6 Trumpets were used several times in the Old Testament. Silver trumpets were used to call the people together for many reasons (e.g., Nu 10:1-10), or to sound an alarm (Am 3:6, Hos 5:8), or to announce judgment (Joel 2:1).

8:7 The first trumpet of the seventh seal devastates a third of the earth. Any attempt to apply this brief and general description to an exact historical event is futile. The calamities of the trumpets have many similarities to Exodus (Ex 7:8 through 11:8), and to Jesus' description of the destruction of Jerusalem in Mt 24 (and parallels).

8:8 The second trumpet results in devastation for a third of the sea.

8:9 The third trumpet poisoned a third of the drinking water. Despite many commentaries to the contrary, this wormwood is not Satan. The term is used seven times in the Old Testament (Dt 29:18, Pr 5:4, Jer 9:15, Jer 23:15, Lam 3:15, Lam 3:19, Am 5:7), always referring to a bitter and possibly poisonous plant.

8:10 The fourth angel affected a third of the massive bodies of the universe. This trumpet illustrates that this is a vision, not a picture of reality. Certainly someone would have recorded if a third of the sun had been missing. Instead, this (along with the other trumpets) represents a general calamity of large but incomplete proportion that, taken all together, will affect every facet of life.

8:11 And it's going to get worse. The last three trumpets also are called 'woes' (9:12).

9:1 This star with the key is not necessarily Satan. Angels who stood before God (8:2) had caused equally horrible things to happen. A somewhat similar statement about Satan may be found in Luke 10:18, but it is not necessary to connect that one line with this one line.

9:2 The abyss is mentioned in Lk 8:31 as an abode dreaded by demons.

9:3 Locusts are a part of an Exodus plague and are in Joel 1 & 2. Scorpions are mentioned in Luke 10:19. These locusts can sting like scorpions.

9:4 The sealing of the faithful occurred in 7:3ff. The faithful endured many tribulations with the rest of the world. But this one they were spared. Perhaps this is connected to Jesus' promise in Mt 24:22. These locusts are carnivorous.

9:5 The time period of 5 months does not represent anything other than a medium length of time. Torment in the New Testament can be either from God or by nature (Mt 4:24, 8:6, 18:34).

9:7 These locusts are similar to those in Joel 1:6, 2:3-5, and 2:25.

9:11 The two names given (Hebrew and Greek) mean destruction and destroyer, respectively. While these would seem appropriate names for Satan, angels of God often were sent as destroyers and to effect destruction. An angel of God was sent to destroy the first born in Egypt (Ex 12:23). The angel of the abyss is probably not Satan, since Satan is imprisoned there



in Rv 20. If Satan were the king of this abyss, he should not also be a prisoner in it. Instead, an angel of God has authority over the eventual prison of Satan.

9:13 The second woe is the sixth trumpet. The first woe was some great torment that was visited upon the unbelievers, but not with death. The second woe includes death. Again, this is not Judgment, since many survive and are unrepentant (9:20-21). Assigning exact historical events to these highly figurative visions is easy to do and impossible to prove. So, the understanding of the vision must fall within the general framework given by John; “Things that are shortly to take place.”

9:13 This may be the same altar mentioned in 8:3.

9:14 These are the four angels of 7:1, but with a difference in direction that only works in a vision. The angels in 7:1, who are holding back calamity, are at the four corners of the word. Now, they are all at the Euphrates (northeast), the direction from which the Assyrian and Babylonian conquerors came. (But, remember that Egypt is to the southwest, so not all conquerors came across the Euphrates.)

9:15 This destruction has been planned to the minute. So, this may fit with the destruction of Jerusalem described by Jesus in Mt 24. A possible application of the first woe (without death and without harm to the Christians) may be the famine in preparation for which Paul and company collected funds. (Note: applications are easy with so little specific information.)

9:21 But this tribulation did not bring about repentance.

10:1 Although many of the descriptions of this “another strong angel” are similar to those in 1:7, 1:15, 1:16, and 4:3, this individual is described as an angel like the one 6:14, so it cannot be Jesus.

10:2 This is a different book than the scroll of chapter 5. The contents of the little book will be revealed beginning in chapter 11 (see 10:10-11). Whether the Lamb needed to open this book is not told. The information given by the seven peals of thunder was understood by John well enough so that he was going to write it down, but he was ordered not to reveal it. Some of God’s plan is still a secret. The two books are revealed; the thunder is not.

10:6 This promise of no more delay is in keeping with John’s repeated assurances that the information in his book would take place shortly to his time.

10:7 This point in the revelation is in the past to John, since it is information that had been preached to His servants the prophets. The information in the scroll could not be given out until the scroll was opened. The scroll could not be opened until the Lamb returned to heaven after being slain (chapter 5). But the revelation was given to the apostles and prophets of the New Testament early enough so that that could preach it and write it before the destruction of Jerusalem. John tells us that there will be no more delay of the prophesied destruction (as foretold by Jesus). All the mysteries have been revealed, as noted in Rm 11:25, 16:25; 1 Co 2:7

– 10, 4:1, 13:2, 15:51; Eph 1:9, 3:3 – 12, 5:32, 6:19; Col 1:26 – 27, 2:2, 4:3; 2 Th 2:7; 1 Tm 3:9; Rv 1:20, 17:5 – 7.

## **An Aside**

As with the seals, John includes an aside before the seventh angel sounds.

10:9 Ezekiel received a similar vision including eating a book and it tasting like honey (Ez 2:8-3:3). The eating figure would seem to illustrate making it a part of him, rather than just reporting. The sweetness is a good thing, so the message was pleasant to John. But upon digestion, the message turned bitter. No reason for the bitterness is given here, so the importance of it will need to be found in the message that follows.

10:11 The reference to kings is a little different than other phrases describing large groups in the Bible. Usually, only peoples, nations, and tongues are mentioned together (Is 66:18, Rv 7:9, 11:9, 13:7, 17:15).

11:1 In John's vision, the Temple is still standing. Some defend a late date for the writing of Revelation (after 70 AD) by saying that this is a vision, so the Temple does not need to be standing. But it would not make much sense to prophesy its future if it were already destroyed. Others have said that the Temple in this vision represents the church, which certainly was standing after 70 AD. That would make the court and the holy city bad parts of the church, perhaps connected with some of the bad elements of the church described in chapters 2 and 3. However, the figure works better if the Temple is still standing. To measure is to determine the worth. Beginning in Ezekiel 40, an angel measured the Temple which had been destroyed previously, but that was in preparation for the next Temple and what was being measured was the next Temple, so that passage may not be used to justify a late date for the writing of Revelation.

11:2 The two time periods are the same in verses 2 and 3 ( $42 \times 30 = 1260$ ), which also equals  $3\frac{1}{2}$  years, a value that will arise again later. The length of time is not exact, but a figure of speech. Although much has been made of this being half of seven, no long explanation is needed. This is a somewhat short period of bad times (at least shorter than the 5 months of 9:5 and 9:10), not because it is half of seven, but because of the words "tread under foot" and "given to the nations." The point of the first three verses is that John is to take the measure of the part of the church that will survive. This task would be both sweet and bitter.

11:3 The two witnesses have been explained as Moses and Elijah, Enoch and Elijah, the true church and its preachers, the Old and New Testaments, the apostles and prophets, the Holy Spirit and the apostles, and a host of other pairings. All such assignments are fantasy. There are two witnesses because of verse 4. The sackcloth represents mourning, as in many places in the Bible. These witnesses have a mournful message.

11:4 This scene recalls Zechariah 4. There, the two witnesses were Zerubbabel (from Haggai 2:23) and Joshua (from Zechariah 3:8), the two men who were chosen by God to be instrumental

in getting the Temple rebuilt after the return of the Israelites from the Babylonian Captivity. So, John's vision represents the humans who led the building of the Eternal Kingdom.

11:5 Acts and several of Paul's letters contain accounts of early church leaders being preserved from harm. But many were not similarly protected. John's vision is a generalization, not a specific promise.

11:6 These events recall the plagues on Egypt in Exodus, and some of the miracles of Elijah.

11:7 The abyss is under the control of the angel with the key (9:1). The things that come up out of the abyss do terrible things, but they were released by God who gave out the key. God used evil armies and evil people at various times to accomplish His will. This is one of them. This beast will do terrible things to unbelievers, too, in following chapters. The fact that the two witnesses were killed by this beast does not mean that this beast is under the control of Satan. Sometimes, the faithful were killed in the various destructions God brought at His various 'comings.' The difference is that the faithful go to heaven. The others don't.

11:8 Jerusalem is called Sodom and Egypt. Sodom is the land of evil destroyed by God in Gn 19. Egypt is the land of bondage from which the Israelites escaped, which also suffered many plagues. Jerusalem, the center of Judaism, is about to suffer a similar fate. Although Paul spoke of his unbelieving relatives as having a zeal for God (Rm 10:2), John characterizes the center of Judaism as corrupt and unbelieving. Many authors say that this city is either Rome or no city in particular, either to avoid applying this section to the destruction of Jerusalem or to explain why so many foreigners were there (verse 9).

11:9 The presence of a multitude of foreigners in Jerusalem is not unusual. In Ax 2, people of every tongue and nation were represented. The city was occupied by foreign troops. It was a center of international commerce. The two witnesses upset more than just Jews. The 3 ½ days represent a short period of time. Some connection could be made to the time Jesus spent in a tomb, as though the watchers did not want to have that happen again.

11:10 Some have taught against giving gifts on Christmas from this verse.

11:11 The fulfillment of this part of the vision is difficult to determine. Since it is prior to the seventh trumpet (11:15), it must relate to something that happened within a short time of John's vision (10:6-7). It is possible that some number of martyrs were resurrected by God in full view of the unbelievers. Another large group was resurrected just after Jesus and were seen (Mt 27:52-53). However, there is no known historical reference. Conversely, this could be a figure of speech for something else, but just what is hard to determine.

11:13 Only a small part of the city fell down. The population of Jerusalem in this period was about 250,000.

## **The Seventh Trumpet Finally Sounds: The Mystery is Completely Announced**

11:15 The kingdom of this world, run by Satan, became the Kingdom of Our Lord in the first century. The kingdom of Satan (Jn 12:31, 14:30; 2 Co 4:4) expired shortly after John's vision (10:6 – 7). Unfortunately, not all of His subjects are obedient. Nonetheless, He has been reigning a long time, and will continue to do so until death is abolished (1 Co 15:25-28).

11:18 Although this sounds like the final judgment, 10:6-7 says that it is near to John. So, some were judged at that time. Some were rewarded, like those who waited under the altar. This scene is like those in Ps 2 and Dn 7. Dn 7:21-22 has the same image of judgment and reward.

## **Overview of the Coming of the Messiah**

In this small scene, Jesus is born and returns to heaven in consecutive sentences (12:5). The point of the vision is that both Jewish and Gentile Christians will be persecuted severely by Satan, but that they will be preserved.

12:1 Now that the seventh angel is done, the information of the little book (10:10) begins. The scroll (the plan of God) was completed in John's time. The little book has not yet been given a time frame. To identify the characters of this first scene, the whole paragraph (through v 9) must be considered. First, the red dragon of v 3 is plainly called Satan in v9. Second, the child must be Jesus due to Messianic references in v5. That means the woman is the mother of Jesus. But this is probably a figure for the faithful of Israel, the people of God, rather than representing one person, Mary.

12:3 Many imaginative interpretation have been given to the numbers of heads, horns, and crowns. The reasoning behind the numbers is not given. No certain country may be determined from the crowns. Many have tried to apply this to Rome by counting Caesars. But not even Roman historians can agree on how many there were.

12:4 One such waiting for Jesus could be the temptation in the wilderness (Lk 4:1-13).

12:5 The rod of iron reference is from Ps 2:9 and Rv 2:27.

12:6 This is the same time period as the two witnesses and the Temple being measured (11:2-3). God preserved the church (true Israel, Rm 9:6, Ga 6:16) through this tribulation, although some died. However, 12:17 indicates that the woman may represent believing Jews, since 'other offspring' are mentioned later.

12:7 The devil had angels, so not all angels are good. There was a war in heaven, so it has not always been a great place. When Jesus returned to heaven, one of His acts was to cleanse the Temple furniture in heaven (Hb 9:23 – 26). These objects are the ones that Moses saw and copied for the tabernacle (Hb 8:5, Ex 25:40). Michael is mentioned in Dn 10:13, 10:21, and 12:1, and in Jude 9.

12:9 Being thrown down to the earth does not mean Satan is in charge of the earth (11:15).

12:10 Some time sense is given here. The first part of the chapter was in the past to John (the birth of Jesus). The kingdom of our God here corresponds to the kingdom in 11:15, so this point in chapter 12 is shortly into John's future. The Accuser is a reference to Zech 3:1. However, Satan can no longer accuse the people of God; he has been thrown down.

12:12 Satan has only a short time on earth. In chapter 20, he is thrown into the abyss. So, the time frame from chapter 12 to chapter 20 is short, not long after this vision.

12:13 Persecution of the early church was from the devil. It is interesting to note that Satan requested permission from God to afflict the righteous previously (Job 1:9 – 12, 2:3 – 6; Lk 22:31). Having lost the war and having been thrown down, Satan is no longer king of this world (11:15), although he had power to work great evil on earth for a short time.

12:14 The period of time corresponds to 12:6. The wings are like those of Ex 19:4.

12:15 Satan poured out something that the world soaked up before it could harm the faithful. The identity of the water is unknown. Some have supposed it to be evil words, false religion, or lies in general. Whatever it was, the world inadvertently helped out the church by drinking down what was intended to sweep the church away. Perhaps the fact that the world swallowed what the devil put out made it easy for the Christians (Jewish Christians) to understand that it was evil before it could affect them.

12:17 The other offspring would seem to be Gentile Christians, similar to Jesus' remark in Jn 10:16 concerning "other sheep not of this fold." The best efforts of Satan could be overcome by believers (Ephesians 6:11, James 4:7, 1 John 3:8)

## **The Rise of Rome as Satan's Tool**

13:1 This beast (from the sea) is different from the one in 11:7 (from the abyss). Again, it is pointless to try to assign meaning to the number of heads, horns, and crowns. Most writers assign them to certain Caesars. Many different lists exist. Such specific applications are based on fantasy, not Scripture.

13:2 This beast is much like the beast in Dn 7:7 that is identified with Rome. The four kingdoms in Daniel are also in a vision in Dn 2, in which the application to Rome is much more plain. The dragon is still Satan (12:9).

13:3 More than ten completely different interpretations of the wounded head have been given by well-known authors. One guess is as bad as another. All we know for certain is that one of the heads of the beast did something to impress a lot of people, and that event cemented his power. The point of the vision is not to predict future events. The focus of the chapter is in verses 8 and 9. Only those whose names are not written in the book of life are impressed by this beast's power. Verse 9 recalls the end of each of the letters to the seven churches. The Christians of John's time are being given a reminder not to be taken in by the seemingly invincible power of evil.

13:5 The 3 ½ years appears again, as in 11:2-3 and 12:6 and 12:14. They are all the same period of time during which the Temple is trampled, the two witnesses preach, and the faithful are preserved. In this period, the beast appears to be winning, although Jesus is reigning. This period is only shortly in the future to John (12:12).

13:6 The words of this beast are described in much the same way as the beast in Daniel 7:8 and 20.

13:7 The beast's authority came from Satan (13:4). But Satan had lost control of the earth in 12:13. So, this authority was not absolute, as it would be if granted by God. The group over which the beast has authority sounds universal here, but is qualified in 13:8. The point of the vision is that the Roman Empire (see comments at 13:2) got its power from the wrong side. Assyria (see Isaiah 7:17) and Babylon (see Dn 2:37) are said to have been raised up by God to accomplish His purposes. Persia's connection to the plan of God may be found in Isaiah 44:28. No statement is made either way for the Greek Empire. But the Roman Empire certainly was not brought up by God, or even by the agency of humans, but by Satan. God controls history when it suits His purpose. In John's time and for a short time after this vision (12:12), Satan could do it, too. The Empire appeared to be winning, the same as was described in Daniel 7:21.

13:8 The translation could go two ways: (1) "has been written from the foundation of the world in the Book of Life of the Lamb that has been slain" or (2) "has been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Translators are divided over whether the writing or the death should be modified by "from the foundation of the world." Rather than arguing that God was not clear, it is more likely that both are true. The writings of John contain several such passages that can go two ways, and in each case, both ways are true. So, one might suspect that John had a bit of a sense of humor. Both concepts are supported elsewhere in the New Testament (Acts 2:23, Acts 4:24, John 17:24, Ephesians 1:4-11, Revelation 17:8). However, this does not support the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Jesus died at a certain moment in history, definitely not close to the Creation. Yet, His death was a part of the plan of God from the beginning. So, as a figure of speech, one may say accurately that He was slain from the foundation of the world. The same may be said for faithful people. Although they could not have faith before they were of sufficient maturity, the faithful were a part of the plan of God. The Book of Life was prepared for their names. Just as Jesus did not really die until that certain day, the names are not actually written until faith is born. Note that a name can also be erased once written (3:5).

13:10 Calvinist translators have added a twist to the first part of the verse. However, it actually reads, "If anyone is for captivity, to captivity he goes." The second line, a parallel statement as is common to the writing of Hebrew people, gives the correct sense, "If anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed." So, the first half tells us that those who use captivity as a means of war will themselves be made captives.

13:11 Another beast appears, different from the previous two. Later, he will be called a false prophet (specifically 19:20, but also 16:13 and 20:10). Since the scene already has a lamb and a dragon, this beast must appear to be a savior, but speaks words of Satan.

13:12 This beast does not compete with the previous beast. The two are a team.

13:13 Satan's people in this period could perform miracles (see Matthew 24:24 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9). Demon possession would be another manifestation. This power will be lost in chapter 20. Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24) may or may not have had the ability to perform miracles. Paul speaks of "the signs of an apostle" as proof of his own authority (2 Corinthians 12:12). However, this was not his only claim to authority. If one could claim authority with miracles alone, then imperfect humans would find it necessary to expose clever charlatans in order to find the truth. God has not left us in such terrible condition. The miracles must match the message. This beast's message was not one of selflessness.

13:16 This mark is declared to be a bad thing in 14:11. A mark on the forehead was given by God as a good thing in 7:3, 9:4, and 14:1, which were reminiscent of Ezekiel 9:4.

13:17 The generic nature of the mark of God leaves the impression that it is a figure of speech rather than a literal mark. This sign of the beast has a literal-sounding application: the ability to buy or sell. To what degree this mark may be literal is uncertain. Since no historian of the time mentioned marks on the skin as being necessary to do business, it is unlikely that such was the case. At one time in this period, one had to show a tax stamp in order to do business in the marketplace. But, to obtain the stamp, one had to give a pinch of incense to the emperor's idol and say, "Caesar is Lord." Many Christians refused; some acquiesced. The church had a difficult time deciding what to do with those who obtained the stamp after the law had been repealed as those people tried to return to the church. Without inspired commentary, assigning this scene to a particular human event is not possible. The safest conclusion is that this mark refers to the influence of paganism, which was the state religion.

13:18 John's introduction to this verse shows that he intends for this number to be understandable by the people of his time. It seems that John wants to translate a name into numbers by taking the sum of the letter values. This does not give us liberty to insist on a particular understanding, because we are so far removed from the event that certain particulars may have become lost to us. Neither should the prescription of this verse be applied to other scenes. The encouragement to understanding applies specifically to the number of the beast. As early as the middle of the second century, so many theories had been advanced that the historian and scholar Irenaeus described three candidates for the meaning of the number (rulers named Euranthas, Lateinos, and Titan), and then argued against accepting any of them. Less than 100 years after this was written, that great scholar could not figure it out. Many have tried to use Hebrew letters translated into Greek numbers. But John, who was generally careful to point out his use of Hebrew terms (e.g., Revelation 9:11, 16:16, John 5:2, 19:13, and 19:17), probably would not require a Greek audience to learn the Hebrew alphabet in order to understand the message. Also, translation of Greek names for emperors into Hebrew letters and back to Greek numbers is uncertain, with different commentators obtaining different values for the same names. Also, while it is fairly easy to determine the sum of the number positions of the letters in a name, reversing the process can result in an infinite number of possibilities. Further, the theory that John gave this number as a kind of code in order to slip a negative statement past the Roman censors is unjustified. God has never hidden His message from the enemies of God's people. Quite the opposite is the case. God always had prophets foretell the doom of nations

quite plainly. One nuance of translation may help. John did not use an article ('the') with the word 'man.' In Greek, the presence or absence of 'the' does not signal the same difference as that found in English between 'a man' and 'the man.' One may prove this by going through a Greek New Testament and noting all the places where the name of God is used. Some have 'the,' some do not. But the translation and the meaning is the same in each case. So, an equally good translation of the end of this verse would be, 'for the number is that of man.' This explanation comes on the heels of the description of the beasts and their miracles. Perhaps this number has something to do with proof that the miracles from the dark side are human, not divine.

## **The Reaping of the Earth, Good and Bad. Jesus Harvests His. Angels Harvest the Others.**

This chapter begins with a glimpse of Jewish and Gentile Christians during the great tribulation. Then, Jerusalem falls.

14:1 The scene shifts back to heaven. The time of the event is between 12:12 (Satan knows he has only a short time) and 20:3 (Satan is imprisoned in the abyss). So, this scene is within a short time to the time of John. Mount Zion is the name of the stronghold of the original City of David (2 Samuel 5:7 and 1 Chronicles 11:5). It came to represent the Lord's dwelling place among His people (Psalm 9:11, 135:21, Isaiah 8:18, Joel 3:17, *et al*). The 144,000 appear to be the same group as in 7:4, Jewish Christians who were on earth.

14:3 These have been purchased. In 5:9, they were purchased by the blood of the Lamb.

14:4 In some way, these 144,000 are the 'first-fruits.' Jesus is given that same description in 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 23. In 1 Co 15:23-24 is the sequence, "Christ, the first-fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then the end when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and all power." Perhaps these 144,000 are "those who are Christ's at His coming." The rest of us seem to have to wait until "the end." The same concept may be found in James 1:18 and Hebrews 12:23.

14:6 This gospel is the same one that was preached by John and the other apostles and prophets. If an angel were to come later with additions or corrections, Paul wrote that the new message should not be believed (Galatians 1:8). Jesus instructed his disciples to preach the gospel to all creation (Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15). They were under the impression that they had accomplished it (Jude 3, 2 Peter 1:3, Colossians 1:6). So, this angel represents the gospel going out to the whole world, although in reality it went in the custody of 'earthen vessels' (2 Corinthians 4:7).

14:7 The Judgment of God may or may not be the end of this world, depending on the context (judgments that are not the final judgment: 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 1 Peter 4:17). Many writers place this angel in the future to themselves because they assume that the final judgment is meant, so they bend everything else to fit. So, they place this announcement in the 'millennium,' this angel bringing warning to those on the earth after the 'rapture.' However, Paul disallowed the



possibility of an angel with a new message, and the ‘rapture’ is not in the Bible. The judgment in this verse refers to that which occurs in the next verse. Since there are survivors on earth in the next few chapters, this cannot be the final judgment.

14:8 Similar lines may be found in Isaiah 21:9 and Jeremiah 51:8. Isaiah declared the fall of Babylon even before that nation became a world power. Jeremiah predicted its fall when it was at its greatest power. Most have decided that this Babylon represents Rome. However, the beast is Rome. Babylon is Jerusalem, as will become evident as the image is repeated in 16:19, 17:5, 18:2, 18:10, and 18:21. The immorality would be the unbelieving Jewish religion.

14:10 Those among the Christians who accept the mark of the beast will suffer with the unbelievers. Those who do not will be spared (9:4). It is interesting that the torment will be in the presence of the angels and the Lamb.

14:13 This appears to be in contrast to the saints under the altar (6:10). Before, they waited and protested. After, they will rest. However, this does not confirm that they will go on to heaven, only that they will rest. Although heaven is described as a land of rest, it is not the only region of rest. Also, considering the details given in Revelation concerning the activities in heaven, ‘rest’ describes only the cessation of tribulation, not an eternity of lounging.

14:14 The identity of the one on the cloud is not given. The reference to “son of man” recalls 1:13 and Daniel 7:13. Jesus referred to Himself in that way in John 13:31, 12:23, 8:28, 6:62, 6:53, 6:27, 5:27, 3:14, 1:51 (and parallels in the other Gospels). However, Ezekiel referred to himself using this description more than 90 times. And, Daniel was called by that name in Daniel 8:17. So, the use of the term is not conclusive. Further, it seems odd that an angel would give an order to Jesus (14:15). However, the identification with Jesus is not without merit.

14:15 The nature of this reaping is not given. It may be good (“Send forth reapers unto the harvest,” John 4:35-38) or bad (“They shall reap the whirlwind,” Hosea 8:7; or “Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe,” Joel 3:13). Both good and bad connotations are found in Galatians 6:7-9.

14:18 This second reaping is certainly bad (14:20). This is the introduction to the seven bowls of wrath that will be poured out on the earth in chapters 16 and 17. If the first reaper is Jesus and the reaping is good, then this generalized vision is like the marking of the saints in 7:3 and 9:4. The second reaping would be like the tribulation that came on the rest of the world.

14:20 No city has been in view in this vision. The only city mentioned previously that was to be “trodden” was Jerusalem in 11:2. So, this compact vision (to be expanded in the next few chapters) is about the destruction of Jerusalem. The saints are reaped by the Master; the others are reaped for wrath, as was the case when Jerusalem fell. The Christians believed Jesus’ words and left town. The unbelieving Jews stayed and died. The distance appears figurative, since no known city is on a plain of 400 miles diameter so that the blood could pool to this extent.

## **The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple**

15:1 This introduces a new vision. The seven “last” plagues are to be illustrated. These plagues “finish” the wrath of God. The premillennial view teaches that these seven bowls of wrath culminate in the final judgment. However, these seven bowls are completed at the end of chapter 16 and people are still alive on earth in chapter 17. The “last” cannot be assigned arbitrarily to the final judgment. These are merely the last events that demonstrated God’s wrath in a provable manner: the last predicted and scheduled total destruction. No prophets gave particulars about any demonstration of God’s wrath for later periods. God may cause cities or civilizations to fall because of their evil, but He has not told us who, when, where, or how.

15:2 This sea of glass is like the one in 4:6, with the addition of the fire. But, despite the fire, this sea is good, being the location of those who were faithful throughout the activities of the beasts of chapters 13 and 14. The foundation of heaven seems to include a touch of wrath.

15:3 The Song of Moses is recorded in Exodus 15.

15:5 This is the real tabernacle, after which Moses patterned the one on earth (Hebrews 8:5). The “testimony” is the Law of God, a copy of which was kept in the ark in the tabernacle on earth (Exodus 25:21). The temple of heaven is also opened in 11:19.

15:6 These last seven plagues came from God, not the devil as in chapters 13 and 14. The attire of the angels is similar to that of priests, but also significantly different. So, their attire probably only contributes to the dignity of the occasion.

15:8 On other occasions, the glory of God filled places so as to make them uninhabitable (Exodus 40:34-35, 1 Kings 8:10-11).

16:1 The seven bowls are poured out in this chapter. Some of these bowls of wrath are similar to plagues in Egypt. These cannot describe the final judgment because survivors remain on earth in chapter 17.

16:2 The point of the plague is to mete out justice on the dragon (16:13), the beasts (16:10), and their followers (16:2). Many applications of these plagues have been imagined. None have any facts. These scenes represent the nature of God’s wrath, not specific events or people.

16:5 God is called righteous after executing these terrible plagues (also in 16:7). God is not all sweetness and light.

16:6 The prophets mentioned here are more likely New Testament prophets, since the beast (Rome) was not around during the time of any Old Testament prophets.

16:8 The point is that they did not repent (also in 16:11).

16:10 The particular historical event that corresponds to this judgment on Rome cannot be determined because there are not enough details.

16:12 Since this is a vision with no historical specifics, this is not likely to be a prediction that Rome would fall to invaders from the east. Rather, the removal of the barrier is reminiscent of the great judgment brought by God on Israel in the past, in much the same way that the plagues on Egypt are recalled in several of the seals and bowls.

16:13 The dragon (Satan, 12:9), the beast (Rome, 12:2, 13:2, Daniel 2, Daniel 7), and the false prophet (13:11-18) produce more miracles to deceive (as in 13:13-15). Demon possession is mentioned several times in Acts.

16:15 This 'coming' is not the final judgment, since it is in connection with these seven bowls of wrath, from which emerge survivors. The admonition about the 'thief in the night' appears in Matthew 24:43, Luke 12:39, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Peter 3:10, and Revelation 3:3. Some refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, at least one to the Final Judgment, and this one to the destruction of Rome.

16:16 This battle is held at the most famous battleground of Israel, including battles of Deborah (Judges 4-5), Gideon, (Judges 7), Saul (1 Samuel 31), Ahaziah, (2Kings 9:27), and Josiah (2 Kings 23:29). In each of these battles, God decided the outcome, sometimes in favor of Israel, sometimes against. The forces of Rome were gathered, but the battle itself is not mentioned. The beast is being tormented in 16:10, so should not be imagined to be ready for victory over Israel in 16:18. Instead, the forces of Rome are being set up for their just punishment a little later in the book.

16:19 Jerusalem is destroyed, using the same figures as were given through Ezekiel 5, describing the same event 650 years earlier. Other references for Babylon as Jerusalem in this book may be found at 14:8, 17:5, 18:2, 18:10, and 18:21. This destruction is the culmination of the 42 months of trampling from 11:2. The fact that some survived illustrates that this is not the final judgment.

17:1 The great harlot is Jerusalem. The chapter division at this point is unfortunate. This is a continuation of 16:19-21. Many say that the harlot is Rome, but in 17:3 and 7, she sits upon the beast that is Rome. So, one of the harlot's sins is the fact that she is supported and carried along by Rome. Isaiah 1:21 and Jeremiah 2:20 use the same image for unbelieving Israel.

17:2 The exact application of this immorality of the kings of the earth cannot be determined. One possibility is the practice that was at that time dividing the Jews. The Emperor and various kings would send sacrifices to the Temple at Jerusalem, but as a political activity, not an acknowledgment of the true God. Some Jews saw this as an affront and insisted that the sacrifices be refused. The majority party thought the sacrifices should be accepted. So, perhaps this immorality represented the turning of true worship into paganism. Or, this could have reference to the various alliances that the Jews had formed with pagan governments.

17:3 This is the same woman in a different setting, as evidenced by her name, Babylon, as in 16:19. This woman, Babylon, was sitting on the beast that has already been identified as Rome (13:2). Therefore, the woman cannot be Rome, but rather derives her power from Rome, which accurately describes the Jewish government of John's time. The Sanhedrin, with its ruling

Sadducees, made many unholy deals with the Roman government. This woman is further identified as Jerusalem in 18:4-20.

17:4 Purple was the royal color. Scarlet was the color of sin. The woman had wealth and prestige, but was full of uncleanness.

17:5 In the New Testament, all the mysteries are revealed (Rm 11:25, 16:25, 1 Co 2:7, 15:51, Eph 1:9, 3:3-9, 6:19, Col 1:26, 2:2, 4:3). This mystery is the answer to what was to happen to the Jewish state. Having been the people of God for 1500 years, many early Christians had great difficulty determining how Israel should fit into the plan. Here, the mystery is revealed; Israel has become a great harlot and has fallen, and will be consumed by the agents of the beast upon whom she sits (17:16). Historically, this is exactly what happened. Although deriving her power from Rome, Israel was destroyed by the Roman legions in 70 A.D.

17:8 Dozens of different lists of leaders have been assigned to the various heads and crowns in 17:8-12. None of the lists is without serious flaws. No early writer had a reasonable explanation. So, the best conclusion is that this was not intended to be applied to specific individuals (or God has given us a message that is unintelligible to the majority). No matter what list of kings is used, history records far more than 10 kings in the Roman Empire. Each commentator must place an arbitrary end to the 'true' Rome in order to make a particular list work. So, John instead is showing us (those who live more than 1900 years later) that the empire our history books call Roman was not always the realm of the dragon. The Roman Empire was in the control of the Devil during only part of its history. Satan's power on earth did not start until he lost the war in heaven (12:12), when persecution of Christians began (12:13). The beast rose after that (13:2). The miraculous powers of the beast began later still (13:13). But identification of the first Caesar to be given power by the Devil is pure speculation. Determining which Caesars were in league with the devil and which were just immoral pagans is impossible to know without inspired commentary. In 17:8, John tells the reader that, although everyone knew that Rome had been in power for a long time, that the beast was in and out. Those who were not Christians wondered why their god was on and off. John says that there will be one more brief time of Satan dominance. The book of life is described as having existed from the foundation of the world. Those who were deceived by the miracles of the beast were those whose names were not written there. Only the names of the faithful are written there. Those whose faith dies are blotted out of the book (3:5).

17:9 Many have identified these seven mountains with the seven hills upon which Rome is built. The same commentators who find the numbers in this book to be so symbolic, suddenly decide that this one is literal. The woman (the Great Harlot of chapter 18) is Jerusalem, who rides upon the power of Rome, which in turn is controlled by Satan.

17:10 The majority of the reign of Satan in Rome is over. Only a small fraction remains.

17:12 The power of Rome (from the Devil) will be split up. Deciding on exactly 10 names is pointless. Hundreds of names could be chosen. The point is at the end of the verse; this diversified power will be short lived.

17:14 The point of the diversified power is persecution of Christians. The kings who receive power from Rome, which in turn was in a Satan-dominated period, participated in the great tribulation that Jesus predicted. But, the Christians will be victorious, although not militarily.

17:15 The harlot (Jerusalem) rests on Gentiles, as indicated by her immorality (idolatry).

17:16 The diversified power that tried to persecute Christians (unsuccessfully) then turned on Jerusalem, as seen in the First Jewish Revolt of 67 – 70 AD.

17:17 Although Satan gave power and authority to Rome, God motivated the diversified powers to execute His wrath on Jerusalem. Although Satan raised Rome, God nudged things along to reveal the mystery.

17:18 In the NAS version, this verse has been reworked to support the identification of the harlot with Rome. The literal translation of the last phrase is, “which had a kingdom over the kingdoms of man.” This statement is true (Psalm 89:27 and Isaiah 24:21). This is part of the mystery. The harlot had authority, but now the Lamb reigns over all the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5).

18:1 All of this chapter describes why God is bringing such destruction on Jerusalem. We have little trouble understanding why God would destroy “His city.” But in that time, this was a very hard concept. Several of the details in this chapter confirm that it is indeed Jerusalem and not Rome. For example, prophets were not slain in Rome (18:24). Christians did not abandon Rome as a result of John’s prophecy (18:4-5), but did abandon Jerusalem as a result of this and Jesus’ prophecy of Matthew 24. Rome never was destroyed in the way Jerusalem was (18:21-22), and certainly not in a time frame close to John (18:10, 17, 19).

18:2 Instead of the dwelling place of God, Mt. Zion had become the dwelling place of demons.

18:3 Every nation participated in Jerusalem’s immorality (idolatry) by building temples to their gods there, and by sending sacrifices to Israel’s God. Jerusalem was a very wealthy trading city. In addition, the annual Temple tax (1/2 shekel of gold per male Jew) and the pilgrimages at holiday time made Jerusalem’s money flow always positive.

18:4 Jesus gave the same order in Matthew 24:15-16 and Luke 21:20-21.

18:7 The images used to describe Jerusalem here are very similar to those used to describe Babylon in Isaiah 47.

18:9 The kings and merchants of the world lost a lot of business when Jerusalem was destroyed.

18:19 Jerusalem, and in particular the Temple, was one of the wonders of the ancient world.

18:20 But this was a time of rejoicing, not lamenting, for Christians. They were vindicated in this destruction.

18:22 The Temple had musicians playing 24 hours a day.

19:2 The harlot was corrupting the earth by presenting the worship of the true God as a form of idolatry. The quotation on vengeance is from Deuteronomy 32:43, indicating that the Christians are “His people.”

19:3 The quotation about smoke is the same as one in Isaiah 34:10, illustrating that Jerusalem will suffer the same fate as the pagan nations did who opposed the people of God in the past.

19:4 The elders and creatures appeared originally in chapter 4.

19:6 The great multitude is from 7:9.

19:7 Paul calls the church the bride of Christ in Ephesians 5:22-33 and 2 Corinthians 11:2. The image has marriage coming after the destruction of Jerusalem. Many commentators have worked very hard to reconcile the images of Paul and this of John. However, no long explanation is necessary. The church and Israel co-existed for about 40 years while the gospel was spread to the whole world. God put an end to Israel when the transition was complete. The church was the bride of Christ when it began, but, because of the overlap with Israel, the bride was not unique until Jerusalem fell. For John’s purpose here, the end of Judaism (by God) is the beginning of the marriage of Jesus and the church. But as the church began, that marriage could be said to have already started in certain geographic areas. Some have tried to describe the transition period as a betrothal, but the language of the text will not support a clear delineation between betrothed and marriage. We should not strain the image in order to make hard lines.

19:9 The marriage supper is always after the wedding. This feast seems to be prepared in heaven. Perhaps those who are blessed are like those who died for their faith and were seen in 6:9. Those seated in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6) could be included. The duration of the marriage supper is not given. Perhaps it is still going on.

19:10 It is a bit odd that John would try to worship this individual. Surely, he knew better. I suspect that the point is that John was so overwhelmed by the experience that he wasn’t thinking carefully, and that he recounted the event, at his own expense, as a reminder to worship God alone. Worship was not accepted by faithful people (Acts 16:29, 10:25), but Jesus did accept worship (Matthew 14:33). God struck Herod Agrippa because he accepted worship (Acts 12:22). The phrase about the “spirit of prophecy” is emphasizing that Jesus’ message was the essence of and the reason for what the prophets had spoken for many previous centuries. In John 1:1, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

19:11 This rider is Jesus, but now shown as the victorious military leader rather than the Lamb that was slain. The identity is confirmed by the name given in 19:13. John wrote previously (John 1:1, 1:14). The description of “Faithful and True” is from 3:14 and 3:7, and 1:5.

19:12 The eyes with fire is also in 1:14. The unknown name was mentioned before in 2:7. When Moses met God for the first time, he asked His name (Exodus 3:13).

19:13 The blood is more likely that of His enemies than His own, as in Isaiah 63:3.

19:14 The army in white linen could be the bride from 19:8 (which would be a switch from a single person representing the church to a large group) or this is another righteous group of citizens of heaven.

19:15 The sharp sword image is also in 1:16. The other images come from Isaiah 11:4 (smite the nations), Psalm 2:9 (rod of iron), and Isaiah 63:3 (winepress of wrath). Each Old Testament image described the Messiah. The expectation of Jewish people that the Messiah would be a great military leader is easy to understand. This same passage has been used by modern religious leaders to wage war in the name of the church. Jesus has been reigning on earth since 11:15.

19:16 This is the title assigned to the Lamb in 17:15. Paul uses the same description in 1 Timothy 6:15.

19:17 If this is the same supper as the marriage supper of the Lamb in 19:7, then the celebration has turned a bit gruesome. If it is a different supper, then this is a stark contrast. Either interpretation works. As the next few verses reveal, these birds are of the same type as the unclean and hateful birds of 18:2, the carrion eaters.

19:19 The historical context of this great slaughter is indicated by the appearance of the beast and the false prophet (19:20). The beast has been identified as Rome in 13:1-7 (Daniel 7:7-8 & 20, Daniel 2), 14:8, and 17:1-16. The false prophet did miracles.

19:20 This signifies the destruction of the authority that was given Rome by Satan (13:4), and the power granted the false prophet (13:12-13, 16:13). The mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image are in 13:4, 13:16-17, 14:9-11, 15:2, and 16:2. Up to here, this sounds much like the condemnations of other nations that were executed by God using real armies, shedding real blood. However, this one is different (verse 21). Rome existed as a world power long before Satan started using it as his tool. Rome continued to exist as a world power for centuries afterwards. Rome did not fall quickly like Nineveh and Babylon, but rather slowly decayed after its power from Satan was gone.

19:21 The method by which these many people died (other than the beast and the false prophet who were cast into the lake of fire) was “the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse.” The one on the horse is Jesus (19:11-13). The sword usually represents the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12, Revelation 1:16, 2:12, 2:16, 19:15). And Jesus was the manifestation of the Word (John 1:1, 14). Jesus did not kill people with a literal sword, but with the Word (John 12:48-50). Those without the Word had no bread with which to sustain life (Matthew 4:4). Jesus’ Word had great power (Matthew 8:16). His Word was life (John 5:24-29). These events are still within a period of time that John considered ‘short.’ Satan was cast out of heaven and down to earth in 12:12, “knowing that he has a short time.” At the end of

chapter 19, Satan is still free to roam the earth. He will be bound in 20:2, signifying the end of the 'short' time. So, this great slaughter was in the 'short' time, beginning some time after Jesus returned to heaven, and ending some time after the destruction of Jerusalem in chapter 18. But, it is still 'short.' Historically, Rome did not fall rapidly or cataclysmically like Jerusalem, Babylon, or Nineveh, to name just a few. In those cases, God used armies of people and much literal blood was shed. In this case, the power of Rome, not Rome itself, was destroyed. Rome no longer had the authority of Satan or the magic of the false prophet. They were just like the rest of the governments of the world. So, the power of Rome eroded slowly over the next ten centuries or more, depending how one marks the end of the Roman Empire. This many people were 'slain' spiritually by the Word.

## **Satan is Bound for a Thousand Years**

20:1 This is similar to the abyss and key found in 9:1. In both cases, the abyss and the key belong to God. The abyss is not a pleasant place. Terrible locusts came from the abyss in 9:3, which tormented those not sealed by God. The angel of the abyss (9:11) is not Satan, but is an angel that God uses to loose terrible plagues, as God did many times in the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Chronicles 32:21, Psalm 35:6, Isaiah 37:36). The beast to whom Satan had given authority and the false prophet that promoted the beast have been removed as potential tools of Satan. Those who worshiped the image of the beast and received the mark (essentially, servants of Satan), have been judged. Finally, Satan himself will be defeated.

20:2 Many wild theories have sprung from this verse. First, one must remember that the period from 12:12 to 20:2 is characterized by John as 'short.' Second, the chain is not literal, since one cannot bind a spiritual being with a literal chain. The binding of Satan represents his new limits; he is confined to the abyss. He is not the king of it; that concept arises from a misunderstanding of 9:11. The king of creatures of the abyss is the angel who has the key. If Satan were king of the abyss, Satan would have the key to his own prison. Before 12:12, Satan had access to heaven (Job 1 and 2, Zechariah 3:1) and earth (Matthew 4:1-11). In Revelation 12:12, he lost access to heaven, but was to retain access to earth for a short time in order for God to use the beast and associates for His purposes (17:17). Satan never had enough power to compete with God – he only thought he did.

20:3 Here, Satan loses all freedom. The duration of this imprisonment is figurative. If it were literal, then God missed this prophecy. Being a round number, 'a thousand years' hints at a non-specific, very long period of time. Other places where 'a thousand' (and not a certain number of thousands) is used are Deuteronomy 1:11, 7:9, 32:30, Psalm 50:10, 84:10, 90:4, 105:8, and many more. Satan's ability to exercise his power on earth (or in heaven) will be limited for a very long time. Although Satan had power on earth as the New Testament was being written, he is now limited and cannot exercise that power. The primary characteristic of Satan is deceit, and he can "deceive the nations no longer" (compare to 2 Co 4:4). The descriptors of the degree of Satan's imprisonment are piled up to illustrate Satan's complete lack of power during this "thousand years": bound with a great chain, cast into the bottomless pit, shut up, and sealed. Therefore, neither demon possession nor genuine Satanic miracles are possible in our time, as predicted in Zech 13:, which Jesus applied to Himself in Mt 26:31. Satan's army (demons) was already bound when Jude and 2 Peter were written (Jude 6 and 2 Pt 2:4) Satan will be released for a



short time after the very long time has expired. The description of that final short time is in 20:7-10. The description of things far in the future to John continues through 22:5. In 22:6, John picks up the ‘shortly’ theme again. The section from 20:7 through 22:5 is the only portion of the book that is not described as shortly, and that section is clearly described as being a long time after John.

20:4 These special people sat on thrones at the time when Satan was cast into the abyss, and would continue to do so during the ‘thousand years.’ Other (unrighteous) people must wait until Judgment. Those who reign with Jesus people are described in various ways that have been used previously in this book: beheaded for the testimony of Jesus (6:9-11), not worshiped the beast (13:4, 14:9-11, 15:2, and 16:2), and not having the mark of the beast (the preceding and 13:16-17).

20:5 This partial resurrection is mentioned in Revelation 14:4, 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, James 1:18, and Hebrews 12:23, but not in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. Some have suggested that the ‘first resurrection’ is a reference to baptism, which does fit. All Christians are said to have been raised up and seated with Him in the heavenlies (Eph 2:6). With so few details given, an exact delineation of the “location” of all spirits is not possible. But, it seems from the few facts we have that all Christians reign with Jesus now.

20:6 Christians are said to reign on earth (5:5), and Jesus reigns in this world (11:15) presently.

## **A Brief Summary of the Short Period from the Release of Satan until Judgment**

20:7 This portion begins the description of what comes after the thousand years, so is well in the future to John. As previously described, if this thousand years were literal, then God missed His prophecy.

20:8 Satan’s deception never comes to fruition. The battle forms, but never takes place. See verse 10. Gog and Magog are from Ezekiel 38:2 and 39:1-6. Magog was identified with the Scythians (north of the Black Sea, the Crimea) by Josephus in his understanding of Genesis 10:2 and 1 Chronicles 1:5. During the Cold War, this led many to apply this to Russia, although the association between Scythians and Russians is impossible to justify historically. In Ezekiel, Gog is a prince of the land of Magog. These represent the far-flung enemies of the kingdom of God, but no one people in particular, since they are also described as being from the four corners of the earth.

20:9 Since Jerusalem was destroyed back in chapter 18, the identification of ‘the beloved city’ must be the church. The potential battlefield is specified as the earth. So, this battle cannot be in a certain location, but is a spiritual battle between the forces of the devil and the worldwide church. Some have tried to identify this as some adversity or difficulty to be encountered by Christians, but the theories always overlook that the battle never takes place. The Christians will not be aware that the battle would be forming. Paul (1 Th 5:3) writes that Judgment will come at

a time when people are claiming, “Peace and safety” (see also 2 Pt 3:10). The army of the devil was consumed by fire from heaven before harm could befall the church. If the church could see the battle forming, the “thief in the night” images (2 Peter 3:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, Luke 12:40, Mark 13:32, Matthew 24:44) fail.

20:10 This is the end of the devil. He went from a thousand years in prison to an eternity in the lake of fire. Others preceded him into that place.

20:11 Heaven and earth pass away, as further described through 21:1, as well as 2 Peter 3:7-13. Whether the person on the throne is the Father or the Son is debatable but of no importance.

20:12 This is the general resurrection on the Last Day, different from the first resurrection described in 20:5-6. The book of life is mentioned in Philippians 4:3, Revelation 3:5, 13:8, 17:8, and 21:27. Being judged by deeds is an image used by Jesus in Matthew 16:27, which was a quotation of Psalm 62:12. John uses faith and deeds interchangeably (*e.g.*, 2:19)

20:14 When death and Hades (the realm of the dead) are thrown in the lake of fire, the final victory is won (1 Corinthians 15:23-28), Jesus will turn the kingdom back over to the Father.

## **After Judgment**

21:1 The new heaven and new earth are also mentioned in 2 Peter 3:13. The same line appears in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. Isaiah’s lines could be understood to look forward to a time before Judgment, likely the church. Several Old Testament prophets looked forward to a future kingdom that stretched seamlessly from the church to eternity. If the assumption is made that this vision is in chronological order with reference to chapter 20, then the object of the vision is certainly after Judgment. Some view 20:11-14 as a description of the beginning of the church (since we would not have seen the Judgment of people who died before Jesus’ time), breaking it away from the ‘thousand years.’ If 20:11ff are intended to be after 20:1-10, then they must occur a significantly long time after the time of John. However, if 21:1 is viewed as a new vision not necessarily in chronological order, then this could be a description of the institution of the church. But, the reference in 20:11 to heaven and earth having fled away seems to connect chapter 21 in sequence with chapter 20.

21:2 The bride image was used in 19:7-10. If the two scenes relate to the same event, then the bride in 19:7 waited from the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD until Judgment Day to finish the ceremony. Instead, chapter 19 is the marriage of the early church and Jesus. The image in chapter 21:2 and 9 continues the marriage analogy into married life. There is no reference to a marriage supper, or even a marriage ceremony. The city is dressed up like a bride even after ‘a thousand years.’

21:3 The speaker is not identified. The tabernacle image has been used repeatedly since Exodus. Hebrews 8:2 gives the same image, along with Hebrews 9:11, Ephesians 2:21, and Exodus 40.

21:4 Death was destroyed in 20:14. The context of Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22 (see 21:1) present the same idea that the hard times of the past will not be remembered.

21:5 God's creative work ended after the sixth day (Hebrews 4:3). Therefore, this newness must refer to the fact that the new heaven and earth were unspoiled.

21:6 He who sits on the throne is the Father. Jesus turned the kingdom back over to the Father after Death was defeated (1 Corinthians 15:23-28). This line is used by the Father in 1:8. The next verse confirms this identity.

21:7 Overcoming is the dominant theme of the seven letters (2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, 21). The idea of inheritance (unearned from a father) is repeated many times (*e.g.*, Matthew 19:29, 25:34, Hebrews 1:14, 1 Peter 3:9).

21:8 This description of hell does not include the idea that these souls will be conscious. Some have used this verse to assert that the wicked are annihilated at Judgment and suffer no further. Matthew 18:8-9, 25:46 includes the idea of everlasting punishment. The devil will be tormented day and night eternally in the lake of fire (20:10). Others in the same lake should receive the same.

21:9 These seven bowls were described from 15:7 through 17:1. That work is done. Now one of those angels has a more pleasant job.

21:10 John reminds his readers that this is a vision, not physical reality, by using 'in the Spirit.' The following paragraph describes a fantastic city that is a cube, 1500 miles on a side. Obviously, this would neither fit in Israel nor have any air on the top floor. A wall 1500 miles high and only 216 feet thick could not stand on the old earth, but this is the new earth. The twelve tribes of Israel (although there were 13) and the twelve apostles (although not all of the original 12 were faithful and more than 12 are named) figure prominently in the design.

21:22 There is no need of a Temple in heaven, since God actually does live there.

22:1 The river of the water of life is also mentioned by Jesus in John 4:7-15 and 7:38, where he applied this image to Himself. Ezekiel 47:1-12 contains the precursor to that image. This is the first mention of the throne of God and of the Lamb. Before, only one has sat on the throne at a time.

22:2 The tree of life is mentioned in Genesis 2:9 and Revelation 2:7.

22:3 The curse is the one in Genesis 3:17-19 (weeds). The tree of life will grow like the one in the Garden, without need of agricultural science.

22:4 Previously, seeing the face of God brought consequences. In Exodus 33:20, God says, "No man can see My face and live." The Name on the forehead is mentioned in 14:1 and possibly 7:3.

## **Final Thoughts and Summary by the Author**

22:6 The 'shortly' theme reappears here. Other than the description of the 'thousand years' and the 'new heaven,' all the rest of Revelation occurs within a short number of years from John. The start and finish of the description of times noted 'shortly' are well marked (20:3-22:5).

22:8 This is John's second mistaken worship (19:10), each with the same response. In both cases, John is using himself as an illustration in order to make the point that all the faithful are equals; worship God.

22:9 Daniel was told to seal up part of his book because the time was not near (Daniel 8:26, 10:14, 12:4, 12:9). Daniel's events occurred 5 centuries later.

22:18 John claims that his book is the Word of God and should be treated as such. Similar commands were given about the Law (Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32, Proverbs 30:5f) and the gospel (Galatians 1:6-9)