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THE BOOK OF REVELATION

by

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December 2017; revised July 2022

The book of Revelation is one of the most misunderstood and misused books in the Bible. Nevertheless, it is one of the most important books of the Bible. Revelation contains approximately 630 allusions to the Old Testament alone. It was written to, for, and about the church, which appears throughout the book in symbolic form. It ties together and completes the entire Bible. The book of Revelation was written to explain to the church how God is dealing with the world, to call Christians to persevere in the struggle against the powers of evil, and to comfort and encourage believers because Christ is victor. The book continually raises the issues: Where do my primary loyalties lie? and Who is my true Lord? By giving us God's perspective on the world, Revelation helps to enable us to critique our own societies and cultures.

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The Book of Revelation

I. Genre

Virtually all interpreters recognize that Revelation comprises three genres: letter (epistle); prophecy; and apocalyptic (Osborne 2002: 12). The genres have been merged or mixed together. Therefore, “the most preferable view is that Revelation is ‘a prophecy cast in an apocalyptic mold and written down in a letter form’ in order to motivate the audience to change their behavior in the light of the transcendent reality of the book’s message” (Beale 1999: 39).

A. Letter (epistle)

“Revelation is encased by an epistolary framework (1:4-8 and 22:10-21). This convention alone sets it apart from apocalyptic materials. The prescript (1:4-8) contains the typical epistolary components—sender, addressees, greetings, and the added feature of a doxology. The postscript (22:10-21), in good ancient letter form, summarizes the body of the writing, as well as legitimates John as its divinely inspired composer.” (Pate 1998a: 12) The significance for interpretation of Revelation’s being a letter is that the book was written to be relevant and understandable to its 1st century recipients. Therefore, people who say that Revelation is a “secret code” that only applies to events that take place just before the Second Coming of Christ, thousands of years after the 1st century, are incorrect.¹

B. Prophecy

Both at the beginning and end of the book John calls Revelation a book of “prophecy” (**Rev 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19**). Other passages talk about prophets or people prophesying (**Rev 2:20; 10:7; 11:3, 6, 10, 18; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 19:10; 22:6, 9**). This does not mean that Revelation is all about the future. For example, **Rev 10:11** and **11:3** both use the word “prophesy.” However, in both cases the term indicates proclaiming the word, righteous acts, and judgments of God, as opposed to “predicting the future.”

We must recall the essential nature of biblical prophecy, i.e., oracles of judgment and oracles of salvation, designed to change people’s behavior. That also is true of Revelation.² The fact that the entire book focuses on the present, was intended to be relevant to John’s first-century audience, and is designed to affect the behavior of the readers, may be inferred from the fact that both at the beginning (**Rev 1:3**) and at the end (**Rev 22:7**) the reader is urged to “heed” the words of the prophecy. Thus, as with all biblical prophecy, the prophetic element of Revelation discerns God’s nature and purpose in the present circumstances of the churches, sees how God’s ultimate purpose relates to the present situation, and calls for a response by the people. The fact that the book of Revelation was designed to be understood by John’s first-century audience is indicated by **Rev 22:10** which says, “*Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.*” That is in contrast to **Dan 8:26** where Daniel is told to “*keep the vision secret, for it pertains to many days in the future.*”

C. Apocalyptic

Apocalyptic is a particular form of prophecy. “It is best to understand apocalyptic as an intensification of prophecy. . . . Apocalyptic should not be seen as too different from prophecy, though it contains a heightening and more intense clustering of literary and thematic traits found in prophecy.” (Beale 1999: 37) “In distinguishing apocalyptic from prophecy, the most obvious difference concerns the means by which the message is communicated. The prophetic ‘word of the Lord’ gives way to revelation through a vision or dream. Symbolism, imagery, numbers—seen already in prophetic texts—come to the fore with greater elaboration in apocalyptic. Apocalyptic texts sometimes reinterpret earlier prophecies. . . . Most important, though, is the difference in focus of the message. The prophets proclaimed God’s working in and through the course of

¹ “A literal reading of Revelation as a code book for deciphering maps in history is a distortion and betrayal of its message” (Stylianopoulos 2009: 31). Richard Bauckham notes that the popularized fundamentalist-dispensationalist interpretation of Revelation essentially misunderstands the genre of prophecy itself: “Conversely, fundamentalist interpretation, which finds in biblical prophecy coded predictions of specific events many centuries later than the prophet, misunderstands prophecy’s continuing relevance by neglecting to ask what it meant to its first hearers” (Bauckham 1993b: 152-53).

² “Rev proves to be a genuine expression of early Christian prophecy. . . . Whereas early Christian homily focuses on the interpretation and exposition of Scripture and tradition, early Christian prophecy announces judgment or salvation” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1980: 109). David Aune’s analysis of the “seven letters to the seven churches” (**Revelation 2-3**) reveals that “the prophetic speech form which the central section of the seven proclamations most resembles is the salvation-judgment oracle, a development of postexilic Israelite prophecy” (Aune 1983: 277; see also Ulfgard 1989: 13; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 46-47; Schnabel 2011: 13).

history. The apocalyptists anticipated a radical intervention by God at the end, beyond history.” (Green 1984: 62) The first word of the book of Revelation, *apokalupsis* (apocalypse; revelation), indicates the book’s apocalyptic genre. That is confirmed by the highly visionary and symbolic nature of the entire book.³

1. The essence of the book is symbolic. Revelation as a whole, beginning with **Rev 1:1**’s use of *deichnumi* (“show”) and *sēmainō* (“communicate by symbols”), together with the repeated introductory formula “I saw” or similar expressions (**Rev 4:1; 12:1-3; 13:1-3; 14:1; 17:1-3, 20:1**), denote “the general symbolic nature of the communication” (Beale 1999: 973). “Revelation 1:1 is an allusion to Daniel 2:28-29, 45 [which] confirms that here the word does mean ‘symbolize.’ . . . In this light, the dictum of the popular approach to Revelation—interpret literally unless you are forced to interpret symbolically—should be turned on its head. Instead, the programmatic statement about the book’s precise mode of communication in 1:1 is that the warp and woof of it is symbolic, so that the preceding dictum should be reversed to say ‘interpret symbolically unless you are forced to interpret literally.’ Better put, the reader is to expect that the main means of divine revelation in this book is symbolic.” (Beale 2006: 54, 55)

2. The sources of apocalyptic symbolism. John uses symbols because he saw visions which could not be expressed in words alone, so he put them into pictures. “The sources for interpreting them come from the OT, inter-testamental literature, and the Greco-Roman world—in other words, in the common world of the original readers in the province of Asia” (Osborne 2002: 17). The extent of Revelation’s dependence on the OT for its symbols is seen in the fact that Revelation contains approximately 630 allusions to the OT alone. Consequently, in order to understand John’s imagery we must look, not to political and other events of our day, but to the literature and socio-political situation of John’s day.

3. The nature of apocalyptic symbolism. “Apocalyptic pictures are not meant to be photographs of objective facts; they are often symbolic representations of almost unimaginable spiritual realities” (Ladd 1972: 102). That is one reason why prophets often “describe their visions in cautious and ambiguous similes . . . lest we forget the limited capacity of human experience and language to convey heavenly reality” (Johnson 2001: 216n.24, e.g., “there was *something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance*” [**Ezek 1:26**]; “I saw *something like a sea of glass mixed with fire*” [**Rev 15:2**]).

Different symbols may refer to the same thing but give us different perspectives or points of view on that subject. For example, in **Rev 4:1** heaven is pictured as a throne room, and in **Rev 6:9** it is pictured as a temple. “It is precisely the fluidity of apocalyptic thinking which makes this possible. . . . In fact, God does not sit upon a throne; he is an eternal Spirit who neither stands or sits or reclines. The picture of God seated upon his throne is a symbolic way of asserting the kingship and sovereignty of the Deity.” (Ladd 1972: 102) Similarly, Christ is portrayed both as a lion (**Rev 5:5**) and as a lamb (**Rev 5:6**). Throughout the book, the church is described in different ways, often in ways that seem difficult to understand. In this same vein, symbols may also be multi-layered. For example, in **Rev 17:1-4** John sees a woman who is a harlot; **17:8** says that she is “*the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth*”; **17:5** calls her “*Babylon the great.*” Babylon itself is not limited to a single city but is symbolic of a worldwide socio-economic and religious culture or civilization.

Additionally, “paradox is central to the symbolism.” (Johnson 2001: 9). Thus, a recurrent pattern throughout the book is that “things are not what they appear to be.” For example, the church at Philadelphia has “*little power*” (**Rev 3:8**); however, *because* of that fact Christ will make those of the “synagogue of Satan” come and “*bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you*” (**Rev 3:9**). On the other hand, the church at Laodicea says, “*I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing*” (**Rev 3:17**); however, the reality, according to Christ, is that they are “*wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked*” (**Rev 3:17**). Throughout the book, Christians are depicted as being attacked and overcome by the forces of Satan and evil (e.g., **Rev 11:7; 13:7**); yet paradoxically, it is their very deaths, because of their faithfulness to the gospel, that reveal their victory (e.g., **Rev 6:9-11; 12:11; 20:4-6**).

D. Guidelines for interpreting symbols in Revelation

1. Some symbols are interpreted in Revelation itself. Seven stars are the angels of the seven churches (**1:20**); seven lampstands are the seven churches (**1:20**); seven lamps of fire are the seven Spirits of God

³ A good three-part series of audio lectures by D. A. Carson concerning the nature and function of apocalyptic, with special emphasis on the book of Revelation, entitled “Preaching Apocalyptic,” can be listened to or downloaded for free at: <http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library?utf8=%E2%9C%93&query=carson+preaching+apocalyptic>.

(**4:5**, i.e., the Holy Spirit); bowls of incense are prayers of the saints (**5:8**); the great dragon is Satan (**12:9**); the saints' fine linen, bright and clean, is the righteous acts of the saints (**19:8**). When the book itself defines some of the symbols, then whenever these defined symbols appear later in the book without any explanation, it is probable that they mean the same thing as previously defined. The two lampstands in Revelation 11:4 are an outstanding illustration of this (thus, the two witnesses are likely not individual prophets but the corporate church in its prophetic and witnessing role)." (Beale 2006: 55-56)

2. Other symbols show continuity with other books of the OT or NT. Although John's images are based in the common world of the first-century readers, those images are not merely historical references. "Because John's images are images designed to penetrate the essential character of the forces at work in his contemporary world and the ultimate issues at stake in it, to a remarkable extent they leave aside the merely incidental historical features of his world" (Bauckham 1993b: 156). That principle is seen in John's treatment of the OT. John, like all biblical prophets, interprets what had been written before for a new age and new circumstances. The primary integrating point is the first coming of Jesus Christ, which profoundly altered the theological landscape. As a result of the significance of Christ, although the images drawn from the OT remain recognizable, Dennis Johnson points out that "they are modified and recombined into new configurations—as we would expect, since the sacrifice and resurrection of the Lamb have brought the warfare of the ages to a new phase and theater of operations" (Johnson 2001: 13). Given the new redemptive-historical situation and Christian context of Revelation, such OT entities and images as the temple, altar, and incense have been given new meanings.

3. Those symbols that are not explicitly defined in the book need to be interpreted according to the context, the major idea that John is conveying, and the general purpose of prophetic symbolism. "It is likely that God has chosen esoteric symbols from the common store of apocalyptic symbols in the first century in order to *turn the reader away from exactly what he is going to do and toward the theological meaning* of how he is going to do it. We do not know what is going to happen behind the picture of locust plagues, meteor showers, volcanic eruptions, and horrible storms. Some may happen literally, many will not. It is important to realize that we know no more about the second coming than Jesus' Jewish disciples did about the first." (Osborne 2002: 16, *emph. added*)

For example, **Rev 16:16** (see also **20:9**) refers to gathering the ungodly for war at a place called Har-Magedon. "Why Har-Magedon? There was, we have every reason to believe, no such place. The name is symbolical. It is a compound word derived from the Hebrew and signifying the mountain of Megiddo. We are thus taken back to Old Testament history, in which the great plain of Megiddo, the most extensive in Palestine, plays on more than one occasion a notable part. In particular, that plain was famous for two great slaughters, that of the Canaanitish host by Barak, celebrated in the song of Deborah [**Judges 5**], and that in which King Josiah fell [**2 Chron 35:22**]. The former is probably alluded to, for the enemies of Israel were there completely routed." (Milligan 1896: 272; see also Schnabel 2011: 233, 237) Thus, the reference in **Rev 16:16** (see also **20:9**) is not asserting that there will be a final physical battle at a particular (non-existent) mountain, plain, or camp, but is drawing a *theological connection* to show what will happen to all of Christ's enemies.⁴

Further, in interpreting Revelation's symbolism we must always bear in mind the moral and ethical purpose behind all prophecy, including apocalyptic: to get God's people to see spiritual reality from God's point of view and then respond to his will and purpose. Thus, Hakan Ulfgard, in discussing the symbolism of Revelation's seals, trumpets, and bowls, says that "the function of this apocalyptic-prophetic writing is to *comfort* the readers in view of a persecution that has already begun and that will be even more accentuated, and to *challenge* them to endurance" (Ulfgard 1989: 29). Beale adds, "Symbolic warnings shock true believers out of their spiritual laziness in going along with the sinful status quo of the unbelieving majority" (Beale 2006: 59).

4. Two common examples of the nonliteral use of language in Revelation.

a. *Numbers in Revelation.* "Numbers are used in apocalyptic literature as symbols of ideas. This

⁴ Meredith Kline argues, for contextual and grammatical reasons, that "Har-Magedon" should really be transliterated as "*Har Mō'ed*" ("Mount of Assembly"). That would suggest that Har Magedon is Mount Zion and that the Har Magedon battle is the Gog-Magog crisis of **Ezekiel 38-39**, which is described or alluded to in **Rev 16:12-16; 19:11-21; 20:7-10** as the climactic effort to destroy the church that is terminated by Christ's *parousia*. (Kline 1996: 207-22) In Revelation, Mount Zion is used typologically to refer to "the church as the earthly expression of the heavenly Mount Zion" (Johnson 2001: 235). Preterists likewise understand the symbolic nature of the Megiddo imagery but apply it to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (see DeMar 1999: 317-19).

has been clearly demonstrated by comparative studies within the literature.” (Summers 1960: 180) Their symbolic use in apocalyptic literature, including Revelation, is “flexible” (Johnson 2001: 15). The four major numbers from which the vast majority of numbers in the book are derived are 4, 7, 10, and 12. Although some consider numbers in Revelation as literal, “it seems more likely that the numbers in the book are meant symbolically, as was common in ancient apocalypses. Each of the numbers tends to signify wholeness or completeness throughout Scripture. . . . This does not mean that no number can be literal. There were of course twelve tribes and twelve apostles, but even that number was chosen by God for theological reasons.” (Osborne 2002: 17)

For example, Christ initially is seen as “*one like a son of man . . . and His eyes [implicitly two, as with men] were like a flame of fire*” (**Rev 1:13-14**). In **Rev 5:6** Christ appears as “*a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes.*” Seven, as a number of fullness or completion, connotes Christ’s omnipotence (“seven horns”) and omniscience (“seven eyes” = fullness of vision). In these examples we see the symbolic and flexible use of numbers characteristic of the apocalyptic genre. “This numerical symbolism suggests that unless there is a clear indication to a literal interpretation, the numbers in John’s Apocalypse should be understood to have a symbolic meaning” (Schnabel 2011: 63).

b. *Time references in Revelation.* “Since the ‘one hour’ of the reign of the ten kings with the beast (17:12) could not conceivably be intended literally, we should not expect any of the time periods in Revelation to be literal” (Bauckham 1993a: 449). Similarly, the “ten days” of tribulation (**Rev 2:10**) clearly is not meant literally. As with so much else in the book, John is making theological connections, not giving us a precise, chronological “history written in advance.”

In the middle of the book we see a time period that recurs, phrased in different ways: “*forty-two months*” (**11:2; 13:5**); “*twelve hundred and sixty days*” (**11:3; 12:6**); “*time, times, and half a time*” (**12:14**). These time periods are figurative, not literal. If those time periods were to be taken literally, and if the church knew when the literal time period begins, then Christians could calculate when the end would come. Since that is contrary to Jesus’ many statements that the end is unknowable, the “literal” interpretation cannot be correct (see Schnabel 2011: 83). They all stem from or are variants of times stated in **Dan 7:25; 9:27; 12:7, 11-12**. The time references in Daniel originally applied to the three and a half years of Antiochus Epiphanes’s depredations against Israel until the success of the Maccabean revolt. In typical prophetic fashion, however, the inter-testamental Jewish writings took this time period to signify “a general time of trial for believers, as a time associated with Israel’s Babylonian captivity, or as the period that must pass before Israel’s final redemption” (Beale 1999: 565; see also Carson 2011: 25-27; Storms 2013: 483 [these time periods “are all *theological*, not chronological, designations. They have in view the *kind* or *quality* of time, not its duration.”]). John is taking that three-and-a-half year time period in its archetypal sense of a time of severe testing until God gives his people final relief and is applying it to the church. **Rev 12:5-6** shows that this period of testing began at Christ’s resurrection and ascension. It will end with his return in glory at the *parousia*.

There is more to the “three and a half years” than simply an undetermined length of time that extends from Christ’s ascension until the *parousia*. That is seen in how John has structured the time periods. The time of the Gentiles trampling the “holy city” (**11:2**) = the time of prophesying of the “two witnesses” (**11:3**) = the time the “woman” is in the wilderness (**12:14**). The “*forty-two months*” (**11:2; 13:5**), “*twelve hundred and sixty days*” (**11:3; 12:6**), and “*time, times, and half a time*” (**12:14**) are all different ways of referring to the same period, but the different ways of phrasing this time period indicate different perspectives or theological emphases. In their order of appearance and significance, they are arranged chiasmatically: the “*forty-two months*” focus on the church’s enemies and their aggression against the church; whereas the “*twelve hundred and sixty days*” and “*time, times, and half a time*” focus on the church’s witness and protection by God, as follows:⁵

⁵ See Johnson 2001: 172; see also Silva 2014: 4:673 (These passages all “refer to the same period, the age of the church, which is one of prophetic witness and at the same time one of persecution. In the light of eternity it is a comparatively short amount of time, although when expressed in terms of days it may seem lengthy”); Bauckham 1993a: 401 (42 and 1260 are both “rectangular” numbers, i.e., the sum of successive even numbers, “to designate this ambiguous period in which the

- A. *42 months*: The “holy city” is trampled by the nations (**Rev 11:1-2**).
- B. *1260 days*: The “two witnesses” prophesy and cannot be harmed (**Rev 11:3-6**).
- B'. *1260 days [as expanded by “time, times, and half a time”]*: The “woman” is nourished and protected in the wilderness (**Rev 12:6, 13-16**).
- A'. *42 months*: The “beast” blasphemes and makes war against the “saints” (**Rev 13:5**)

Suffering and safety, trial and testimony, alienation and nourishment are all bound up in these descriptions of the time of testing of the church. Through it all, these descriptions also demonstrate God’s sovereignty over the church, Satan, suffering, and evil.

II. Interpretive approaches

Important questions regarding the book of Revelation are: To what extent is the book related to the 1st century (i.e., the time when it was written, and the circumstances and audience to which it was addressed)? To what extent is it related to the period just before Jesus comes again? And to what extent is it trans-historical or principiant (i.e., deals with principles that apply throughout history, without specifically referring to particular historical events)? Different answers to this question have led to five main interpretive approaches to the book.

A. *The Preterist approach*

The preterist approach contends that the book relates to the events in the first century. John is telling the churches how to cope with oppression and how God would deliver them from their oppressors. There are two basic variants of the preterist approach: The primary preterist position is that Revelation “is not concerned with either the scope of world history or the end of the world, but with events that were in the near future to St. John and his readers. . . . The Book of Revelation is a ‘covenant lawsuit,’ prophesying the outpouring of God’s wrath on Jerusalem. It is a prophecy of the period known in Scripture as ‘the Last Days,’ meaning the last days of the covenantal nation of Israel, the forty-year ‘generation’ (Matt. 24:34) between the Ascension of Christ (A.D. 30) and the Fall of Jerusalem to the Romans (A.D. 70). It foretells events that St. John expected his readers to see very soon.” (Chilton 1987: 51-52; see also Preston 2010: 17-18, 230) The second form of preterist interpretation holds that Revelation is a prophecy of the triumph of the church over its enemies: unbelieving Israel and the Roman Empire (Chilton 1985: 165-66; Bahnsen 2015: 9-22).

1. Strengths of the preterist approach. The greatest strength of this approach is the seriousness with which it takes the historical setting in which John wrote, the seven churches to whom he actually wrote, and the time references at the beginning and end of the book (**Rev 1:1, 3; 2:10, 16; 3:10; 22:7, 10, 12, 20**).

2. Weaknesses of the preterist approach.

a. *When the book of Revelation was written.* The preterist version which sees Revelation as being fulfilled in AD 70 can only be valid if the book was written before AD 70. Strong arguments have been made for that position (Gentry 1989; Noe 2006: 781-84). Nevertheless, based both on internal and external evidence, the consensus of the majority of scholars, both historically and today, is that the book was written during the reign of Domitian, around AD 95 (Beale 1999: 4-27).

b. *The time references.* The time references, beginning in **Rev 1:1** (“*the things which must soon take place*”) are derived from **Dan 2:28-29, 45**. In **Rev 1:1** John substituted “quickly” for Daniel’s “*in the latter days*.” “Quickly” in this context “connotes neither the speedy manner in which the Daniel prophecy is to be fulfilled nor the mere possibility that it could be fulfilled at any time, but the definite, imminent time of fulfillment, which likely has already begun in the present. . . . John’s substitution of [‘quickly’] implies his expectation that the final tribulation, defeat of evil, and establishment of the kingdom, which Daniel expected to occur distantly ‘in the latter days,’ would begin in his own generation, and, indeed, that it had already begun to happen.” (Beale 1999: 181-82) John’s time references link the present and the future. They show that the principles about which he writes already are present and active. They are consistent with the “already, but not yet” nature of the kingdom, and with the “signs” Jesus gave in the Olivet Discourse, which occurred in principle in His own generation, yet allow the consummation to occur at an unpredictable time in the future.

c. *The eschatological and universal aspects of Revelation.* Perhaps the greatest problem with the

beast and the saints oppose each other,” as opposed to “triangular” numbers, i.e., the sum of successive numbers, including 666 which represents the beast, and “square” numbers, i.e., the sum of successive odd numbers, including 144 which represents the saints.

preterist approach is that it does not take seriously the eschatological and universal aspects of Revelation. Revelation's depiction of the "beasts" comes largely from **Daniel 2, 7** (see below, section VII.G.1). Daniel's beasts describe four *world empires*, which also are the subject of God's ultimate judgment and the substitution of his own kingdom (**Dan 2:34–35, 44–45**). Further, **Daniel 2** and **7** both contemplate *universal* judgment, not merely a local judgment such as occurred in AD 70 (Beale 1999: 44–45). The preterist view of **Rev 19:11–21**—that Christ divorces his unfaithful wife (Israel) and takes a new bride (the church) (Gentry 1998: 80–81) also does not correlate with that passage's apocalyptic context of universal judgment (see Payne 1980: 624n.150).

Similarly, **Rev 1:7** says that when Christ comes "*all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him.*" To limit that to mean "all the tribes of the *land* [of Israel]" when Christ came in judgment on Jerusalem in AD 70 is to ethnically, geographically, and temporally "obscure the passage's allusion to God's promise of international blessing to and through Abraham (Gen. 22:18). The circle of mourners will include not just Israel but also the Gentile nations." (Johnson 2001: 52–53) Indeed, when Revelation later refers to "*every tribe*" (which corresponds to "*all the tribes*") it clearly is referring to a multi-ethnic, multi-national multitude of the faithful (**5:9; 7:9**), or of rebels against Christ (**11:9; 13:7**).

Again, **Rev 3:10** talks about an "*hour of testing*" that will come upon "*the whole world, to test those upon the earth.*" The word translated "world" is the Greek *oikoumenē*, which refers to the entire earth and all its inhabitants or, sometimes, to the Roman Empire (Danker 2000: "*oikoumenē*," 699). The word translated "earth" is *gē*, which refers to the entire earth or, sometimes, to some portion of it, such as the land of Israel (Danker 2000: "*gē*," 196). "The interchangeability of *gē* and *oikoumenē* is one indication of the inadequacy of the preterist interpretation that limits Revelation's prophecies of judgment to the devastation of Jerusalem and the 'land' of Judea, culminating in 70" (Johnson 2001: 88n.35).

The preterist version that sees Revelation fulfilled with the fall of the Roman Empire faces a similar problem. "The prophecy of the Revelation goes far beyond any known historical situation in the first century. While the Rome of John's day embodied antichristian tendencies, the portrait of Antichrist in Revelation 13 is far larger than historical Rome." (Ladd 1972: 9) The final judgment simply was not fulfilled in the fall of Rome in the 5th century.

Preterism not only misses the universal scope of the judgment, but misses the universal scope of God's plan to renew creation to a state of perfect righteousness. It overlooks the symbolism of the New Jerusalem as a Holy of Holies and how the new heavens and new earth reverse and surpass the forces set in motion in **Genesis 1–3** and thus are the consummation of God's worldwide historical plan and drama going all the way back to Eden (see below). As Mark Stephens puts it, "John pushes the boundaries of his eschatology much further than many of Israel's prophets, by universalizing the results. For John, the 'end' was not simply the land of Israel, nor the people of Israel. His eschatological resolution embraces peoples from every tribe (Rev 7:9; 21:3), and the 'land' which is impacted is the entire earth. Furthermore, John's vision is a vision of eternity, as opposed to a vision of long life (see, for example, Isa 65:17–25)." (Stephens 2011: 259) In a practical sense, therefore, all preterist views reduce the book largely to an historical account that has little relevance to the church since at least the fifth century, and which provides no hope concerning the future.

B. The Historicist approach

This approach views Revelation as a symbolic prophecy of the entire history of the church, from its beginning until the *parousia*. The book's various symbols designate different historical movements and events in the Western world and the Christian church, such as the Goths, Muslims, the medieval papacy, the Reformation, etc.

A variant of that approach sees the "seven letters to the seven churches" (**Revelation 2–3**) as describing the history of the entire church age in seven eras epitomized by the seven churches, i.e., the church at Ephesus as epitomizing the early church until the death of John (c. AD 99); Smyrna represents the church from the second through the fourth centuries; Pergamum is the beginning of the church-state system under Constantine and incipient Roman Catholicism; Thyatira is the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages; Sardis represents the church of the Protestant Reformation; Philadelphia is the faithful church in the last days; and Laodicea is the apostate church in the last days. (Smith 1980b: 24–36; see also Scofield 1967: 1353n.4; Ironside 1943: 123–24;

Pentecost 1958: 153; MacDonald 1995: 2355) That view was quite popular in the nineteenth century, particularly among dispensationalists, although it had adherents going back to the Middle Ages.

1. Strengths of the historicist approach. This approach takes seriously the fact that Revelation is applicable and relevant for all periods of church history until Christ returns.
2. Weaknesses of the historicist approach. Most historicists tend to view the literary order of the *visions* of the book as the chronological order in which certain events occur *in history* and tend to ignore the evidence of recapitulation in Revelation (see below, section **V.F. Structure: progressively parallel; not strictly chronological**). The historicist approach in general and the “seven churches” variant have fallen out of favor largely because they are both subjective and arbitrary (Thomas 1967: 323-27; Thomas 1992: 507-11; Osborne 2002: 105; see also Hamstra 1998: 131). Typical of the criticisms of historicism are the following:

- “There are no fixed guidelines as to what historical events are meant” (Ladd 1972: 11).
- “No one has been able to prepare a chronological scheme making even an approach to general acceptance. The history of the church cannot be portioned off into seven successive periods marked by characteristics to which those noted in the seven epistles correspond.” (Milligan 1893: 269)
- “In regard to the number and length of the periods [of church history, represented by the seven churches] there is, indeed, no unanimity; the less, on account of the various denominational differences establishing different points of view, especially since the sixteenth century” (Schaff 1990: 1:14).
- Historicism “tries to identify historical movements too specifically and limits prophecies of the Apocalypse to Western church history, leaving aside the worldwide church” (Beale 1999: 46).
- “Advocates of the historical school of interpretation always seem to discover the climax of prophecy in their own day—a sure proof of the illegitimacy of this approach” (Payne 1980: 593).

C. The Futurist approach

Futurists essentially take **Rev 4:1-22:5** as depicting the “tribulation period” and its aftermath (i.e., the future period of time immediately before and after the *parousia*). There are essentially two futurist views which correspond to the two main premillennialist views: more moderate futurism corresponds to historic premillennialism; more extreme futurism corresponds to dispensationalist premillennialism. Because moderate futurism does not make the sharp distinction between Israel and the church, it does not see a “pretribulation rapture” as implicit in Revelation. While it sees the bulk of the book as concentrating on the end of history, it does not as strictly see the visions of the book as indicating the chronological sequence of events that will transpire. On the other hand, dispensationalists believe that the church is raptured at or before **Rev 4:1** and is not present until **19:7** (where it is seen in heaven). According to that view, **Rev 4:1-19:7** focuses exclusively on the Israel of the future and chronologically describes the seven-year tribulation. Antichrist will make himself known and will begin the “great tribulation” against the 144,000 Jews who have converted to Christ and against others who do not support his rule (see Osborne 2002: 21; MacDonald 1995: 2361; Smith 1980a: 17-21; Smith 1980b: 39-40, 68-75, 120-24). After that will come the *parousia*, a literal millennium, judgment on unbelievers, and the new heaven and new earth (**Rev 19:11-22:21**).

1. Strengths of the futurist approach. The greatest strength of this approach is that it recognizes that Revelation does deal with events just before, at the time of, and after Christ’s *parousia*.
2. Weaknesses of the futurist approach. Most futurists tend to view the literary order of the *visions* of the book as the chronological order in which certain events occur *in history*. Additionally, futurism renders virtually the entire book of Revelation irrelevant for John’s original audience in the first century and for all those who have followed during the last two thousand years. In connection with this, Gentry correctly states that futurism “has to reinterpret phenomena in John’s day to make them fit modern times. It overlooks the claims of the nearness of the events in Revelation.” (Gentry 1998: 92) That problem is magnified in the dispensationalist version of futurism since dispensationalists claim that the church will be “raptured” into heaven and will not experience any of the events on earth depicted in **Rev 4:1-22:5**. Finally, futurism, particularly in its dispensationalist form, often leads to speculation that is divorced from the first-century and church-centered context of the book. As a result, the relevance and power of the book, and the theological significance of its imagery, is lost.

D. The Idealist approach

Whereas both historicism and futurism tend toward specific and speculative identification of Revelation’s passages and images with particular historical (or presumed future) events, the opposite is true in

idealism. The idealist approach sees Revelation as a symbolic portrayal of the conflict between good and evil, the kingdom of God and the powers of Satan. “In general, the idealist view is marked by its refusal to identify any of the images with specific future events, whether in the history of the church or with regard to the end of all things” (Johnson 1981: 410). Strict idealism focuses on the trans-historical principles that the symbols represent. Accordingly, the beast represents satanic evil wherever it occurs in opposition to the church, and the seals, trumpets, and bowls represent God’s judgment on evil throughout history.

1. Strengths of the idealist approach. Idealism, more than any other approach, correctly recognizes that theology and symbolism are central to Revelation. It sees that the book deals with issues and teaches principles that are relevant to the entire life of the church from the 1st century to the Second Coming.
2. Weaknesses of the idealist approach. The primary weakness of “pure” idealism is its failure to connect any of the prophecies of the book with history, either past, present, or future, although the book itself appears to do so from time to time. In its most radical form, the book is viewed simply as a depiction of the timeless struggle between God/good and Satan/evil. “The problem with this alternative is that it holds that Revelation does not depict any final consummation to history, whether in God’s final victory or in a last judgment of the realm of evil.” (Beale 1999: 48)⁶

E. Summary of the above four approaches

One might schematically and summarily critique the above views along the axes of relevance for the church today and hope for ultimate resolution in the future, as follows:⁷

	<i>Preterism</i>	<i>Historicism</i>	<i>Futurism</i>	<i>Idealism</i>
<i>Relevance</i>	1 st Century—Yes After 1 st Century—No	Yes	1 st Century—Yes (chs. 2-3 only) After 1 st Century—No Just before <i>parousia</i> —Yes	Yes (in principle, but not historically)
<i>Hope</i>	No	Yes	Yes	No

F. The Eclectic approach

Each of the above approaches has certain strengths, but also weaknesses. Consequently, most Evangelical and Reformed interpreters utilize various aspects of all the approaches in interpreting the book of Revelation (Beale 1999; Johnson 1981; Osborne 2002; Smalley 2005). Beale describes this fifth alternative approach to the book as “modified idealism” or “eclecticism” (Beale 1999: 48-49). This approach is consistent with biblical prophecy and apocalyptic in general: prophecies based on specific events result in themes and principles that apply throughout history; the prophets take prophecies relating to one event, time, and place, and rework and apply them to other events, times, and places; specific events often serve as examples or paradigms for later events or principles. “John’s Revelation is on target for his Asian audience, but the symbols he uses are flexible enough that they could and would be appropriately used to address many another situation of crisis in church life” (Witherington 2003: 25). The following commentators elaborate this:

- “John’s Revelation is on target for his Asian audience, but the symbols he uses are flexible enough that they could and would be appropriately used to address many another situation of crisis in church life” (Witherington 2003: 25).
- “It is important in the course of interpreting the Apocalypse not to restrict the identity of ‘Rome’, or indeed ‘Babylon’. John sees both of these in general, not civic or imperial, terms; for they are representative concepts, and images which stand for unrighteous opposition to God in any society or system at any time.” (Smalley 2005: 3)
- “As on so many other occasions, [John] starts from what is limited and local only to pass in thought to what is unlimited and universal. His Jerusalem, his Babylon, is not the literal city. She is ‘the great harlot

⁶ Ironically, this is also a problem with full preterism which sees Revelation 21-22 as a description not of the final consummation but of the church. It sees the church age as “endless” (Preston 2010: 54-55). Thus, according to full preterism, there is no end to sin, oppression, or death (Preston 2010: 262-63, 266; Preston 2013: 22).

⁷ To clarify the “No” answers: On the “Relevance” axis, the preterist view of Revelation makes the book not directly relevant for the church today because it contends that only the church of the first century (or up to the fifth century at most) was being addressed; since futurism contends that the church is raptured at **Rev 4:1** and the vast bulk of the book (**Rev 4:1-22:5**) only pertains to Israel and the seven years before the *parousia*, that view likewise renders the vast bulk of the book irrelevant for the church today. On the “Hope” axis, all preterist views gives no hope for the future because they see Revelation essentially as history that ended in AD 70 or at the latest with the fall of Rome in the fifth century; pure idealism gives no hope for the future because it views the book only as containing timeless principles but not as depicting any future consummation.

that sitteth upon many waters;’ and ‘the waters which thou sawest,’ says the angel to the Seer, ‘are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues [Rev 17:1, 5, 15].’” (Milligan 1896: 295)

The themes and imagery of Revelation are not merely references to particular events but have ongoing relevance for the church. The principles of idealism, utilized in the eclectic approach, provide practicality for the faith and life of the church from the first century to the *parousia*. On the other hand, the eclectic approach recognizes that Revelation does more than set forth ongoing principles. The book not only describes first-century events but also the consummation of the ages. Consequently, this approach provides ultimate hope for believers, whatever trials they may be experiencing now. This is the approach that will be presented here.

III. The situation of the late 1st century churches

“The book of Revelation reflects conflict among Christians, conflict between Christians and Jews, and conflict between Christians and the representatives of Rome. The work attempts to interpret these conflicts and to resolve them in accordance with its own perspective.” (Yarbro Collins 1998: 400)

A. *The kingdom and the culture*

Revelation raises a fundamental question faced by many Christians: Why, since God is sovereign and Christ already has inaugurated his kingdom, is the culture so pagan and we suffer? First-century Greco-Roman religion was linked to various cultural, social, economic, and political practices. Christians therefore were faced with sometimes difficult choices concerning when to acquiesce to the prevailing practices and when and how to resist. Those same issues, of course, confront Christians today.

There were at least three religious factors facing the churches in the first century that had legal implications. First, in Roman society, the different trade guilds all had their own patron gods. The effect of those patron gods is indicated by Beale: “Apparently, a significant group among the Asia Minor churches did not think it a grave sin to show open expression of loyalty to such trade guild deities. This was especially the case when they were expected to pay their ‘dues’ to trade guilds by attending annual dinners held in honor of the guilds’ patron deities. Homage to the emperor as divine was included along with worship of such local deities. For the culture in general these expressions of loyalty were part of being patriotic. After all, the patron gods of the guilds together with the imperial god of Rome were purportedly responsible for the social and economic blessings that the culture had enjoyed. Refusal to show gratefulness to these gods was bad citizenship.” (Beale 1999: 30)

Second, the churches were facing the rise of emperor worship. This had both religious and social implications: “John’s revelation comes to him at a time when the imperial cult was increasingly being used as the social glue to bind each major Asian city, but also the province, together. . . . Texts such as Rev. 13.4; 15-16; 14.9-11; 15.2; 16.2; 19.20; 20.4, which refer or allude to worship of the Beast, likely reflect the impact of the emperor cult on John and other early Christians.” (Witherington 2003: 25)

Third, the legal vulnerability of the churches was exacerbated by a changed legal status of Christianity in relation to Judaism after AD 70. “Up until the era of the mid-A.D. 60s (but not after A.D. 70) the Romans were prone to identify Christianity as a sect of Judaism, intimately and necessarily bound up with it” (Gentry 1989: 227). That is because, “According to Roman law, religions were considered illegal outside their country of origin, though this was not enforced unless there was overt social misbehavior associated with the practice of a religion. The only exception to this law was Judaism, the practice of which was allowed throughout the Empire.” (Beale 1999: 30-31) However, Christians did not support the Jewish revolt and escaped from Jerusalem before its destruction by the Romans. The Christians’ failure to support the revolt and their escape from Jerusalem were regarded by their Jewish fellow-countrymen as apostasy. As a result, after AD 70 the Jewish leaders attacked Jewish Christians, their presence in the synagogues, and their status as Jews. Consequently, “Jewish Christians were no longer perceived by the Roman government as under the umbrella of Judaism and, therefore, faced the cruel dilemma of either forsaking Christ (if they were to be readmitted into the synagogues) or worshipping Caesar.” (Pate 1998: 140) Revelation reflects the opposition to Christianity derived not only from the Roman state but from Judaism as well (**Rev 2:9; 3:9**).

B. *The issue of persecution*

Related to the issue of the kingdom and culture is the issue of persecution. Research indicates that, although in the last years of his reign Nero systematically persecuted Christians in Rome itself, “there is no evidence that during the last decade of the first century there occurred any open and systematic persecution of the church” (Ladd 1972: 8). Nevertheless, Revelation indicates that by the end of the first century the churches in Asia were experiencing at least sporadic instances of persecution (**Rev 1:9; 2:10, 13**). John may be foreseeing

that existing trends in society will lead to increased persecution in the future. Thus, Revelation is replete with examples that both warn believers of coming persecution and exhort them to be faithful witnesses to death (see, e.g., **Rev 3:10; 6:9-11; 7:13-17; 11:3-12; 12:1-17; 13:7; 17:14; 19:7-10; 20:4-6**).

C. Internal problems

As the letters to the seven churches (**Revelation 2-3**) make clear, “the problems which directly confronted the churches of John’s time, and shaped the contents of Revelation, arose from *within* his community, and not merely from beyond it” (Smalley 2005: 4). Those problems included: lack of love (**2:4**); false teaching (**2:14-15**); immorality based on false teaching and false prophecy (**2:20-21, 24**); spiritual deadness, lack of faithfulness, lack of perseverance (**3:1-4**); lukewarmness and pride (**3:15-17**).

IV. Purpose and themes

As we observe the situations of the first-century churches and consider Jesus’ analysis of those churches in **Revelation 2-3**, we will see parallels to the trials we face and issues we confront today. The purposes and themes of the book help orient us to the book and give us an overall grasp of what it is all about. These purposes and themes are interrelated and have been expressed in various ways. The following are representative.

A. To explain to the church how God is dealing with the world

Wilbur Smith has highlighted an important aspect of Revelation’s structure and the significance of that structure: “Many scenes of this book are located in heaven, while the judgments themselves take place on this earth; and the scenes in heaven always precede the earthly events to which they are attached. . . . I have always felt that there are two great truths to be drawn from this phenomenon. First, what is about to take place on earth, though unknown to man and unexpected by him, is fully known to those in heaven—the ascended Lord, the angels, the twenty-four elders, the living creatures, and the others. Secondly, what is to take place on earth is under the complete control and direction of heaven, so that we may safely say, judging from this book, as well as from other prophetic books in the Scripture, that everything that takes place on this earth only fulfills the Word of God.” (Smith 1962: 1497)

Walter Elwell similarly states, “The purpose of Revelation is ultimately to explain to the church how God is dealing with the world. . . . A fundamental theme that runs through Revelation is that life and history can be observed from two points of view. We may look at the problems, persecution, sufferings, evil, and distress that surround us and become discouraged; or we may look beyond that to the glorious eternal realities that also surround us—God, Christ, the saints of old, the angels, the throne of God, the music, color, sound, and beauty of heaven, the New Jerusalem with its streets of gold, and the victory already won. The choice is ours; both perspectives are true.” (Elwell 1989: 1200-01) John is explaining through visions and symbols that God is fulfilling his eternal plan. The point of the book is “not so much to enable them [the seven churches to whom John was writing] to foresee the future as to enable them to see their present from the perspective of the future” (Bauckham 1993b: 167) It might not appear obvious to us in this world that God is fulfilling his plan. However, “One of the key themes of the book is that things are not what they seem” (Johnson 2001: 9).

B. A call to perseverance in the struggle with the powers of evil

Alien cultural values, sporadic persecution, legal and social vulnerability, and pressure from both the state and Jews would have tempted Christians to compromise their faith and practice. Revelation makes clear that, from the first century to the *parousia*, there will be evil and attempts to suppress the witness of the church. God’s plan includes martyrdom for many of his people. Therefore, God’s people are to remain faithful despite hardship and keep the words of the prophecy that are written in the book (**Rev 1:3; 22:7**). “Like Jesus’ initial kingship, the church’s kingship consists now in conquering by maintaining her faithful witness in the face of trials (e.g., 2:9-11, 13; 3:8; 12:11); in overcoming the powers of evil (e.g., 6:8 in relation to 6:9-11); in subduing sin in her members’ lives (see chaps. 2-3); and in beginning to rule over death and Satan by identification with Jesus (cf. 1:5–6, 18). The church’s endurance, then, is part of the process of conquering” (White 2000: 175). Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza summarizes, “John seeks to move [his audience] to control their fear, to renew their commitment, and to sustain their vision” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 37).

C. To comfort and encourage Christians because Christ is victor

Revelation demonstrates that God is sovereign over all of history, over all evil, and is orchestrating the events of history to glorify his name and bring about a glorious, eternal conclusion for his people. Revelation “shows us a God of love and power, who triumphs sovereignly over all his and our enemies. Human history, as

we know it, will culminate when Satan suffers eternal defeat and the bridegroom embraces his bride. The church will enjoy eternal joy and peace with Jesus.” (Hamstra 1998: 127) William Hendriksen summarizes this important theme as follows: “In the main, the purpose of the book of Revelation is to comfort the militant Church in its struggle against the forces of evil. It is full of help and comfort for persecuted and suffering Christians. To them is given assurance that God sees their tears (7:17; 21:4); their prayers are influential in world affairs (8:3, 4) and their death is precious in His sight. Their final victory is assured (15:2); their blood will be avenged (19:2); their Christ lives and reigns for ever and for ever. He governs the world in the interest of His Church (5:7,8). He is coming again to take His people to Himself in ‘the marriage supper of the Lamb’ and to live with them for ever in a rejuvenated universe (21:22). . . . The theme is the victory of Christ and His Church over the dragon (Satan) and his helpers. . . . Throughout the prophecies of this wonderful book Christ is pictured as the Victor, the Conqueror (1:18; 2:8; 5:9ff.; 6:2; 11:15; 12:9ff.; 14:1; 15:2ff.; 19:16; 20:4; 22:3). He conquers death, Hades, the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, and the men who worship the beast. *He* is victorious; as a result, so are *we*, even when we seem hopelessly defeated.” (Hendriksen 1982: 7-8)

V. Structure

A. *The complexity, unity, and importance of structure*

The more one studies the book of Revelation the more one is impressed by the intricacy of its design. “The interconnections in Revelation may be so complex that one structural outline cannot do it full justice. Here we may have not a two-dimensional jigsaw puzzle but a three-dimensional Rubik’s cube.” (Johnson 2001: 35) Despite its literary complexity, Richard Bauckham’s study of Revelation reveals that it is “actually one of the most unified works in the New Testament. . . . Revelation was evidently designed to convey its message to some significant degree on first hearing (cf. 1:3), but also progressively to yield fuller meaning to closer acquaintance and assiduous study.” (Bauckham 1993a: 1n.1, 1)

This structural design is important for our understanding the book, especially given its apocalyptic and symbolic nature. Ranko Stefanovic summarizes the importance of the structure of the book for understanding its content: “It appears that the rich structural design of the book of Revelation was well planned by the inspired author. This design is, thus, very significant for understanding the sweeping thematic progression of the book. It warns the reader against studying and interpreting a passage or section in isolation from the rest of the book. Any interpretation of the text must be in agreement with the general purpose of the book as a whole.” (Stefanovic 2002: 43)

B. *Repetition of phrases and ideas*

Part of Revelation’s complex, unified literary structure is revealed in its pattern of the repetition of phrases and ideas. Several phrases and ideas recur, often in widely separated passages, and sometimes in slightly varying form. “These repetitions create a complex network of textual cross-reference, which help to create and expand the meaning of any one passage by giving it specific relationships to many other passages.” (Bauckham 1993a: 22) One reason for the repetition of key phrases may be because John was writing for *hearers* as well as for readers (**Rev 1:3**). “In a text intended for oral performance the structure must be indicated by clear linguistic markers.” (Bauckham 1993a: 3)

1. Repetition of phrases and ideas helps to tie the book together and reinforce its basic message. Phrases, substantive ideas, and promises to the church are introduced at the beginning of the book and find their fulfillment at the end of the book:

1:1; 22:6- “to show to His servants”	2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7- “who overcomes”
1:1; 22:6- “things which must soon take place”	2:7; 22:2, 14- “the tree of life”
1:1; 22:6, 16- Jesus sends his angel	2:10-11; 20:6; 21:4- deliverance from the second death
1:2; 19:10; 20:4- “the testimony of Jesus”	2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20- “I am coming quickly”
1:3; 22:7- “blessed is he . . . who heeds”	2:17; 19:12- A name “no one knows”
1:3; 22:7- “the words of the prophecy”	2:23; 20:12; 22:12- “according to . . . deeds”
1:3; 22:10- “the time is near”	2:27; 19:15- “He will rule them with a rod of iron”
1:4; 22:16- “the seven churches”	2:28; 22:16- “morning star”
1:6; 20:6- “priests of God”	3:4, 5, 18; 19:8, 14- clean, white garments
1:8; 21:6; 22:13- “the Alpha and the Omega”	3:5; 20:12, 15; 21:27- “book of life”
1:8; 21:22- “the Almighty”	3:12; 21:22- temple
1:14; 2:18; 19:12- eyes “like a flame of fire”	3:12; 22:4- God’s name on overcomers
1:16; 2:16; 19:15- sword from Christ’s mouth	3:12; 21:2, 10- New Jerusalem comes from heaven
1:17; 22:13- “the first and the last”	3:21; 20:4- overcomers sit on thrones

1:18; 20:14-“death and Hades”

2. Repetition of phrases reinforces theological parallels and contrasts that John wants his readers to see. **Rev 17:1-19:10** and **Rev 21:9-22:9** parallel each other. “In 17:1-19:10 he sees the harlot of Babylon and her fall; in 21:9-22:9 he sees the bride of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven. Together these two sections form the climax towards which the whole book has aimed: the destruction of Babylon and her replacement by the New Jerusalem.” (Bauckham 1993a: 4-5)

Consequently, both sections begin and end almost identically:

17:1-3: “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls . . . came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I will show you’ . . . And he carried me away in the Spirit.”

21:9-10: “Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls . . . came and spoke with me, saying, ‘Come here, I will show you’ . . . And he carried me away in the Spirit.”

19:9b-10: “And he said to me, ‘These are true words of God.’ Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God.’”

22:6-9: “And he said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true . . . And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, ‘Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God.’”

The subtlety of the book’s structure is seen in that the main enemies of God and his people make their principal appearances in this order: Death and Hades (**6:8**); the dragon (**12:3**); the beast and false prophet (**13:2; 13:11** [discounting the anticipatory reference in **11:7**]); Babylon (**17:1** [discounting the anticipatory reference in **14:8**]). Their destruction is in the reverse order, creating a chiasmic arrangement: Babylon (**18:1–24**); the beast and false prophet (**19:20**); the dragon (**20:10**); Death and Hades (**20:14**)⁸

C. Basic structure of content

Many commentators see a basic two-part structure of the content of the book: **chs. 1-11** and **12-22**. These two major sections can be seen as unfolding the messages of the two books (scrolls) of Revelation: the sealed book of **5:1-5**, whose message is unfolded in **6:1-11:9**; and the “little book” of **10:2, 8-10**, whose message is unfolded in **12:1-21:8**. Hendriksen further comments on the content of the two halves of the book: “The first major division (chapters 1-11) reveals the Church, indwelt by Christ, persecuted by the world. But the Church is avenged, protected and victorious. The second major division (chapters 12-22) reveals the deeper spiritual background of this struggle. It is the conflict between the Christ and the dragon in which the Christ, and therefore His Church, is victorious.” (Hendriksen 1982: 23; see also Payne 1980: 594)⁹

D. Basic literary structure

There have been many proposed literary structures of Revelation. “Some proposals have used implicit indicators as structural organizers. Some examples of this approach involve chiasm, intercalation, reiteration and encompassing. Other suggestions have emphasized the use of explicit textual indicators such as: ‘in the Spirit’; ‘what is now and what will take place later’; ‘come and see’; ‘earthquake’; and, of course, the number ‘7.’ Regarding the use of the number 7, some scholars propose an overall septenary outline for the Apocalypse within which is included the explicit references to the 7 Churches, the 7 Seals, the 7 Trumpets and the 7 Bowls. Some outlines with less than seven major sections provide a septenary structure only for each major textual section. And, finally, some have combined the two above approaches resulting in an overall septenary outline for the Apocalypse within which is incorporated a sevenfold structure for a number of those self-same sections.” (Korner 2000: 160-62)

E. Representative structural outlines

One reason why commentators have proposed different structures for the book is that both substantive

⁸ Beale observes, “This reversal points further to a lack of concern for chronological sequence in the Apocalypse. The four foes are eliminated simultaneously, as is evident from the repetition of the wording and OT allusions in the descriptions of their defeat (e.g., ‘gather together for the battle’ [**16:14; 19:19; 20:8**]).” (Beale 1999: 812) Additionally, **Rev 14:8** reports, “*Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great,*” but “Babylon the great” is not even introduced until **17:1-5**. “*Fallen, fallen*” in **Rev 14:8** is derived from **Isa 21:9**.

⁹ The seventh trumpet (**Rev 11:15-19**) evinces the end of this age and the beginning of the age to come and speaks of the same eschatological events as are spoken of at the end of the book. The fact that the seventh trumpet sounds in the center, rather than the end, of the book, is another indication that the order of John’s *visions* does not represent their chronological occurrence *in history*. (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 75-76)

theological content and literary markers must be taken into account. Some commentators give primacy to content, while others may give greater weight to literary factors. The following represent some of the more well thought-out models of the book's structure.

1. G. K. Beale (Beale 1999: x-xvi).

1:1-20: Prologue

2:1-3:22: The letters to the seven churches: Christ encourages the churches to witness, warns them against compromise, and exhorts them to hear and to overcome compromise in order to inherit eternal life.

4:1-5:14: God and Christ are glorified because Christ's resurrection demonstrates that they are sovereign over creation to judge and to redeem.

6:1-8:5: The seven seals

8:6-11:19: The seven trumpets

12:1-15:4: Deeper conflict

15:5-16:21: The seven bowl judgments: God punishes the ungodly during the inter-advent age and consummately at the last day because of their persecution and idolatry

17:1-19:21: Final judgment of Babylon and the beast

20:1-15: The millennium is inaugurated during the church age as God limits Satan's deceptive powers and as deceased Christians are vindicated by reigning in heaven. The millennium is concluded by a resurgence of Satan's deceptive assault against the church and the final judgment.

21:1-22:5: The new creation and the church perfected in glory

22:6-21: Conclusion

2. Introductory sanctuary scene model (Stefanovic 2002: 32-35).

Prologue (**1:1-8**)

1. Introductory sanctuary scene (**1:9-20**)

The messages to the seven churches (**2:1-3:22**)

2. Introductory sanctuary scene (**4:1-5:14**)

The opening of the seven seals (**6:1-8:1**)

3. Introductory sanctuary scene (**8:2-5**)

The blowing of the seven trumpets (**8:6-11:18**)

4. Introductory sanctuary scene (**11:19**)

The wrath of the nations (**12:1-15:4**)

5. Introductory sanctuary scene (**15:5-8**)

The seven last plagues (**16:1-18:24**)

6. Introductory sanctuary scene (**19:1-10**)

The eschatological consummation (**19:11-21:1**)

7. Introductory sanctuary scene (**21:2-8**)

The New Jerusalem (**21:9-22:5**)

Epilogue (**22:6-21**)

3. A chiasmic [ideas are repeated in inverted order] model (Stefanovic 2002: 38-40).

A. Prologue (**1:1-8**)

B. Promises to the overcomer (**1:9-3:22**)

C. God's work for man's salvation (**4:1-8:1**)

D. God's wrath mixed with mercy (**8:2-9:21**)

E. Commissioning John to prophesy (**10:1-11:18**)

F. Great controversy between Christ and Satan (**11:19-13:18**)

E'. Church proclaims the end-time gospel (**14:1-20**)

D'. God's final wrath unmixed with mercy (**15:1-18:24**)

C'. God's work for man's salvation completed (**19:1-21:4**)

B'. Fulfillment of the promises to the overcomer (**21:5-22:5**)

A'. Epilogue (**22:6-21**)

4. Richard Bauckham (Bauckham 1993a: 21-22).

1:1-8: Prologue

1:9-3:22: Inaugural vision of Christ and the churches including seven messages to the churches

4:1-5:14: Inaugural vision of heaven leading to three series of sevens and two intercalations [insertions of other material]:

6:1-8:1; 8:3-5: Seven seals, numbered 4+1+(1+intercalation)+1

8:2; 8:6-11:19: Seven trumpets, numbered 4+1+(1+intercalation)+1

12:1-14:20; 15:2-4: The story of God's people in conflict with evil

15:1; 15:5-16:21: Seven bowls, numbered (4+3) without intercalation

17:1-19:10: Babylon the harlot

19:11-21:8: Transition from Babylon to the New Jerusalem

21:9-22:9: The New Jerusalem the bride

22:6-21: Epilogue

5. William Hendriksen (Hendriksen 1982: 16-18).

1. Christ in the midst of the lampstands (**1:1-3:22**)

2. The vision of heaven and the seals (**4:1-7:17**)

3. The seven trumpets (**8:1-11:19**)

4. The persecuting dragon (**12:1-14:20**)

5. The seven bowls (**15:1-16:21**)

6. The fall of Babylon (**17:1-19:21**)

7. The great consummation (**20:1-22:21**)

6. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 35-36; the Roman numerals indicate explicitly numbered seven-series).

A. **1:1-8:** Prologue and Epistolary Greeting

1:1-3: Title

1:4-6: Greetings

1:7-8: Motto

B. **1:9-3:22:** Rhetorical Situation in the Cities of Asia Minor

1:9-10: Author and Situation

1:11-20: Prophetic Inaugural Vision

I. **2:1-3:22:** Prophetic Messages to Seven Communities

C. **4:1-9:21; 11:15-19:** Opening the Sealed Scroll: Exodus Plagues

4:1-5:14: Heavenly Court and Sealed Scroll

II. **6:1-8:1:** Cosmic Plagues: Seven Seals

III. **8:2-9:21; 11:15-19:** Cosmic Plagues: Seven Trumpets

D. **10:1-15:4:** The Bitter-Sweet Scroll: "War" against the Community

10:1-11:14: Prophetic Commissioning

12:1-14:5: Prophetic Interpretation

14:6-15:4: Eschatological Liberation

C'. **15:5-19:10:** Exodus from the Oppression of Babylon/Rome

IV. **15:5-16:21:** Cosmic Plagues: Seven Bowls

17:1-18: Rome and Its Power

18:1-19:10: Judgment of Rome

B'. **19:11-22:9:** Liberation from Evil and God's World-City

19:11-20:15: Liberation from the Powers of Evil

21:1-8: The Liberated World of God

21:9-22:9: The Different Cosmopolis of God

A'. **22:10-21:** Epilogue and Epistolary Frame

22:10-17: Revelatory Sayings

22:18-21: Epistolary Conclusion

F. Structure: progressively parallel; not strictly chronological

In order to understand both how Revelation is put together and what it means we must understand that the book is not simply a chronological narrative. Stephen Travis emphasizes the crucial point that in Revelation "the fact that the *visions* follow in sequence is not necessarily a reason for believing that they represent a continuous *historical* sequence" (Travis 1982: 142). Prophetic books (e.g., Isaiah) frequently record visions or prophecies in a different order from the order in which they are actualized history. Similarly, prophetic books (e.g., Daniel) frequently include different visions that repeat or recapitulate the same events from different perspectives.

Revelation draws heavily from such OT books as Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Beale discusses the significant *structural* similarity between Revelation and Daniel: "Daniel's structure of five synonymously

parallel visions (chs. 2, 7, 8, 9, 10-12) may be the most influential on the structure of Revelation, since Daniel is used so much in the book and is used to signal the broad structural divisions of the Apocalypse. . . . Daniel’s five parallel visions are supplemental perspectives about the same general period of the future; it would be unexpected for a book like Revelation to model itself on Daniel’s parallel structure and yet have its parallel sections not also pertain to the same general period of the future. Rather, it would seem more natural for the parallels to reflect an ‘already and not yet’ temporal perspective, especially since some of Daniel’s significant future visions have begun to be fulfilled in Christ’s first coming. That the same phenomenon of recapitulation found in Daniel also occurs in other Jewish apocalyptic writings . . . likewise points to the identical phenomenon in Revelation.” (Beale 1999: 135-37)

In light of the above, most commentators see the book’s different sections as being essentially parallel to each other: the same substantive events may be repeated in different visions (using different imagery) and in different literary units. These parallel sections encompass the entire church age; overlap both temporally and thematically (i.e., recapitulate each other); and conclude with the end of the age, the *parousia*, the judgment, and the new heavens and new earth. Even though they recapitulate each other, the parallel sections show some chronological and thematic progression, i.e., earlier in the book the end is reached, but it becomes more exhaustively described in later parallel accounts.

William Hendriksen first called this “progressive parallelism,” because the different sections of the book are: “arranged in an ascending, climactic order. There is progress in eschatological emphasis. The final judgment is first *announced* then *introduced* and finally *described*. Similarly, the new heaven and earth are described more fully in the final section than in those which precede it.” (Hendriksen 1982: 36) This is the view taken by Victorinus of Pettau (died c.304), Bishop of Poetovio (modern Ptuj, Slovenia), author of the earliest complete commentary on Revelation that has come down to us (Bruce 1938: 352-53).¹⁰

Progressive parallelism is clearly seen in how the seals in Revelation (**Rev 6:1-17; 8:1-5**) parallel Christ’s Olivet Discourse, and end with a description of the end of the age (**Matt 24:3-31; Mark 13:3-27; Luke 21:7-28**). Similarly, the trumpets (**Rev 8:6-9:21; 11:15-19**), the woman and the dragon (**Rev 12:1-14:20**), and the bowls (**Rev 16:1-21**) all are parallel and end with a description of the end of the age:

<i>Matt 24-Olivet Discourse</i>	<i>Rev 6/8:5-Seals</i>	<i>Rev 12-14-Woman & Dragon</i>	<i>Rev 8-9/11-Trumpets</i>	<i>Rev 16-Bowls</i>
Wars: 24:6 Int’l unrest: 24:7 Earthquakes: 24:7 Famine: 24:7 Persecution: 24:9 False Christs: 24:23	Wars: 6:3-4 Int’l unrest: 6:3-4 Famine: 6:5-6 Persecution: 6:9-11 False Christ: 6:1-2	War: 12:7; 13:7 Earth woe: 12:12 Sea woe: 12:12 River: 12:15 Persecution: 12:13 False god: 13:4, 12-14	Earth: 8:7 Sea blood: 8:8-9 Rivers & springs: 8:10 Euphrates: 9:14	Earth: 16:2 Sea blood: 16:3 Rivers & springs: 16:4 Euphrates: 16:12
Sun dark: 24:29 Moon dark: 24:29 Stars fall: 24:29 Powers of heaven shaken: 24:29	Sun dark: 6:12 Moon: blood: 6:12 Stars fall: 6:13 Earthquake; heaven shaken: 6:12, 14		Sun dark: 8:12 Moon dark: 8:12 Star falls: 8:10 Stars dark: 8:12 Earthquake: 11:13	Sun scorches: 16:8 Throne of beast: dark: 16:10
Son of Man & cloud: 24:30 Angels gather: 24:31	God’s & Lamb’s wrath: 6:16-17 Loud voice: 7:2 Thunder: 8:5 Sounds: 8:5 Lightning: 8:5 Earthquake: 8:5	God’s wrath: 14:10 Son of Man & cloud: 14:14 Loud voice: 14:15 Angels reap: 14:17-20	God’s wrath: 11:18 Loud voices: 11:15 Thunder: 11:19 Sounds: 11:19 Lightning: 11:19 Earthquake: 11:19 Hail: 11:19	God’s wrath: 16:19 Loud voice: 16:17 Thunder: 16:18 Sounds: 16:18 Lightning: 16:18 Earthquake: 16:18 Hail: 16:21

1. The progressively more intense descriptions of the “earthquake” in 8:5; 11:19; 16:18-21 and the cosmic phenomena in 6:12-17 and 20:11 is thematic, not chronological. Revelation’s use of the

¹⁰ In chapter 8 of his commentary, regarding the relationship of the trumpets and bowls, Victorinus states, “The ‘trumpet’ is the word of power. And although there is a repetition of scenes by the bowls, this is not spoken as though the events occurred twice. Rather, since those events that are future to them have been decreed by God to happen, these things are spoken twice. And therefore, whatever he said rather briefly by way of the trumpets he said more completely by way of the bowls. Nor ought we to pay too much attention to the order of what is said. For the sevenfold Holy Spirit, when he has passed in revue the events to the last time, to the very end, returns again to the same times and supplements what he had said incompletely. Nor ought we inquire too much into the order of the Revelation. Rather, we ought inquire after the meaning, for there is also the possibility of a false understanding.” (Victorinus 2012: 8.2). This same recapitulation view was applied by Tyconius in his influential commentary on Revelation (now lost to us), written about AD 385 (see Yarbrow Collins 1998: 388).

earthquake is drawn from the OT, which describes the quaking of the earth when God manifests himself. Often in such cases earthquakes are part of the quaking of the entire cosmos when God appears. That occurred on Mount Sinai and on other occasions in the past (**Exod 19:18; Judg 5:4-5; Pss 68:8; 77:17-18; 114; Isa 64:3; Hab 3:3-15**). The OT further states that such quaking will occur in the future “day of the Lord” (**Isa 13:13; 24:18-23; 34:4; Joel 2:10; Mic 1:3-4; Nah 1:5-6**). Significantly, Christ used the same kind of language to describe his second coming in the Olivet Discourse (**Matt 24:29-30; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25-26**). That background provides the context for interpreting **Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 16:18-21; 6:12-17; and 20:11**:

4:5—*lightning and sounds and thunder*

8:5—*thunder and sounds and lightning and an earthquake*

11:19—*lightning and sounds and thunder and an earthquake and great hail*

16:18-21—*lightning and sounds and thunder and a great earthquake . . . and great hail*

6:14—*The sky was split apart . . . and every mountain and island were moved out of their places*

16:20—*every island fled away, and the mountains were not found*

20:11—*earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them*

“The formula, whose core is an allusion to the Sinai theophany [**Exod 19:16**], is expanded by the addition of an extra item in 8:5 and 11:19, while in 16:18-21 the earthquake and hail are described at some length. In 4:5 the formula describes a theophany confined to heaven, which in the latter instances becomes a theophany resulting in judgment on earth. Thus the formula serves to anchor the divine judgments of chapters 6-16 in the initial vision of God’s rule in heaven in chapter 4. It also creates a particular kind of relationship between the three series of seven judgments. The judgments of the seventh seal-opening, the climax of the first series, described by this formula in 8:5, encompasses the whole course of the of the judgments of the seven trumpets, and similarly the judgment of the seventh trumpet, described by this formula in 11:19b, encompasses the whole series of the bowl judgments, climaxing in the final, fullest elaboration of the formula in 16:18-21. Thus the formula indicates that it is the same final judgment which is reached in the seventh of each of the three series. With each of the first two sevenths we attain a preliminary glimpse of the final judgment, which the following series then approaches again from closer range, as it were. . . . Two passages remain to be considered. Both 6:12-17 and 20:11 are explicitly passages in which the earthquake accompanies the theophany of God the Judge. Moreover in these two cases John employs the tradition of the cosmic quake, in which the heavens as well as the earth flee from God’s presence. The first passage echoes several Old Testament descriptions of the Day of the Lord. The second seems to include the notion of the destruction of the old cosmos to be replaced by the new (cf. 21:1).” (Bauckham 1993a: 8, 208)

Rev 6:14 (“*every mountain and island were moved out of their places*”), **16:20** (“*every island fled away, and the mountains were not found*”), and **20:11** (“*earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them*”) are all clearly parallel, virtually identical descriptions, that can only describe the same event: the destruction of the earth at the end of the age; God’s judgment at the *parousia*. The reference in **6:14** to “*every mountain and island*” parallels **16:20**. Both **16:20** and **20:11** say that every island (**16:20**), or earth and heaven (**20:11**), “*fled away.*” They both use the same word, including even the same person and tense, for “*fled away*” (*pheugō*). Both passages add that the mountains (**16:20**), or earth and heaven (**20:11**), were not “*found.*” Again, both passages use the same word for not being found (*heuriskō*). The events described in all those passages must be parallel, and must refer to the *parousia*, because they *cannot happen twice*. “John’s insistent point, from ch. 6 on, has been that no one on earth survives the *parousia*. . . . Taken at face value, the upheavals of chs. 6 and 16 are just as fatal as those of Rev. 20.11” (Mealy 1992: 160; see also at 158-62, 194; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 64). “[The result of the great earthquake is] doubly astounding since this had already occurred as far back as 6:14b as one result of the opening of the sixth seal. This repetition is just one of the indications that the different series of plagues are not actually to be considered as following one upon the other, but are probably to be regarded as differing versions of the same series of eschatological woes preparing the way for the end of this world and age” (Rist and Hough 1957: 488).¹¹

2. The repeated pattern of judgment shows that Revelation is not a single, chronological narrative, but is

¹¹ **Rev 6:12-17** and **7:3** also provide a clear example of the fact that the order of the visions John had *cannot* represent the chronology of the events in history that they symbolize. In **7:3** an angel says that the earth is not to be harmed until the bond-servants of God have been sealed. However, **6:12-17** had depicted the destruction of the earth and sky at the “last day.” Consequently, **7:3** must precede **6:12-17** in *history* even though it follows **6:12-17** in the sequence of visions.

structured in progressively parallel sections. There is a recurrent pattern of judgment throughout Revelation. The repeated judgments follow a characteristic pattern: they originate in heaven but their main effects are on the earth. Thus, the seals are opened, trumpets are sounded, and bowls are poured in heaven, but their effects occur on the earth. Later descriptions are intensified and add details to the earlier descriptions of the same event. In addition to the seals-trumpets-bowls, this pattern also appears elsewhere. “In 14:14-20 there is a double harvest of the earth. . . . The pattern is similar to the seventh seal, trumpet and bowl. The judgment originates in heaven, but its main effects—especially punishment—are felt on earth. A new element is introduced, however: Not only is the judgment on the earth depicted, but also the blessings of the saints who were taken out of the world in the first judgment are depicted. This pattern is repeated in 19:1-21. . . . The judgment originates in heaven, and its consequences are played out on the earth. Here, however, the blessings-of-the-saints theme introduced in the two-harvest judgment is expanded in the “marriage feast” where the blessedness of the saints at the final judgment is not merely implied but explicitly depicted. There remains one final judgment scene, that of 20:9-22:5. . . . The pattern is the same as the other judgments. It is initiated in heaven, but the judgment’s consequences are felt on earth. In addition, as in chap. 19 there is an expanded section on the blessings for the saints, in this case in the new Jerusalem.” (Steinmann 1992: 77-78)

3. The repeated references to the “wrath” of God and the Lamb demonstrate recapitulation. **Rev 6:17** says, “*The great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?*” That is, of course, a rhetorical question, the answer to which is “no one” (at least among unbelievers). That question and answer “enhances the universal, consummate nature of the scene” (Beale 1999: 124). **Rev 11:18** is similar: “*Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged . . . and to destroy those who destroy the earth.*” **Rev 14:9-11** speaks of the eternal nature of “*the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger*” (i.e., “*the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever*”). “The chapter then concludes with two scenes that can only occur at the end of the age. The first (vv. 14-16) represents a harvest, a reaping of souls, and apparently a gathering in of the redeemed, to which our Lord refers in Mt 13:30, 39; 24:30, 31. . . . The second one [**14:17-20**], which is not a harvest but a vintage scene [the angel “*gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God*”], must depict the gathering of the unbelieving and wicked ones of the earth.” (Smith 1962: 1514)

Rev 19:15, which is a clear Second Coming passage, again refers to “*the wine press of the fierce wrath of God,*” thus connecting **14:19-20** with **19:15**. **Rev 16:19** uses the same image of God’s wrath as **14:10**, when it speaks of “*the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.*” The horses of **14:20** appear again in **19:18**. Similarly, the precise divine title “God the Almighty” occurs in Revelation only in **16:14** and **19:15**. The gathering of kings in **16:14** recurs in **19:19**. (Bauckham 1993a: 20). The context in all of these passages can only be the consummation and final judgment.

4. The descriptions of God and Christ demonstrate progressive parallelism. God and Christ are described in **Rev 1:4, 8**, and **4:8** as the one “*who is and who was and who is to come.*” In **Rev 11:17** and **16:5** God and Christ are addressed directly as the one “*who are and who were.*” The references to “*and who is to come*” are omitted. The reason for the change is that the sounding of the seventh trumpet in **11:15** and the third bowl in **16:4** announce or anticipate the coming of the kingdom, judgment, and reign of God and Christ. Those descriptions of God are parallel descriptions of the coming of God and Christ and show progression prior to his coming.

5. Repeated expressions of singing and rejoicing in heaven demonstrate progressive parallelism. In **Rev 11:17**, a heavenly scene of praise and worship following the vindication of the “two witnesses,” the twenty-four elders proclaim, “*O Lord God, the Almighty, . . . You . . . have begun to reign.*” In **Rev 19:6** the great multitude in heaven similarly proclaims “*the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.*” The same word (Greek = *basileuō*) is used for “reign” in both cases. In both cases the verbs are in the aorist active indicative tense. Johnson discusses the significance of this: “The aorist tense of this verb [particularly since it is a ‘stative’ verb] signals the initiation of God’s rule, the establishment of his redemptive and eschatological kingdom in its full and final phase, with the subjection of all his enemies and rivals. . . . NASB correctly reflects the inceptive implication of the aorist form, *ebasileusas*, in Rev. 11:17: ‘you . . . have begun to reign.’ The aorist form of the same verb in 19:6 conveys the same inceptive force and should be similarly translated.” (Johnson 2001: 262, 262n.32, 263n.33)

In **Rev 15:3-4**, a parallel passage of praise and rejoicing in heaven, the redeemed “*sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.*” This song draws heavily on the OT “songs of Moses” (**Exod 15:1-18; Deut 32:1-43**) as well as other OT passages such as **Ps 86:8-10**;

111:1-3; Isa 66:23; Jer 10:7. These songs all show the fulfillment of the “new song” sung by the twenty-four elders in **Rev 5:9-10** in which they recounted the Lamb’s sacrificial death, made the redeemed to be a kingdom and priests, and enabled the redeemed to reign upon the earth. Following the overthrow of Babylon the great, the multitude rejoices over God’s having “*avenged the blood of His bond-servants*” (**Rev 19:2**). That is reminiscent of the “song of Moses” (**Deut 32:1-43**) which concludes by saying that God “*will avenge the blood of His servants*” (**32:43**).

All of these songs depict different visions of the defeat of evil, the vindication of the saints, and the concomitant rejoicing in heaven at the fulfillment of God’s plan, his triumph, and his reign. The connections among these passages again demonstrate the progressively parallel structure of the book. 6. Repeated expressions of finality demonstrate progressive parallelism. **Rev 10:7** (when the angel is about to sound the seventh trumpet) states, “*The mystery of God is finished.*” **Rev 15:1** (when the angels are about to pour the bowls) similarly states, “*the wrath of God is finished.*” In both cases the Greek *etelesthē* (“is finished”) precedes the “mystery of God” and the “wrath of God.” Placing the verb in that position in both cases emphasizes “the finality and completion of God’s plan” (Johnson 2001: 162n.9). Similarly, **Rev 16:17** says, “*A loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, ‘It is done.’*” In parallel fashion, **Rev 21:6** says, “*Then He said to me, ‘It is done.’*” Those parallels also show the “progressively” parallel nature of the book: **Rev 10:7** arises during an interlude of the trumpet judgments; **Rev 15:1** is just prior to the last of the “seven plagues” (the bowl judgments); **Rev 16:17** occurs when the seventh bowl is poured out; and **Rev 21:6** is said when New Jerusalem descends from heaven.

G. *Rev 1:19 and the structure of the book*

Dispensationalists take the view that the church is raptured and not even present on earth, but only in heaven, after **Rev 3:22**. They base their view on **Rev 1:19**, which they see as establishing a three-part structure to the book: “*the things which you have seen*” (which they interpret to be the vision of Christ in **Rev 1:1-18**); “*the things which are*” (which they interpret to be the seven churches of **Rev 2:1-3:22**, which they then interpret to refer to the “church age” ending at the pretribulational rapture of the church; and “*the things which will take place after these things*” (which they interpret to be the things which take place after the rapture of the church). (Smith 1980a: 17-20; Smith 1980b: 1, 17-18; Thomas 1998: 186-87; MacDonald 1995: 2354, 2361) That view is not sustainable for several reasons:

1. Begging the question. The dispensationalist view *assumes in advance* that the church is raptured before the tribulation because that is demanded by dispensationalism itself. That, of course, is the fallacy of *petitio principii* or “begging the question” (i.e., taking for granted or assuming the very thing that needs to be proven). Further, such an idea is not mentioned anywhere in Revelation.
2. **Rev 1:19** is not designed to establish a three-part chronological structure for the events that take place in history. “First, ‘things that you have seen’ in 1:19 probably does not refer only to the initial vision in 1:12-18 and therefore to a part of the book that deals with the past in distinction to parts that deal with the present and the future, referred to in the subsequent phrases in 1:19. It refers, rather, to the book’s entire vision (‘what you see,’ the aorist tense of *eides* indicating not the time of the vision but its totality). This likelihood is substantiated by the observation that v 19 does not stand alone but is part of an overall section (vv 9-20) that is best viewed as a commissioning narrative, so that ‘write what you see’ is merely a repetition of the command in 1:11 to record all the visions of the book. Second, ‘things that are’ probably refers not only to the present as described in chs. 2-3 but to references to the present throughout the book. In fact, it may not be a temporal reference at all, but an allusion to the figurative nature of the book that needs to be interpreted (accordingly, some translate *ha eisiv* as ‘what they [the pictorial visions] mean’.” (Beale 1999: 162-63)

The third phrase, “*after these things,*” does not mean “after the things of the church are completed” as, for example, Chuck Smith takes it (Smith 1980a: 17-20; Smith 1980b: 17-18). Rather, **Rev 1:19** (along with **1:1; 4:1; and 22:6**) alludes to **Dan 2:28-29, 45**. That context is important for interpreting “*after these things.*” Specifically, **Dan 2:29** uses the phrase “*after these things*” (Greek = *meta tauta*) as equivalent to the phrase “*in the latter days*” (**Dan 2:28**). As such, when John uses the same phrase in **Rev 1:19**, the time period to which it refers includes the entire period from Christ’s first coming until the establishment of the new heavens and new earth.¹²

¹² Additionally, the words *meta tauta* occur eight other times in the book of Revelation (**4:1; 7:1; 7:9; 9:12; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1; 20:3**). The phrase indicates “the order in which John saw the visions but not necessarily the historical order of their

3. “The things which are” and “the things which will take place after these things” are connected and are not capable of complete separation. Both “the things which are” and “the things which will take place after these things” describe the content of the one “revelation” that Jesus Christ gave to John (**Rev 1:1-2**). As such, the “seven letters to the seven churches” (**Revelation 2-3**) concern the churches’ present circumstances but also make promises with respect to the future. Indeed, much of what was included in those “seven letters” was future when John wrote Revelation but is now past to us. Similarly, the fact that the visions in **Revelation 4-22** depict events that were future when John received the visions does not tell us which of those events are future to us. Many of the events of **Revelation 4-22** take place throughout history and transcend history. Thus, a simple and definable “past-present-future” chronological structure of Revelation is not correct.

VI. The church in Revelation

A. The book of Revelation was written to, for, and about the church

The book of Revelation was written to the church (**Rev 1:4; 22:16**). As we saw above, it was written for the church and deals with issues that concern the church. Consequently, as we will see, the church is present throughout the book.

On the other hand, dispensationalists believe that the church is raptured at the beginning of **chapter 4**, in part because “the word *church*, so prominent in chapters 2 and 3, does not occur again until 22:16” (Walvoord 1966: 103). Again, that view *assumes in advance* that the church is raptured before the tribulation because that is demanded by dispensationalism itself. That view is not sustainable for at least two reasons.

1. The absence of the word “church” proves nothing at all. “First, it should be noted that the word ‘church’ (*ekklēsia*) as a denotation of the body of Christ as a whole does not appear at all in the book. The only usage of the word in the book is to apply to a particular local church or to ‘the churches.’ . . . Since the terminology is not used in the book at all, it should be obvious that the absence of the corporate ‘church’ in some of the chapters can be no more significant than its absence in the book as a whole.” (Bell 1967: 318-19) Second, the word “church” is not used in John’s visions describing the people of God in heaven where dispensationalists say the church is located after **Rev 3:22**. Even **Rev 19:7-9**, which refers to the “marriage supper of the Lamb,” does not use the word “church,” but calls the church the “bride” and the “saints.” Third, several Gospels and Epistles also do not use the word “church,” but clearly are talking to and about believers (i.e., the church).¹³

2. The entire book concerns the church. Both John’s introduction (**Rev 1:1-4**) and his concluding reference to the church in **Rev 22:16** (“*I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches*”) make clear that the *entire book* concerns the church. “Revelation 1:4 tells us that the whole of the book is addressed to these churches, and that fact alone means that the letters [i.e., **Revelation 2-3**] are not intended to stand alone and apart from the whole book” (Goldsworthy 2000: 217). Since the book of Revelation is “*the Revelation of Jesus Christ*” (**Rev 1:1**), Christ’s body, the church, is present throughout the book. It is described in various symbols in virtually every chapter. John assumes the NT truth that, “as the body of Christ, and therefore it is to be expected that the body will share the experience of the Head” (Ford 1979: 259). Thus, throughout the book we see the church experiencing both the suffering, and the vindication and triumph, of Christ. In **Rev 22:16** where Jesus says “*I have sent My angel to testify to you these things,*” the subject of the angel’s testimony is the entire book, not just some part of it. Dispensationalism makes the vast bulk of the book *irrelevant* to the church. The dispensationalist interpretation that the church is absent from the book after **chapter 3** is amazingly far-fetched. The idea that “in the consummating book of the New Testament, directed specifically to seven historical local churches facing severe persecution and needing desperately some hopeful words from the apostle, John instead directs only three chapters to them and spends the remainder of his time compiling a lengthy eschatological handbook concerning events which were to take place on the earth after the church is removed . . . reveals its shallowness and its failure to deal with the contents of the book in any meaningful way” (Bell 1967: 317).

occurrence as events” (Beale 1999: 316–17).

¹³ *Ekklēsia* does not appear in the gospels of Mark, Luke, and John. It also does not appear in the epistles of 2 Timothy, Titus, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, and Jude.

B. *The importance in Revelation of the use of OT figures to describe the church*

At the very outset of the book (**Rev 1:6**) John says, “*He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father.*” That is applying to the church the language of **Exod 19:5-6**, which originally had applied to OT Israel (cf. **1 Pet 2:5, 9**). **Rev 5:9-10** uses similar language. The application in Revelation of OT figures for the nation of Israel to the church has important implications for understanding the book and seeing the central place the church has in it: “The whole trend of the book, from the introductory reference to the Christian churches in Asia under Jewish sanctuary symbolism, to the final vision of the New Jerusalem, testifies to the fact that in the thinking of the seer, the Christian church has taken the place of literal Israel. . . . From this principle emerges yet another. If the things of Israel are now applied to the Christian church they must thereby automatically have a world-wide application rather than merely a local. The true Israel is scattered throughout every nation, and similarly Babylon also has become world-wide. The seven lamp-stands point to a world-wide body of believers, but the original seven-branched candlestick resided in a Palestinian holy place. Throughout this book John takes materials from the visions of the Old Testament prophets originally couched in a local setting, and he applies them to world-wide events.” (Ford 1979: 257, 258)

VII. Overview of major ideas and sections¹⁴

Several aspects of the major ideas and sections of Revelation have already been discussed above, particularly in chapter **I. Genre** (regarding numbers and time periods in Revelation) and **V. Structure** (particularly parallels of the seals-trumpets-bowls and the multiple descriptions of the *parousia* and final judgment), As we go through the major sections of Revelation, please refer back to those prior discussions as those aspects of the book will not be repeated. Other important aspects of the major sections of the book are below.

A. *Rev 1:1-20: Prologue*

Verse 1 begins, “*The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place.*” This is telling us that God is the author, he wrote the script, and he knows what is coming next. **Rev 1:1** alludes to **Daniel 2**, which three times talks about how God made known what will take place “*in the latter days.*” By substituting the word “soon” for “*in the latter days,*” John is saying that we are in the latter days now; the time of fulfillment is at hand. This is similar to when Jesus announced at the beginning of his ministry, “*the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand*” (**Mark 1:15**). God’s sovereign control is further indicated in **vv. 4** and **8**, which say that God is “*the one who is and who was and who is to come*” and “*I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . the Almighty.*” Those expressions tell us that God is sovereign over all of history: past, present, and future. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. That is telling us that nothing that exists is outside of God’s control. He is eternal. He is the first and the last. When **v. 8** says that God is “*the Almighty,*” that is telling us that there is no power that can compare to him. John promises blessing to those who read, hear, and heed the words of the book (**Rev 1:3**).

1. The “seven spirits who are before His throne” (Rev 1:4; see also 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). That is probably a figurative reference to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit clearly is one (**Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 22:17**; see also **Eph 4:4**) yet is referred to as “the seven Spirits” (**Rev 1:4; 5:6**; or “sevenfold Spirit,” NIV note) which, in **Rev 5:6**, are equated with the Lamb’s “seven eyes.” The “seven eyes” and “seven Spirits” have been adapted from **Zech 3:8-9; 4:1-10**.¹⁵ In **Zech 3:9**, the “seven eyes” are related to an inscription that deals with God’s removing the iniquity from the land. In **Zech 4:2, 10**, the “seven lamps” and “seven eyes” are associated with God’s Spirit. “John has interpreted the ‘seven eyes’ in Zechariah as Yahweh’s Spirit and has identified both as a possession of the Lamb. It is only by the Spirit of Yahweh’s ‘Servant the Branch [**Zech 3:8**],’ the messianic lamb, that iniquity has been removed

¹⁴ Good audio expositions of the book of Revelation that can be listened to or downloaded for free, are available online by: Arturo Azurdia at: http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/azurdia_revelation.html; G. K. Beale at: <http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library?f%5Bbook%5D%5B%5D=Revelation&f%5Bcontributors%5D%5B%5D=B%5Deale%2C+G.K.&page=2&sort=contributors>; D. A. Carson at: <http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library?f%5Bbook%5D%5B%5D=Revelation&f%5Bcontributors%5D%5B%5D=C%5D=Carson%2C+D.+A.&sort=contributors>; John Fesko at: <http://www.genevaopc.org/audio/fesko-lectures/72-revelation-lecture-series.html>; Jonathan Menn at: <http://www.elea.net/sermons.html#revelation> (both audio and written transcripts); and Kim Riddlebarger at: <http://www.christreformed.org/kim-riddlebarger/#Revelation> (audio), and <http://kimriddlebarger.squarespace.com/downloadable-sermons-on-the-bo/> (written transcripts).

¹⁵ The “seven Spirits” may also have been adapted from **Isa 11:2** which speaks of “*the Spirit of the Lord . . . the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.*”

from the world (Zech. 3:9) and resistance to the kingdom overcome (cf. Zech. 4:6–7).” (Beale and McDonough 2007: 1102; see also Bauckham 1993b: 110-15) The “seven Spirits” suggest the fullness of the Spirit.

2. The “bond-servants” (Rev 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 11:18; 19:5; 22:3, 6). Every reference to “bond-servants” (Greek = *doulos*, often translated “slave” or “servant”) in Revelation (except 15:3 where the term is used of Moses) undeniably refers to Christians (i.e., the church). In fact, every time the term is applied in the NT to people living after Jesus’ resurrection, it applies to Christians, not Jews. In Rev 7:3 “bond-servants” is another way of describing the 144,000 of 7:4. Since nowhere in the NT is the term “bond-servants” used to distinguish “Jewish believers” from regular Christians of any background, it should be taken the same way, as applying to the church, in 7:3 (for more on the 144,000, see section VII.D. Rev 6:1-8:5: *The seven seals*, below).

3. The seven churches (Rev 1:4; 2:1-3:22). The seven churches were real, historical churches in the Roman province of Asia (modern Turkey). The letters to the seven churches show that the church is the true Israel of God. The distinction between outward, physical Israel and inner, spiritual Israel is clear from the references in 2:9 and 3:9 to “those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” In other words, “there are men who are actually and outwardly Jews—literal Israel—but in reality they are not true Jews—spiritual Israel—but follow the ways of Satan rather than God” (Ladd 1972: 116).

Although they are addressed to specific, historical situations in the different churches, the seven messages have universal import. They address issues and problems that are common to all churches and set forth principles valid in all churches. The “seven letters” have a common purpose: “The entire sequence is a literary composition designed to impress upon the church universal the necessity of patient endurance in the face of impending persecution” (Mounce 1998: 65). Consequently, virtually all commentators (except preterists) view the seven churches as representative of churches throughout history until the Second Coming. Even dispensationalists view the seven churches as “representative not only of the rest of the churches of their time, but also of the entire age until Christ comes” (Thomas 1998: 216). Several linguistic and contextual factors within Revelation suggest that the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 were selected to typify or apply to the universal church:

- *“The seven churches.”* First, even the early church regarded the number “seven” as indicating fullness or completeness. Hence, the “seven” churches signify the universal church (Aune 1997: 130; see also Johnson 2001: 14; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 53). Second, in Rev 1:4 the definite article (“the”) before “seven churches” is an indication that the seven churches were designed to have universal applicability: “John addressed himself not to seven, but to ‘the seven churches which are in Asia,’ as if there were no more churches in the province. More, however, there certainly were. . . . Importance must be attached to the number seven. Every reader of the book of Revelation is familiar with the singular part played by that number in its structure, and with the fact that (unless chap. xvii. 9 be an exception) it never means that numeral alone. It is the number of unity in diversity. . . . Their number—seven—must thus be regarded as typical of unity, and the seven churches as representative of the one universal church.” (Milligan 1896: 28-29)
- *Write in “a book” (or scroll).* The fact that the seven messages to the seven churches are to be written on only one book or scroll (Rev 1:11) is significant: “The fact that there is only one scroll, instead of seven, confirms that the book is for the entire Christian Church” (Hamstra 1998: 101).
- *To “the churches.”* The way Jesus ends each message to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 demonstrates that each message is not limited to that individual church but also is applicable to the wider church. The reason is that, even though each of the “seven letters” is addressed to a particular church, the end of each letter is to the churches as a whole, i.e., “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).
- *Fulfillment of promises at the end of the book.* What is promised to the seven churches in Rev 2:1-3:22 finds its fulfillment later, particularly at the end of the book (see above, section V.B. *Repetition of phrases and ideas*). That indicates the continued presence of the church throughout the book and the representative nature of the seven churches.

4. “A kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (1:6; 5:10; compare Exod 19:6; Isa 61:6; see also 1 Pet 2:5, 9). This is an OT description of Israel which is now being applied to the church, i.e., the new, true, spiritual Israel. “In Mosaic times the nation of Israel was made a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5-6). Hebrews 10:19-25 shows that all Christians now have the privileges of the high priest, in that they are able to enter the Most Holy Place through Christ” (Poythress 1991: 116). “As the language used here of

these *men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation*, when they are said to have been made *a kingdom and priests unto our God*, is the same kind as that of [1:6], we seem entitled to conclude that, even from its very earliest verses, the Apocalypse has the universal Church in view.” (Milligan 1896: 82)

5. The description of Jesus (Rev 1:5-8, 12-20). Even in the introduction the focus is on Christ. Jesus is the “*faithful witness*” (1:5) because he did nothing on his own but only what the Father showed him (John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10). He lived a perfectly holy life and is the perfect manifestation of the Father (Matt 1:22-23; 27:3-4; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; 23:22, 40-41, 47; John 5:30; 7:18; 8:29, 46; 14:6-11; 17:6; Acts 3:14; 4:27, 30; 13:28, 35; 2 Cor 4:4; 5:21; Col 1:15, 19; 2:9; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3, 9; 3:2; 4:15; 7:26-28; 9:14; 1 Pet 1:19; 2:22; 1 John 2:29; 3:5; Rev 3:7; 5:1-8).

The description of Jesus having “*the dominion forever and ever*” (1:6), “*coming with the clouds*” (1:7), being “*like a son of man*” (1:13), “*clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash*” (1:13), whose hair is “*white like white wool*” (1:14), with eyes “*like a flame of fire*” (1:14), and feet “*like burnished bronze*” (1:15), are all taken from the book of Daniel: Dan 7:14, everlasting dominion; Dan 7:13, coming with the clouds and son of man; Dan 10:5, robe and sash; Dan 10:6, eyes and feet; Dan 7:9, hair like white wool. In Dan 10:5, however, the hair like white wool refers to the “*Ancient of Days*,” i.e., God. Rev 1:14 is showing that Jesus is God. This is corroborated in 1:15, which says “*His voice was like the sound of many waters.*” That same description is applied to God in Ezek 43:2. Also, in 1:17-18 Jesus says, “*I am the first and the last [i.e., Alpha and Omega] . . . and I have the keys of death and of Hades.*”

B. Rev 2:1-3:22: *The letters to the seven churches*

Even in the first century the churches were experiencing the signs Christ had warned about in the Olivet Discourse, including persecution by Jews (Mark 13:9; Rev 2:9-10; 3:9), persecution in general including death (Matt 24:9; Rev 2:9-10, 13), false prophets (Matt 24:5, 11, 23-26; Rev 2:2, 6, 14-15, 20-24); falling away from the faith (Matt 24:10; Rev 2:14, 20-24; 3:1-3, 15-17), and love growing cold (Matt 24:12; Rev 2:4). In this section, Christ encourages the churches to witness and warns them against compromise in order that they may inherit eternal life.

1. The ethical nature of the prophecies to the churches. The “seven letters to the seven churches” is a key section in the book. They consist entirely of Christ’s words to the churches, which alone makes them important. They provide exhortations, warnings, and promises that play out throughout the rest of the book and are fulfilled at the end of the book. Håkan Ulfgard notes, “The ‘letters’ to the seven churches also have the character of a public, prophetic message. Their words of comfort or threat are not directed at the distant future, but speak directly into the lives of the readers/listeners, challenging them to identify themselves with the ‘symbolic universe’ outlined in John’s visions, and to act accordingly.” (Ulfgard 1989: 13)

Part of the prophetic-ethical strategy of the seven messages is to highlight the contrast between “present and eschatological reality.” Richard Bauckham explains: “The Bride is the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God (21:2), the church at the consummation of history. The Bride is the church which the Lamb, when he comes, will find ready for his marriage, arrayed in the fine linen of righteous deeds (19:7-8). The Bride is the church seen from the perspective of the *parousia*. Very different were the churches addressed in the Apocalypse. The ‘soiled clothes’ of the Christians at Laodicea (3:17) contrast with the pure linen of the Bride. The general unpreparedness for the Lord’s coming at Ephesus, Pergamum, Sardis (3:17) contrasts with the Bride’s ardent prayer for the Bridegroom’s coming (22:17). The contrast is not really between the faithful and the unfaithful within the churches. . . . The contrast is rather between present and eschatological reality, between the churches as they are and the churches as they must become if they are to take their place at the eschatological nuptial banquet.” (Bauckham 1993a: 167) That same contrast should impel us to assess the present state of our own churches and lives in light of the coming eschatological reality.

2. The contrast between the churches and the “earth-dwellers.” The phrase “*those who dwell on the earth*,” or variants of that phrase, repeatedly occurs throughout the book (Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8). The phrase consistently has a negative meaning. It indicates that, at their essence, unbelievers approach life from a worldly perspective and mindset; they are *of* the world in addition to being *in* the world (cf. John 17:14-18). As such, they follow the ways of the world and fall under God’s condemnation.

By contrast, in Revelation the church always belongs to heaven regardless of where its members

may reside physically (Johnson 2001: 147). Throughout Revelation, all of humanity (“*every tribe and people and tongue and nation*”) is seen as being a member of one of two, mutually opposing, camps: the world (**Rev 11:9; 13:7; 14:6**; see also **17:15**), or the church (**Rev 5:9; 7:9**); those who dwell on the earth (**Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8**), or those who are citizens of heaven (**Rev 6:9, 11; 7:9-10; 11:12; 12:10; 14:1-3; 15:2-4; 19:1-9, 14; 20:4-6**); those who worship the beast (**Rev 13:3, 4, 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11; 19:20**), or those who worship the Lamb (**Rev 4:8-11; 5:9-14; 6:9; 7:9-17; 11:15-18; 12:11, 17; 14:4, 12; 15:2-4; 17:14; 19:5-9; 20:4; 21:9; 22:3**); those who bear the mark of the beast (**Rev 13:16-17; 14:9, 11; 19:20**), or those who are sealed by God (**Rev 7:3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4**); those whose names have not been written in the book of life (**Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:15**), or those whose names have been written in the book of life (**Rev 3:5; 21:27**); those who are part of the “great city” (**Rev 11:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21**), or those who are part of the “beloved city” (**Rev 20:9**). There is no “neutral” or third alternative.¹⁶ Therefore, believers should approach life from a heavenly perspective and mindset (**Phil 3:20**); although they are *in* the world they should not be *of* it (**John 17:13-19**). The entire book of Revelation provides the heavenly perspective of the true significance of what is occurring on earth, so that believers can be conformed to the image of Christ (**Rom 8:29**).

3. The paradoxical nature of “overcoming.” In **Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21** Christ gives promises to the one who “overcomes.” The Greek for “overcome” or “conquer” is *nikaō*. That same term is used in **Rev 12:11, 15:2**, and in **Rom 8:35-37**. The use of *nikaō* in **Revelation 2-3** (and throughout Revelation) indicates a paradoxical notion of “overcoming” that is modeled on Christ’s own overcoming of Satan and death. In **Rev 1:5-6**, John describes Christ’s redemptive work. “That the victory of Christ took place at his death is clear from John’s reference to his blood (1:6). Without at all denying the victory in Christ’s resurrection, the irony of victory in Christ’s death is palpable.” (White 2000: 172) The paradoxical nature of Christ’s overcoming likewise is portrayed in **Revelation 5**. “He conquered death by being raised from the dead. But the present victorious effect of the Lamb’s overcoming resides not only in the fact that the Lamb continues to ‘stand’ but also in the fact that it continues to exist as a slaughtered Lamb. . . . That is, Christ as a Lion overcame by being slaughtered as a Lamb, which is the critical event in chap. 5.” (Beale 1999: 352)

The church follows in her Master’s footsteps. For believers, what Revelation is saying, as White puts it, is that “like Jesus’ initial kingship, the church’s kingship consists now in conquering by maintaining her faithful witness in the face of trials (e.g., 2:9-11, 13; 3:8; 12:11); in overcoming the powers of evil (e.g., 6:8 in relation to 6:9-11); in subduing sin in her members’ lives (see chaps. 2-3); and in beginning to rule over death and Satan by identification with Jesus (cf. 1:5-6, 18). The church’s endurance, then, is part of the process of conquering.” (White 2000: 175)

We see this same paradoxical notion of “overcoming” in **Rev 11:7; 13:7** where the beast is said to “overcome” the saints by causing their physical suffering and death. At the same time, however, Christ and the saints are said to “overcome” the dragon, the beast, and all their agents “*because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death*” (**12:11**; see also **15:2; 17:14**). White concludes, “Perseverance in faith despite persecution is victory for the church in history” (White 2000: 168).

4. What Jesus commends, condemns, and promises. Each message to an individual church ends with the words, “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” Thus, anything that is said in these two chapters that applies to one applies to all, both individually and corporately.

Jesus commends three things to more than one of the churches. Repeating something indicates its importance. The first thing Jesus commends is *perseverance*: Ephesus in **2:2-3**; Thyatira in **2:19**; and Philadelphia in **3:10**. Perseverance is staying faithful; not falling back into sin or apostasy. Perseverance is continuing to do what we ought to be doing day in and day out, in good times and bad, whether we are recognized for it or not—because Jesus recognizes it. The second thing, which is closely related to perseverance, is *not denying the faith—not denying the name of Jesus*. Jesus commends Pergamum for this in **2:13** and Philadelphia in **3:8**. In both cases the specific context had to do with pressure put on people or even persecution because they were Christians. The third thing that Jesus repeats in a positive way has to do with *white garments*. Jesus mentions this in connection with Sardis in **3:4** and Laodicea in **3:18**. **Rev 19:8** tells us that those white garments are “*the righteous acts of the saints.*”

¹⁶ In the second half of the book we see this dualism expressed through the contrast of three vivid images involving animals, women, and cities: Beast—Lamb; Harlot—Bride; Babylon the great—New Jerusalem.

As with the things he commends, there are three main things that Jesus repeatedly condemns. The first thing that Jesus condemns is a twofold matter of *idolatry and immorality*: Pergamum in **2:14** and Thyatira in **2:20**. Both examples combine food sacrificed to idols and immorality. Eating food sacrificed to idols was a major issue in the first century. But doing that was just the external manifestation of idolatry that had already taken place in the heart. Once idolatry occurs, it leads to every other kind of immorality. The reason is that idolatry is the root sin of mankind, because idolatry is putting anything or anyone over God and Christ. The second thing that Jesus repeatedly condemns is also an internal matter. To both Smyrna in **2:9** and Philadelphia in **3:9** Jesus condemns “*those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*” When Revelation was written, there were ethnic Jews in the churches, but they were not what Jesus calls “true Jews”—they were not true, *spiritual* Israel. They were people who named Jesus’ name but had never really broken with their past. Having Jesus as our Lord means that there is now a fundamentally new allegiance in our lives: it is not our race, our tribe, our socio-economic status, or our nation—it is Jesus. The final thing Jesus repeatedly condemns is *the failure of the churches and the people to evaluate themselves*. Jesus does this by way of *contrast*. To Sardis in **3:1** he says, “*I know your deeds that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*” And to Laodicea he says in **3:17** he says, “*You say I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing, but you don’t know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.*” The problem is that we are blind to our own blindness. We think that the way *we* see things is the way *everyone else* sees things or *should* see things.

Jesus’ evaluation of the churches ultimately relates to our relationship with *him*. If he truly is number one in our lives, if he truly is our Lord, we *will* persevere; we will *not* deny the faith; we will act as he acts. But if he is not truly our Lord, we will be idolaters with a Christian face; we will think we are something when we are nothing. Jesus knows where our hearts really are. This is reflected in the promises he makes to overcomers. The promises fall into four basic categories: promises concerning Life, a Name, Authority, and Relationship. He makes promises concerning *life* to Ephesus in **2:7**, to Smyrna in **2:11**, and to Sardis in **3:5**. Each such promise is a different way of saying, “Everyone who is in Christ has eternal life.” He makes promises concerning a *name* to Pergamum in **2:17**, to Sardis in **3:5**, and to Philadelphia in **3:12**. He makes promises concerning *authority* to Thyatira in **2:26-27** and to Laodicea in **3:21**. He makes promises concerning a *relationship* to Pergamum in **2:17**—“*I will give some of the hidden manna and I will give him a white stone,*” to Thyatira in **2:28**—“*I will give him the morning star,*” and to Philadelphia in **3:12**—“*I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.*” These promises highlight our oneness and intimacy with Christ. Jesus *is* the manna (**John 6:48-58**). Jesus *is* the white stone (**Mark 12:10**). Jesus *is* the morning star (**Rev 22:16**). Jesus *is* the temple (**Rev 21:22**). In these promises Jesus is saying, “Everything that I am, I give to you.” He is promising us an amazing intimacy of relationship with himself. That is why in the NT, and in Revelation in particular (**Rev 21:2, 9-10**), Jesus is called the bridegroom and husband and the church is called the bride and wife. Jesus is promising us *himself*, completely, intimately, and forever, in a way that the best marriages on earth only hint at.

C. Rev 4:1-5:14: The throne, the book (scroll), and the Lamb

In this section, God and Christ are glorified because Christ’s resurrection demonstrates that they are sovereign over creation to judge and to redeem. “The ‘book’ is best understood as containing God’s plan of judgment and redemption, which has been set in motion by Christ’s death and resurrection but has yet to be completed” (Beale 1999: 340). Schüssler Fiorenza states, “The central theological question of chapters 4-5 as well as of the whole book is: Who is the true Lord of this world?” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 58)

There are significant parallels between these two chapters and **Daniel 7**:

<i>Event</i>	<i>Daniel 7</i>	<i>Revelation 4-5</i>
1. Introductory vision phraseology	Dan 7:9	Rev 4:1
2. Throne(s) set in heaven	Dan 7:9a	Rev 4:2a
3. God sitting on a throne	Dan 7:9b	Rev 4:2b
4. God’s appearance on the throne	Dan 7:9c	Rev 4:3a
5. Fire before the throne	Dan 7:9d-10a	Rev 4:5
6. Heavenly servants surrounding the throne	Dan 7:10b	Rev 4:4b, 6b-10; 5:8, 11, 14
7. Book(s) before the throne	Dan 7:10c	Rev 5:1-5
8. The book(s) opened	Dan 7:10c	Rev 5:2-5, 9
9. A divine figure receives authority to reign forever	Dan 7:13-14a	Rev 5:5b-7, 9a, 12-13
10. The kingdom’s scope: “all peoples, nations, and tongues”	Dan 7:14a	Rev 5:9b

11. The seer's emotional distress on account of the vision	Dan 7:15	Rev 5:4
12. The seer's reception of counsel from one of the heavenly servants	Dan 7:16	Rev 5:5a
13. The saints given divine authority to reign over a kingdom	Dan 7:18, 22, 27a	Rev 5:10
14. Concluding mention of God's eternal reign	Dan 7:27b	Rev 5:13-14

Those parallels indicate the following four basic ideas:

“(1) John intends chs. 4-5 to depict the fulfillment of the Daniel 7 prophecy of the reign of the ‘son of man’ and of the saints, which has been inaugurated by Christ’s death and especially his resurrection, that is, his approach to the throne to receive authority.

(2) The combination of such scenes as Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1-2 with the predominant scene from Daniel 7 expresses a judgment nuance in the vision, since these scenes all serve as introductions to announcements of judgment. . . . More precisely, these OT scenes present a vision of God’s cosmic reign and dominion that issues first in judgment, followed by redemption. This is the theological background of Revelation 4-5 and subsequent chapters.

(3) The idea of judgment is also connoted by the image of the ‘book,’ which has been described in language from Ezekiel 2, Isaiah 29, Daniel 7, and Daniel 12. Each of these contexts has the central idea of judgment, but again together with ideas of salvation or blessing.

(4) The Daniel 7 idea of a kingdom in which all peoples will serve the ‘son of man’ (Dan 7:14) and God (7:27b) is seen by John as fulfilled in the church. Yet the church is also the fulfillment of the Danielic reign of the saints of Israel.” (Beale 1999: 314-15 [chart]; 368-69 [text])

1. The 24 elders (Rev 4:4, 10; 5:8; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4). Many view the 24 elders as representing the entire OT and NT church, combining the numbers of the 12 patriarchs and the 12 apostles (Milligan 1896: 69; Hendriksen 1982: 85). However, in **Rev 5:8-10, 11:16-18, and 14:1-3** there appears to be a distinction between the 24 elders and the redeemed (Ladd 1956: 97-98). Further, in **Rev 5:8 and 7:13-14** (cf. **8:3**), elders perform angelic functions and reveal matters to John. Consequently, although they are associated with the church, they do not appear to be identical to the church (see Ladd 1972: 73-75; Beale 1999: 322; Johnson 2001: 99-100).

2. The book (scroll) sealed with seven seals (5:1-4). There are several theories concerning the identity of the sealed book. Some suggest that the book is the disclosure of the names of the redeemed. However, “by opening the scroll the Lamb does not merely disclose its contents, but puts them into operation,” and “there is no suggestion here or elsewhere in the book that John’s purpose was to reveal the identity of the redeemed” (Caird 1966: 71). Others contend that the book is the OT. However, the description of the scroll is drawn from **Ezek 2:9-3:3**. Therefore, to view the book or scroll as the OT “overlooks John’s dependence on Ezekiel . . . and it does not explain why the death of Christ should be the indispensable qualification for opening the scroll” (Caird 1966: 72).

Kenneth Gentry correctly notes the dependence on Ezekiel and observes that the point of Ezekiel’s vision was “judgment on Israel” (Gentry 1998: 51). As a preterist, he contends the scroll is “God’s divorce decree against his Old Testament wife for her spiritual adultery” (Gentry 1998: 51-52). In the OT, God indeed talked about such a divorce (see **Isa 50:1; Jer 3:8**). In AD 70, “the final and conclusive destruction of the temple accomplishes this” (Gentry 1998: 52). However, by concentrating on the events of AD 70, the preterist view misses the far broader story of Revelation. It also fails to see how Revelation transforms and universalizes OT ideas.

Another view is that the book is the revelation of those coming events which John has been charged to communicate. However, Christ won the right to open the scroll by his death on the cross. “There is no very obvious reason why, having won the right in A.D. 30, he should have postponed the exercise of it until A.D. 95. The natural assumption is that the opening of the scroll, by which its contents are both revealed and put into effect, follows immediately on the victory by which he acquired the right to open it. This means that from John’s standpoint some at least of the contents are already past; and for confirmation of this we need only turn to the vision introduced by the breaking of the fifth seal, in which John looks back on a past martyrdom as well as forward to a future one.” (Caird 1966: 71-72)

The best view, therefore, is that “the content of the scroll is God’s redemptive plan, foreshadowed in the Old Testament, by which he means to assert his sovereignty over a sinful world and so to achieve the purpose of creation. John proposes to trace the whole operation of this plan from its beginnings in the Cross to its triumphal culmination in the new Jerusalem.” (Caird 1966: 72; see also Beale 1999: 340)

3. The Lion who is a Lamb (5:5-6). Just as Revelation has a paradoxical notion of “overcoming,” so

Rev 5:5-6 presents a contrasting and paradoxical identification of Christ as both a military conqueror and a sacrificial victim. In the contrast between what he hears (**Rev 5:5**) and what he sees (**Rev 5:6**), John “first evokes the idea of the Messiah as the Jewish nationalistic military conqueror and then reinterprets it by means of the notion of sacrificial death for the redemption of people from all nations (cf. 5:9-10). . . . By placing the image of the sacrificial victim alongside those of the military conqueror, John forges a new symbol of *conquest* by sacrificial death. . . . Jesus the Messiah has already defeated evil by sacrificial death. He has won a victory, but by sacrifice, not military conflict, and he has delivered God’s people, but they are from all nations, not only Jews. The continuing and ultimate victory of God over evil which the rest of John’s prophecy describes is the outworking of his decisive victory won on the cross.” (Bauckham 1993a: 214-15)

4. The “saints” (**Rev 5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:6-7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9**).

Everywhere else the NT uses the word “saints” it manifestly is referring to Christians (the church) (see **Matt 27:52; Acts 9:13, 32, 41; 26:10; Rom 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25, 26, 31; 16:2, 15; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:1, 2; 14:33; 16:1, 15; 2 Cor 1:1; 8:4; 9:1, 12; 13:13; Eph 1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Phil 1:1; 4:22; Col 1:2, 4, 12, 26; 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Tim 5:10; Phlm 5, 7; Heb 6:10; 13:24; Jude 3**). Most of the images in Revelation picture the “saints” on earth (**Rev 5:8; 8:3-4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 20:9**). Others picture them in heaven (**Rev 13:6; 18:20; 19:8**). That is consistent with the rest of the NT, which establishes a connection between the church on earth and the church in heaven. For example, **Phil 3:20** tells us “*our citizenship is in heaven.*” **Eph 2:6** affirms that the church is “*raised up with Him, and seated with Him in the heavenly places*” (see also **Col 3:1**). As in **Rev 14:1** where the 144,000 are “*standing on Mount Zion*” with the Lamb, so in **13:6-7** the saints on earth also are “*those who dwell [or ‘tabernacle’] in heaven.*”

In Revelation the connection between the saints on earth and the saints in heaven is seen in at least two ways: in persecution and defeat; and in ultimate victory. The saints on earth are oppressed “because loyalty to their heavenly citizenship demands disobedience to their earthly citizenship” (Beale 1999: 697). Nevertheless, although they are oppressed on earth, the saints’ spiritual connection with the heavenly realm remains active and effective. In both **Rev 5:8** and **8:3-4** censers (incense bowls) symbolize “*the prayers of the saints.*” In **8:5** an angel fills the censer with the fire of the altar and throws it to earth. “The imagery is powerful: Christians’ prayers are integral to the downfall of the gospel’s enemies” (Johnson 2001: 142).

5. Those who have been “*purchased . . . from every tribe and tongue and people and nation [who have been made] a kingdom and priests to our God*” (**Rev 5:9-10**). The “new song” of **Rev 5:9-10** is a song of victory and redemption. Those who have been purchased out of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation, now constitute a kingdom and priests (for more on “purchased” see below at “The 144,000 of **Rev 7:4-8; 14:1-5**”). The reference to “*kingdom and priests*” is drawn from the promises given to Israel in **Exod 19:6** and **Isa 61:6**: “(a) First of all, the verbs of both of these OT texts are future tenses—they contain God’s promises to His people for the future. By affirming that Jesus has made us to be a kingship and priests, the author clearly sees Christ’s redemptive actions as a fulfillment of those promises of God. (b) Second, the promises made to ‘the house of Jacob,’ or ‘the people of Israel’ [**Exod 19:3**] or ‘those mourning in Zion’ [**Isa 61:2-3**] are in Revelation seen to be fulfilled in the Christian church.” (Bandstra 1992: 16; this is also affirmed in **1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6**)

With respect to their “*reign upon the earth*” (**Rev 5:10**), both the present (“*they reign*”) and the future (“*they will reign*”) tense are supported by good textual evidence. The present is probably to be preferred since **5:9-10** appears to describe “an inaugurated fulfillment of the prophesied kingdom of the saints and ‘son of man’ in Daniel 7 and by the fact that 1:5b-6a, which views the saints as a *present* kingdom, is developed in 5:9b-10a. . . . Both 1:5-6 and 5:9-10 make explicit that the creating of saints as a kingdom is a direct result of Christ’s redemptive death, so that it is probable that this kingdom began immediately after this death. Furthermore, the ‘new song,’ which encompasses ‘already-and-not-yet’ redemptive truths, includes reference to Christ’s present authority (‘opening the book’), so that the saints’ reign, also a part of the song, likely includes reference to an inaugurated event.” (Beale 1999: 362-63) In other words, “The saints who are now crushed on earth are already recognized in heaven as those to whom dominion belongs, and stand even now before the throne of the Most High” (Hooker 1967: 29).

D. **Rev 6:1-8:5: The seven seals**

In this section Christ exercises His role as king and judge by using evil heavenly forces to inflict trials

on people throughout the time before His return, for purification of believers or punishment of unbelievers. Although Christians are persecuted, the last judgment is God’s ultimate response to the saints’ prayer in **6:10** that He avenge their blood.

1. The four horsemen (Rev 6:1-8). On their face, the first four seals unleash four individual “horses,” upon each of which sits an individual rider.¹⁷ Nevertheless, “not one of the four riders is a person. Each is rather a cause, a manifestation of certain truths connected with the kingdom of Christ when that kingdom is seen to be, in its own nature, the judgment of the world. Even war, famine, and death and Hades, which follow, are not literally these things. They are simply used, as scourges of mankind, to give general expression to the judgments of God.” (Milligan 1896: 89)

In addition to identifying these “four horsemen of the apocalypse,” there is also the issue of when the horsemen are unleashed. Some think that the horsemen are unleashed only shortly before Christ’s second coming. However, the context of the passage demonstrates otherwise. **Revelation 6** is intimately connected with **Revelation 5**. **Revelation 5** provided that the Lamb (Christ) alone was worthy to “*open the book*” (**Rev 5:4, 8**) and “*break the seals*” (**Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1**), based on what he did on the cross (**Rev 5:5-6, 9**). Consequently, **Rev 6:1-8** describes destructive forces that were unleashed as a result of Christ’s death on the cross and his concomitant resurrection and ascension. The identification of the seals as being inaugurated with the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, as opposed to being events that only occur shortly before the *parousia*, is confirmed by the parallel between the “signs” Jesus gave in the Olivet Discourse, which characterize the entire period between Christ’s first advent and the Second Coming, and the events listed in **Rev 6:1-14**:

<i>Olivet Discourse (signs)</i>	<i>Revelation 6 (seals)</i>
Matt 24:5, 11, 23-24; Mark 13:6, 22 (false Christs)	corresponds to 1 st seal (6:2)
Matt 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11 (famine)	corresponds to 2 nd seal (6:4)
Matt 24:6-7, 12; Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:10 (wars and rumors of war)	corresponds to 3 rd seal (6:6)
Matt 24:22; Mark 13:12, 20; Luke 21:24 (death); Luke 21:11 (plagues)	corresponds to 4 th seal (6:8)
Matt 24:9; Mark 13:9, 13; Luke 21:12, 16-17 (believers persecuted & killed)	corresponds to 5 th seal (6:7-10)
Matt 24:29; Mark 13:24-25; Luke 21:25 (signs in the sky & heavens)	corresponds to 6 th seal (6:12-14)

Although the events of the first four seals may occur one after another, it is more likely that they occur simultaneously since: (1) the fourth seal appears to summarize the first three; and (2) **Ezek 14:12-21; Zech 6:1-8**; and the Olivet Discourse (**Matt 24:6-13; Mark 13:7-9; Luke 21:9-12**), on which **Rev 6:1-8** is based, portray such events as occurring simultaneously.

Just as **Revelation 4-5** raised the question “Who is the true Lord of this world?” Christ’s receipt of the book (scroll) and his breaking of its seals answers that question. By receiving the book and breaking its seals, Christ is demonstrating that he is the reigning Lord, exercising sovereignty over the world and all that happens in it.¹⁸ That Christ is the ultimate cause of the judgments is seen in the fact that Christ’s breaking the seals is the basis of the command to the horsemen to “come” (**Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7**). The major OT passages behind **Rev 6:1-8** likewise have God as the ultimate cause of the judgments (see **Zech 6:1-8; Ezek 14:12-21**). This is important for what follows in the rest of the book, since much of what follows details oppression, plagues, and death. Even in the plagues, Christians should be able to recognize that Christ is sovereign.¹⁹ That Christ ultimately is in charge gives Christians confidence and hope. Such trials test, prove, and refine the faith of believers while, at the same time, acting as punishments on those who reject Christ and persecute the church.

2. The rider of the white horse (Rev 6:1-2). The identity of the first horseman has caused considerable debate. The issue is whether he is a positive or a negative rider.

a. *The white horseman as positive*. “Some commentators [e.g., Irenaeus 1885: 4.21.3; Hendriksen 1982: 93-96] have identified the rider as Jesus Christ, but the problem with this view is that since the Lamb is the one opening the seals in heaven, he cannot also be one of the riders. Moreover, theologically it would be inappropriate to have an angelic being, a creature, command Christ, the Creator, to do things (6:1).” (Ngundu 2006: 1557)

¹⁷ The personal, singular “he” or “him” is used of each of the riders.

¹⁸ **Rev 1:5, 13-14; 2:26-28; 3:21; 5:1-4** show that Christ already has begun his messianic kingship. See also **Matt 28:18; Acts 2:32-36; Eph 1:18-22** which all attest that he is reigning now as messianic king.

¹⁹ The authority of the four horsemen is in the form of “divine passives, i.e., “*it was given to him*” (**Rev 6:2**); “*it was granted*” (**Rev 6:4**); “*authority was given to them*” (**Rev 6:8**). The power given to the horsemen not only is given to them by heavenly authority but is subject to divinely-appointed limits (see **Rev 6:6, 8**).

The second “white horseman as a positive force” view is stronger than seeing the first horseman as Christ himself. Several commentators who view the first rider as a positive force conclude, “The rider is not Christ himself but symbolizes the proclamation of the gospel of Christ in all the world” (Ladd 1972: 99; see also Milligan 1896: 89-90). This view is based on the fact that, the 14 times it is used elsewhere in the book, “white is always a symbol of Christ, or of something associated with Christ, or of spiritual victory” (Ladd 1972: 98). Also, “the same basic structure of thought appears in the Olivet Discourse and in the Revelation: a time of preliminary troubles marked by evils in human society and in nature (the seven seals) . . . there is, however, in the preliminary evil period one positive note . . . ‘the gospel must first be preached to all nations’ (Mark 13:10).” (Ladd 1972: 98-99) Further, the bow is often used as a symbol of divine victory (**Ps 45:4-5; Isa 41:2; 49:2-3; Hab 3:9, 13; Zech 9:13**), and elsewhere in Revelation Christ elsewhere is seen wearing crowns (**Rev 14:14; 19:12**) and “conquering” (**Rev 3:21; 5:5; 17:14**)

b. *The white horseman as negative.* Other commentators hold that it is more likely that the rider on the white horse, like the riders on the other three horses, is a symbol of the Antichrist and the forces of evil. Reference to a personal Antichrist, however, appears to be problematic. “As with the personal equation of the first rider with Christ, the inclusion of Antichrist here breaks the sequence of otherwise impersonal causes which are mentioned during this scene in Rev. 6” (Smalley 2005: 150).

Therefore, the “white horseman as evil” view is strongest when identifying the white horseman as false Christs, false prophecy, or the forces of evil in general, rather than as Antichrist *per se*. Alan Johnson mentions the major arguments in favor of that position: “Support for the identification of the white horse with the Antichrist and his forces is the parallelism with the other three horses, which are instruments of judgment. The references in 19:11-16 to the rider on the white horse as ‘Faithful and True’ and of whom it is said that ‘with justice he judges and makes war’ may stand in contrast to the rider in 6:2 who is not faithful or true and who wages war for unjust conquest. . . . Again, the ‘bow’ would most naturally be connected with the enemy of God’s people (Ezek 39:3; cf. Rev. 20:7-8). Finally, the parallelism to the Olivet Discourse shows that the first events mentioned are the rise of ‘false Christs and false prophets’ (Matt 24:24).” (Johnson 1981: 473)

Additionally, the four horse-drawn chariots of **Zech 6:1-8** clearly are an OT source behind the four horsemen of **Rev 6:1-8**. In Zechariah, the four horse-drawn chariots are all of the same nature. Further, the fourth horseman (“Death,” with “Hades” following him, **Rev 6:7-8**) appears to be the result or summary of the activities of the prior horsemen. If so, then the first horseman, like the other three, must be evil. On balance, therefore, the “white horseman as evil” appears to be the stronger position.

3. The martyrs (**Rev 6:9-11**). Some hold that the martyrs are OT saints, largely because of the “absence of the stock phrase ‘the testimony of Jesus’ in Rev. 6:9” (Mealy 1992: 85n.1), and the fact that they had not obtained their white robes before, but only receive them in **6:11** (Milligan 1896: 98-102). Nevertheless, it is far more likely that the martyrs represent Christians, perhaps including OT saints.

First, the context in Revelation concerns the church and the persecution of Christians for the testimony of Jesus (see **Rev 1:9; 2:9; 2:13; 3:10**, and virtually everything from **Rev 7:1-20:10**). Second, “One of the repeated emphases of the entire New Testament is that it is the very nature of the church to be martyr people. When Jesus taught that a man to be his disciple must deny himself and take up his cross (Matt. 10:38; 16:24), he was not speaking of self-denial or the bearing of heavy burdens; he was speaking of the willingness to suffer martyrdom. The cross is nothing less than an instrument of death. Every disciple of Jesus is in essence a martyr; and John has in view all believers who have suffered.” (Ladd 1972: 104; see also Bauckham 1993b: 155; Milligan 1896: 102, 192) Therefore, while it is possible that only literal martyrs are in mind, it is “more likely ‘slain’ is metaphorical and those spoken of represent the broader category of all saints who suffer for the sake of their faith. . . . The only other place in the Apocalypse where deceased believers are exhorted to ‘rest’ appears to be addressed to all saints in general who persevere by ‘keeping the commandments . . . and their faith’ and ‘die in the Lord’ (14:12–13).” (Beale 1999: 390-91)

As to not explicitly saying “*of Jesus*” after “*the testimony*” in **6:9** some ancient manuscripts do include the phrase “*of the Lamb*” after “*because of the testimony*” (Beale 1999: 391). In any event, the testimony “*of Jesus*” is implied from **1:2, 9**. Further, **12:11**, which obviously refers to Christian

martyrs, likewise speaks only of “*the word of their testimony*,” which is equivalent to “*the testimony of Jesus*” (12:17). Finally, receiving white garments is a heavenly reward for the faithful (3:4, 5, 18; 6:11; 7:9, 14; 19:8, 14).

As with the first four seals, martyrdom (the fifth seal) is an event which characterizes the entire period until Christ’s return. This passage is of crucial importance in understanding the book, since the rest of the book, in essence, represents and illustrates the answer to the martyrs’ prayer in **Rev 6:10**.²⁰ At this point, it is important to observe how the martyrs epitomize the paradoxical nature of the believers’ victory over Satan, the “beast,” the forces of evil, and the world. The paradoxical or counter-intuitive nature of the martyrs’ victory is discussed in depth by Bauckham: “When the beast puts the martyrs to death, who is the real victor? The answer, in Revelation, depends on whether one sees the matter from an earthly or a heavenly perspective. From the earthly perspective it is obvious that the beast has defeated the martyrs (11:7; 13:7). . . . The apocalyptic visions, however, reveal that from a *heavenly* perspective things look quite different. From this perspective the martyrs are the real victors. To be faithful in bearing the witness of Jesus even to the point of death is not to become a helpless victim of the beast, but to take the field against him and win. John can depict the triumph of the martyrs only in scenes set in heaven, because it requires the heavenly perspective—established when the slaughtered Lamb is first seen triumphant before the throne of God (5:6)—to make their triumph apparent, but the heavenly perspective is destined to prevail on earth at the parousia (19:11-21). . . . The martyrs conquer not by their suffering and death as such, but by their faithful *witness* to the point of death (cf. 12:11). Their witness to the truth prevails over the lies and deceit of the devil and the beast. For those who reject this witness, it becomes legal testimony *against* them, securing their condemnation. This negative function of witness also a positive possibility: that people may be won from illusion to truth.” (Bauckham 1993a: 235, 237)

4. The prayer of the martyrs and its answer (Rev 6:10-17). The prayer of the martyrs and its sequellae are unique in Revelation: “In a book imbued with references to worship, the opening of the fifth seal in [Rev 6:9-11] contains the only example of a prayer of supplication and its answer” (Heil 1993: 220). As such, this prayer “exemplifies the prayer of the holy ones [in Rev 5:8],” and “with regard to the succeeding context, the souls’ prayer sets the agenda for the remainder of the book” (Heil 1993: 242).

God’s immediate answer in **Rev 6:11** warns the “servants” to whom the book is addressed (**Rev 1:1**) that like the “fellow servants” (**6:11**) and brothers of the souls under the altar, they can expect to be killed for the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ. At the same time, “they are assured that God will eventually judge and vindicate them, so that they can hope to share in the white robes and heavenly rest of the souls who have gone before them.” (Heil 1993: 221-22)

The judging of “*those who dwell on the earth*” and the vindication of the church, which answer the martyrs’ prayer, are seen at various points in the remainder of the book. In **Revelation 6** itself, the answer to the prayer of **6:10** is explicitly seen at **6:12-17**. The context of the martyrs’ prayer of **6:10**, and God’s telling the martyrs to wait until the number of their fellow servants to be killed was complete (**6:11**), shows that what is depicted in **6:12-17** must be the final judgment.²¹ “The calamitous scene in 6:12-17 assumes that the persecution of all Christians who are to be persecuted has finally run its course and that all that remains is to execute final punishment on the persecutors, which strikes the very last note of world history. Consequently, this passage cannot deal with preparousia judgments of unbelievers during an extended tribulation period, since they have not yet finished persecuting the saints at that point.” (Beale 1999: 396)

Because of the progressively parallel nature of the book, every scene of judgment on the ungodly and vindication of the believers is an answer to the prayer of the martyrs in **Rev 6:10**. **Rev 7:9** depicts an answer to their prayer, as it shows “*a great multitude which no one could count . . . standing before the Lamb . . . and palm branches were in their hands, and they cry out with a loud voice, saying ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’*”²² **Rev 14:3** shows the 144,000 singing

²⁰ The martyrs’ prayer, “*How long, O Lord?*” echoes Habakkuk’s cry (**Hab 1:2-4**) when his own people were being oppressed, justice was perverted, and Israel was faced with the might of Babylon.

²¹ Preterists, on the other hand, cite the fact that the people say to the mountains, “*Fall on us*” (**Rev 6:16**) as evidence that “this passage is not speaking of the End of the World, but of *the End of Israel* in A.D. 70” (Chilton 1987: 198). The reason is that the original context of the statement is Hosea’s prophecy against Israel (**Hos 10:8**) which Jesus quoted on the way to his crucifixion (**Luke 23:28-30**), specifically referring to the coming destruction of Jerusalem which happened in AD 70 (Chilton 1987: 198-99).

²² In **Rev 6:11**, God told the martyrs to rest until the full number of their brethren who also were to be killed had been

a new song before the throne. **Rev 15:2-4** similarly shows “*those who had been victorious over the beast . . . standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God, and they sang the song of Moses . . . and the song of the Lamb.*” Those images all show the vindication of the saints as the answer to the martyrs’ prayer.

In **Rev 16:3-6**, the prayer is shown to be answered in the judgment of the earth-dwellers. The prayer’s mention of God’s avenging “our blood” is directly alluded to: **Rev 16:3-4** states that the second and third bowls poured by the angels turn the sea, rivers, and springs into “blood.” **Rev 16:6** concludes, “*For they poured out the blood of the saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.*” Likewise, in the judgment of Babylon (**Rev 18:21-24**), **v. 24** says that “*in her was found the blood of the prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.*” When they are rejoicing over the judgment of Babylon, the multitude in heaven specifically rejoice over the fact that God “*has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her*” (**Rev 19:2**). That is a direct answer to the martyrs’ prayer in **6:10** in which they asked “*How long, O Lord . . . will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?*” The Greek word for “avenge” (*ekdikeō*) appears in Revelation only in **6:10** and **19:2**, thus connecting the two passages. **Rev 20:4-6** then emphasizes the positive vindication accruing to those who have been martyred for Christ.

5. The “144,000” (**Rev 7:4-8; 14:1-5**). Most agree that the 144,000 of **Rev 7:4-8** and **Rev 14:1-5** represent the same group (e.g., Beale 1999: 733; Ladd 1972: 114-17, 190; MacDonald 1995: 2371).

There are two main views about the identity of the 144,000:

(1) They are a group of ethnic Jews who have become believers in Jesus Christ during the tribulation shortly before the *parousia*. The identification of the 144,000 with ethnic Israel is based on taking the number and the tribal identity literally, and on the dispensational presupposition that the church has been raptured before the sealing of the 144,000 occurs (Pate 1998: 164-65; Thomas 1998: 196-97; MacDonald 1995: 2364). Gentry similarly believes that these are ethnic Jews who became believers but, as a preterist, he believes that this occurred before AD 70 (Gentry 1998: 56-57).

(2) The other main view (which we believe is the correct one) is that “under a Jewish figure, they include all the followers of Christ, or the universal Church” (Milligan 1896: 117; Ladd 1972: 114; see also Beale 1999: 412-23; Hamstra 1998: 106-07; Hendriksen 1982: 110-11; Ngundu 2006: 1559; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 67). This view is consistent with the purpose of the book as a whole: to inform, exhort, and comfort the church. It is also consistent with the theme of the sections of the book in which the 144,000 are found (i.e., **Rev 6:1-8:5** and **12:1-14:20**), both of which deal with the church facing persecution.

There are several exegetical reasons why the 144,000 constitute the church as a whole (Beale: 1999: 409-23; Milligan 1896: 114-21):

a. *The 144,000 are the same as the “bond-servants” of Rev 7:3*. The term for “bond-servant” (Greek = *doulos*) “is never used exclusively of Jewish Christians anywhere else in the book, but always refers to believers in general” (Beale 1999: 413). In fact, the entire NT makes very clear that in Christ “*there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised*” (**Col 3:11**; see also **Gal 3:28**). Christ “*made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall . . . so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man*” (**Eph 2:14, 16**).

Singling out ethnic Israelites for special favor is contrary to the entire thrust of the gospel, the NT, and Revelation in particular: “Nowhere else in the Apocalypse is any distinction drawn between Jewish and Gentile Christians. In Rev. 2-3, Christ walks among every part of the seven Asiatic churches, which were made up . . . of both former Jewish *and* former Gentile members. The sealed scroll of Rev. 5.1-8.1 contains the judgemental and salvific purposes of God for his whole world and his entire Church. . . . The praises of God which ring through the drama of Revelation, and culminate in the vision of the holy city of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22), are offered by all the saints of God, whatever their ethnic and religious background; and they all wear the same whitened robes (3.4, 5, 18; 6.11; 7.9, 13).” (Smalley 2005: 187)

Sealing on the forehead (**Rev 7:3**) corroborates that the entire church is sealed inasmuch as there is no indication of any limit among believers of those who are sealed.²³ The

completed. That is the exact situation dealt with in **Revelation 7**.

²³ Ulfgard points out, “These people are to be sealed in order to escape the wrath of God announced in 6:16f, not in order to

universal sealing of the whole church is confirmed by **Rev 7:1** in which four angels standing at “*the four corners of the earth*” hold back “*the four winds of the earth*” until the sealing is done. “Those demonic tempests are universal, and not particular, in nature; they affect potentially all creation, not just a part of it, and all Christians, not simply a privileged group of believers” (Smalley 2005: 188).

The primary OT background to the sealing of the church in **Rev 7:3** probably is **Ezek 9:3-10**, where God commanded an angel to mark the foreheads of all those who sighed and groaned over the abominations of Jerusalem; they would be spared during the judgment of the city. “Preservation of the faithful in the midst of judgment on the wicked is the theme of the Old Testament vision, and in like manner it is the theme of this vision of St. John” (Milligan 1896: 114).

b. *The sealing of the 144,000 contrasts with Satan’s sealing his followers.* Being sealed on their foreheads shows God’s ownership and is equivalent to having the name of Christ and God “*written on their foreheads*” (**14:1; 22:4**). It contrasts with the sealing that Satan does of his followers. The “mark” of the beast on the forehead of unbelievers (**13:16-17; 14:9-11**) is identified with the beast’s name.

In Revelation all human beings are identified with one of two camps: the world or the church; all belong either to Christ or to the beast. Consequently, since Satan puts a seal on all of his followers (**Rev 13:16-17; 14:9-11**), God correspondingly seals all of his followers (Beale 1999: 413). The universality of the sealing is confirmed by **Rev 20:4** which speaks of “*those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead.*” That is not referring to an ethnically-based group of people. **Rev 22:4** likewise talks about those who have “*His name . . . on their foreheads*” and clearly refers to all Christians.

The seal primarily implies spiritual protection. Although they may suffer and be martyred for their faith, since they bear the seal and name of Christ, not the mark of Satan and the beast, they can remain faithful to death, and are protected from God’s wrath in the judgment. This applies to all Christians, regardless of ethnic background. If the sealing here is only of a select group of Christians [i.e., Jewish believers only, as some commentators maintain] then, because nowhere else in Revelation does such a sealing take place, it follows that the remaining members of the church are not sealed and protected (Smalley 2005: 186, 188).

c. *The description of the tribes of Israel (Rev 7:4-8) indicates that the universal church, not just Jewish believers, is in view.* The NT shows the church to be the true, spiritual Israel. In Revelation, even before **chapter 7**, Christians have been depicted as true Israel. **Exod 19:6** is applied in **Rev 1:6** and **5:10** to the church; **Dan 7:18, 22** in **Rev. 5:9; Isa 62:2** and **65:15** in **Rev 2:17** and **3:12; Isa 43:4; 45:19; 49:23; and 60:14** in **Rev 3:9** (see Beale 1999: 418). “John distinguishes between literal and spiritual Israel, it would be possible for him to speak of the twelve tribes of Israel and by doing so to designate those who are true Jews—the church. And he indicates this intention [in **Rev 7:4-8**] by listing the twelve tribes in a form not identical with empirical.” (Ladd 1972: 116)

Several aspects of the list of the tribes in **Rev 7:4-8** are highly unusual: (1) The tribe of Dan is missing. (2) Manasseh is present but Ephraim is missing. (3) Joseph has been substituted for Ephraim, but that would create a duplication because Joseph would include both Ephraim and Manasseh since Joseph was their father. (4) The order of the tribes does not correspond to any listing in the OT: Gad, Asher, and Naphtali—who were sons of handmaids—are listed ahead of all the other sons except Judah (who is listed first) and Reuben. (5) The tribes themselves were no longer in existence as a result of the Assyrian exile in 722 BC, the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and mixed marriages.

Christopher Smith cogently demonstrates how John has adapted the conventional listings of the tribes to portray the church as the new Israel. He points out: “Judah is elevated to the head of the list because Christ, the head of the church, was descended from this tribe. . . . The promotion of the handmaids’ sons typifies the inclusion of the Gentiles in the new covenant . . . Reuben is not displaced, however. As the first-born, he represents believing Israelites, those

who, like the first-born in the Old Testament, “belong to the Lord” (Exod. 13.2). . . . Dan specifically is excluded, as many commentators have suggested, because of that tribe’s longstanding association with idolatry [and apostasy], and because of the Jewish tradition that the antichrist would come from the tribe of Dan.” (Smith 1990: 114-15)

Contextual details confirm that the 144,000 from the “tribes of Israel” in **Rev 7:4-8** represent a Jewish figure to symbolize the church. The details of the vision suggest that this is a vision of heaven—the true heavenly reality of the church (see **Eph 2:6; Rev 20:4**). John hears the noises of heaven (**Rev 14:2**), and the 144,000 are singing “*a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders*” (**Rev 14:3**; see also **Rev 5:8-10**). **Heb 12:18, 22** state that Christians “*have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.*” The church’s already having “*come to Mount Zion*” is reflected in the 144,000 of **Rev 14:1** who are “*standing on Mount Zion.*” They contrast with those who “*dwell on the earth,*” who are all the followers of the beast (**Rev 13:8, 12, 14**). The descriptions in both **Revelation 13** and **14** are intended to be all-inclusive. To contend that the 144,000 only includes a segment of believers destroys the contrast John is making between the residences of the people in **Revelation 13** and those in **Revelation 14**.

d. *The 144,000 of Rev 14:1-5 are parallel to all the redeemed of Rev 5:9.* In **Rev 14:3-4** the 144,000 are those “*purchased from the earth*” and those who have been “*purchased from among men . . . for God.*” In **Rev 5:9** the Lamb “*purchased for God men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*” The parallel between the two is so close that both groups mentioned as “purchased” likely are identical. “This would mean that the 144,000 in 14:1-3 are not some small remnant of ethnic Israelites but another way of speaking of the larger remnant of humanity living during the church age whom Christ has redeemed from throughout the world” (Beale 1999: 412). That is consistent with the other NT uses of “purchased” people (**1 Cor 6:20; 7:23**; Greek = *agorazō*). In those other passages Christ likewise purchased Christians in general (i.e., the church).²⁴

e. *In Rev 14:1-5 the 144,000 are described as virgins.* Here, again, one must beware of falling into the trap of interpreting apocalyptic imagery literalistically, as Payne does when he describes them as “a group of dedicated Christian youth” (Payne 1980: 612). Nowhere else does the Bible view sexual relations within marriage as sinful. If the image of **Rev 14:4** is taken literally and is not a symbolic representation of all believers, then John would be requiring celibacy and being male for the whole church. That, of course, is contrary to everything else in the NT.

The issue of **Rev 12:1-14:20** is the persecution of the church by Satan and the world system. Even though believers may be killed (**13:7, 15**), **14:1** shows the faithful believers standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion. In other words, just as the Lamb triumphed over Satan through his death, so do His people who follow in His footsteps (**14:4**).²⁵

“The word ‘chaste’ (or ‘virgins’) can refer to the spiritual condition, not only to physical relations” (Ladd 1972: 191). The prophets repeatedly compare idolatry and unfaithfulness to God with sexual immorality (e.g., **Isa 57:3; Jer 2:7-3:10; Ezek 23:48-49**). Jesus compared rejection of Him to adultery (**Matt 12:38-39; 16:1-4; Mark 8:38**). **Jas 4:4** extends the concept of spiritual adultery beyond specific idolatries or acts, by calling people “adulteresses” who have “*friendship with the world,*” or even have the “*wish to be a friend with the world.*” On the other hand, all Christians are called to be betrothed to Christ as “*a pure virgin*” (**2 Cor 11:2**). That idea is carried forward in Revelation in the image of the church as the bride (**Rev 19:7-9; 21:2, 9**).

²⁴ **2 Pet 2:1**, the last verse where Christ is said to have “purchased” people, appears to be a case in which Peter used phenomenological language, since he is referring to “*false teachers among you . . . even denying the Master who bought them.*” “In other words, he described the false teachers as believers because they made a profession of faith and gave every appearance initially of being genuine believers” (Schreiner 2003: 331). Even this passage confirms that whenever Christ truly purchases people, he purchases the church in general, not a special class of people.

²⁵ Bauckham sees the reference to virgins as belonging to the image of an army: “The followers of Christ are symbolized as an army of adult males who, following the ancient requirement of ritual purity for those who fight in holy war (Deut. 23:9-14; 1 Sam. 21:5; 2 Sam. 11:9-13; 1QM 7:3-6), must avoid the cultic defilement incurred through sexual intercourse. This ritual purity belongs to the image of an army: its literal equivalent in John’s ideal of the church is not sexual asceticism, but moral purity.” (Bauckham 1993b: 78; see also Yarbrow Collins 1998: 405-8; Johnson 2001: 202-3)

In the specific context of the 144,000, John speaks of the idolatrous worship of the beast as sexual immorality (**Rev 13:4, 6, 8, 11-18; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; 19:2**). We already have seen the juxtaposition of **chapters 13-14** in terms of where those who follow the beast reside (they “*dwell on the earth*”), compared to where those who follow the Lamb reside (they are “*standing on Mount Zion*”). The Lamb and the beast themselves are also juxtaposed in **Revelation 13-14** which, again, highlights the contrast between the two. In **14:1** we see the true Lamb; in **13:11** we see the false lamb. The contrast highlights the fact that all people follow either one or the other of the two “lamb.” Thus, it is obvious that the 144,000 are not “dedicated Christian youth” or any other subset of the church; the 144,000 is a figure for the church as a whole. Consequently, they are “virgins and undefiled in the sense that they have refused to defile themselves by participating in the fornication of worshipping the beast but have kept themselves pure unto God” (Ladd 1972: 191).

f. “144,000” is symbolic, not literal. Most commentators agree that the number 144,000 is symbolic. “In Revelation perfectly rounded thousands all appear to be symbolic.” (Gentry 1998: 56) “The number 144,000 is much better explained by its symbolic import—12 x 12 x 10 x 10 x 10 expressing completion in a salvific, covenant sense—than as a literal census of a Jewish remnant” (Smith 1990: 116). Beale concludes by describing the probable basis of the 144,000: “The square of twelve may be merely the number of the tribes of Israel multiplied by itself or, more likely, the twelve tribes multiplied by the twelve apostles. Ch. 21 confirms this suggestion, where the names of the twelve tribes and of the twelve apostles form part of the figurative structure of the heavenly city of God. . . . The city also has a wall one hundred and forty-four cubits in height with twelve foundation stones on which are written the names of the twelve apostles (cf. also the similar figurative use of ‘twelve’ twice in 22:2). If Gentile believers are clearly identified together with ‘the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel’ as part of the new Jerusalem (21:12, 14, 24; 22:2-5), then it is not odd that John should refer to them together with Jewish Christians in 7:4 as ‘the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.’ This receives confirmation from the prior observation that the ‘sealing’ of 7:2-3 is equivalent to believers receiving a ‘name.’ And it is clear that one of the names written on Gentile Christians, in addition to the names of God and Christ, is ‘the name of the new Jerusalem’ (3:12), which is a virtual reference to all Christians as ‘new’ Israel.” (Beale 1999: 417)

6. The “great multitude” (**Rev 7:9-17; 19:1, 6**). The primary issue regarding the “great multitude” is whether it is a different group from the 144,000, or is equivalent to the 144,000 seen from a different perspective. Those who think that the 144,000 are Israelite believers hold that the “great multitude” are Gentiles converted by the 144,000 Jewish Christians during the “great tribulation” (Pate 1998: 165), or are martyrs from all ethnic backgrounds (Payne 1980: 610-11; see also Johnson 1981: 484). The bases for those beliefs include the fact that the 144,000 are on earth, are specifically enumerated, and drawn from the “twelve tribes of Israel,” whereas the “great multitude” is in heaven, could not be counted, and come “*from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues*” (**7:9**) (Pate 1998: 165-66; see also Resseguie 2009: 137; Smalley 2005: 185). However, the symbolic nature of the number 144,000, and the theological designation of the church as the true Israel, indicate that “what some have seen as contrasts [between the groups described in **7:4-8** and **7:9-17**] may actually be designed to complement each other and show the continuity of the first group with the second” (Johnson 1981: 484). The fact that the “great multitude,” like the 144,000, represents the entire church is seen in the following ways:

a. *The relationship between the 144,000 and the “great multitude” parallels the relationship of the Lion and the Lamb in Rev 5:5-6.* There is a significant parallel between the description of the church in **chapter 7** and the description of Christ in **chapter 5**. In both cases John uses a “hearing-seeing” pattern, and in both cases that which is identified is identified by two different symbols. That is not by accident. Thus, in **Rev 5:5** John “hears” one of the elders talk of Christ as “*the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah.*” However, in **5:6** John “saw,” not a Lion, but “*a Lamb standing, as if slain.*” The Lamb is the Lion, not someone or something else. John employs that same method of identification in **chapter 7** by identifying the church first by what he “heard” (the 144,000) and then by what he “saw” (the great multitude): “The two images depict the same reality. They are parallel to the two contrasting images of Christ in 5:5-6.” (Bauckham 1993b: 76)

This double form of identification has theological significance in that it reveals different aspects of the church, just as “Lion” and “Lamb” reveal different aspects of the person and

work of Christ: “John views the same events from two different points of view. One point of view—what he hears [7:4]—is the inner reality or theological perspective. The other point of view—what he sees [7:9]—is the outward reality. On the one hand, John hears a symbolic number that represents the complete number of those who belong to God [i.e., God’s true Israel]. . . . On the other hand, John sees a multitude from every tribe and nation and language and people (7:9). . . . This is the outward reality: the Israel of God includes all who follow the Lamb, both Jews and Gentiles.” (Resseguie 2009: 137-38) Ulfgard adds, “While 7:4-8 (in an audition and from an earthly perspective) gives the symbolic number 144,000 to those who will be saved through God’s protective sign, 7:9–17 (in a heavenly perspective) visualizes their security and comfort in God” (Ulfgard 1989: 105).

A similar “hearing-seeing” (or “seeing-hearing”) pattern to describe the same thing is found throughout Revelation. Thus, in **Rev 9:13-16** John heard the angel blowing the sixth trumpet and what that entailed; in **9:17-21** he saw in a vision what occurred as part of the same reality he had just heard. In **Rev 14:1** John saw the Lamb and the 144,000 on Mount Zion; he then heard the same reality described in **14:2-5**. In **Rev 15:2** he saw the overcomers standing on the sea of glass; in **15:3-4** he heard what was sung by that same group. In **Rev 17:1-6** John saw the “great harlot”; in **17:7-18** he heard the angel state the identification and description of the same reality he had just seen.

b. *Just as the 144,000 identifies the church as true, spiritual Israel, so does the phrase “a great multitude which no one could count.”* The phrase “a great multitude which no one could count” (**Rev 7:9**) evokes the promise in the Abrahamic Covenant that God would “greatly multiply your descendants [lit. ‘seed’] so that they will be too many to count” (**Gen 16:10**; see also **Gen 13:16**; **15:5**; **22:17**; **26:4**; **32:12**). The NT repeatedly explains that the Abrahamic Covenant, and specifically the promise to multiply Abraham’s seed, is fulfilled in Christ and the church (**John 8:31-58**; **Rom 4:11-18**; **9:6-8**; **Galatians 3-4**). “Therefore, the multitudes in Rev. 7:9 are the consummate fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise and appear to be another of the manifold ways in which John refers to Christians as Israel” (Beale 1999: 427).

c. *The use of “a great multitude” elsewhere in Revelation.* **Rev 19:1** and **6** are the only other occasions when the phrase “a great multitude” is used in the book. In both cases it obviously refers to the entire church, not just a segment of it. On all three occasions in the book when “a great multitude” is found, the same Greek phrase (*ochlos polus*) is used.

7. The great tribulation (**Rev 7:14**). This is the only place in the Bible where the phrase “the great tribulation” occurs. In the Olivet Discourse (**Matt 24:21**) Jesus referred to “great tribulation” (without the definite article “the”) in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The images are drawn from **Dan 12:1** which speaks of “a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time.” The only other time the phrase “great tribulation” occurs is in **Rev 2:22** when Christ tells the church at Thyatira that he will throw those who commit adultery with Jezebel into “great tribulation.” The use of the article (“the”) in **7:14** suggests that this is the eschatological distress or tribulation prophesied by Daniel.

Although the emphasis may be on the final war waged by the dragon and his followers against the church, this eschatological distress suffered by the church is not limited to a brief period shortly before the *parousia*. “The ‘great ordeal’ survived by the redeemed does not occur exclusively at the end of history. The time of judgement has already been set in motion in John’s day, and may overtake believers as well as unbelievers (cf. 2.22) at any time, until the end of time. It is a present reality, and not only a future certainty, which can assume the form of persecution (2.2-3), famine (6.5-6), imprisonment (2.10) and even death (2.13; 6.9). . . . The ecclesial vision of Rev. 7:9-17 refers to a company of the faithful which includes martyrs, but embraces all believers.” (Smalley 2005: 196)

That also is suggested by **Rev 1:9** and the broader context of the NT’s understanding of tribulation and suffering. In **Rev 1:9** John calls himself “your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom.” In other words, John’s conviction is that the tribulation has already begun in his own day: “From the standpoint of the triumphant Church all the affliction of this present time is set in the light of the [great tribulation] which has already opened.” (Schlier 1965: 143-45) This suggests an “already, but not yet” nature of the tribulation, similar to that of the kingdom: since we are in “the last days” as a result of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, the tribulation has already begun; however, we can anticipate an extreme form of that tribulation shortly before Christ returns.

8. “They have washed their robes and made them white” (**Rev 7:14**). “Being placed in the blood makes

the blood the instrument by which the whitening takes place” (Porter 1999: 158). Other passages in the NT demonstrate a radically different view of tribulation and suffering that is relevant here to explain how the blood of Jesus whitens a person. In **Col 1:24** Paul says that his own sufferings on behalf of the church are “*filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.*” In **2 Cor 4:8-12** he also explains that the suffering of believers is “*carrying about in the body the dying Jesus*” so that, paradoxically, “*the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*” Likewise, in **Rev 7:14** and elsewhere in Revelation, those who have experienced tribulation, suffering, and death for the sake of Christ have demonstrated their radical identification with him. They have borne witness, both verbally and in their own bodies, to the suffering and death that he endured. They have, by their faithfulness through suffering, demonstrated that their own faith was real. Their suffering has purified them. They have been conformed into Christ’s image (**Rom 8:29**), because, like Christ, they have been “*obedient to the point of death*” (**Phil 2:8**). Because Christ is totally righteous, total commitment to Christ is righteousness and results in totally pure garments (see **Rev 19:8**).

Similarly, **Rev 12:11** states that “*they overcame him [Satan] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.*” Bauckham explains, “The victory does not consist in their mere death as such, but in their faithful witness to the point of death (cf. 2:13; 11:7), maintaining the witness of Jesus (12:7; 19:10), following in the path of Jesus whom Revelation 1:5 calls ‘the faithful witness’. The value of their witness is derivative from his, it is maintaining his witness, and so the victory of their faithful witness as far as death is derivative from his victory.” (Bauckham 1993a: 228-29) Again we see Revelation’s paradoxical view of overcoming and victory. Just as Jesus the Lamb triumphed through his sacrificial death (**Rev 5:6, 9**), so the victory of God’s people is of the same kind as the Lamb’s: faithfulness even to the point of martyrdom.

The connection with **Revelation 12** also shows us how John is depicting the church as the new, true Israel. We see this in at least two ways. First, the white-washed robes of **Rev 7:14** echo **Exod 19:10, 14** where the people of Israel had to “*wash their garments*” to prepare for God’s presence on Mount Sinai. In John’s vision, “the multitude in their white-washed robes are depicted as a true congregation of God analogous to Israel at Sinai” (Ulfsgard 1989: 84). Second, **Rev 12:6, 14** speak of the woman fleeing to the “wilderness” where she was “nourished.” That recalls Israel’s wilderness wanderings when God sustained the nation for forty years following the exodus. The feast of tabernacles celebrated that event (**Exod 23:16; 34:22; Lev 23:33-43; Num 29:12-38; Deut 16:13-15**). In **Rev 7:9**, the great multitude is seen standing before the Lamb with palm branches in their hands. Palm branches were particularly associated with the feast of tabernacles (**Lev 23:40**). Just as the palm branches were used in the feast of tabernacles to celebrate God’s protective presence among his people in the wilderness, so “in the Christian reinterpretation of the Bible they tell the readers/listeners that they share the same experience with Christ” (Ulfsgard 1989: 90). Given that connection, the great multitude’s crying out “*salvation to our God*” (**Rev 7:10**) may allude to **Ps 118:25**. That psalm was recited at the feast of tabernacles, and the *lulav* (palm branches) were waived at that point (Ulfsgard 1989: 91).²⁶

E. **Rev 8:6-11:19: The seven trumpets**

There is some disagreement among commentators concerning the extent to which the seals, trumpets, and bowls overlap. One complicating factor is mentioned by Johnson: “Just as the vision genre sometimes compresses vast historical eons into symbolic images that pass like the twinkling of an eye (see Rev. 12:1-5, which spans redemptive history from Genesis 3 to Acts 1), so also a split-second in time may be expanded in visionary descriptions and simultaneous climactic events presented as successive, in order to help hearers to see different facets of Christ’s victory.” (Johnson 2001: 176)

Those who think the seals, trumpets, and bowls are sequential in time typically cite: (A) the order of the plagues differ; (B) their intensity increases from ¼ of humanity in the seals (**6:8**) to 1/3 in the trumpets (**9:15**), to universality in the bowls (**16:1-11**); (C) the absence (in the bowl series) of “interludes or delays which impede the advance of the trumpet cycles toward their climax” (Johnson 2001: 36); (D) the bowls are described as being “*the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished*” (**15:1**) (see Beale 1999: 116-21; Resseguie 2009: 56-59; Smith 1962: 1515-16; Thomas 1998: 191-93; Johnson 2001: 36-37, 46-47, 223n.4). Thomas sees the seals,

²⁶ This connection is strengthened by the fact that when Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time, the people “*took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him*” (**John 12:13**). In **Rev 7:9-10** the great multitude is also “*standing . . . before the Lamb*” with palm branches in their hands. The Greek word for “palm trees” is *phoinix*. In the NT it occurs only in **John 12:13** and **Rev 7:9**.

trumpets, and bowls as being essentially, but not entirely, chronological. As he sees it, they have a “telescopic” relationship in which the bowl judgments are contained in and “issue from the last of seven trumpet judgments which, in turn, result from the seventh of seven seal judgments” (Thomas 1994: 73) On the other hand, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza draws a demarcation between the fifth seal and what follows. She sees the first five seals as preparatory, as opposed to the sixth-seventh seals, trumpets, and bowls, which she sees as the final, cosmic-cataclysmic events of the “great day of the Lord” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 65, 71, 93). Then again, Dennis Johnson appears to view the bulk of the seals and trumpets not as sequential but as overlapping throughout this age (Johnson 2001: 122, 146, 223). His demarcation essentially is between the trumpets and the bowls. He views only the seven bowls as indicating the final judgment, but essentially agrees with Thomas that they are “contained within and elaborat[e] on the seventh trumpet and the sixth seal” (Johnson 2001: 223n.4).

Others see progression of events in Revelation not as strictly chronological or historical but as representing a *literary* progression. In other words, the relationship between the seals, trumpets, and bowls is primarily thematic. Recapitulation is the occasion for new emphases. Beale, for example, contends that the bulk of the bowls recapitulate the seals and trumpets throughout this age, all having a common ending (the final judgment). He states, “There is not a one-to-one correspondence between each corresponding trumpet and bowl. But they are similar enough to be considered parts of the same overall program of divine judgments occurring during the same general period.” (Beale 1999: 810) In his view, the first five seals, six trumpets, and five bowls cover the time between Christ’s resurrection and the *parousia*; the last two seals, seventh trumpet, and last two bowls depict the last judgment (Beale 1999: 810).

In the first six trumpets (**Rev 8:6-9:21**), God responds to the saints’ prayer in **Rev 6:10** by using angels to bring judgments on the persecutors of the church. In **10:1-11** John is recommissioned to prophesy about God’s plan for bringing in the consummation of the kingdom. In **11:1-13** God’s decree insures His presence with His people and their effective witness, despite their persecution. In the seventh trumpet (**11:14-19**), God brings final judgment and establishes the consummated kingdom.

1. The trumpet judgments (**Rev 8:6-9:21; 11:15-19**). In typical prophetic fashion, in the OT the exodus plagues had been broadened to apply to Israel in its land (**Amos 4:10**) and to Israel in exile (**Deut 28:27-60**). Now they apply to the entire world:

1 st trumpet (hail) (8:7)	corresponds to 7 th plague (Exod 9:22-25)
2 nd and 3 rd trumpets (water to blood) (8:8-11)	correspond to 1 st plague (Exod 7:20-25)
4 th trumpet (darkness) (8:12)	corresponds to 9 th plague (Exod 10:21-23)
5 th trumpet (locusts) (9:1-11)	corresponds to 8 th plague (Exod 10:12-15)

The trumpets also parallel the exodus judgments in that, just as Israelites were not affected by the plagues, but only the Egyptians (**Exod 7:18, 21, 24; 8:3-4, 8-9, 11-12, 21-23, 29-31; 9:3-7, 10-11, 14, 23-26; 11:4-7**), so Christians, but not unbelievers, are protected from the trumpet judgments (**Rev 9:4**). In Revelation this does not mean that these judgments do not affect Christians in any way whatsoever. Christians may suffer physically in the same or similar ways as non-Christians suffer during these judgments, but the basis and nature of the judgments are different for Christians and non-Christians: “The judgments of the Trumpets are judgments on the world. The Church, it is true, may also suffer from them, but not in judgment. They may be part of her trial as she mixes with the world during her earthly pilgrimage. Trial, however, is not judgment. To the children of God it is the discipline of a Father’s hand. In the midst of it the Church is safe, and it helps to ripen her for the fullness of the glory of her heavenly inheritance.” (Milligan 1896: 155-56)²⁷

The first six trumpets parallel the first five seals. However, the focus is different: “whereas the first five seals focused on the trials through which believers must pass, now the focus in the first six trumpets is on judgments that unbelievers, both inside and outside the visible church, must endure” (Beale 1999: 472-73). The seventh trumpet parallels the sixth and seventh seals. They all describe the *parousia* which brings with it the final judgment and the beginning of the consummated kingdom.

a. A “fallen star” is given the key to the “bottomless pit” or “abyss” (**Rev 9:1-2; 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3**). In Revelation, the image of the “abyss” or “bottomless pit” appears seven times (**Rev 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3**). It is the abode of locust-demons [evil spirits] and their

²⁷ That is the same phenomenon we saw in **Rev 7:14**. Tribulation and suffering for Christ test, prove, and purify our identification with Christ in his own suffering and death. That is exactly what was predicted by Christ in the Olivet Discourse and in such passages as **Matt 10:16-39** and **John 15:18-25**. Dispensationalists, who think that the church will be raptured before any of these events occur and will have a “ring-side seat” to observe the sufferings of others, do not seem to have any conception of the Christian’s radical identification with Christ in his suffering or the paradoxical nature of both Christ’s victory and ours.

king (**9:1-11**); the beast rises from it (**11:7; 17:8**); it is where Satan is bound (**20:1-3**; see also **Luke 8:31; 2 Pet 2:4**). The “*star from heaven which had fallen to the earth*” (**9:1**) corresponds to Satan’s being “*thrown down to the earth*” (**12:9**), and Christ’s statement, “*I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning*” (**Luke 10:18**). “This ‘fallen star’ is the contrast and counterpart of Him who is ‘the bright, the morning star [**Rev 22:16**],’ and who ‘has the keys of death and of Hades [**Rev 1:18**]’” (Milligan 1896: 148). The fallen angel is “given” the key to release the locusts from the abyss. That is a “divine passive.” In other words, “only by God’s permission can [the evil spirits] be released to bring destruction to the earth (9:1-11; 20:1-3)” (Moo 2009: 157n.22).

The opening of the abyss in **Rev 9:2** may, counter-intuitively, demonstrate correspondence with the “binding of Satan” in **Rev 20:1-3**, not with the “loosing” or “releasing” of Satan in **20:3, 7**. The reason is that the events of **Rev 9:1-12** are not events that occur only immediately before the *parousia* but clearly are preliminary. More important theologically is the fact that the demons who are released in **9:1** cannot oppress believers but only those “who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (**9:4**). Similarly, “the locking up of the ‘abyss’ in 20:1–3 may convey the idea that Satan and his hordes cannot be on the loose to deceive those ‘who did not receive the mark [of the beast] on their foreheads [**20:4**].’ 9:1-10 and 20:1-3 are synchronous and portray those whom Satan is permitted to deceive and those whom he is not permitted to deceive.” (Beale 1999: 986)

b. *Locusts from the bottomless pit (Rev 9:1-12)*. The “locusts” are demonic in character. That is indicated by the facts that they dwell in and arise from the abyss as does the beast (see **Rev 11:7; 17:8**); their king is “the angel of the abyss” whose names mean “destruction” (Abaddon) or “destroyer” (Apollyon; **Rev 9:11**); and their actions are to torment and hurt people (**Rev 9:5, 10**).

While the locusts parallel the eighth plague of Egypt, the primary imagery appears to be drawn from the book of Joel. Joel speaks of a great locust plague (**Joel 1:4**). The locusts in Joel have the appearance “like the appearance of horses, and like war horses” (**Joel 2:4**; compare **Rev 9:7**). They came with the sound of chariots (**Joel 2:5**; compare **Rev 9:9**). They are associated with the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars (**Joel 2:10**; compare **Rev 9:2**) and herald the coming day of the Lord and the judgment that comes with it (**Joel 2:1, 11, 30-32**). The demonic “locusts” are not permitted to harm believers, since believers have been sealed (**Rev 9:4**). That demonstrates Christ’s ultimate authority over Satan and all of the evil that the book of Revelation depicts.

The “five months” of **Rev 9:5, 10** should not be taken literally since, as discussed earlier, most if not all of the numbers and time periods elsewhere in the book are not literal. “It is “more in accordance with the style of the Apocalypse to regard that particular period of time as simply denoting that the judgment has definite limits” (Milligan 1896: 147).

c. *The Euphrates (Rev 9:13-14; see also 16:12)*. To “literalize” the Euphrates would depart from sound principles of exegesis when dealing with a book of visions and metaphors. The Euphrates “is simply a symbol of judgment; and the four angels which had been bound at it, but were now loosed, are a token—four being the number of the world—that the judgment referred to, though it affects but a third part of men, reaches men over the whole surface of the globe.” (Milligan 1896: 151) The number “four” as indicating the world is seen in the fact that the earth is said to have “four corners” (**Rev 7:1; 20:8**) and “four winds” (**Rev 7:1**). The reference to the Euphrates anticipates the sixth bowl, where the Euphrates again is mentioned (see discussion below in connection with **Rev 16:12**). That connection suggests that this trumpet likely covers the entire inter-advent period and “contains a punitive pattern that finds consummation in the sixth bowl.

d. *The “200,000,000” (Rev 9:16)*. Although many Bibles translate the number of the horsemen as 200,000,000, that is not accurate. The actual wording in the Greek is *dismuriades myriadōn* (“double myriad of myriads” or “twice ten thousand times ten thousands”). “Without exception, *urias* (‘ten thousand’) designates an incalculable immensity wherever it is used without any numerical adjective. In the LXX the plural also has a figurative connotation of an innumerable, indefinite host [e.g., **Gen 24:60; Lev 26:8; Num 10:36; Deut 32:30; 33:2, 171 Kgs 18:7-8; Ps 3:6; Dan 7:10; Mic 6:7**]. . . . The use of the double plural *muriades myriadōn* (‘ten thousands of ten thousands’) in Rev. 5:11 in referring to an innumerable host confirms the same figurative

use of the almost identical double plural here. The prefix *dis-* ('twice') intensifies the figurative aspect of innumerability. Therefore, a figurative meaning is demanded by a literal translation of the number, since its plural forms leave it too indefinitely stated to be calculated precisely." (Beale 1999: 509) Attempts by some dispensationalists to take the number literally and apply it to the modern Chinese army are foolish (see Lindsey 1970: 84-87; Walvoord 1966: 166; see also Smith 1980b: 120 [“*the kings from the east*” of **Rev 16:12** are the armies of China, Japan, and India]; Pentecost 1958: 331 [“*the kings from the east*” are a “great opposing Gentile force that will be composed of the coalition of nations in Asia”]).

e. *The identity and purpose of the horsemen (9:17-21)*. Most commentators take the “horses” and their riders to be demonic, similar to the “locusts” of **9:1-11**. Boxall is representative: “As befits their demonic origin, these horses have the same hybrid nature as the locusts (Joel’s vision of the Day of the Lord has influenced both: e.g. Joel 2:4-5; cf. Ezek. 38:14-16). Their heads are like lions’ heads (again perhaps a parody of the true messianic Lion: 5:5; cf. 9:8), and their tails were like serpents, with heads by which they inflicted harm (cf. the scorpion-like tails of the locusts at 9:10, which also cause harm; at 12:9 Satan will be identified as the ancient serpent). The heads on the tails are probably to be envisaged as serpent-heads biting their victims.” (Boxall 2009: 148)

The ultimate purpose of the horsemen relates to redemption: either to bring humanity to repentance (Stylianopoulos 2009: 23n.23); or to confirm humanity in its idolatry and sin from which it does not repent (**Rev 9:20-21**)—and if there is no repentance, then there will be judgment. That leads Steinmann to conclude that the horsemen are not demonic but are a figure for Christians as witnesses in the world: “They bring a message of spiritual death to those who will not repent. That they share some of the features of the demonic scorpions of the fifth trumpet (breastplates, cf. 9:7, 17; powerful tails, 9:7, 19) reveals that the world sees them as demonic, as Jesus was viewed on occasion (cf. Matt 12:22–30; Mark 3:23–27; Luke 11:14–23).” (Steinmann 1992: 74)

If both the locusts and horsemen are demonic, then the picture most likely shows them following in the footsteps of their ultimate father, who was “*a murderer from the beginning . . . a liar and the father of lies*” (**John 8:44**). Beale maintains that the locusts and horsemen do not depict modern warfare but figuratively depict deception. Although that may seem counter-intuitive, he states, “The combination of serpents (9:19) and scorpions (vv 3, 5, 10) reflects a broader linkage in biblical and ancient thought, where the combination was metaphorical for judgment in general and deception or delusion in particular” (Beale 1999: 515; see **Num 21:6; Deut 8:15; Ps 58:3-6**; see also **Luke 10:17-19**). Thus, the demons deceive and harden the earth-dwellers in their rejection of Christ, their idolatry, and their sin.

Rev 9:20 indicates that the basic or root sin of mankind is idolatry which manifests itself in such practices as murder, sorcery, immorality, and theft (**Rev 9:21**). Idolatry, by its very nature, results from deception and turning from the truth to a lie. The entire scene echoes the song of Moses in **Deuteronomy 32**. There, God warns Israel against idolatry (**Deut 32:21**; compare **Rev 9:20**), compares the fruit of idolatry to the “*venom as serpents*” (**Deut 32:33**; compare **Rev 9:19**), and says that he will send against them “*the teeth of beasts*” and “*the venom of crawling things*” (**Deut 32:24**; compare **Rev 9:17-19**).

If the horsemen symbolically depict Christian witness, the result is the same. The fire from their mouths (**Rev 9:17**) is akin to the fire that comes out of the mouths of the “two witnesses” in **Rev 11:5**. The actions of the horsemen are called “plagues” (**Rev 9:18, 20**); again, the two witnesses had the power to bring “plagues” on the earth (**Rev 11:6**). The fact that the demonic locusts could not kill, but the horsemen can, suggests to Steinmann that “Satan can harm the soul but that Christians through the preaching of God’s word of judgment on the unrepentant can wield God’s power of divine judgment that kills the soul” (Steinmann 1992: 74).

Ironically, therefore, whether the horsemen are demonic or are Christian witnesses is not particularly significant in light of their activities and purpose. Even if they are demons, we must remember that it was Christ who broke the seals thereby releasing the horses and horsemen in **Rev 6:1-8**; it is God who authorized the release of the locusts in **9:1**; it is God who gives authority to the beast to make war with the saints and overcome them in **13:7**; and it is God who will release Satan in **Rev 20:3, 7**. So, either way, ultimately it is God who authorizes

the release of the horses and horsemen in **9:13-14** to accomplish his purposes.

We see God's superintending hand in the activities of the horsemen in that the horsemen have "*fire and brimstone*" that proceeds "*out of their mouths*" (**Rev 9:17-18**). The "mouths" suggest the speech of the horsemen: either deception that seduces mankind into idolatry (if the horsemen are demons), from which mankind does not repent; or the testimony of the believers (if the horsemen are Christian witnesses), which proves not to lead to mankind's repentance. The "*fire and brimstone*" is a clear Scriptural phrase signifying God's judgment (see **Gen 19:24; Deut 29:23; Ps 11:6; Isa 30:33; 34:8-9; Ezek 38:22; Luke 17:29**). It also is used in Revelation to describe the second death, the eternal "lake of fire" into which Satan, the beast, the false prophet, and all those whose names are not written in the book of life will be thrown as a result of God's judgment on their idolatry and sin (**Rev 14:10; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8**).

Rev 21:8 demonstrates its connection with **9:20-21** by repeating that idolaters, murderers, sorcerers, and immoral persons will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. As if to cement that connection, **21:8** ends its list of those who are subject to the second death by mentioning "all liars" (i.e., those who follow the path of idolatry by turning from the truth to a lie). Thus, either directly or indirectly, the horsemen are the instruments of God's judgment. The fact that they have the power to kill (**9:18, 20**), whereas the locusts earlier in the chapter did not (**9:4-6**), indicates the "sealing" of God's judgment for idolatry (i.e., if the idolater does not have God's seal of protection [**9:4**], upon death his eternal spiritual state is sealed or made certain).

Regardless of the identity of the horsemen, therefore, John's interest in **Revelation 9** primarily is *theological*, not physical. He is using vision and symbolism not to talk about the torment or even death of the body *per se* but to highlight the torment and death of body and soul that will ensue if believers fall back in their commitment to Christ. As Jesus said, "*Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*" (**Matt 10:28**). The entire chapter is another, highly graphic, way of keeping the central issue—Where or with whom does our allegiance lie?—before us.

2. The little book (**Rev 10:2, 8-10**). The little book of **chapter 10** is closely associated with, if not identical to, the book of **Revelation 5**:

- Both books are opened.
- Both are held by Christ (as the Angel of the Lord in **chapter 10**).
- Christ is likened to a lion (**5:5; 10:3**).
- Both are allusions to the scroll of **Ezekiel 2**.
- Both are associated with a "strong angel" who "cries out."
- God is called the one who "lives forever and ever" (**5:13; 10:15**).
- Both books are directly related to the end-time prophecy of **Daniel 12**.
- In both visions someone approaches a heavenly being and takes a book out of the being's hand.
- In both visions John's prophetic commission includes nearly identical language in reference to the voice speaking from heaven (**4:1; 10:8**).
- Both scrolls concern the destiny of "peoples, nations, tongues, and tribes/kings" (**5:9-10; 10:11**) (see Beale 1999: 527; see also Johnson 2001: 159-60).

3. The "temple" and "holy city" (**Rev 11:1-2**). There are different views on the meaning of the temple and the holy city, which (as with most of John's imagery) fall into two large classes: "literal" views and "figurative or symbolic" views.

a. *The temple and holy city as literal*. Preterists view the temple as the literal, historical temple in Jerusalem that was destroyed in AD 70 (Gentry 1998: 65-67; Bahnsen 2015: 18). The reference in **11:2** to the outer court being "*given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months*" is seen as being derived from Christ's prediction in **Luke 21:24** regarding the siege and fall of Jerusalem by the Romans (Payne 1980: 616; Bahnsen 2015: 18-19). On the other hand, dispensational and some other futurist views project **Revelation 11** into the period immediately preceding Christ's *parousia*. Both the temple and the altar are taken as referring to a literal, restored temple in the literal "holy city" of Jerusalem. "Those who worship in it" are seen as believing ethnic Jews. (Thomas 1998:198; MacDonald 1995: 2367; Smith 1980b: 99-100; see also Ladd 1972: 149-51)

Both "literal" positions have little regard for the *purpose* of the book (which is relevant and directed to the church of all times, from the 1st century to the *parousia*); the *structure* of the

book (in which progressively parallel sections recapitulate the challenges facing the church during all periods of history, from the 1st century to the *parousia*); or the *symbolic nature* of the book (in light of which “the dictum of the popular approach to Revelation—interpret literally unless you are forced to interpret symbolically—should be turned on its head” [Beale 2006: 55]). G. B. Caird makes the perhaps counter-intuitive point (at least to Western “literalist” minds) that, when we take Revelation’s apocalyptic genre seriously, “It is hardly too much to say that, in a book in which all things are expressed in symbols, the very last things the temple and the holy city could mean would be the physical temple and the earthly Jerusalem. If John had wanted to speak about them, he would have found some imagery to convey his meaning without lapsing into the inconsistency of literalism.” (Caird 1966: 131)

b. *The temple as figurative.* The actual phrase “*temple of God*” is found eleven times in the NT (**Matt 26:61; 1 Cor 3:16, 17a, 17b; 2 Cor 6:16a, 16b; 2 Thess 2:4; Rev 3:12; 7:15; 11:1, 19**). Every time that phrase is used it refers to the church.²⁸ Consequently, the “temple” is best understood as figurative or symbolic of the church. Additionally, there are good contextual and theological reasons within Revelation itself why the “temple” of **Rev 11:1-2** cannot be a literal physical building, but symbolizes the church.

First, the Greek word for “temple” here is *naos*. *Naos* never refers to a physical, earthly temple any other time it is used in Revelation. In Revelation, *naos* refers either to God’s existing heavenly temple (**Rev 7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5-6, 8; 16:1, 17**) or to the future New Jerusalem where God and the Lamb are the temple (**Rev 3:12; 21:22**). In **Rev 3:12** the promise to the overcoming saints is that they will be made “*a pillar in the temple of My God.*” Since overcomers are promised to be made parts of God’s temple, it is not surprising that their identity as the temple is confirmed in **Rev 11:1-2** even while they are on earth.²⁹

Second, the symbolic nature of the language of **Rev 11:1-2** and identification of the “temple” with the church are reinforced by the fact that John is told to “measure” not only the temple and the altar but also “*those who worship in it.*” “Measuring” the temple comes from **Ezek 40:2-5; Zech 2:1-5**. Throughout the Bible, “measuring” is not merely a physical act to determine the size of something but has theological significance. “To measure expresses the thought of preservation, not of destruction. . . . When God therefore measures, He measures, not in indignation, but that the object measured may be in a deeper than ordinary sense the habitation of His glory.” (Milligan 1896: 169)³⁰ God is not interested in preserving physical buildings, since he “*does not dwell in houses made by human hands*” (**Acts 7:48**). Rather, he is interested in preserving his people, the church, which is his temple (see **1 Cor 3:9, 16-17; 2 Cor 6:16-7:1; Eph 2:21; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 3:12**; see also **Rev 13:6**).

Third, **Rev 13:6** is consistent with identifying the temple as the church by telling us that the beast blasphemes “*His [God’s] name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.*” Thus, in **13:6** the “tabernacle” and “those who dwell in heaven” are equated, just as the “temple” and God’s people are equated in **11:1**.³¹ That identity is corroborated by the fact that both the “forty-two months” and the “1260 days” of **Rev 11:1-2**, when seen in their context throughout Revelation, are, respectively, references to the persecution of, and God’s protection of, the church.

c. *The holy city as figurative.* Jerusalem was called the “holy city” in the OT and through the

²⁸ In **Matt 26:61** Jesus’ reference probably was to the temple of his own body (see **John 2:19-21**) (Nixon 1970:848). If the reference was to the then-existing temple building, it was only as a physical “type” or foreshadow of Christ and his people as the true temple (Beale 2004: 275-76).

²⁹ Similarly believers, while still on earth, nevertheless are said to be “raised” and “seated” with Christ in “heavenly places” (**Eph 2:6**). Further, Christ, in heaven, so identifies with his people on earth that he said to Saul of Tarsus, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *Me*?” (**Acts 9:4**).

³⁰ “Measuring as preservation” is another reason why either the first century temple building or a proposed future temple building cannot be in view here. The reason is that in the Olivet Discourse Christ predicted the “abomination of desolation” appearing in, and the destruction of, the temple, not its preservation and its being the habitation of God’s glory as is the case here (see Reader 1982: 410). A future temple building cannot be in view here for the additional reason that that would be a return to the “shadows” of the OT system, which Christ has forever fulfilled, abolished, and superseded (see **Heb 4:14-5:10; 7:1-10:22**).

³¹ Johnson notes that the NASB’s use of the words “that is” between “those who dwell in heaven” and “His tabernacle” equates the two and “accurately reflects the implication of the Greek grammar” (Johnson 2001: 166n.12).

time of Jesus' ministry on earth (e.g., **Neh 11:1, 18; Isa 48:2; Matt 4:5; 27:53**). However, after Jesus' resurrection and ascension Jerusalem is no longer called the "holy city." In Revelation, "holy city" is used only four times: here, and in **21:2, 10; 22:19** where it refers to the New Jerusalem, which is equated with the redeemed, the bride of Christ, the church. These multiple inter-textual cross-references dispel the error of "literalism" when interpreting an apocalyptic book like Revelation and clarify the meaning of the symbols John uses. Kistemaker concludes, "The holy city is the spiritual Jerusalem of the saints" (Kistemaker 2000: 437).

d. *The outer court.* The "outer court" is tied to the "holy city" in **11:2**. Thus, what is said about the "holy city" also applies to the "outer court." Many see "the court which is outside the temple" as a reference to those who outwardly belong to the church but are not true believers (Hendriksen 1982: 127; Milligan 1896: 174-75; Reader 1982: 411). However, "in what follows in ch.11 there is no mention of apostates or compromisers, only a contrast of true witnesses with those who persecute them" (Beale 1999: 560). Therefore, the "outer court" likely distinguishes "the inner, hidden reality of the church as a kingdom of priests (cf. 5:10) who worship God in his presence from the outward experience of the church as it is exposed to persecution by the kingdom of the nations" (see Resseguie 2009:161; Bauckham 1993a: 272). Therefore, the "outer court" likely suggests the outer experience of the church that faces persecution, as opposed to the inner, spiritual safety of the church which has been "measured" and is protected by God. Again, this imagery is another way of viewing the same reality, the church, from different points of view (Resseguie 2009: 161).

The identification of the "outer court" with the outward, physical state of the church and the hardship it suffers, as opposed to its inward, spiritual security in Christ, is consistent with John's description of the church throughout Revelation: the church follows in the footsteps of Christ; it may suffer and die transiently and physically, but it triumphs spiritually and eternally: "Like the seal which was set on the foreheads of God's servants, the measuring of the temple betokens an inner security against spiritual dangers. But the angel's orders are to leave the outer court exposed, because God does not offer to the church security from bodily suffering or death. It is his intention that they should remain outwardly vulnerable to the full hostility of their enemies, secure only in their faith in the crucified and risen Lord. The one thing he guarantees is that his witnesses shall have free scope to prophesy; for to prophesy is to die the death of a martyr." (Caird 1966: 132)

This view also correlates with Revelation's picture of the church as the "holy city": during "this age" the church is "measured" (i.e., is known and protected spiritually by God), but its "outer court" is not measured, and so it and the "holy city" will be "tread under foot . . . for forty-two months" (i.e., throughout "this age" the church, although protected spiritually, is subject to physical persecution in the world). With the *parousia* and the consummation of the "age to come," however, the "holy city" in its entirety is "measured" (**Rev 21:15-17**). In other words, in the consummation, the church not only is known and protected spiritually but now is no longer subject to any physical persecution. This dual picture also is consistent with the "already, but not yet" nature of the kingdom. Revelation's imagery is thus coherent with the rest of the NT's view of the church. To take such images as the "temple," "holy city," and "outer court" as physical entities, or as distinguishing believing Jews from non-believers, would actually destroy the amazingly coherent inter-relationship of Revelation's own symbology as well as the coherence of Revelation with the rest of the NT.

4. The two witnesses (**Rev 11:3-12**). As with most of the other symbols in the book, the "two witnesses" have been the subject of a great variety of interpretations (see Strand 1981: 127n.3). However, there are two primary clusters of interpretation: (1) Literalists view the "two witnesses" as literal individuals, either: the reincarnation of "Elijah and Moses [who] are God's messengers who will represent the Jewish Christian community at the end of history" (Pate 1998: 169); or "two actual historical eschatological personages who will be sent to Israel to bring about her conversion" (Ladd 1972: 154). (2) The better view sees the "two witnesses" as a symbol for the entire church, particularly in its role as a faithful witness (Hendriksen 1982: 129; Payne 1980: 617; Beale 1999: 573; Johnson 2001: 171). The reasons for identifying the two witnesses with the church are as follows:

a. *The symbolism behind the two witnesses is broader than simply the prophets Moses and Elijah.* **Rev 11:6** certainly alludes to Elijah (see **1 Kgs 17:1**) and Moses (see **Exod 7:14-12:32**). However, the reference to "two olive trees and two lampstands" (**11:4**) is clearly modeled on

Zech 4:1-14. The reference to “fire flow[ing] out of their mouth and devour[ing] their enemies” (**11:5**) is closely based on **Jer 5:14**. The resurrection of the two witnesses (**11:11**)—“the breath of life came into them” and “they stood on their feet”—is taken from **Ezek 37:5, 10**. The fact that the symbolism behind the two witnesses in **Rev 11:3-11** transcends Moses and Elijah indicates that the two witnesses themselves transcend Moses and Elijah (or individuals like Moses and Elijah).

b. *The attributes of Moses and Elijah are applied collectively.* While the role of the church-as-witness in **11:3-12** is modeled on Moses and Elijah, the “two witnesses” “do not function as two individual entities, but only as one entity—always in unity and in absolute union” (Strand 1981: 130; see also Beale 1999: 575 [“That these prophets are not two individuals comes from observing that the powers of both Moses and Elijah are attributed to both the two witnesses equally, and not divided among them”]). For example, **11:5** says “fire flows out of their mouth.” That statement cannot be “literal” and alone is sufficient to indicate that these are not individual human beings. Further, the word “mouth” is singular. Similarly, **11:8** refers to their “dead body,” not “bodies.” Although most translations say “bodies,” the Greek is singular. Thus, the “two witnesses” are treated as one collective entity not two individuals.

c. *The “two witnesses” theme throughout the book of Revelation.* “The book of Revelation places a pervasive emphasis on ‘two witnesses’ that constitute a unity in their divine activity—namely, ‘the word of God’ and ‘the testimony of Jesus Christ’” (Strand 1981: 134; see **Rev 1:2, 9; 6:9; 20:4**; cf. **12:17; 14:12**). Therefore, as Andrew Steinmann concludes, “This close identification of the twofold witness with the saints demonstrates that the two witnesses in the third scene of the sixth trumpet should be understood as the assembly of the saints, the Church” (Steinmann 1992: 75).

d. *The two witnesses are “the two olive trees and the two lampstands” (Rev 11:4).* In **Zech 4:12-14**, from which this image is drawn, the two olive trees are identified as “the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.” In Zechariah, “these two anointed ones were Joshua and Zerubbabel, who served as high priest and governor in the kingly line. Later, these two offices would be combined in the Messiah who is both priest and king ([Zech] 6:13; Ps 110:4; Heb 7).” (Yilpet 2006: 1081)

“Lampstands” earlier have been identified as being the seven churches (**1:12, 20; 2:1**). Since the seven lampstands are churches, so are the two lampstands. With respect to the difference between the “seven” and the “two,” Bauckham synthesizes John’s use of this imagery: “If the seven lampstands are representative of the whole church, since seven is the number of completeness, the two lampstands stand for the church in its role of witness, according to the well-known biblical requirement that evidence be acceptable only on the testimony of two witnesses (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15; cf. Matt 18:16; John 5:31; 8:17; 15:26-27; Acts 5:32; 2 Cor 13:1; Heb 10:28; 1 Tim 5:19). They are not part of the church, but the whole church insofar as it fulfills its role as faithful witness.” (Bauckham 1993a: 274)

e. *The witnesses prophesy for 3½ years (Rev 11:3).* As discussed earlier, prophecies typically are connected by intertextual patterns, themes, and key words. John employs that same strategy throughout Revelation. The two witnesses prophesy for three and a half years (**11:3**), the same length of time “the holy city” is trampled (**11:2**), “the woman” is in the wilderness (**12:6, 14**), and “those tabernacling in heaven” are blasphemed and attacked (**13:6**). Those texts are all symbols of the church as a whole. That is indicated by the three-and-a-half-year time reference. “The period of three and a half years is based on Dan. 7:25; 12:7, 11 (and perhaps Dan. 9:27), which prophesies a time of tribulation for Israel as a community.” (Beale 1999: 574) **Rev 11:3** is consistent with that pattern. It is another image that brings out a nuance or aspect of the church as the true Israel. Further, since the three and a half years is not a literal three-and-a-half year period of time, but is a symbolic representation of the time from Christ’s death and resurrection until the *parousia* (Kistemaker 2000: 438; Johnson 2001: 189; Beale and McDonough 2007: 1119; Resseguie 2009: 30-31), the “two witnesses” could not possibly be individual human beings.

f. *The beast “will make war with them” (Rev 11:7-10).* One does not “make war” against individuals. The beast’s “making war” against the two witnesses and “overcoming” them is based on **Dan 7:21**, where the horn of Daniel’s fourth beast “wages war” against the saints and “overpowers” them. In Daniel’s context, the war is not against individuals but is against God’s

people as a whole (**Dan 7:18, 22-27**).

Further, **Rev 11:7, 9-10** are clearly parallel to **13:1-2, 7-8**:

11:7, 9-10: *“the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them . . . Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies . . . And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice”*

13:1-2, 7-8: *“And it was given to him [i.e., the beast that comes up out of the sea, 13:1-2] to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. All who dwell on the earth will worship him”*

The “beast” that comes up out of the abyss is the same as the “beast” that comes up out of the sea. The “peoples and tribes and tongues and nations” of those who rejoice at the death of the two witnesses and those who worship the beast correspond to each other; they are the counterpart of the church which has been redeemed out of every “tribe and tongue and people and nation” (**Rev 5:9; 7:9**). Those who “dwell on the earth” are set in opposition to the church as a whole. The conclusion is inescapable: **Rev 11:7, 9-10** is a parallel description of the same event recorded in **Rev 13:1-2, 7-8**.³² That further compels the conclusion that the “two witnesses” of **Rev 11:3-12** is a picture of the universal church.

g. *The great city (Rev 11:8)*. **Rev 11:8** tells us that, after they are killed, their bodies will lie in “the great city,” which “mystically” or “spiritually” is identified as “Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” That would appear to identify “the great city” as Jerusalem. However, elsewhere in Revelation “the great city” is consistently used to identify “Babylon the great” (**Rev 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21**; see also **Rev 14:8; 17:1, 5; 18:2; 19:2**; Reader 1982: 407-14).³³ At this point, we need to recall what apocalyptic genre and symbolism entail and John’s overall purpose in writing: “We need to realize that the Spirit’s identifications are not simple allegories, but define present situations seen in eschatological perspective. . . . The story is set in Jerusalem because Jerusalem’s treatment of the prophets and especially of Jesus is paradigmatic: this is what those who bear the witness of Jesus may expect from the world. Any and every city in whose streets the corpses of the witnesses lie is thereby identified, its character seen in the Spirit, as Sodom and Egypt.” (Bauckham 1993a: 172)³⁴

As indicated in **11:8-9**, “the great city encompasses all who dwell upon the earth, who give allegiance to the beast” (Johnson 2001: 173). Thus, “Babylon the great” is not merely a single city but a world-wide socio-economic-religious culture or entity that is opposed to God and Christ. Consequently, the “two witnesses” likewise are a figure for another world-wide socio-economic-religious entity, the church.

h. *The resurrection of the two witnesses (Rev 11:11-13)*. The description is taken from **Ezek 37:5, 10**. There are two main views concerning the resurrection and ascent of the “two witnesses”: it is a figure for the church’s ultimate vindication; or it is a description of the actual resurrection of believers at the *parousia*. Beale articulates the first view: “The ascent of the witnesses figuratively affirms a final, decisive deliverance and vindication of God’s people at the end of time. This figurative understanding is enforced by the Ezekiel prophecy, which uses nonliteral resurrection language to speak of Israel’s restoration from captivity. . . . John applies

³² There is one nuance to this comparison. **Rev 11:7-13** appears to relate to events that take place at the end of history. As was mentioned above in the section “Time References in Revelation,” the 42 months (**Rev 11:2**) and 1260 days (**Rev 11:3**) refer to the entire period of the witness of the church that began with Christ’s resurrection and ascension. **Rev 11:7**, however, relates to events “when they have finished their testimony.” The “three and a half days” (**11:9, 11**) contrast with the 1260 days, and the section ends with the *parousia*. While **Rev 13:7** may likewise have special application to the period at the end of history, the principles stated in that chapter apply to all of history since Christ’s resurrection and ascension. As will be seen in section VII.G., the “beasts” of **Revelation 13** represent anti-Christian governments, societies, and cultures that began with ancient Rome but exist throughout history. That is seen in **Rev 13:5** which says that “authority to act for forty-two months was given to [the beast].” **Rev 13:7**, unlike **Rev 11:7**, does not specify that the “war with the saints” takes place only after certain events have been completed, and the discussion of the activities of the beast in **Revelation 13** does not end with a description of the *parousia*. Thus, in principle, the beast is *always* at war with the saints, although that warfare will intensify at the end of history.

³³ Preterists identify “the great city” and “Babylon the great” as Jerusalem (Mathison 1999: 152-54; Preston 2010: 102-03, 167-69, 327n.129). The specific nature and identity of Babylon the great is discussed below at “17:1–19:10: final judgment of Babylon.”

³⁴ The fact that the great city is “mystically” and “spiritually” identified as Jerusalem itself is a verbal clue that the focus is not on literal Jerusalem.

Ezekiel's words to the restored church because he sees its members finally released from their earthly pilgrimage of captivity and suffering. This demonstrates that they are God's true people (cf. Ezek. 37:12-13)." (Beale 1999: 597)

On the other hand, the resurrection could be the literal resurrection and rapture of the church at Christ's return. **Ezek 37:5, 10** is part of Ezekiel's prophecy of the dry bones that, in a vision, he sees re-animated to life. The image certainly conveys the idea of resurrection, not simply vindication. Whether **Rev 11:12** signifies vindication or literal resurrection is of little moment, since final vindication entails resurrection and *vice versa*.

Further, this passage parallels **Revelation 20**. The "*three and a half days*" (**Rev 11:11**) of the beast's triumph over the "two witnesses" is consistent with the "short time" Satan is given to "*deceive the nations*" and bring world-wide opposition against the saints (**Rev 20:3, 7-9**). In **Rev 20:9-10**, Satan and his minions are destroyed at the *parousia*, at which resurrection and judgment occur (**Rev 20:11-15**). That similarity is indicated here by the fact that the resurrection occurs "*in that hour*" in which also "*there was a great earthquake*" (**11:13**). The "hour" suggests Christ's Second Coming and the judgment it entails (see **Rev 3:3; 14:7, 15**). The "earthquake" also is a motif indicating the *parousia* and God's judgment of the earth (see discussion above in section **V.F. Structure: progressively parallel; not strictly chronological**).

5. Do the ungodly truly repent before the *parousia* (**Rev 11:13**; see also **6:14-17; 9:20-21; 16:11**)?

After the death of the "two witnesses," they went up to heaven "*and their enemies watched them . . . and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven*" (**Rev 11:12-13**). Opinion is divided concerning whether that represents true repentance or not.

a. *Giving glory to God as acknowledging His sovereignty, but not as true repentance.* A number of reasons are cited by commentators as indicating that true repentance is not in view here.

- *The great earthquake and the context of the final judgment.* The OT background for the "great earthquake" appears to be **Ezek 38:19**. In that context, when Gog comes against Israel, the great earthquake is part of the manifestation of God's presence when he comes in final judgment. Gog and Magog of **Ezekiel 38-39** are likewise used in Revelation as part of the *parousia* and final judgment (**Rev 20:8-9**). As noted earlier, the "earthquake" motif is used throughout Revelation, including **Rev 11:13**, as a manifestation of the final judgment. W. Reader points out that the mass conversion of 90 percent of the depraved world at the end of history is an idea "found nowhere else in the book. It contradicts the idea that those saved are a limited group (7:1-15; 14:1-5; 18:4) and cannot be harmonized with the repeated statement that the plagued world remained impenitent (9:20f; 16:9, 11, 21)." (Reader 1982: 413) In fact, **Rev 11:11-12** indicates the vindication and/or resurrection of the church at the end of time while those who watched are called "their enemies." Given this context and designation, the actions of the "enemies" in **11:13** cannot represent true repentance and conversion.

- *Giving glory to God.* Although "giving glory to God" usually signifies true worship, it does not always indicate that. In some cases it indicates the response of unbelievers who acknowledge God's sovereignty without necessarily having repentant and regenerate hearts (see **Josh 7:19; 1 Sam 6:5; Acts 12:23**). An example of this is Nebuchadnezzar in **Dan 2:46-47**. There, the king recognized God's sovereignty and paid homage to Daniel. However, such acknowledgement was only temporary. It was followed in **Daniel 3** by the attempt to force Daniel and others to worship a golden idol on pain of death. So in **Rev. 11:13**, those who acknowledge God's sovereignty remain unbelievers (see Beale 1999: 603-04).

b. *Giving glory to God as true repentance.* Other reasons suggest this is real repentance:

- *Contrasting responses.* In **Rev 14:6-7** the angel who proclaims the gospel calls for a two-step process of repentance, "*fear God, and give Him glory.*" The repentance of **Rev 11:13** is consistent with what the angel calls for and is inconsistent with the response of the people seen in **16:9**. In **16:9**, the people cursed God and did not give Him glory; in **11:13**, the people acted consistent with the angel's charge in **14:7**, i.e., "*the rest were terrified*" and "*gave glory to the God of heaven.*" (Resseguie 2009: 166) Bauckham suggests that this response stems from those in **11:13** being convinced of the truth of the testimony of the "two witnesses" because they "perceive the martyrs' participation in Christ's triumph over

death” as a result of the resurrection of the two witnesses (Bauckham 1993a: 281).

- *Fear; glory; God of Heaven.* While “fear” may or may not signify reverence toward God (compare **Rev 1:18; 14:7; 15:4; 19:5** with **1:7; 2:10; 18:10, 15**), when it is coupled with giving glory to God it is likely to have the positive meaning of worship (Bauckham 1993a: 278). Further, in Revelation, “to give glory to God” always “refers positively to giving God the worship which is due to him (4:9; 14:7; 16:9; 19:7)” (Bauckham 1993a: 278-79).

6. The mission of the church, regardless of the results. The martyrdom of the “two witnesses” is another instance of the paradoxical nature of Christian witness. “*Following the Lamb wherever He goes*” (**14:4**) may lead to death and apparent defeat in this world but, as with Christ Himself, that is the means by which God triumphs over sin and evil. Bauckham believes that the believers’ faithful witness to death is the manner in which the ungodly nations will be brought to repentance and faith (Bauckham 1993a: 279-83). On the other hand, if a mass conversion of unbelievers does not occur before Christ’s return, the witness of Christian martyrdom still is necessary and important: it proves their faith to be genuine, which is vital for their own everlasting well-being (see, e.g., **Rev 6:9, 11; 7:9-17; 11:11-12; 15:2-4; 20:4-6**); and it provides evidence for God’s condemning and judging the unbelieving world (Beale 1999: 960; see also Johnson 2001: 274; Bauckham 1993a: 237; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 78).

God does not immediately answer the martyrs’ cry “*How long, O Lord?*” (**Rev 6:10**). Instead, “the Lamb’s mission and victory must be continued in the followers of the Lamb” (Bauckham 1980: 31). Regardless of the number of conversions that result from that witness, “the delay of the *parousia* is filled with the mission of the church” (Bauckham 1980: 33).

F. *Rev 12:1-15:4: The woman, the dragon, and the beast*³⁵

The visions of **Revelation 12-14** begin with the birth (**12:1, 4-5**)³⁶ and ascension (**12:5**) of Christ and may even reach back to the Garden of Eden (**12:9**). It is at these points when the conflict between the woman and the dragon or serpent began and was most basic and acute. John’s visions in this section extend to the *parousia* and judgment (**14:14-20**) and the vindication of God’s people (**15:2-4**). As Hendriksen noted earlier, beginning in **Revelation 12** we receive an explanation of the deeper spiritual background of the struggle of the church with the forces of evil (Hendriksen 1982: 23; similarly, **Rev 13:1-10** provides a much fuller explanation of **Rev 11:7**).

Rev 11:3-13 and **12:1-15:4** “portray essentially the same point in different imagery” (Bauckham 1993a: 273n.52). Both passages show the powers of evil making “war” against the church (**Rev 11:7; 12:17**). In both cases the church is protected (temporally in **Rev 11:3-7**; geographically in **12:6, 14-16**). In both cases the church is vindicated and is seen in heaven (**Rev 11:11-12; 14:13-16; 15:1-4**). In both cases its persecutors are judged (**Rev 11:13-19; 14:7-11, 17-20**).

Isa 26:16-27:1 may stand behind **Revelation 12**. In Isaiah, Israel is depicted as a woman in labor who cries out in pain (compare **Isa 26:16-17** and **Rev 12:1-2**); there is the promise of resurrection (compare **Isa 26:19** and **Rev 12:5**); God’s people are hidden and protected for “a little while” (compare **Isa 26:20** and **Rev 12:6, 12, 14-16**); and God will punish the “serpent,” the “dragon” (compare **Isa 27:1** and **Rev 19:20-21; 20:10**).

1. The “woman” and “her children” (**Rev 12:1-17**). As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, **Revelation 12** is a central passage in the book. It recapitulates the history of the church and its conflict with Satan beginning at least with the first coming of Christ, if not before. The picture of the woman in **12:1** is from **Gen 37:9**. “The central feature of this heavenly woman is that she is the mother of the Messiah (vs. 2). Some commentators think she represents Mary, the mother of the Lord; others Israel, the people who gave birth to Messiah. It is true that Isaiah 66:7 pictures Zion as being in travail to give birth to the new redeemed Israel (see Isa. 26:17; Mic. 4:10); but this heavenly woman is mother both of

³⁵ The “beasts” which take up all of **Rev 13:1-18** will be discussed in detail in the next section.

³⁶ Although on its face **Rev 12:1-5** appears to refer to the birth of Christ, G. B. Caird makes the plausible point that **Rev 12:5** actually is referring not to the birth of Christ but to his death on the cross and the resurrection and ascension the cross entailed. The reason is that **12:5** is alluding to **Ps 2:7-9**. “In the psalm it is not at his birth but at his enthronement on mount Zion that the anointed king is addressed by God, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you’, and is given authority to smash all the nations with an iron bar (Ps. ii. 7-9). A king’s birthday is the day of his accession.” (Caird 1966: 149; see also **Rom 1:3-4**; Allison 1985: 72-73) As Longman and Reid point out, this not only makes sense of the allusion to **Ps 2:7-9** but also “explains the otherwise inexplicable leap from nativity to ascension” (Longman and Reid 1995: 183). Contextually that also makes sense inasmuch as **Rev 12:5** leads immediately to the casting down of Satan in **12:7-12**, an event that occurred as a result of what Christ accomplished on the cross.

Messiah and of the actual church on earth (her ‘offspring,’ vs. 17). Therefore, it is easier to understand the woman in a somewhat broader sense as the *ideal* Zion, the heavenly representative of the people of God (Isa. 54:1; 66:7-9).” (Ladd 1972: 167; see also Beale 1999: 630; Carson 2011: 19-20)

The woman “*gave birth to a son*” (12:5), who obviously is Christ. The dragon (Satan, 12:9) “*went off to make war with the rest of her children,*” who are specifically described as those “*who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus*” (12:17). That can only be the church, since only Christians meet that description.³⁷

2. The defeat and casting down of the dragon (Rev 12:7-12). The “dragon” is identified as “*the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan*” (12:9).

a. *The dragon’s (Satan’s) defeat occurred at the Cross.* “The defeat of the Dragon (12:7-9) is doubtless the same event as the victory of the Lamb (5:5-6), and both are to be historically located in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (continued in the witness and martyrdom of his followers 12:11)” (Bauckham 1993a: 186). Hence, “Michael’s victory is simply the heavenly and symbolic counterpart of the earthly reality of the Cross.” (Caird 1966: 153-54; see also Ladd 1972: 172)

The context of **Revelation 12** also makes clear that Satan’s being “*thrown down*” is not an event that occurred before history began or an event that will occur just before the end of history. **Rev 12:5-6** connect Christ’s resurrection and ascension with the woman fleeing into the wilderness. **Rev 12:9, 11, 13-14** similarly connect the expulsion of Satan with the “*blood of the Lamb*” and the flight of the woman. “Since the immediate sequel to the dragon’s expulsion is its pursuit of the woman and her flight into the wilderness (vs. 13-14), the first vision guides us to interpret the expulsion of the dragon and its angelic allies as referring not to a primeval rebellion that antedated the fall of humanity but to the victory and ascent of the woman’s child” (Johnson 2001: 388).

“*Having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time*” (12:12) indicates the same thing: “This period of time is not to be looked at as if it were a brief special season at the close of the Christian age, when the wrath of Satan is aroused to a greater than ordinary degree because the last hour is about to strike. The *great wrath* with which he goes forth is that stirred in him by his defeat through the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord. It was roused in him when he was ‘cast into the earth,’ and from that moment of defeat therefore the ‘short season’ begins.” (Milligan 1896: 209-10) This is consistent with the fact that Christ’s first coming began the “last days”; hence, in this context, Satan’s “short time” is equivalent to the “last days” (for more on this see Menn 2017, section **IV.B. Christ’s first coming and the “last days”**).

Satan’s fall in **Rev 12:10** (“*now . . . the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down*”) corresponds to **John 12:31** (“*now the ruler of this world will be cast out*”).³⁸ In **John 12**, Jesus says that his being “lifted up” on the cross means that “the inaugurated judgment of the devil is to be executed decisively. These parallels confirm further that the imagery in Rev. 12:7-10 explains the significance of Christ’s death and resurrection.” (Beale 1999: 660)

b. *The nature of Satan’s defeat.* Caird makes the interesting observation, “In the book of Job one of the angels in the heavenly court is called the Satan (with the definite article), because he holds an appointment as accuser or prosecutor in the lawcourt of God [**Job 1:6–12**]. . . . Satan appears again as accuser in the visions of Zechariah, where the high priest Joshua is on trial [**Zech 3:1–7**].” (Caird 1966: 154)

The “casting down” of Satan appears to relate in significant part to his ability to accuse the brethren, as well as to deceive the nations (**Rev 12:10**). Satan has only one fatal accusation he can make against people: unforgiven sin. At the cross Jesus took that ability of Satan “*out of the way, having nailed it to the cross*” and thereby “*disarmed the rulers and authorities*” (**Col 2:14-15**). What Christ accomplished on the cross, therefore, significantly affected Satan’s ability to accuse the saints: “In the light of Rev. 12:11, the accusations of v 10 appear to be directed against the illegitimacy of the saints’ participation in salvation. . . . The death and

³⁷ This is another example of the apocalyptic use of two different symbols to describe the same entity. The messianic community, the true Israel, the ideal Zion (i.e., the Old and New Covenant church as a whole) is first described as a mother, but then (at least the New Covenant church) is described as her own “children.”

³⁸ The Greek verbs used in the two passages are similar, forceful words, derived from the same root: **John 12:31**—*ekballō* (“drive out; expel”); **Rev 12:10**—*kataballō* (“throw down; strike down”).

resurrection of Christ have banished the devil from this privilege formerly granted him by God, because Christ's death was the penalty that God exacted for the sins of all those who were saved by faith. . . . Therefore, the devil no longer had any basis for his accusations against the saints, since the penalty that they deserved and that he pleaded for had at last been exacted in Christ's death." (Beale 1999: 659; see also **Rom 3:21-26; 8:1, 33-34, 38-39**)

The result for believers is an important change in status and security, even though it may not appear so to the naked eye. However, part of the reason why John wrote the entire book of Revelation is to make clear to believers that "things are not what they seem" (Johnson 2001: 9). External hardships are no indication of God's disfavor or of spiritual insecurity. Beasley-Murray clearly grasps this in connection with the casting down of Satan in **Rev 12:7-12**: "Two things are in mind here. First, that Satan has no place in heaven represents an important victory won for man, since Satan is no longer able to accuse man before God, which suggests that God will no longer listen to accusations against his people, for they are forgiven. Secondly, Satan's defeat in heaven signifies that his power has been broken in the affairs of man in history, so that even if he does intensify his efforts to control the nations and destroy the work of God, the extent of his influence is limited (he has for example no power over the Church), and his days are numbered (vv. 13ff.)." (Beasley-Murray 1974: 202; see also Beale 1999: 660 ["This understanding of Satan's fall from heaven is comparable to that of **[Luke 10:17-20]**. . . . That is, the devil's fall means that the salvation of Jesus' followers is secure from Satanic threat, and their power over demons is an initial indication of the devil's defeat and their salvific security."])

3. The sea and the abyss (**Rev 12:12; 9:1-2, 11; 11:7; 13:1; 17:8; 20:1, 3; 21:1**). **Rev 12:12** says, "*Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you.*" Whereas **12:9** had said that the devil had been "*thrown down to the earth,*" it appears from **12:12** that he also was thrown down to the sea. The sea often is associated with the idea of chaos and evil (see Beale 1999: 789; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 83; see also Schnabel 2011: 279 for different meanings the term "sea" encompasses in Revelation). Just as the beasts of **Dan 7:2-8** arose out of the sea, so the beast of **Rev 13:1** arose out of the sea. Elsewhere the OT portrays the sea as the abode of evil sea monsters, although God is sovereign over the sea and its inhabitants (**Job 38:8-11; Ps 74:12-15; 89:9-10; 104:5-9; Prov 8:27-29; Isa 27:1; 51:9-10; Ezek 32:2**). The sea as chaos and evil is further indicated by **21:1** which says that, in the new heavens and new earth "*there is no longer any sea.*" "The sea as the source of satanic evil opposing God's throne has been eliminated and replaced by the river of redemption, which has its source in the throne [**Rev 22:1**]" (Beale 1999: 328).

The sea appears to be synonymous with the abyss "as is made clear at 11:7 and 17:8, where the same beast that comes up from the sea at 13:1 is described as having come up from the *abussos* [abyss]" (Moo 2009: 156). Consequently, Satan's being "*thrown down to the earth*" (**12:9**) and "*coming down to the earth and the sea*" (**12:12**) are parallel to his being "*thrown into the abyss*" (**20:1-3**). That confirms that Satan's being bound and "thrown into the abyss" in **Rev 20:1-3** occurred in connection with Christ's first coming and is not an event that takes place after his *parousia* (see also below at **20:1-3** for more on the relationship between the "casting" [**12:9**] and the "binding" [**20:3**] of Satan).

4. The death, but paradoxical victory, of the saints (**Rev 12:11; 13:7**). In **Rev 13:7** it says that authority was "given to" the beast to make war against the saints and overcome them. That is a "divine passive" (i.e., the authority was granted to the beast by God, much like God gave Satan authority over Job in **Job 1:12; 2:6**). "God is in control and the war against the saints does not further the beast's aims but rather thwarts them. Evil is conquered by the saints' testimony—even their testimony unto death. Christ conquers by his death on the cross, and it is the pattern of the saints also (12:11)." (Resseguie 2009: 185)

5. The harvest (**Rev 14:14-20**). In v.14 we see the "*one like a son of man, having a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand.*" The phrase "*one like a son of man*" is directly taken from **Dan 7:13-14** and can only refer to Jesus (see **Rev 1:13**). The gathering of the grapes for the wine press of God (**Rev 14:17-20**) clearly refers to the judgment of the ungodly at the end of the age.³⁹ Some see the reaping of the harvest (**Rev 14:15-16**) as representing another account of the same judgment of the ungodly in order to emphasize "the severity and unqualified nature of the punishment" (Beale 1999: 774-75). On the other hand, others (probably the better view) hold that the grain harvest is the

³⁹ Such imagery for God's judgment is drawn from **Isa 63:1-6; Lam 1:15**; see also **Rev 19:15**.

redemption of the godly (the church), in distinction to the judgment of the ungodly, for the following reasons:

- Just as the references to wine in **Rev 14:8, 10** prefigure the “wine press” metaphor of **14:19-20**, so the “first fruits” of **14:4** prefigures the grain harvest metaphor of **14:15-16**.
- The grain harvest takes place in only one action: reaping (no threshing or winnowing is said to take place); therefore, it is not parallel to the grape harvest which takes place in multiple actions: gathering, throwing, and treading.
- Regarding eschatological consummation, reaping in the NT is always a positive image of bringing people into the kingdom (**Mark 4:29; John 4:35-38**), not of judgment on the ungodly (Bauckham 1993a: 290-96; Johnson 2001: 209-12).

6. The victors over the beast (**Rev 15:2-4**). This scene pictures the victorious “overcoming” church mentioned by Christ in **Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21**. The scene’s setting and imagery are linked to the scenes in **Rev 4:6** (“*sea of glass*”) and **5:9** (the song praising the Lamb). That reinforces the idea of the overcoming church pictured in heaven.

The “standing” of the saints may suggest resurrection. The verb for “stand” used here (*histēmi*) is not typically used for resurrection.⁴⁰ However, it is used of Christ’s “*standing at the right hand of God*” in **Acts 7:55-56**, of the Lamb’s standing in **Rev 5:6**, of the great multitude’s standing before the throne in **Rev 7:9**, and of the two witnesses’ “standing” in **Rev 11:11** after they had been dead for three and a half days. All such uses of *histēmi* certainly denote victory and vindication if not also resurrection (or victory and vindication *as evidenced by* resurrection).

That the universal church is being referred to also is indicated by the songs sung. **Rev 15:3** first mentions the “song of Moses,” which refers back to the song of victory sung after the exodus from Egypt (**Exod 15:1-21**). In **Revelation 15**, however, there is a difference. Milligan notes that the song sung by the victors “is not that of Moses only, the great centre of the Old Testament Dispensation; it is also *the Song of the Lamb*, the centre and the sum of the New Testament. Both Dispensations are in the Seer’s thoughts, and in the number of those who sing are included the saints of each, the members of the one Universal Church.” (Milligan 1896: 261)

G. The “beasts” of **Rev 11:7; 13:1-18; 14:9; 15:2; 16:2, 10, 13; 17:3-17; 19:19-20; 20:10**

1. The “beast” imagery is drawn from the book of Daniel. The description of the “beast” of **Rev 13:1-7** is primarily drawn from **Daniel 7**. The “beast coming up out of the sea” is from **Dan 7:2-3**. The “ten horns” are based on **Dan 7:7, 20, 24**. **Rev 13:1-2** turns Daniel’s lion, bear, leopard, and “dreadful and terrifying” beast, which in Daniel represented four successive world empires, into one. However, in Revelation the image of the beast also draws from Daniel’s descriptions of the “little horn” and Antiochus. Thus, Alan Johnson notes that, according to **Rev 13:2**, “this beast had ‘on each head a blasphemous name.’ This prominent feature is repeated in 17:3 (cf. 13:5-6). Arrogance and blasphemy also characterize the ‘little horn’ of Daniel’s fourth beast (7:8, 11, 20, 25) and the willful king of Daniel 11:36. John alludes to the vision of Daniel but completely transforms it.” (Johnson 1981: 525) Both Daniel’s little horn (**Dan 7:21**) and Revelation’s beast (**Rev 13:7**) wage war against the saints and overcome them.

2. The OT uniformly uses the imagery of “beasts” to signify forces of evil, world empires, and the satanic influence behind the evil and empires. Although many people apply the “beast” imagery to a supposed end-time individual, the Bible always applies beast imagery to empires, forces, and entities that transcend the individual. In addition to the “beasts” of **Daniel 7**, the OT contains several other references to “beasts” as epitomizing evil empires (**Ps 74:13-14; 87:4; 89:10; Isa 27:1; 30:7; 51:9; Jer 51:34; Ezek 29:3; 32:2-3**). Hence, Sam Storms concludes that the “beast” of **Revelation 13** “is primarily corporate in nature, rather than personal” (Storms 2013: 478). At the same time, “the national entities were inseparably identified with the archetypal reality of the satanic, idolatrous systems represented by the seven-headed monster (Leviathan, Rahab, and the dragon) so that the beast represented, not the political power, but the system of evil that found expression in the political entity” (Johnson 1981: 525). That connection is made clear by a comparison of the “dragon” of **Rev 12:3-4, 7-13:1** and the “beast” of **Rev 13:1-10**: The devil is described as being red and as having seven heads and

⁴⁰ On the other hand, *ansitēmi*, which is derived from *histēmi*, frequently is used for resurrection (see **Matt 12:41-42; 17:9; 20:19; Mark 8:31; 9:9-10, 31; 10:34; 12:23, 25; 16:9; Luke 9:8, 19; 11:31-32; 16:31; 18:33; 24:7; John 6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:23, 24; 20:9; Acts 2:24, 30, 32; 3:26; 13:33, 34; 17:3; 31; Rom 14:9; 1 Thess 4:14, 16**).

ten horns (**Rev 12:3**). Likewise, the beast is described as scarlet (**Rev 17:3**) and has seven heads and ten horns (**Rev 13:1; 17:3**). This comparison clearly shows the identification between ungodly world empires and the satanic “power behind the throne.” The dragon has diadems on his heads (**Rev 12:3**) and the beast has diadems on his horns (**Rev 13:1**). “That the dragon had diadems on his heads (12:3) and the beast now has them on his horns shows that the dragon has the ultimate rule and mandates his will through the beast” (Beale 1999: 633-34, 684).

3. Comparison of **Daniel 7, 8, 11; 2 Thessalonians 2; and Revelation 13, 19.** In addition to drawing on Daniel, the beast of Revelation demonstrates similarities of Paul’s description of the “man of lawlessness” in **2 Thessalonians 2**. The following comparison shows the connections:

<i>Daniel 7:7-27 (4th beast & little horn)</i>	<i>Daniel 8:9-26 (little horn)</i>	<i>Daniel 11:21-45 (the despicable person)</i>	<i>2 Thess 2 (man of lawlessness)</i>	<i>Revelation 13, 19 (the two beasts)</i>
Extremely strong; greater than the others: 7:7, 17, 19-20	Exceedingly great; very mighty, but not by his own power: 8:9-10, 24 Prosper and performs his will: 8:24	He will accomplish what his fathers never did, and will do as he pleases: 11:24, 36	Is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power: 2:9	The dragon gave him his power, throne, and great authority; authority over all people: 13:2-4, 7
Utters great boasts: 7:8, 11, 20 Speaks out against the Most High: 7:25	Magnifies himself: 8:4, 8, 11, 25 Opposes the Prince of princes: 8:25 Removes the regular sacrifice, throws down the sanctuary, and tramples the holy place; is the transgression that causes horror: 8:11-13	Enraged at the holy covenant: 11:28, 30 Exalts and magnifies himself above all gods; speaks out against God, and shows no regard for God: 11:36-37 Does away with the regular sacrifice; sets up the abomination of desolation: 11:31	Opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship; shows himself to be God: 2:4 Takes his seat in the temple of God: 2:4	Speaks arrogant words and blasphemies: 13:5-6 Is worshiped: 13:4, 8, 12; 19:20
Devours, crushes, and tramples others: 7:7, 19 Wages war against the saints, overpowers them and wears them down: 7:21, 25	Tramples down some of the host of heaven and stars: 8:10 Will destroy to an extraordinary degree, including the holy people: 8:24-25	Will kill many, including the faithful: 11:32-35, 44	Man of lawlessness; son of destruction: 2:3	Makes war against the saints and overcomes them: 13:7, 15; 19:19
	Insolent and skilled in intrigue, shrewd, and will cause deceit to succeed: 8:23, 25	Seizes the kingdom by intrigue; speaks lies; uses smooth words to turn people to godlessness: 11:21, 27, 32	Acts with all deception: 2:10	Deceives the earth-dwellers: 13:14; 19:20
			Does signs, and false wonders: 2:9	Performs great signs: 13:13
Authority for time, times, and half a time: 7:25	Tramples the holy place for 2,300 evenings and mornings: 8:14	Will prosper until the indignation is finished: 11:36		Is given authority for 42 months: 13:5
His dominion is taken away and destroyed forever; his body is given to burning fire at the coming of a Son of man: 7:11, 13-14, 22, 26-27	Will be broken without human agency: 8:25	His end will come at the appointed time: 11:35, 45	Slain at Lord’s coming: 2:8	Seized and thrown into lake of fire at Lord’s coming: 19:20

4. A comparison of the descriptions and activities of the “beasts” of Revelation. The following table lists the descriptions and activities of the “beasts” in Revelation:

<i>Rev 11:7</i>	<i>Rev 13:1-8</i>	<i>Rev 13:11-18</i>	<i>Rev 16:10-16</i>	<i>Rev 17:3-17</i>	<i>Rev 19:19-20</i>
Ascends from the abyss.	Ascends from the sea: 1	Ascends from the earth: 11		Ascends from the abyss: 8	
	Has 10 horns, 7 heads: 1	Has 2 horns like a lamb: 11		Has 10 horns (=kings), 7 heads (=mountains=kings): 3, 9-10	
	Blasphemous names on his heads: 1			Full of blasphemous names: 3	
	Speaks arrogant words and blasphemies: 5-6	Speaks like a dragon and deceives earth-dwellers: 11, 14	Unclean spirits come out of beast’s & false prophet’s mouth: 13		
	Earth-dwellers amazed, follow, & worship the beast: 3-4, 8	Makes earth-dwellers worship 1 st beast: 12, 14		Marvel at the beast: 8	
Fights, defeats, & kills the 2 witnesses	Fights saints & overcomes them: 7	Authority to give breath to image of 1 st beast & kill those who do not worship beast’s image: 15	Unclean spirits from beast & false prophet assemble kings of the world for war against God: 13-14	Beast & kings assemble for war against the Lamb: 14	Beast & kings assemble for war against rider of white horse & his army: 19
				The Lamb will overcome them: 14 Beast will go to destruction: 8	Beast & false prophet seized & thrown into lake of fire: 20

5. The characteristics of the “beast” may reflect aspects of 1st century Rome and its emperors. Several aspects of the “beast” reflect the 1st century Roman context in which John wrote. “The titles of blasphemy on the seven heads of the beast may allude to the honorific designations given to Roman emperors in the first century AD, in order to support their wish to be venerated as divine within the cult of Caesar. The imperial coinage of the time bore eloquent testimony to this desire; and, at their deaths, Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius and Vespasian were declared by the Senate to be ‘divine’ (*divus*). . . . All this may suggest that the beast of Rev. 13.1 symbolizes the Roman Empire, the unjust oppressor of the Christian Church.” (Smalley 2005: 336) Preterists identify the “beast” from the sea with Rome, as epitomized by Nero (Chilton 1985: 175-81; DeMar 1999: 255-59).

6. The “beast” of Revelation transcends 1st century Rome and its emperors. Although the depiction of the “beast” in Revelation may be anchored in 1st century Rome, its meaning and relevance point beyond the situation that Christians faced in that time and place. John’s combining Daniel’s four beasts into one suggests that the beast transcends any one historical empire (Resseguie 2009: 182, 191; this is paralleled in John’s depiction of “Babylon the great” in **Revelation 17-18** as being based on first-century Rome but as transcending the Roman Empire). That is confirmed by the OT which “uses *the same sea monster image* to represent successive evil empires spanning hundreds of years” (Beale 1999: 686, *emph. in orig.*; “Rahab” is a synonym for Egypt in **Ps 87:4** and for Babylon in **Jer 51:34**). Johnson concludes that the identification of the sea beast and the dragon—the oppressive empire with the satanic power behind it—“helps us see that the beast itself is not to be identified with any one historical form of its expression or with any one institutional aspect of its manifestation. In other words, the beast may appear now as Sodom, Egypt, Rome, or even Jerusalem and may manifest itself as a political power, an economic power, a religious power, or a heresy (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3).” (Johnson 1981: 525; see also Storms 2013: 488; Rushdoony 1970: 170 [“The beast, symbol of human government and empire, of anti-Christian states and cultures generally, represented the Roman Empire of St. John’s day, and all other anti-Christian orders. The beast represents the totality of all such empires in the ancient world, and all to

come. Its seven heads and ten horns emphasize totality.”) John does with the “beast” what he does elsewhere in the book: he sees the forces at work in his world and both universalizes them and exposes their true and deepest significance. John sees what most people do not, namely, although outwardly we may not “worship the beast” (**Rev 13:8**), if Jesus Christ is not our true Lord then at the level of our most fundamental identity we are, indeed, “earth-dwellers” who do, in fact, worship the beast. He is revealing the ultimate stakes involved in our relationship with our society and culture.

7. The description of the “beast” from the sea (**Rev 13:1-10**) is a parody of Christ. Like the “*man of lawlessness*” of **2 Thess 2:3-12**, the most important aspect of the beast of Revelation is not political or economic, but is theological. **Rev 13:5-6; 17:3** stress the beast’s arrogance and blasphemies. That the beast is truly “Antichrist”—the great theological counterpart to Christ and all that Christ represents—is seen in the many parallels between Christ and the beast. Both Christ and the beast: (1) Have swords (compare **Rev 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21** and **13:10**); (2) Have horns (compare **Rev 5:6** and **13:1, 11**); (3) Are slain, with the same Greek work (*sphagizō*) used to describe their deaths (compare **Rev 5:6** and **13:3, 8**); (4) Rise to new life (compare **Rev 2:8; 5:6, 9; 13:8** and **13:3, 12**); (5) Are given authority (compare **Rev 2:27; 5:1-9** and **13:2, 14**); (6) Wear many diadems (compare **Rev 13:1** and **19:12**); (7) Have a throne (compare **Rev 13:2** and **3:21**); (8) Have authority over “every tribe, tongue, people, and nations” (compare **Rev 5:9; 7:9** and **13:7**); (9) Have followers who have their names written on their foreheads (compare **Rev 13:16-17** and **14:1**); (10) Receive universal worship (compare **Rev 5:8-14** and **13:4, 8**).

Additionally, the description of the beast as the one who “*was and is not and is to come*” (**Rev 17:8**) parallels the description of God as the one “*who is and who was and who is to come*” (**Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8**). In contrast with each other, the beast has blasphemous names written on his heads (**Rev 13:1; 17:3**); Christ has a name written on him which no one knows except himself (**Rev 19:12**). Those who have the Lamb’s name written on their forehead have been purchased (Gr. = *agoradzō*) from the earth (**Rev 14:1, 3**); those who do not have the beast’s name written on their forehead are not able to buy (*agoradzō*) on the earth (**Rev 13:17**).⁴¹

8. The beast from the earth (**Rev 13:11-17**). The second beast “is also a parody of the messianic Lamb of 5:6 and has an ironic relation with that Lamb. It, too, is a lamb with horns [**Rev 13:11**].” (Beale 1999: 707) The second beast has primarily a religious role, and is later called “*the false prophet*” (**Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10**). This beast parallels the “*man of lawlessness*” with respect to satanic influence (**Rev 13:11; 2 Thess 2:9**), signs (**Rev 13:13-15; 2 Thess 2:9**), deception (**Rev 13:14; 2 Thess 2:10**), and worship (**Rev 13:12, 15; 2 Thess 2:4**). Preterists identify the beast from the earth (the “false prophet”) as the “Jewish religious leaders who sought to seduce Christians” before AD 70 (Chilton 1985: 181; see also DeMar 1999: 259-60). Others see this beast as the “imperial cult” of ancient Rome which now transcends Rome or as “religious deception” (Johnson 2001: 196, 338). “Whereas the true prophet was to lead people to worship God, this prophet leads them to worship the state. This beast may take many forms and may at times even be equated with the state, as well as well as with false prophets in the church (as in 2:2, 14-15, 20-24). That manifestations of the beastly false prophet occur in the church is also suggested by the OT, where false prophecy almost always takes place within the covenant community. This is reinforced by Christ’s prophecy that false prophets and messiahs would arise in the believing community itself (Matt. 24:5, 11 and parallels). Jesus also likened false prophets to beasts and foretold that ‘false prophets’ would ‘come . . . in sheep’s clothing but are inwardly ravenous wolves’ (Matt. 7:15). The image of a wolf in lamb’s clothing suggests a traitor within the fold of the church. . . . Therefore, this imagery and background suggest deception within the covenant community itself. Whereas the first beast speaks loudly and defiantly against God, the second beast makes the first beast’s claims sound plausible and persuasive. . . . Therefore, it takes a discerning Christian to detect the evil inherent in the second beast.” (Beale 1999: 707-08)

9. The fatal head wound and recovery of the beast (**Rev 13:3, 12, 14**).

a. *The beast’s fatal head wound.* The word for the beast’s “wound” in Greek is *plēgē*, which is usually translated “plague.” Everywhere else in Revelation that word signifies a divinely inflicted judgment or punishment (**Rev 9:18, 20; 11:6; 15:1, 6, 8; 16:9, 21; 18:4, 8; 21:9; 22:18**). **Rev 13:14** adds that the beast’s fatal head wound was inflicted by the “sword.” In

⁴¹ The “mark of the beast” (**Rev 13:16-17; 14:9-11**), like God’s seal on the church (**Rev 7:3**), is not an “outward tattoo or insignia on the body but rather a symbol of the beast’s ownership and control of his followers’ thoughts (forehead) and deeds (right hand)” (Johnson 2001: 196). The beast’s mark and God’s seal are “made visible in peoples’ norms, values, and beliefs” (Resseguie 2009: 136).

Revelation the sword frequently refers symbolically to the divine judgment of the Messiah (**1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21**). The reference to the sword also echoes **Isa 27:1** which says: “*In that day the Lord will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent with His fierce and great and mighty sword, even Leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea.*” All of those references point to the true meaning of the “*fatal wound*” suffered by the beast: “Everywhere in the book the only sufficient conqueror of the beast and the dragon is the slain Lamb, together with the faithful saints (12:11; 19:19-21). Furthermore, it is the event of the life and especially the crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus that dealt this death blow to the dragon and the beast (1:5; 5:9; 12:11). This same thought is paralleled by other NT teaching (Luke 10:17-24; 11:14-22; John 12:31-33; Col 2:15).” (Johnson 1981: 526) Consequently, the fatal “plague” by the “sword” in **Rev 13:3, 12, 14** “cannot be describing a literal death and resurrection of some historical [or future] person” (Beale 1999: 689).

b. *The recovery of the beast.* All of the parallels between the first “beast” and Christ, and the parallel positions within the covenant community between the second “beast” and the “*man of lawlessness*,” highlight the essentially theological or spiritual nature of “Antichrist.” In other words, all of the political, economic, and social issues raised by governments and cultures confront us with the fundamental question: Where does my primary loyalty lie—with Christ or with the world? That same issue, in a different form, is raised by the beast’s fatal head wound and his recovery. Richard Bauckham observes, “The parallel between the ‘death’ and ‘resurrection’ of the beast and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ poses the issue of what is truly divine. Is it the beast’s apparent success which is worthy of religious trust and worship? Or is the apparent failure of Christ and the martyrs the true witness to the God who can be ultimately trusted and may alone be worshipped?” (Bauckham 1993a: 452)⁴²

10. The number of the beast: 666 (Rev 13:18).

a. *Nero and the use of gematria.* Gematria is a mystical method of interpreting Scripture by substituting numbers for letters in certain words or names. It is sometimes used to try to figure out who is the Antichrist. The most popular version of this is based on the Nero *redivivus* (“Nero returned to life”) myth that was circulated in the 1st century, i.e., Emperor Nero really had not died but had escaped to Parthia in the East and would return with a huge army subduing all opposition (Minear 1968: 248-50).⁴³ If the words “Caesar Nero” are transliterated into Hebrew, they have a numerical value of 666 (Resseguie 2009: 191). Therefore, some scholars believe that John identifies Nero as the beast (see Chilton 1985: 180-81; DeMar 1999: 260-61).⁴⁴

b. *Gematria fails as a method of identification.* However appealing the Nero idea is to some, gematria ultimately fails as a method of identifying Antichrist. First, to attempt a literal calculation of some individual’s name is contrary to the symbolic way in which numbers are used in Revelation and other apocalyptic literature. Second, there are many names, both ancient and modern, that come to 666 when subjected to gematria (see Beale 1999: 720-21; DeMar 1999: 231-38). Even the word “beast,” when transliterated into Hebrew, comes to 666 (Resseguie 2009: 191). As far back as the second century, Irenaeus recognized the same thing: “It is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfillment of the prophecy, than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found possessing the number mentioned; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved” (Irenaeus 1885: 5.30.3).

The problem is deeper than the multiple spurious identifications of Antichrist based on

⁴² Despite the parallel, Beale notes the fundamental difference between the resurrection of the beast and the resurrection of the Lamb: “The Lamb really did conquer the defeat of death by resurrection, but the beast’s continued existence is not a reversal of his actual defeat” (Beale 1999: 689). Indeed, **Rev 17:8** says that the beast comes up out of the abyss only to “*go to destruction.*”

⁴³ Richard Bauckham (1993a: 384-452) has done an exhaustive study of John’s use of the Nero’s return myth, including the historical records, John’s use of the Jewish Sybylline Oracles and the Christian apocalypse the Ascension of Isaiah, and a detailed study of the significance of numbers. He states, “The legend of Nero’s return proved useful to John because he could adapt it to the needs of his prophetic vision of the triumph of the kingdom of God over the Roman Empire’s pretensions to divine rule” (Bauckham 1993a: 450-51).

⁴⁴ Schnabel, however, observes that John could not have been identifying Nero as the “final” Antichrist since Nero died in AD 68, whereas John wrote Revelation several years after that (Schnabel 2011: 190).

gematria over the last two thousand years. The real problem is the use of gematria itself. Its use is akin to magic or the occult. Beale points out why the method itself is not what John had in mind: “There is no evidence of any other number in the book being used in such a way. All the numbers have figurative significance and symbolize some spiritual reality and never involve any kind of literal gematria calculation. . . . If a Hebrew or Greek gematria system of literal computation were being used exceptionally here, then John would have alerted his readers by writing something like ‘and the number of his name *in Hebrew* (or *Greek*) is 666.’” (Beale 1999: 721) This suggests that a literal calculation method will *never* yield the correct interpretation, and that John’s reference to 666 was never intended to promote the use of gematria at all.

11. The transcendent nature of evil. Because the beast appears to transcend historical individuals and empires, the number of the beast likewise probably transcends historical individuals and empires. That is indicated in two ways.

a. *The “number of [a] man” (Rev 13:18).* The Greek phrase “*number of a man*” does not have a definite article (i.e., the word “the”) before “man.” Consequently, it “can be translated generically as ‘a number of man’ (i.e., a number of humanity), or nongenerically, referring to an individual, ‘a number of a person’ (i.e., a specific individual)” (Resseguie 2009: 189). The “generic” sense of the “number of man” in **Rev 13:18** is indicated by its closest biblical parallel—**Rev 21:17**. In that verse an angel was measuring the wall of New Jerusalem “according to human measurements.” The word “human” in **21:17** does not have the definite article in front of it. The phrase “human measurements” obviously does not indicate the measurement of or by a specific person. Rather, it has a generic meaning (Resseguie 2009: 189-90).

The parallel between **Rev 13:18** and **21:17** is seen in how they *contrast*: in **13:18** “man” or “human” is identified with the beast; in **21:17** “man” or “human” is identified with an angel. “The parallel and contrast surely suggest that whereas the beast is humanity debased, the new Jerusalem represents humanity exalted to the position of the angels” (Bauckham 1993a: 398). Thus, it is most likely that “the omission of the article in 13:18 indicates the general idea of humanity, not some specific individual who can be discerned only through an esoteric method of calculation. Therefore, in both verses *anthrōpou* [the Greek word for “man”] is a descriptive or qualitative genitive, so that the phrase here should be rendered ‘a human number’ (so RSV) or ‘a number of humanity.’ It is a number common to fallen humanity.” (Beale 1999: 724)

b. *The significance of the number 666.* The number six suggests incompleteness and imperfection. “The number seven refers to completeness and is repeated throughout the book. But 666 appears only here. This suggests that the triple sixes are intended as a contrast with the divine sevens throughout the book and signify incompleteness and imperfection. . . . The triple repetition of sixes connotes the intensification of incompleteness and failure that is summed up in the beast more than anywhere else among fallen humanity.” (Beale 1999: 721-22) Or, as Resseguie puts it, 666 is the epitome of “humanity’s bestial traits” (Resseguie 2009: 190). Milligan summarizes: “The number six itself awakened a feeling of dread in the breast of the Jew who felt the significance of numbers. It fell below the sacred number seven just as much as eight went beyond it. This last number denoted more than the simple possession of the Divine. As in the case of circumcision on the eighth day, the ‘great day’ of the feast on the eighth day, or of the resurrection of our Lord on the first day of the week, following the previous seven days, it expressed a new beginning in active power. By a similar process the number six was held to signify inability to reach the sacred point and hopeless falling short of it. To the Jew there was thus a doom about the number six even when it stood alone. Triple it; let there be a multiple of it by ten and then a second time by ten until you obtain three mysterious *sixes* following one another, 666; and we have represented a potency of evil than which there can be none greater, a direfulness of fate than which there can be none worse.” (Milligan 1896: 235) In the second century Irenaeus arrived at a similar conclusion. He held that 666 signifies “a summing up of the whole of that apostasy which has taken place during six thousand years” (Irenaeus 1885: 5.28.2).

H. Rev 15:5-16:21: The seven bowl judgments⁴⁵

In this section God punishes the ungodly during the inter-advent age and brings final judgment at the last day because of their persecution and idolatry. As we saw earlier in the plagues of the trumpets and bowls occur in the same order and involve: (1) the earth; (2) the sea; (3) rivers; (4) the sun; (5) the realm of evil; (6) the Euphrates; and (7) the final judgment of the world with “lightning, sounds, thunders, and earthquake” and “great hail.” At this point, we must again recall that Revelation is *not* a chronological narrative. As with the seals and trumpets, the bowls are not necessarily sequential but may be simultaneous. Thus, concerning the sixth bowl (darkness), “We are told of *their pains and of their sores*. But pains and sores are not an effect produced by darkness. They can, therefore, be only those of the first bowl, a conclusion confirmed by the word ‘plagues’ instead of plague [16:9].” (Milligan 1896: 268, *emph. in orig.*)

As was true with the trumpets, the bowl judgments draw upon the imagery of the exodus plagues:

1 st bowl (sores) (16:2)	corresponds to 6 th plague (Exod 9:8-11)
2 nd and 3 rd bowls (water into blood) (16:3-6)	correspond to 1 st plague (Exod 7:20-25)
5 th bowl (darkness) (16:10-11)	corresponds to 9 th plague (Exod 10:21-23)
6 th bowl (frogs) (16:12-16)	corresponds to 2 nd plague (Exod 8:2-9)
7 th bowl (hail) (16:17-21)	corresponds to 7 th plague (Exod 22-26)

1. The sixth and seventh bowls (Rev 16:12-21). The sixth and seventh bowls are connected. The sixth bowl prepares the world for the final war against God; the result occurs at the seventh bowl, which is the *parousia*. The focus on Satan, the “gathering for war” of the world against God and his people, and the complete and final defeat of God’s enemies, show that sixth and seventh bowls correspond to **Rev 20:7-10** (they also parallel **19:17-21**). Milligan indicates the probable reason why the seventh bowl is poured out on the air: “The seventh or last Bowl is poured out into the air, here thought of as the realm of that prince of this world who is also ‘the prince of the power of the air’ [Eph 2:2]” (Milligan 1896: 268, *emph. in orig.*).

That the church is present during this time is apparent from **16:15** which says, “Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk naked and men will not see his shame.” Just as we earlier saw the connection between the seals and the Olivet Discourse, here we see the same connection between the bowls and the Olivet Discourse. “I am coming like a thief” repeats Christ’s warning to the church in **Matt 24:43** and **Rev 3:3**. “Blessed is the one who stays awake” repeats Christ’s exhortations to the church in **Matt 24:42-44, 45-51; Matt 25:1-13, 14-30** that we need to be alert, ready, prepared, and faithfully doing what we should be doing.

2. The drying up of the Euphrates to prepare for the kings of the east (Rev 16:12). As with so much else in Revelation, the imagery of the sixth bowl is based on historical precedents which are then used typologically. The drying up of the Euphrates and the kings from the east appears to draw on God’s judgment of Babylon, which itself followed the pattern of the drying up of the Red Sea and the Jordan River at and following the exodus (see **Exod 14:21-22; Josh 3:16; 4:23**). Isaiah and Jeremiah had prophesied that judgment on Babylon would include the drying up of the Euphrates (**Isa 11:15; 44:27-28; Jer 50:38; 51:36**). The prophecies were fulfilled by Cyrus’s diversion of the water (see **Isa 44:27-28**). That allowed Cyrus’s army to enter Babylon unexpectedly and defeat it (Beale 1999: 827). Cyrus, his princes and kings, were “from the east” (**Isa 41:2, 25; 46:11; Jer 50:41; 51:11, 28**).

John takes the fall of historical Babylon and typologically universalizes it in Revelation: “As at the exodus and especially at the fall of historical Babylon, the drying up of the Euphrates again marks the prelude to the destruction of latter-day Babylon. And just as Babylon has been universalized and become symbolic [see discussion of Babylon below], so the Euphrates cannot be a literal geographical reference to the Euphrates in modern Iraq, Syria, and Turkey but must be figurative and universal, despite those who contend that the reference is literal. This is indicated by 17:1, where the Babylonian harlot ‘sits on many waters,’ which is another way of referring to ‘the Euphrates and its water’ (16:12). The ‘many waters’ of 17:1 are figuratively interpreted as ‘peoples and multitudes . . . and nations and tongues’ in 17:15. . . . Therefore, the drying up of the Euphrates’ waters is a picture of how the multitudes of Babylon’s religious adherents throughout the world become disloyal to Babylon [see **17:15-18**]. Disenchantment with Babylon is a prelude to Babylon’s judgment, and the final judgment itself.” (Beale 1999: 828)

There is dispute concerning the identity of “the kings of the east”:

a. *The “kings of the east” as unbelievers*. The majority sees the “kings of the east” as “a

⁴⁵ With respect to the chronological relationship between the seals, trumpets, and bowls, see the introductory remarks at section VII.E. **Rev 8:6-11:19: The seven trumpets**, above.

figurative universalization of not only Babylon and the Euphrates River but also of Cyrus and his allies, ‘the kings from the rising of the sun,’ who are interpretively escalated into ‘the kings of the whole inhabited earth’ (16:14; cf. 18:18)” (Beale 1999: 828). A similar view is that “the kings of the east—the pagan hordes—join forces with the kings of the whole (civilized) world to do battle with Messiah, for it is clearly the eschatological ‘battle on the great day of God the Almighty’ (vs. 14)” (Ladd 1972: 213).

b. *The “kings of the east” as believers.* Others see the “*kings of the east*” in positive terms. The reasons are as follows: The word for “east” (Greek = *anatolē*; which also means “rising” or “the position of the rising sun”) “was a familiar symbol for the Messiah in New Testament times. It pointed to something or Someone of heavenly origin. Elsewhere the Apocalypse used the term in this manner [7:2], and it is hardly likely that a book so carefully written should change the meaning of this symbol in the later chapter. . . . The ‘kings of the east’ may be intended as a direct contrast to the ‘kings of the whole world’ mentioned in the same paragraph, and could represent heavenly beings who come to deliver the saints, as the Median kings from the east came with Cyrus to deliver Israel of old from Babylon.” (Ford 1979: 268) Since the sixth bowl is the preparation for the final battle and the *parousia*, the “*kings of the east*” may therefore refer to the heavenly armies that accompany Christ in **Rev 19:11-16**.

I. *Rev 17:1-19:10: Final judgment of Babylon*

As has been seen elsewhere throughout Revelation, humanity consists of two, and only two, types or groups: those who are committed to Christ and those who are not. Babylon epitomizes the system and worldview of everything and everyone that is not Christ’s. The world’s system appears all-powerful but contains the seeds of its own destruction. God’s judgment on the ungodly economic, cultural, and religious system of the world leads to the establishment of God’s consummated reign (**Rev 19:6**) and the union with his people (**Rev 19:7-9**). **Rev 13:4** raised the question, “*Who is able to wage war with him [the beast]?*” That is answered in **Rev 17:14**: the Lamb and those who are with him (“*the called and chosen and faithful*”) will overcome the beast because the Lamb is “*Lord of lords and King of kings.*” In yet another recapitulated image, the saints are vindicated, the blood of the martyrs is avenged, and the prayer of **Rev 6:10** is answered.

1. Babylon the great, the mother of harlots (Rev 17:1-5, 9, 15, 18) in its 1st century context. Most commentators identify Babylon as Rome, based on the reference to the seven hills (**Rev 17:9**) (e.g., Bauckham 1991: 52; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 97; Beale 1999: 869-70). The Greek word which the NIV translates as “hills” is the plural of *oros* which is “a relatively high elevation of land that projects higher than a bounos (‘a minor elevation, hill’)” (Danker 2000: “*oros*,” 724). Consequently, most translations (e.g., ESV, NAS B, NKJV, RSV) translate the term as “mountains” rather than “hills.” Although the allusion probably is to Rome, the use of *oros* in **17:9** suggests that “Babylon the great” transcends historical Rome since Rome’s hills are actually of very minor elevation even compared to the hills of Palestine.⁴⁶ Indeed, the fact that John uses the name “Babylon the great” rather than “Rome” indicates that he is not limiting his identification to the then-existing Roman state or society. While John uses Roman power, economy, and culture as the historical backdrop for his depiction of Babylon the great, Rome is seen as a paradigm or “type.” Specifically, Rome/Babylon is depicted as a *corrupting influence* on people (i.e., it is a “harlot”).⁴⁷

There are two major sources for John’s depiction of Babylon the great: Jeremiah’s oracle against historical Babylon (**Jeremiah 50-51**) and Ezekiel’s great oracle against Tyre (**Ezekiel 26-28**).⁴⁸ Richard Bauckham’s extensive study of this portion of Revelation has led him to conclude that what is in view here primarily is a two-fold corruption: first, cultural and economic exploitation and corruption; and second, religious corruption (Bauckham 1991: 47-90). They are, of course, related: Jesus frequently

⁴⁶ “The altitude of the central part of Rome ranges from 13 metres (43 ft) above sea level (at the base of the Pantheon) to 139 metres (456 ft) above sea level (the peak of Monte Mario)” (“Rome” 2012: n.p.).

⁴⁷ Babylon is called the “*Mother of Harlots*” (**Rev 17:5**). That is figurative language to indicate “that which allures, tempts, seduces and draws people away from God” (Hendriksen 1982:167). Such allurement reveals that people’s primary commitment and loyalty is to the world (Schnabel 2011: 208).

⁴⁸ Allusion also is made to all of the shorter oracles against Babylon and Tyre found among the OT prophets (Babylon: **Isa 13:1-14:23; 21:1-10; 47; Jer 25:12-38**; Tyre: **Isaiah 23**) (Bauckham 1991: 54). In alluding to these OT oracles but reinterpreting them to apply to the Rome of his day and beyond the Rome of his day, John is standing in the line of biblical prophets, and Jesus himself, who took the inspired words of the prophetic tradition and gave them new meaning and application.

warns believers about the fact that the lure of riches can turn one's head, choke the word in one's life, and thereby become one's new, true Lord (e.g., **Matt 6:19-24; 13:7, 22; 19:16-30; Mark 4:7, 18-19; 10:17-25; Luke 8:7, 14; 12:13-21; 16:13**). Paul does the same thing (e.g., **Col 3:5-6; 1 Tim 3:3; 6:6-11**).

The images of the harlot, drawn from the OT oracles concerning Tyre (**Isa 23:15-18; Ezekiel 26-28**), primarily relate to the first of these two forms of corruption: "The reference there is obviously to the vast trading activity through which the city of Tyre had grown rich. Tyre's commercial enterprise is compared with prostitution because it is association with other nations for the sake of profit. . . . In other words, Rome is a harlot because the associations with the peoples of her empire are for her own economic benefit. . . . Rome offered the Mediterranean world unity, security, stability, the conditions of prosperity. But in John's view these benefits are not what they seem: they are the favors of a prostitute, purchased at a high price." (Bauckham 1991: 54-56)

2. The "called and chosen and faithful" (Rev 17:14). Here the church is clearly identified, since the people referred to are "*those who are with Him [the Lamb]*." Further, they are described as the "*called and chosen [elect] and faithful*." Everywhere else in the NT, after Christ's resurrection, when those words describe people, they are used to describe Christians (the church): "called" (**Rom 1:1, 6, 7; 8:28; 1 Cor 1:1, 2, 24; Jude 1**); "chosen [elect]" (**Matt 20:16; 22:14; 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 22, 27; Luke 18:7; Rom 8:33; 16:13; Col 3:12; 2 Tim 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; 2:4, 9; 2 John 1, 13**); "faithful" (**Matt 24:45; 25:21, 23; Luke 12:42; Luke 16:10; 19:17; John 20:27; Acts 10:45; 16:1, 15; 1 Cor 4:2, 17; 7:25; 2 Cor 6:15; Eph 1:1; 6:21; Col 1:2, 7; 4:7, 9; 1 Tim 1:12; 3:1; 4:3, 10, 12; 5:16; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:6; 1 Pet 5:12; 3 John 5; Rev 2:10, 13**).

3. "My people" (Rev 18:4). "My people" can only be those who are united with and faithful to the Lord (i.e., the church). John's exhortation to "*come out of her, my people*" is yet another example of an inter-textual allusion. The statement alludes to **Isa 48:20; 52:11; Jer 50:8; 51:6, 9, 45**.⁴⁹ In all of those passages, the context concerned literal Babylon. So here, like the warnings in the letters to the seven churches (**Revelation 2-3**), this verse "is addressed to professing Christians who were being seduced by Satan through the wiles of the queen prostitute to abandon their loyalty to Jesus" (Johnson 1981: 566-67).

4. "Come out of her, my people" (Rev 18:4). John is alluding to **Isa 48:20; 52:11; Jer 50:8; 51:6, 9, 45** as the background for his exhortation to "*come out of her, My people*." In John's first century context, John's command or exhortation "is not for physical withdrawal but for a distinctly countercultural way of life in the midst of Greco-Roman society" (Stylianopoulos 2009: 26; see also Bauckham 1993a: 377 ["None of John's first readers lived in the city of Rome. The command is for the readers to *dissociate* themselves from Rome's evil, lest they share her guilt and her judgment."]).

Since Babylon the great transcends first-century Rome, John's exhortation applies at all times and places to Christians who always are at the risk of seduction by the allure of the world's many charms: "Even in its OT setting, this was no mere warning to leave the city of Babylon. John, like the OT prophets, is exhorting God's people to shun the charms and snares of the prostitute city. Babylon exists wherever there is idolatry, prostitution, self-glorification, self-sufficiency, pride and complacency, reliance on luxury and wealth, and violence against life (18:4-8, 24). Believers are to separate themselves from all forms of Babylon. While they still have to live and work in the world, they also need to claim a distinctive identity and to develop habits of resistance that will enable witness to take place." (Ngundu 2006: 1572)

5. The list of cargoes (Rev 18:12-13). Bauckham has compared Ezekiel's account of Tyre's trade in **Ezek 27:12-25** with John's account of Rome's trade and concludes that Ezekiel's account was an accurate portrayal of Tyre's trade in the sixth century BC and John's list of cargoes is an accurate list of Rome's imports in the first century AD (Bauckham 1991: 59).

John completes his list of cargoes in **18:13** by referring to slaves. Slavery was the basis of Rome's economic system. Yet the way John phrases the mention of slaves as part of Babylon the great's cargoes is profoundly theological: "That John gives both the common term for slaves in the slave markets ['bodies'] and a scriptural description of slaves ['souls of people'] must mean that he intends a comment on the slave trade. He is pointing out that slaves are not mere animal carcasses to be bought

⁴⁹ In **2 Cor 6:16-17** Paul similarly paraphrased **Isa 52:11** in exhorting believers to remain pure. In that passage he also called the church the "*temple of God*" (cf. **Rev 11:1, 19**). Since **2 Corinthians** was written in approximately AD 56, it is possible that John knew of it. Regardless of that, John's use of "*come out of her*" shows the common practice among the apostles to identify OT themes and phrases and apply them to the church.

and sold as property, but are human beings. But in this emphatic position at the end of the list, this is more than just a comment on the slave trade. It is a comment on the whole list of cargoes. It suggests the inhuman brutality, the contempt for human life, on which the whole of Rome's prosperity and luxury rests." (Bauckham 1991: 79)

5. Those who mourn for Babylon (Rev 18:9-11, 14-19). In **Revelation 18**, John observes that three classes of people lament the destruction of Babylon the great: "*the kings of the earth*" (**18:9**); "*the merchants of the earth*" (**18:11**); and "*every shipmaster, passenger, sailor, and all who make their living by the sea*" (**18:17**). "These are precisely the people who themselves benefited from Rome's economic exploitation of the Empire. What they lament is the destruction of the source of their own wealth." (Bauckham 1989: 97)⁵⁰

6. Babylon is not limited to Rome but is universal. Although the context of **Revelation 17-18** may have been the social, economic, political, and religious circumstances of his own day, John's apocalypse far transcends Rome. Although there are some identifying first-century markers ("seven hills"; the list of cargoes), "they are sufficiently few to make the reapplication of the images to comparable situations easy" (Bauckham 1993b: 156). This is seen in the language John uses. In his description of Babylon as a "great harlot" and the "mother of harlots" (**Rev 17:1, 5**; see also **Rev 17:2, 4, 15; 18:3, 7, 9**), John stands in a long line of prophets who employ the language of illicit sexual relations to condemn economic injustice, cultural corruption, and religious faithlessness. For example, **Isa 23:1-18** condemns Tyre as a harlot for its commercial trade practices. Ezekiel condemns Jerusalem as a harlot for its idolatry, cultural corruption, and economic injustice (**Ezek 16:1-59**). The entire book of Hosea is a graphic portrayal of Israel's "harlotry" in its use of its money and resources (**Hos 2:5-9**), its idolatry (**Hos 2:11-13; 4:11-13; 13:1-2**), and its general cultural corruption (**Hos 4:1-2, 7-8, 14; 10:13**).

Further, John constantly speaks in "universal" terms: the expected trial "*is about to come upon the whole world*" (**Rev 3:10**); the beast has authority "*over every tribe and people and tongue and nation*" and "*all who dwell on the earth will worship him*" (**Rev 13:7-8**);⁵¹ the kings "*of the whole world*" are gathered for the final battle (**Rev 16:14**); Babylon corrupts and deceives "*all the nations*" (**Rev 14:8; 18:3, 23**) and is guilty of the blood "*of all who have been slain on the earth*" (**Rev 18:24**).

Just as the beast of **Rev 13:1-2** combines all of the features of the four beasts of **Dan 7:3-8** into one, so Babylon the great combines in itself all of the evils of the two great evil cities (Babylon and Tyre) on which it is prophetically based. Thus, Babylon is not an individual city, or even an individual empire, but appears to be a world-wide entity. It may be seen as "the ultimate seductive expression of secular wrongdoing" (Smalley 2005: 427), or "the final manifestation of the total history of godless nations . . . who will seduce all the world to worship that which is not God" (Ladd 1972: 222), or material seduction and fallen human culture (Johnson 2001: 17, 246, 268-69n.2, 339). Indeed, "John's Babylon is the final climax of the enterprise begun at Babel (= Babylon) in Genesis 11: the age-long human enterprise of organizing human society in opposition to God. . . . Thus the Babylon of Revelation is not only a specific visionary image of contemporary Rome, but also an eschatological image. In other words, it transcends its original reference and becomes a symbol of the whole history of organized human evil whose fall will be the end of history." (Bauckham 1989: 93)⁵²

In his portrayal of Babylon the great, John is again confronting his audience with the choice between the beast or the Lamb, the world or the church, those who dwell on the earth or those who are citizens of heaven, because Babylon is the "anti-kingdom"—the alluring, all-encompassing alternative

⁵⁰ John's perspective, of course, is not that of the people of the *earth* and the *sea* (**Rev 18: 9, 11, 17**) but is that of *heaven* (**18:20**). From his perspective, the fall of Babylon is cause for rejoicing and the worship and praise of God (**18:20; 19:1-6**).

⁵¹ Similarly, the "*many waters*" on which the great harlot Babylon sits (**Rev 17:1**) are explicitly defined to be "*peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues*" (**Rev 17:15**); cf. **Rev 5:9; 7:9** where the church is drawn "*from every tribe and tongue and people and nation*."

⁵² Babylon the great's transcending historical Rome and representing the universal seduction of the world is consistent with the reference to the "*seven kings of which one is an eighth*" in **Rev 17:9-11**. This may be "a reflection of the Hebrew idiom, the 'graded numerical saying,' which uses two consecutive numbers in parallel. In some cases this idiom indicates that the enumeration is illustrative rather than exhaustive (Prov 6:16; 30:15, 18, 21, 29), but when the numbers seven and eight are used in this way, they seem to indicate an indefinite but adequate number (Eccl 11:2; Mic 5:4[5]). . . . This usage may confirm what we would be justified in suspecting in any case: that John's numbers seven and eight are not to be taken literally, as defining how many Roman emperors there will actually be before the parousia, but as symbolizing all the evil, antichristian emperors there can be before their excess of evil brings its own destruction." (Bauckham 1993a: 405)

to the kingdom of God.⁵³ Thomas Torrance concludes, “Ostensibly Babylon is a world-wide civilization and culture, magnificent in her science and arts and commerce, but it is drugged with pride and intoxicated with its enormous success. At the same time it is a strange mingling of world power and religion, of paganism and Christianity, which becomes the greatest hindrance to the Christian Gospel. Its inner mystery is revealed at last as the great dominion of Satan that desires to entrench itself forever in the creation of God, in sharp antagonism to the dominion that supervenes upon the world from above, the Kingdom of God.” (Torrance 1959: 115)

7. The spiritual nature of Babylon. As mentioned above, there are two aspects to Babylon the great’s corruption of humanity: the cultural-economic and the religious. The religious aspect of Babylon the great’s corrupting influence may be inferred from an OT referent: “In conjunction with the fact that Babylon is a harlot, destruction by fire [**Rev 18:8**] leads us directly to the thought of the spiritual, and not simply the civil, or political, or commercial, character of the city. According to the law of Moses, burning appears to have been the punishment of fornication only in the case of a priest’s daughter [**Lev 21:9**]. . . . The conclusion to be drawn is that Babylon is a spiritual city.” (Milligan 1896: 309, 310)

Throughout the Bible, the language of harlotry, sexual immorality, and infidelity are equated with spiritual infidelity (i.e., forsaking God to pursue other gods and ungodly practices) (see, e.g., **Jer 3:6-10; Ezek 16:15-22; Hos 2:2; 4:12; Mal 2:13-16; 1 Cor 6:15-18; Jas 4:4; Rev 2:18-22; 14:8; 17:1-5; 18:1-3; 19:1-2**). Desmond Ford points out, “While it is true that Scripture uses the harlot symbol for cities such as Tyre and Nineveh [to indicate economic and cultural corruption] it is much more frequently applied to the apostatizing people of God” (Ford 1979: 270). Ford goes on to discuss what he sees as the literary background for the symbolism John uses concerning Babylon the great: “‘Harlot’ and not ‘adulteress’ is the most appropriate figure, for the emphasis is upon the many lovers and the wages gained. The literary origin of the symbolism in Rev. 17 is to be found in Jer. 2:33-34 and 3:1-11, where Judah is a harlot (Jer. 2:20) with a sign upon her forehead (Jer. 3:3), who causes transgression in others (Jer. 2:33), and ‘on whose skirts is found the lifeblood of the guiltless poor’ (Jer. 2:34). She is clothed in crimson (Jer. 4:30) and golden ornaments. Her lovers will despise her (Jer. 4:30) and seek her life. . . . *Pornē* [prostitute; whore] is used in the LXX [Greek OT] at least fifty times to describe the spiritual fornication of Israel and Judah. . . . Such contentions as these, as used in this study, are not meant to deny the well-known arguments for Rome. . . . They are meant rather to indicate that John saw more than just Rome, and that he was particularly concerned with the final apostasy which will have as its centre the issue of the relationship to God rather than political matters. Furthermore, he was writing to professing Christians, not for unbelieving citizens of Rome. Therefore, he intends by his portrayal to admonish the flock, lest its members be led by Antichrist into spiritual fornication.” (Ford 1979: 270, 304n.159)

Babylon the great’s religious and spiritual corruption certainly was present in the first century. Bauckham discusses the nature of civilization’s religious corruption in the first-century context in which John writes: “From John’s Jewish Christian perspective, the political religion of Rome was the worst kind of false religion, since it absolutized Rome’s claim on her subjects and cloaked her exploitation of them in the garb of religious loyalty. Thus, for John, Rome’s economic exploitation and the corrupting influence of her state religion go hand in hand. . . . In John’s perspective, the evils of Rome came to a head in her persecution of Christians, because here Rome’s self-deification clashed with the lordship of the Lamb to which the Christian martyrs bore witness and so what was implicit in all of Rome’s imperial policies here became explicit.” (Bauckham 1991: 57-58)

One aspect of this religious corruption may also have been the cooperation between first-century Judaism and Rome. Some commentators identify the harlot with unfaithful Israel, especially Jerusalem (McDurmon 2011: 2; Chilton 1985: 187-88 [Jerusalem is the harlot; her being pictured as “sitting on the beast” (Rev 17:3) represents “her dependence upon the Roman Empire for her national existence and power”]). “The description in [**Rev 17:6; 18:24**] of the harlot’s killing the martyrs is distinctly reminiscent of Jesus’ accusations against Jerusalem (Mt 23:29–39). . . . When John speaks of the beast turning on the harlot and destroying her [**Rev 17:16-18**], he in all probability alludes to the divine judgment that befell Jerusalem for cooperating with the imperial cult.” (Pate and Haines 1995: 43)

⁵³ John is thus challenging Christians to critique their own societies. As Bauckham says, “Any society whom Babylon’s cap fits must wear it. Any society which absolutizes its own economic prosperity at the expense of others comes under Babylon’s condemnation.” (Bauckham 1993b: 156; see also Schnabel 2011: 211-12)

As was true with respect to cultural and economic corruption, the religious corruption of Babylon the great is not limited to first-century Rome. John was not particularly interested in the current political and economic situation *per se*, although of course he was fully aware of it. Rather, “To him Babylon is essentially religious and personifies the whole world’s apostasy from God. . . . John saw more than just Rome, and . . . was particularly concerned with the final apostasy which will have as its centre the issue of the relationship to God rather than political matters. Furthermore, he was writing to professing Christians, not for unbelieving citizens of Rome. Therefore, he intends by his portrayal to admonish the flock, lest its members be led by Antichrist into spiritual fornication.” (Ford 1979: 269, 304n.159)⁵⁴

8. Babylon the harlot is the counterpart to the pure woman of Rev 12:1. The universal nature of Babylon the great is seen in its obvious contrast with the woman of **Revelation 12**. “As the woman of Rev. 12 obviously is a figure for the people of God in all times, so the woman in Rev. 17 encompasses the rebels of every era. But as John particularly applies the bride eschatologically [see **Rev 19:7-8; 21:2, 9**], so with the harlot. Paul had spoken of [the apostasy] and Babylon to John summarizes the rebellion spoken of by the apostle to the Gentiles. Babel had originated in rebellion, and thus it will end.” (Ford 1979: 269) The table below shows how the woman, the ideal Zion, the heavenly representative of the people of God (**Rev 12:1-2, 5-6, 13-17**), is clearly contrasted with “the great harlot” of **Revelation 17-18**:

<i>The Woman of Rev 12</i>	<i>The Great Harlot of Rev 17-18</i>
Clothed with the sun (12:1)	Clothed with purple & scarlet (17:4; 18:16)
The moon is under her feet (12:1)	Sits on many waters (17:1, 15)
Wears a crown of 12 stars (12:1)	Adorned with gold, precious stones, & pearls (17:4; 18:16)
Gave birth to a son (12:5)	Is the mother of harlots (17:5)
Fled into the wilderness (12:6, 14)	Lives sensuously with the kings and merchants of the earth (17:2; 18:3, 9)
Is sustained by God (12:6, 14)	Is carried by the beast (17:3, 7)
Is persecuted by the dragon (12:13, 15)	Is drunk with the blood of the saints (17:6; 18:24)

9. Babylon is the counterpart to the New Jerusalem. Both Babylon and the New Jerusalem are symbolic. Babylon the great’s universal nature is seen in its obvious contrast with the New Jerusalem. The fact that Babylon is described both as a woman and a city, and the New Jerusalem likewise is described both as a woman and a city (**Rev 21:2**), shows not only the universal nature of the comparison but also the connection of culture, economics, and religion: they mutually interact, and all determine and reveal one’s true loyalties. “Babylon, the city of this world, the place of exile and alienation for Christians, is the spiritual capital for those who are earthbound, whose point of view is from below (that is, from this world). The earthbound includes not only those outside the church but also those within. Babylon is where the ‘inhabitants of the earth dwell and the followers of the beast make their home. Yet Babylon is not only the home of the earth’s inhabitants; it is also where Christians live, although it cannot be called their home.” (Resseguie 2009: 35)

The parallels between Babylon and New Jerusalem show the seductive nature of the world and its values; the contrasts show that the world and its values are ultimately deadly:

<i>Babylon (Rev 17-18)</i>	<i>New Jerusalem (Rev 21-22)</i>
Introduction	Introduction
Approach of the angel (17:1)	Approach of the angel (21:9)
Invitation: “Come, I will show you” (17:1)	Invitation: “Come, I will show you” (21:9)
Translation of seer by angel (17:3)	Translation of seer by angel (21:10)
To a wilderness (17:3b)	To a high mountain (21:10)
Opening of the vision (17:3)	Opening of the vision (21:10b)
Comparisons	Comparisons
Dressed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet (17:4; 18:16)	Dressed in fine linen, bright and clean (19:8)
Adorned with gold (17:4; 18:16)	Made of pure gold (21:18, 21)

⁵⁴ The spiritual nature of the harlot has led some commentators to view Babylon as the prophets viewed faithless Israel: “Babylon is not the Jerusalem only of ‘the Jews.’ She is the great Church of God throughout the world when that Church becomes faithless to her true Lord and King. . . . Babylon is the world in the Church.” (Milligan 1896: 295-96) However, Babylon is never called *moichalis*, ‘adulteress’; always *porne*, ‘harlot’. Hence, Babylon was never the Lamb’s wife.” (Hendriksen 1982: 167n.3) Also, “Rev. 18—especially verses 11, 13—suits the description of the city of the world; it can hardly be said to harmonize with the idea of the false church.” (Hendriksen 1982: 167n.1) Babylon as Rome and Babylon as the false church have elements of truth; but both ideas appear to be too limited.

Adorned with jewels (17:4; 18:16)	Brilliance is like crystal-clear jasper (21:11); city wall is jasper (21:18); foundation of city wall is adorned with every kind of precious stone (21:19-20)
Adorned with pearls (17:4; 18:16)	Twelve gates are twelve pearls (21:21)
Contrasts	Contrasts
The great harlot (17:1)	The bride, the wife of the Lamb (21:2, 9)
Dwelling place of demons (18:2)	Dwelling place of God (21:3, 22)
A name written on her forehead (17:5)	God's name written on its citizens' foreheads (22:4)
Her followers are not in the book of life (17:8)	Its citizens are in the Lamb's book of life (21:27)
Holds a golden cup full of abominations and unclean things of her immorality (17:4); a prison of unclean spirits and unclean birds (18:2)	Nothing unclean will enter it (21:27)
Her wine makes the nations drunk (17:2; 18:3)	The water of life is given freely, and the tree of life brings the healing of the nations (21:6; 22:1-2)
Corrupts & deceives the nations; the kings of the earth committed immorality with her (17:2; 18:3, 9, 23)	The nations will walk by its light; the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it (21:24, 26)
God's people are called to come out of Babylon (18:4)	God's people are called to enter New Jerusalem (22:14)
Doomed to destruction (17:16-17; 18:8-23)	The saints will reign forever and ever (22:5)

10. The judgment of Babylon is patterned on the judgment of historical Babylon (Rev 18:1-24). In connection with the sixth bowl (Rev 16:12), we saw how God's judgment in Revelation is patterned in part on the destruction of historical Babylon. Now, **Rev 18:7** quotes **Isa 47:7-8** concerning Babylon's sensuality. However, the comparison between historical Babylon and the world's Babylon the great of **Revelation 18** is not limited to that one quotation. **Revelation 18** uses **Isaiah 47** something as a template to pronounce God's judgment on Babylon the great for its pride, sensuality, sorceries, and ungodliness, just as God similarly judged historical Babylon. The following table shows the similarities between the two Babylons:

<i>Historical Babylon—Isaiah 47</i>	<i>Babylon the Great—Revelation 18</i>
Calls herself a queen, not a widow (47:7-8)	Calls herself a queen, not a widow (18:7)
Thinks she is secure (47:8, 10)	Thinks she is secure (18:7)
Glorifies herself (47:8, 10)	Glorifies herself (18:7)
Sensual (47:8)	Sensual (18:3, 9)
Uses sorcery (47:9, 12-13)	Uses sorcery (18:23)
Sinful (47:10)	Sinful (18:4-5)
Judgment will come suddenly (47:9, 11)	Judgment will come suddenly (18:8, 10, 17)
Will burn (47:14)	Will burn (18:8-9, 18)
Those who slept with her cannot save her (47:15)	Those who slept with her cannot save her (18:3, 9-19)

Beale summarizes the correspondence between the two Babylons: "As elsewhere in Revelation, the pride and fall of historical Babylon is taken as a typological pattern of the hubris and downfall of the worldwide Babylonian system at the end of history. As with old Babylon, latter-day Babylon sees herself as a mother to all her inhabitants, whom she nourishes. She has complete confidence that she will never be without the support of her children. As with the Babylonian nation, latter-day Babylon's political and economic security will be removed suddenly. And her proud confidence in such security will be revealed as without foundation and as a delusion (as in Isa. 47:9-11; Jer. 50:31-32). Such confidence is self-idolatry, which must be judged. The church must beware of trusting in economic security lest its members be judged along with the world." (Beale 1999: 903)

11. Rev 18:1-19:6: the judgment on Babylon. **Rev 18:1-19:6** has an interconnecting structure:

18:1-3: An angel pronounces judgment on Babylon
18:4-20: A voice from heaven predicts the fall of Babylon
18:21-24: An angel pronounces judgment on Babylon
19:1-6: Voices in heaven praise God for the fall of Babylon

(see Bauckham 1993a: 338-43; for similar structural outlines see Beale 1999: 891)

Although **Rev 18:6** might be taken as giving Babylon twice the punishment she deserves, the references to "double" and "twice" are idiomatic Hebrew expressions for "equivalent" retribution (Kline 1989: 171-79; see also **1 Tim 5:17**; Ladd 1972: 238 ["punishment in full measure"]; Beale 1999: 900-02). That is confirmed by **Rev 18:7** which says, "*To the degree that she glorified herself and lived*

sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning.”

J. Rev 19:11-21: The Second Coming of Christ

In this section Christ reveals His sovereignty and faithfulness to His promises when He comes again to bring judgment on all those who have opposed Him and oppressed His people. In keeping with the progressively parallel structure of the book, the *parousia* or its effects have been mentioned or described at **Rev 1:7; 6:12-17; 8:1-5; 11:11-19; 14:14-20; 16:17-21** (the *parousia* or its effects will also be described at **20:7-10, 11-15; and 21:1-2**). **Revelation 19** symbolically describes the *parousia* in detail. The events of **Revelation 19** are clearly linked with previous *parousia* passages. Mealy describes these connections: “In Revelation 19, preceding the revelation of Jesus on a white horse, John describes a triumphal liturgy before the throne of God, which has affinities both with the scene of 7.9-12 and with that of 11.15-17. Praises are offered to ‘God who sits on the throne’ because of the justice of his judgment in the overthrow of Babylon (19.1-3); and then, as in 16.17, ‘A voice came from the throne’ . . . The first sentence [**19:5**] clearly harks back to Rev. 11.18, where the *parousia* was predicted as the time for God’s reward to be given to ‘Thy bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear Thy name, the small and the great’. Similarly, the giving of praise to God because he has taken up his eschatological reign (v. 6) points back to 11.15-17. . . . In Revelation 19, the throne of God is shown for the third time [**19:1-6**] (cf. 7.9-17; 11.15-18) to denote the *parousia* not only as an occasion of wrath, but also one of rejoicing. It all depends on what group of people is facing the throne.” (Mealy 1992: 156)

The church in **chapter 19** is described with two different images:

1. **The “bride” (Rev 19:7-9; see also 21:2, 9; 22:17)**. As he has done throughout the book, in his image of the bride John has taken an OT image relating to the restoration of Israel (**Isa 49:18; 61:10; 62:5**), and applied it to the church. In **Rev 21:9** the New Jerusalem is described both as “*the bride*” and “*the wife of the Lamb*.” John does that to elaborate the nature of the relationship between Christ and his people. The imagery connotes the love and intimacy of the relationship: “The specification of the woman as bride evokes the notion of newness and ardor, and the reference to Jerusalem as wife suggests enduring fidelity and fruitfulness. Thus, in designating the New Jerusalem as bride and wife, John is telling us of the city’s beauty, and the intimacy and fruitfulness of the relationship between God and the redeemed in the apocalyptic age. Moreover, the appearance of similar language in [**19:7, 9; 20:9; 22:17**] indicates that that relationship has already begun in the historical community.” (Deutsch 1987: 112-13)
 - a. *The bride of Christ contrasts with the harlot of the world*. The wording of **Rev 17:1** and **21:9** are parallel. The Bride is clothed “*in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints*” (**Rev 19:8**). The “Mother of Harlots” is dressed as a harlot, “*clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immoralities*” (**Rev 17:4; 18:16**). The bride is exalted (**Rev 21:9-22:5**); the harlot is destroyed (**Rev 17:1-19:6**).
 - b. *The “marriage supper of the Lamb” is contrasted with “the great supper of God.”* All who are invited to the “*marriage supper of the Lamb*” are “*blessed*” (**Rev 19:9**); at the “*great supper of God*” all who oppose Christ are killed and eaten (**Rev 19:17-21**).
2. **The armies (Rev 19:14)**. There are different views concerning the identity of the “armies” of **Rev 19:14**. The two main views are that they represent angels or that they represent redeemed believers (i.e., the church, perhaps in concert with angels). In **Rev 12:7** angels waged war with the dragon and his armies. Elsewhere in the NT, angels are said to accompany Christ at the *parousia* and participate in the execution of the final judgment (see **Matt 13:40-42; 16:27; 24:30-31; 25:31-32; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 2 Thess 1:7; Jude 14-15**).

The better view is that the heavenly armies of **Rev 19:14** include the saints, not merely angels. That is seen by comparing **Rev 19:13-15** with the important parallel passage of **Rev 17:14** which “supports the identification of the armies as the saints, not angels, because there it is saints who accompany Christ, and there also Christ is called ‘Lord of lords and King of kings’ (as in 19:16). The ‘white, pure linen’ worn by the armies . . . is appropriate both for angels (15:6; Dan. 10:5; 12:6; Ezek. 9:2) or saints (19:8). But in the Apocalypse, with one exception (15:6), only saints wear white garments (3:4-5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14). The saints here and in 17:14 take part in the final judgment only in that their testimony is the legal evidence condemning their oppressors (for such an understanding of a witness that judges see Matt. 12:41-42 par.; Rom. 2:27).” (Beale 1999: 960)

Additional inter-textual references within Revelation indicate that the armies of **19:14**, at minimum, include the church: “The robe dipped in blood (Rev. 19.13) recalls 7.14, in which the robes of the saints attending Christ’s *parousia* were described as washed and made white in the blood of the

Lamb . . . The sharp sword (Rev. 19.15) correlates with the warning to the church at Pergamum in 2.16 . . . The reference to Christ ruling the nations with a rod of iron (Rev. 19.15) closely echoes the words of 2.26-27, in which Christ promises the church in Thyatira that the overcomer will participate with him in his role as ruler and judge at the parousia.” (Mealy 1992: 221-22)

As the *parousia* itself begins, John sees “*heaven opened*” (Rev 19:11) which harks back to previous *parousia* and judgment passages (Rev 6:14; 11:19; 15:5; cf. 4:1). The consummate nature of this scene is indicated in that the only weapon involved in the warfare being described is, “*From His mouth comes a sharp sword*” (Rev 19:15; see also 1:16; 2:12; Isa 11:4; 49:2; Heb 4:12): “The idea goes back to creation. God created the worlds by his word. He spoke and it was done. This creation was mediated through the living word, Christ (John 1:3; Heb. 1:2). The judgment of the old order will also be mediated through the word of Christ.” (Ladd 1972: 255) Jesus’ name, “*King of kings and Lord of lords*” (Rev 19:16), indicates his ultimate rulership over all other authorities.

The *parousia* entails different things. It can be described as having a dual nature, which John describes in different ways. The *parousia* entails both the vindication of the righteous and the judgment of the unrighteous. The *parousia* also is described both as a courtroom proceeding and as a battle or war.

1. The *parousia* as vindication of the righteous. When Jesus returns he will come, symbolically, not on a donkey (see John 11:13-15) but on “*a white horse*” along with his armies “*on white horses*” (Rev 19:11-14). In ancient Rome, victorious generals in major wars sometimes had a public “triumph” in which they entered Rome in a chariot pulled by four white horses, with their victorious army following behind them (Ramsay 1875: 1163-67). The color white thus suggests victory.

White also conveys the ideas of righteousness, holiness, and vindication: “Throughout the Apocalypse ‘white’ has represented a reward for purity or purity itself, resulting from persevering faith tested by persecution [3:4-5]. . . . 19:7-8 has refined this idea by understanding ‘white’ garments not only as representing righteousness but also as a reward of *vindication* for those who have persevered through persecution. Vindication is probably included in most of the earlier uses of ‘white’ (e.g., the Son of man and the saints stand vindicated by God after their faithful witness is rejected by the world and they are persecuted: 1:14; 2:17; 3:4-5; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 14:14). In particular, in 14:14 and 20:11 ‘white’ conveys ideas of not only divine holiness and purity but also juridical vindication of truth through judgment. Likewise, the white color of the horse here suggests the same idea of vindication in introducing the following judgment scene, especially because of its close connection to vv 7-8 and especially to the ‘white linen’ of v 14, which also contains the idea of vindication.” (Beale 1999: 950)

As we have seen throughout Revelation, God’s identifying with and vindicating his people follows the pattern of his identifying with and vindicating Christ: believers will suffer, die, and appear defeated in this world, but their faithfulness to death results in their eternal victory and vindication (Rev 2:9-10, 13; 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 11:7-13; 12:11; 14:1-5, 13; 17:14; 18:20-24; 19:1-9; 20:4-6).

2. The *parousia* as judgment of the unrighteous. In addition to vindicating the righteous, the *parousia* entails the judgment of the unrighteous. Rev 19:15-21 concentrates on the *parousia* as judgment on the unrighteous.

3. The judgment at the *parousia* as both a battle and a courtroom proceeding. In describing the *parousia* 19:11 says, “*In righteousness He judges and wages war.*” That is consistent with the picture throughout the Bible of God’s judgment at His coming as both a court of law and a war or battle: “The imagery of trial and war is a metaphorical expression of God’s rule. He rules in his judgments and in his battles. In his wrath, he vindicates his name, but he also vindicates all who belong to him and who trust in him for protection and deliverance.” (VanGemeren 1990: 220)

a. The judgment of the Lord as a court of law. In the OT, “the Lord’s coming may be compared to a court scene. In his court Yahweh is the *prosecutor, witness, and judge*. He is the sovereign judge seated above his creation: ‘But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him’ (Hab. 2:20; see Zeph. 1:7). When he comes, he will assemble all nations and ‘enter into judgment against them’ (Joel 3:2). He brings charges (Hos. 4:1-3), serves as witness for the prosecution (Jer. 29:23; 42:5; Mic. 1:2), condemns, and executes the verdict. The bases of the accusation and condemnation are human arrogance, the rejection of his kingdom, and a selfish and greedy lifestyle [Mal 3:5].” (VanGemeren 1990: 219)

In the NT, we see the judgment described in courtroom terms at Matt 25:31-46; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 4:4-5; 2 Cor 5:10. In Revelation, the judgment-as-courtroom-proceeding explicitly appears at 11:18; 20:11-15. In Revelation 19, the judgment-as-courtroom theme is suggested by the metaphor “*His eyes are a flame of fire*” (Rev 19:12).

That indicates Christ's role as divine, all-seeing judge. It is also seen in **Rev 2:18-23** where, by the same metaphor, Christ's all-seeing eyes pierce through the exterior to the interior (He "*searches the minds and hearts,*" **Rev 2:23**) of the church of Thyatira and the prophetess Jezebel and her followers. The result is vindication and reward of the faithful and judgment of the unfaithful.

b. *The judgment of the Lord as a battle or war.* In the battle theme, "Yahweh is the Divine Warrior, who comes to establish order out of chaos, anarchy, and autonomy of the kingdoms of humankind. The warrior vents his wrath against all opposition in his realm [**Isa 13:13**]. In his wrath he comes with vengeance, likened to war and a bloodbath [**Jer 46:10**]." (VanGemeren 1990: 220) Vos elaborates this: "The setting is martial; the background that of a fierce battle and a decisive victory. In the Old Testament this is for a long time the prevailing mode of representation, though from Daniel and the Psalms onward the formal forensic picture becomes increasingly in evidence, without, however, entirely superseding the other. In the martial judgment there is no apparatus of records kept and examined, and no verdict solemnly pronounced on the basis of these. . . . There is one peculiar feature about this execution of judgment . . . the immediateness of its effect. This is best illustrated by the description of the disposal of the 'Man-of-Sin' [**2 Thess 2:8**]; it is brought about by the breath of the mouth of Christ, by the mere manifestation of His coming. Plainly this feature was borrowed from [**Isa 11:4**]. In Isaiah it is simply one of the illustrations of the prophet's conception of the instantaneousness of Jehovah's supernatural working particularly in judgment." (Vos 1979: 262-63)

In Revelation, the judgment-as-battle appears at **6:12-17; 11:18; 14:17-20; 16:14-21; 17:14; 18:17-24; 19:11-21; 20:7-10**. In **Revelation 19**, the reference to Christ's riding on a white horse (**19:11**) and his "armies" also following on white horses (**19:14**) indicate the *parousia*-and-judgment-as-war theme (see Schnabel 2011: 236, 288). That is made explicit in **Rev 19:17-21**. In **19:17**, "*the great supper of God*" parodies the "*the marriage supper of the Lamb*" (**19:9**). That connection is seen in that both **Rev 19:9** and **19:17** contain the same phrase, *eis to deipnon* ("to the supper"). "The link implies that judgment is but the other side of the coin of salvation" (Beale 1999: 965).⁵⁵

K. Rev 20:1-15: The binding of Satan, the reign of the saints, the judgment of Satan, and the final judgment

The "thousand years" or "millennium" is the period between Christ's first coming until shortly before His Second Coming. During that period, God limits Satan's deceptive powers and deceased Christians are vindicated by reigning in heaven. This period is concluded by a resurgence of Satan's deceptive assault against the church. That, in turn, is concluded by the *parousia* and the final judgment.

Although there are four paragraphs or subsections in **Revelation 20** (**20:1-3**, the binding of Satan; **20:4-6**, the reign of the saints; **20:7-10**, the final destruction of Satan and his forces; and **20:11-15**, the last judgment), those really are subsets of two larger sections: events before the *parousia* (**20:1-6**); and events connected with the *parousia* (**20:7-15**).

The events recorded in **Rev 20:1-15** do not follow chronologically from where **19:21** left off. Instead, following the progressively parallel structure of the book, **Revelation 20** recapitulates history from Christ's first coming to the *parousia* and final judgment, adding new details and emphases.⁵⁶ "*The overthrow of Satan*, and not the reign of a thousand years, is the main theme of the first ten verses of the chapter. So far is the latter from being the culminating point of the whole book, that it is not even introduced at the beginning of any new and important section." (Milligan 1896: 336). Satan is Christ's greatest adversary. In **Revelation 19** John described the end of the beast and false prophet. It is therefore proper that end of Satan (the "power behind the throne") be emphasized separately in this chapter.

1. The binding of Satan (Rev 20:1-3): symbolic language. Beale begins our discussion of **Revelation 20** by reminding us of the danger of "literalism" (in a physical sense) when John is writing about spiritual

⁵⁵ The image of flesh-eating birds gorging on the dead (**19:17-21**) is drawn primarily from **Ezek 39:4, 17-20**. It is "the application of an ancient curse formula" that reflects "an ancient means for hurting and humiliating an enemy even after death" (Aune 1998b: 1067-68; see **Gen 40:19; Deut 28:26; 1 Sam 17:44, 46; 1 Kgs 14:11; 16:4; 21:24; 2 Kgs 9:10; Job 39:27-30; Jer 7:33; 15:3; 16:4; 19:7; 34:20; Hab 1:8; Matt 24:28; Luke 17:37**).

⁵⁶ See **Appendix 2—THE MILLENNIUM: An Amillennial Synthesis of the Biblical Data** in Menn 2017 for the reasons why **Revelation 20** recapitulates **Revelation 19** instead of following it chronologically and for further discussion of the "thousand years," the "two resurrections," and the reign of the saints (**Rev 20:4-6**).

truths in an apocalyptic genre: “It is wrong to picture the devil being ‘cast out of the earth’ in some spatial sense, so that he is no longer present on the earth. This would be to take the ‘abyss’ in an overly literalistic manner. Rather, like ‘heaven’ throughout the Apocalypse, it represents a spiritual dimension existing alongside and in the midst of the earthly, not above it or below it (as with, e.g., the heavenly sphere in 2 Kgs. 6:15-17 and the Satanic sphere in Eph. 6:10-17; cf. 2 Cor. 10:3-5).” (Beale 1999: 987) Beale’s point is highlighted when we consider the language John uses in **20:1-3**. “Satan is not a literal dragon who can be bound with a physical chain or locked away in a physical pit” (Johnson 2001: 283). To hold to a “literal” 1000 years requires, to be consistent, that the “key” and “chain” held by the angel in **Rev 20:1** are a physical key and chain, and that the “abyss” of **Rev 20:3** is an actual pit in the earth which has a physical lock and physical “seal” (Waltke 1988: 273; Jackson 2001: n.p.). That, of course, is not what is intended by such language. Satan is a spiritual, not a physical, being. The language John uses is figurative or symbolic.

There is another important aspect to John’s language concerning the “binding” of Satan and its relationship to how this appears in history, namely, John is employing “epic idiom” to describe God’s victory over the dragon (White 1999: 62).⁵⁷ After surveying multiple biblical examples of the use of epic idiom, White states, “In each and every case . . . the monster’s fate in the epic idiom is only analogous, not identical to its fate in history. This will be so whether they find the evil animal to have been captured or slain. In all such cases, the fate of the dragon represents the truth that the effort of God’s enemies to resist his creative and redemptive work in heaven and earth is itself effectually resisted by God whether through temporal or final means.” (White 1999: 62) He concludes that “the fate of the dragon in Rev 20:1–3 is *analogous but not identical* to the fate of Satan in history. Stated differently, while the dragon is captured and confined in the epic imagery and plot of John’s vision, Satan is not captured and imprisoned in history. Rather, like the serpentine dragons of Babylon and of the darkness and deep, Satan is deposed from his role as deceiver of the world nations.” (White 1999: 63, *emph. added*)

2. The binding of Satan occurred at Christ’s first coming. The first issue is *when* did this “binding” occur? Premillennialists contend that the binding occurs after the *parousia*. All others agree that the binding occurred in connection with Christ’s first coming. Both the NT and contextual clues within Revelation itself make clear that Satan’s binding occurred in connection with Christ’s first coming. Hoekema tells us why: “Is there any indication in the New Testament that Satan was bound at the time of the first coming of Christ? Indeed there is. When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus replied, ‘How can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man?’ (Matt. 12:29). Interestingly enough, the word used by Matthew to describe the binding of the strong man is the same word used in Revelation 20 to describe the binding of Satan (the Greek word *deō*).” (Hoekema 1979: 228-29)

Jesus’ own words in **John 12:31** correspond to **Rev 20:3**: **John 12:31** (“*Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out [Greek = *ekballō*]*”); **Rev 20:3** (“*He threw [Greek = *ballō*] him into the abyss*”). Consequently, the NT often talks of Satan’s judgment, fall, limitation, and defeat in connection with Christ’s first coming and during this age.⁵⁸

Jesus’ giving his disciples the Great Commission (**Matt 28:18-20**) reflects this new state of affairs: “The earthly political authority to which Satan arrogantly laid claim, by which he oppressed the nations, and which he offered to Christ [**Matt 4:8-9; Luke 4:5-6; Eph 2:1-2**] was righteously won by Christ’s glorious redemptive labor. . . . We should remember that the Great Commission opened with this noble declaration: ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth’ (Matt. 28:18b). That authority encompassed heaven and earth and is ‘above every name that is named [**Eph 1:21; Phil 2:9-**

⁵⁷ What John is doing is borrowing “imagery and plot from pagan cosmogenic myth . . . so that Elohim the true Creator was depicted in combat with the anti-creative dragon, serpent, or sea. In fact, we should state the matter differently: precisely by calling attention to the mythic traditions in their reformulations of creation and redemption, the monotheistic writers of Scripture were ‘demythologizing’ those traditions.” (White 1999: 61) This is similar to what John did earlier in **Revelation 13** and **17** in appropriating and transforming the Nero *redivivus* legend and how he, like other NT prophets and writers, frequently reappropriated the images of OT prophecies for his own purposes and circumstances.

⁵⁸ For other verses on the “casting” theme see **Matt 12:28; Mark 3:22-23; 9:38; 16:17; Luke 9:49-50; 10:18; John 12:31; Acts 5:16; 16:16-18; 19:11-12; 2 Pet 2:4**.

For other verses on the more general theme of the limiting of Satan see **Matt 12:29; Mark 3:24-27; John 16:11; 17:15; Acts 26:18; Rom 8:33, 38-39; 16:20; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20-23; 3:8-12; 6:10-16; Col 1:13; 2:10, 15; Heb 2:14; Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 3:21-22; 1 John 2:13; 3:8; 4:3-4; 5:18; Jude 6**.

10; 1 Pet 3:22].” (Gentry 1990: 58, 94)

3. The binding of Satan in Rev 20:1-3 is parallel to the casting down of Satan in **Rev 12:7-12**. “The Apocalypse itself also gives evidence to the correctness of this interpretation [that Satan’s binding occurred at Christ’s first coming], for the twelfth chapter, which forms the center of the book, depicts Christ’s coronation as bringing about the ejection of Satan from heaven” (Grenz 1992: 162). In other words, the binding of Satan in **20:1-3** is parallel to Satan’s being “*thrown down to the earth*” (**12:9**) and coming down to the earth and the sea (**12:12**). The same four names for Satan (“*the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan*”) “occur in the same order in both passages of the Greek text [**12:9; 20:2**], and these two passages are the only places in the entire book where this series as a whole is applied to him. This unique parallel between these two passages provides some evidence of an intent to connect the two narratives.” (Shea 1985: 45) The parallels between the two chapters are consistent with the recapitulatory nature of the entire book. As with the many other inter-textual cross-references throughout the book, the parallels between **chapters 12** and **20** indicate that they depict the same events from different perspectives, to bring out different nuances or emphases.⁵⁹ The parallels between **Revelation 12** and **20** are reflected in the following table:

<i>Rev 12:7-12</i>	<i>Rev 20:1-6</i>
Angels’ evil opponent is “ <i>the great dragon . . . the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan</i> ” (12:9)	Angels’ evil opponent is “ <i>the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan</i> ” (20:2)
Satan cast to earth [and the sea] (12:9; 12)	Satan cast into the abyss (20:3)
Satan “ <i>knows that his time is short</i> ” (12:12)	Satan to be “ <i>released for a short time</i> ” (20:3)
Satan’s fall results in the kingdom (12:10-11)	Satan’s fall results in the kingdom (20:4-6)
The saints’ kingship is based not only on Satan’s fall but on Christ’s victory and their faithfulness to “ <i>the word of their testimony</i> ” even to death (12:11)	The saints’ kingship is based not only on Satan’s fall but on their faithfulness “ <i>of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God</i> ” even to death (20:4)

The scenes of the woman and the dragon (**Rev 12:1-17**) and the binding and release of Satan (**Rev 20:1-3**) are also consistent with the scene of the two witnesses and the beast (**Rev 11:3-12**). All three scenes use different imagery to picture the same time period and same events (the spiritual protection of the church despite the opposition to it and its suffering in this world): the two witnesses are divinely protected until they have finished their testimony; the woman is protected in the wilderness; Satan is bound for a thousand years to prevent him from deceiving and gathering the nations to destroy the church (Johnson 2001: 286-87; see also at 44-45).

Nevertheless, the “binding” of **Rev 20:3** is not identical in all respects to the “casting” of **Rev 12:9**, but is an aspect of it. The reason is that Satan will be “loosed” from his “binding” (i.e., from the restrictions that have been placed on his ability to “deceive the nations”) for a short time before Christ returns (**Rev 20:3, 7**, see below). On the other hand, “the victory [Christ] won over Satan was won once and for all” (Ladd 1972: 263). Satan will never again ascend to the place, status, or authority he had before he was “cast down” by what Christ accomplished on the Cross.

4. The purpose of the binding of Satan. Satan has been an active agent in the world since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (**Gen 3:1-13**). Jesus called him the “*father of lies*” (**John 8:44**). He is the accuser of believers and “*deceives the whole world*” (**Rev 12:9-10**). Nevertheless, the scope of his deceptive authority has been significantly limited, his power has been decisively broken, and his ultimate defeat has been definitely ensured. Satan’s binding at Christ’s first coming is a relative, not absolute, curtailment of Satan’s activities for a specific purpose during a specific time.⁶⁰ Satan is bound “*so that he would not deceive the nations any longer*” (**Rev 20:3**). Gentry elaborates this: “In Old Testament times only Israel knew the true God (Ps. 147:19-20; Amos 3:2; Luke 4:6; Acts 14:16; 17:30). But Christ’s incarnation changed this as the gospel began flowing to all nations (e.g., Isa. 2:2-3; 11:10; Matt. 28:19; Luke 2:32; 24:47; Acts 1:8; 13:47).” (Gentry 1998: 83) John Sittema adds that Jesus’ ascension “marked his triumphal enthronement, and with it, the binding of Satan ‘so that he can no longer deceive

⁵⁹ Two different emphases that should be noted are: (1) The “short time” in **Rev 12:12** and **20:3** are different: in **Rev 12:12** the “short time” is the entire period from Christ’s resurrection and ascension to the *parousia*, whereas the “short time” in **20:3** only is the end of that period, shortly before the *parousia*. (2) Satan’s deceptive activity referred to in **Rev 12:9** and **20:8** likewise are different: the former occurs throughout the period from the ascension to the *parousia*, whereas the latter occurs only for a short time before the *parousia* and also is not subject to the restrictions now placed on Satan. See the next two sections in the main text for further discussion of these points.

⁶⁰ Even though he disagrees about the timing of the “binding,” premillennialist Ladd agrees that the binding of Satan “is a symbolic way of describing a curbing of his power and activity; it does not mean complete immobility. His incarceration in the abyss does not mean that all of his activities and powers are nullified.” (Ladd 1972: 262)

the nations.’ This is the necessary corollary to Pentecost languages [**Acts 2:1-11**] that would enable the kingdom’s advancement to the ends of the earth (see Luke 11:20-21).” (Sittema 2013: 86n.3) Paul states this in **Acts 26:17-8** where he says that Christ sent him to the Gentiles “*to open their eyes so that they might turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.*”

Rev 20:7-8 also clarifies the nature of this binding since v. 7 picks up where v. 3 leaves off.⁶¹

Rev 20:3 states that Satan is bound “*so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed.*” **Verses 7-8** then pick up the thought, “*When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released . . . and will come out to deceive the nations . . . to gather them together for the war.*” Johnson highlights the significance of **20:7-8** on the meaning of **20:3**: “Although it is true throughout history that Satan, the ancient serpent, ‘deceives the whole world’ (Rev. 12:9), in this vision a specific deception to obtain a specific objective is in view. We see this objective when, at the end of the thousand years, the dragon is released and comes out ‘to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war’ (20:8). . . . In light of this explanation of the aim behind the dragon’s deception (20:8), his binding during the thousand years prevents Satan from gathering the nations in a worldwide conspiracy to blot out the church.” (Johnson 2001: 284-85)⁶²

5. The releasing of Satan (**Rev 20:3, 7**). **Rev 20:7** states, “*When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison.*” Beale describes the scenario the Bible depicts when Satan is released shortly before Christ comes again: “Throughout the time between Christ’s first and second comings, Satan will not be able to deceive any of ‘the full number’ (6:11) of those purchased by Christ because they have been ‘sealed’. When ‘the full number’ has been gathered in, then the devil will be permitted to deceive the majority living at the end of history, causing them not only to be blinded to the truth of Christ but also to seek to annihilate Christ’s followers. . . . At the end of the age, persecution by deceived multitudes will break out against the church, such that it would vanish were it not for God’s intervention on its behalf (so also Mark 13:19-22; Matt. 24:21-24).” (Beale 1999: 986-87) This context helps us see the difference between the “short time” Satan is given following his release in **Rev 20:3** and the “short [or ‘little’] time” he had when cast to the earth in **Rev 12:12**. The short time of **Rev 20:3** is the very last stage of the time Satan had in **Rev 12:12** (see Beale 1999: 993).⁶³

6. The binding and release of Satan before the *parousia* and his destruction at the *parousia* are parallel to the restraint, revealing, and destruction of the “man of lawlessness” in **2 Thess 2:6-12**. The binding of Satan now, but his release shortly before the *parousia*, also is consistent with **2 Thess 2:6-12** where “*the mystery of lawlessness is already at work,*” but “*the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan*” currently is restrained. When the restraint “*is taken out of the way . . . the lawless one will be revealed.*” In fact, both **Revelation 20** and **2 Thessalonians 2** are parallel in multiple respects, including the essential order of the events they describe:

⁶¹ Schüssler Fiorenza correctly points out, “Although the chapter formally divides into three divisions, with 20:7-10 as part of the vision beginning in 20:4ff, contextually 20:7-10 brings to conclusion 20:1-3” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 106).

⁶² The fact that the church has not been destroyed but has spread to include people “*from every tribe and tongue and people and nation*” of the world (**Rev 5:9**) is the “analogous but not identical” historical manifestation of John’s vision of Satan’s binding, discussed above by White (see White 1999: 66n.41).

The language of **Rev 20:3, 7-9** makes clear the specific purposes of the “binding” of Satan, i.e., preventing him from stopping the spread of the church throughout the world and preventing him from leading a worldwide conspiracy to destroy the church. However, we have seen earlier that, as a result of Christ’s first coming, Satan’s power also has been limited in other ways: he no longer has access to heaven, he no longer is able to accuse believers, and he no longer has control over believers since they have been transferred from his dominion to that of Christ; hence, believers can “*resist the devil and he will flee from you*” (**Jas 4:7**).

⁶³ The Greek wording of the two verses is different: **Rev 12:12** = *oligon kairon*; **Rev 20:3** = *mikron chronon*. The words essentially are synonymous. However, Zodhiates notes a difference regarding the words for “time”: *Chronos* “perceives time quantitatively as a period measured by the succession of objects and events and denotes the passing of moments. Another word, *kairos* . . . considers time qualitatively as a period characterized by the influence or prevalence of something.” (Zodhiates 1993: “*chromos*,” 1487) That distinction is consistent with the way Revelation uses the phrase “short time”: in **Rev 12:12** the “short time” (*kairos*) denotes that, qualitatively, the period following Satan’s being cast to the earth is the time characterized by his influence or prevalence on the earth; in **Rev 20:3** the “short time” (*chronos*) denotes that, quantitatively, Satan’s remaining time of influence will soon end.

<i>2 Thess 2:6–12</i>	<i>Rev 20:1–15</i>
Man of lawlessness (MOL) is currently restrained (2:6-7)	Satan is bound by an angel (20:1-3)
Restrainer will be taken out of the way (2:7)	After the “1000 years” Satan will be released (20:3, 7)
MOL will be revealed & come in accord with Satan (2:8-9)	Satan will come out (20:8)
MOL will deceive those who perish (2:8-12)	Satan will deceive the nations and gather them together for the war (20:8-9)
MOL will be slain at Christ’s coming (2:8)	Satan will be destroyed [at Christ’s coming] (20:9-10)
Those who did not believe the truth and took pleasure in wickedness will be judged (2:12)	The dead will be judged; those whose names are not in the book of life will be thrown into the lake of fire (20:11-15)

Sydney Page highlights the parallels between the two passages: “Both passages speak of a restriction that prevents a major outbreak of evil for a limited period of time but that will eventually be removed, with the result that there will be a period of heightened opposition to God that will be brought to an end by divine intervention. Besides having this basic sequence of events in common, Revelation 20 and 2 Thessalonians 2 exhibit a number of similarities of detail. The overarching sovereignty of God is emphasized in both accounts. . . . Both accounts also highlight the role of deception in connection with this eschatological rebellion. . . . Not only do the two passages have the theme of deception in common, but in both Satan occupies a prominent position in relation to it. In Revelation he is presented as the one who deceives, and in 2 Thess 2:9 he is seen as the real force behind the lawless one’s program of deception. Finally, there is a significant similarity between the Johannine and Pauline conceptions of how the rebellion is terminated. . . . But the resemblance is even closer than this, for in [2 Thess 1:7-9] Paul, like John, associates the return of Christ with fire and the execution of final judgment on the enemies of God.” (Page 1980: 40-41) Those parallels demonstrate that the events of both passages end (not begin) at the *parousia*.

7. The reign of the saints (Rev 20:4-6). Virtually all commentators agree that the church (or its representatives, the martyrs) is being described in this passage. The parallels between this scene and the scenes in **Rev 6:9** and **7:14-17** indicate that these are heavenly, not earthly, thrones.⁶⁴ That the scene is in heaven, not on the earth, also is apparent from the fact that “all of John’s forty-seven references to ‘a throne’ or ‘thrones’ in Revelation locate the throne in heaven, except for Satan’s throne (2:13) and that of the beast (13:2; 16:10)” (Ngundu 2006: 1675). Even the thrones of Satan and the beast are “not earthly but located in a spiritual dimension” (Beale 1999: 999).

The Greek of the passage is irregular. It is therefore difficult to say whether one group of people is being described in different ways, or more than one group is being described: “The text is ambiguous on the issue of participation in this messianic reign. If *hoitines* [‘those’] retains its classical sense, it would refer to a wider circle than the martyrs referred to in the *tōn pepelekismenōn* [‘who had been beheaded’] clause. Thus participation would seem to be open to all faithful Christians. But *hoitines* in NT Greek most often functions just like the ordinary relative, so the *hoitines* clause may be a further qualification of ‘the souls of those who had been beheaded.’ Thus participation would be limited to the martyrs. . . . Although it is not clear whether the thousand-year reign was limited to the martyrs, at least

⁶⁴ On the other hand, J. Marcellus Kik states, “Throne is a figure of speech indicating the reign of the saint. . . . The thrones stand for the saints’ spiritual dominion within himself and over the world. Through the grace of Christ they reign in life over the flesh, the world, and the devil. . . . He reigns over sin because sin has no dominion over him. He reigns over Satan who cannot touch him. He reigns over the world because of Him who has overcome the world. . . . Thus these thrones are not literal and material. . . . Rather they are the thrones occupied by the saints on earth during the period of [the] thousand years.” (Kik 1971: 210, 213) Kik notes that in **Rev 20:4** the words *sat*, *given*, *worshipped*, *received*, and *reigned* all are in the aorist tense. He concludes, “Since they are all in the same tense they must refer to the same time. That is, the time of not worshipping the beast and not receiving his mark is the same time as that of sitting on thrones and living and reigning with Christ.” (Kik 1971: 228) R. Fowler White adds, “To say in [Rev] 20:6 that those who take part in the first resurrection will reign with Christ is to say that they will do so first on earth before they die and then in heaven after they die” (White 1992: 13). In a private communication with the author, White likewise cited the aorist tense of the verbs, stating, “As Augustine taught, the first resurrection *precedes the martyrs’ bodily death and delivers them to it*. To put this in terms of the text itself, the martyrs were slain because they *had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand, and had come to life and had reigned with Christ for a thousand years*. The aorist verbs here should be translated consistently as referring to events preceding the martyrs’ death.”

it is clear that they are singled out for special emphasis. The first resurrection and the exercise of kingly power with Christ are blessings by which those who share the fate of Jesus with regard to his death are also enabled to share in his glorious destiny.” (Yarbro Collins 1977: 251)

In light of the ambiguous Greek, “some commentators see three groups in this passage: the saints in general (those who sat in the thrones), the martyrs (those beheaded), and the living saints (those who had not worshipped the beast nor received its mark)” (Ladd 1972: 265). Others see this heavenly court as also including angels, since in **Rev 4:4** those sitting on thrones appear to be angels.

Because the overthrowing and permanent destruction of Christ’s greatest adversary is the main theme of **Rev 20:1-10**, no specifics are given concerning the nature of the “thousand years” other than the summary fact that the saints “*sat on [thrones], and judgment was given to them*” (**20:4**). Premillennialists place this scene *after* the Second Coming of Christ, think that the “first resurrection” is the resurrection of believers at the *parousia*, and maintain that “*the rest of the dead*” who “*come to life*” refers to the resurrection of everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, 1000 years after the *parousia*. Amillennialists hold that the “1000 years” is a figurative description of the current time, between Christ’s resurrection but *before* the Second Coming. They contend that the “first resurrection” refers to Christians’ new life in and union with Christ (Augustine 1950: 20.6-10; White 1992: 22; Shepherd 1974: 36-38; Venema 2000: 331-36), Christ’s resurrection in which believers spiritually participate (Hughes 1977: 315-18), or the Christians’ translation to heaven upon their physical death (Kline 1975: 366-75). “*The rest of the dead*” who “*come to life*” refers to the unbelievers who were not participants in the “first resurrection” but whose only resurrection is the bodily resurrection that takes place at the *parousia* (Beale 1999: 1013-14; White 1992: 10-11; for more detailed discussions of all these issues see Beale 1999: 991-1017).

8. The Timing of the “Thousand Years.” “That the millennial reign described in verses 4-6 occurs before the Second Coming of Christ is evident from the fact that the final judgment, described in verses 11-15 of this chapter, is pictured as coming after the thousand-year reign. Not only in the book of Revelation but elsewhere in the New Testament the final judgment is associated with the Second Coming of Christ. (See Revelation 22:12 and the following passages: Mt. 16:27; 25:31-32; Jude 14-15; and especially 2 Thess. 1:7-20.) This being the case, it is obvious that the thousand-year reign of Revelation 20:4-6 must occur *before* and *not after* the Second Coming of Christ.” (Hoekema 1977: 160)⁶⁵

The reign of the saints as a *current*, not future, phenomenon is consistent with the rest of Revelation and the NT, which pictures the church currently as raised with Christ in heaven (**Eph 2:5-6; Phil 3:20; Heb 12:18-24; Rev 1:6; 5:9-10; 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 13:6; 14:1-4; 15:2-4**). For example, **Rev 20:4b** clearly parallels **Rev 6:9** (Gourgues 1985: 680 [table and wording]):

Rev 6:9	Rev 20:4b
I saw (<i>eidon</i>) under the altar	I saw (<i>eidon</i>)
the souls (<i>tas psuchas</i>)	the souls (<i>tas psuchas</i>)
of those who had been slain	of those who had been beheaded
for the word of God (<i>dia ton logon tou theou</i>) and the witness (<i>kai dia tēn marturian</i>) they had borne.	for their witness to Jesus (<i>dia tēn marturian Iēsou</i>) and for the word of God (<i>kai dia ton logon tou theou</i>).

In short, “The opening verses of the chapter declare the cosmic victory won by Christ at his first advent. Verses 4-6 speak of the resultant victory of his faithful witnesses, despite apparent defeat, whether that victory be in the heavenly realm of the intermediate state or the earthly realm of Christian living.” (Grenz 1992: 163) Thus, “When saints are translated to heaven at death they join Christ on his judicial throne to rule over the enemy in inaugurated fulfillment of the promise given to ‘overcomers’ in 3:21 and 2:26-27, though these promises will also reach complete fulfillment at the final resurrection of the saints [see **Matt 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor 6:2-3**]” (Beale 1999: 996).

9. The “camp of the saints and the beloved city” (Rev 20:9). Neither the “camp” nor the “city” is to be taken as a literal camp or city. They, like the many other figures we have seen, figuratively and symbolically describe the church. The “beloved city” (i.e., the church) contrasts with the “great city”

⁶⁵ “If Rev. 20:11-15 is regarded as chronologically subsequent to Rev. 20:1-10 (as it is by premillennialists [e.g., Thomas 1995: 581]) then the analogy of faith (which clearly teaches that the general judgment occurs at Christ’s second coming) demands that the ‘1000 years’ and ‘little season’ precede the second coming” (Waldron 2000: n.p.).

(i.e., Babylon, the worldwide anti-Christian, religious-cultural entity). Additionally, the “*camp of the saints*” and the “*beloved city*” are the same, not different. As we saw above and will below, the New Jerusalem is equated with the “*holy city*” which is equated with believers (the church). **Rev 3:12** further identifies all believers (i.e., “*he who overcomes*”) with “*the city of My God*” (i.e., the New Jerusalem). The “*beloved city*” cannot be different from the “*holy city*” or “*the city of My God,*” which is the New Jerusalem, i.e., the believers, the overcomers, “*the camp of the saints.*” These are all overlapping metaphors that are equated with the church (see Kistemaker 2000: 437; Bauckham 1993a: 172; Beale 1999: 1027.).

The equation of the “*camp of the saints*” with the “*beloved city*” shows in another way that the worldwide church is being described. In **20:9** the NASB and ESV say that Gog and Magog came up on “*the broad plain of the earth.*” The NKJV and NIV translate that phrase as “*the breadth of the earth.*”⁶⁶ Gundry therefore observes, “To come against this city or camp, Gog and Magog had to spread out ‘over the breadth of the earth.’ So the city did not seem to be confined to one spot. It was the saints themselves wherever they lived on earth.” (Gundry 1987: 256-57)

10. The final destruction of Satan and his forces (Rev 20:7-10).

a. *The battle or war of Rev 20:7-10 is the same as the battle or war of Rev 16:14-16 and 19:17-21, which occurs just before the parousia.* Premillennialists see the battle or war of Har-Magedon (**Rev 16:14-16**) and the battle or war of **Rev 19:19-21** as two descriptions of the same event which occurs just before the *parousia* (e.g., Ladd 1972: 256-57). However, they see the battle or war of **Rev 20:7-10** as another, similar battle or war that takes place after the *parousia* and after Christ has reigned on the earth in perfect righteousness for 1000 years (Ladd 1972: 269-70). That idea contradicts the very nature of the Second Coming which entails resurrection, judgment, and renewal of the earth and begins the “*age to come*” in which there will forever be no more sin or evil. “Another difficult dimension of the premillennial chronology is its conception of the ultimate victory of Christ. According to Paul, the final enemy of Christ is death, and the Lord destroys this last foe at the resurrection of the believers (1 Cor 15:25-26, 50-55 [which occurs as part of the *parousia*]). . . . Because of their loyalty to the premillennial doctrine, they teach that death is not destroyed until the end of the millennial reign. The premillennial chronology, therefore, places the final victory of Christ a full thousand years after the resurrection and thus a thousand years after the event that Paul declares marks the triumph of the Lord.” (Grenz 1992: 143-44)

In addition to the effect Christ’s second coming has in eliminating sin and death, the context of Revelation itself reveals that the battle of **20:7-10** is the same as that of **16:14-16** and **19:17-21**. All three passages draw on the Gog-Magog prophecy of **Ezekiel 38-39**. Meredith Kline discusses the interrelationship of **Ezekiel 38-39**; **Rev 16:14-16**; **19:17-21**; and **20:7-10**. He details how Revelation indicates they must all be referring to the same battle that occurs at the time of the *parousia*: “The war (*polemos*) of Rev 20:8 is certainly ‘the war of the great day of God, the Almighty,’ the battle of Har Magedon described in 16:14-16. In each case it is the war to which Satan, the dragon, gathers the nations of the whole world. . . . The relationship of Rev 20:7-10 to Ezekiel 38-39, obvious enough from the adoption of the Gog-Magog terminology in Revelation 20, is also evidenced by a set of basic similarities: the marshaling of hordes from the four quarters of the earth (Ezek 38:2-7, 15; 39:4; Rev 20:8); the march of the gathered armies to encompass the saints in the city of God, center of the world (Ezek 38:7-9, 12, 16; Rev 20:9); the orchestration of the event by God (Ezek 38:4, 16; 39:2, 19; Rev 20:3, 7); the timing of the event after a lengthy period in which God’s people were kept secure from such a universal assault (Ezek 38:8, 11; Rev 20:3); the eschatological finality of the crisis (Ezek 39:22, 26, 29; Rev 20:10ff.); and the fiery destruction of the evil forces (Ezek 38:22; 39:6; Rev 20:9-10). Just as clearly, the Gog-Magog prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39 is a primary source drawn on by Rev 16:14-16; 19:17-21 and other Apocalyptic prophecies of the final conflict. Prominent in these passages is the major feature that marked the dependence of Rev 20:7-10 on the Ezekiel prophecy—namely, the universal gathering of the enemy armies (Rev 16:14-16; 17:12-14; 19:19; and compare 6:15 with Ezek 39:18-20), including too the historical setting of that event at the close of the world-age (Rev 6:12-17; 11:7-13; 16:16-17 [cf. 17:10-14]; 19:15-21), following an era in which it is given to the Church to fulfill its mission of gospel witness (11:3-

⁶⁶ In a footnote the NASB notes that the phrase literally is “*breadth of the earth.*”

7; cf. 12:6, 14). . . . It therefore follows that the thousand years that precede the Gog-Magog crisis of Rev 20:7-10 precede the Har Magedon-*parousia* event related in the other passages. Har Magedon is not a prelude to the millennium, but a postlude. Har Magedon marks the end of the millennium. And that conclusion spells the end of premillennialism.” (Kline 1996: 219-20)

Since Revelation as a whole has a progressively parallel structure, in this recapitulation of the final destruction of Satan and his forces we see a subtle development of the ideas that had previously been discussed in **chapters 16 and 19**: “In Rev.16.14 the worldly rulers are mustered for the battle, by demonic spirits, on the Day of the Lord; in 19.19 the beast, with the rulers of the earth and their armies, wages war against the Messiah and his followers; while in 20.8 the Satan himself assembles innumerable and hostile nations from the four corners of the earth . . . to do battle with God’s people on the earth and in heaven (20.9).” (Smalley 2005: 513) In other words, the culminating picture of this event reveals Satan to be the “power behind the throne” who directs both the demons and the beast.

It may seem “natural” to view the events of **Rev 20:7-10** as a physical battle (or war) between Satan and his followers and the church, involving the physical weapons of war. Support for the “physical” aspect of warfare between the world and the church is found in **Matt 24:22** which says, “*Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short*” (see also **Mark 13:20**). However, that probably is not, in fact, the focus of the passage. In commenting on this passage, J. Marcellus Kik points out, “The language is so vivid that it is hard for us to realize this is not a battle of arms—of sword and gun. Our Lord clearly indicates that the battle for Christianity is not fought with carnal sword. It is a battle between the true Gospel and the false Gospel. It is a battle of truth against error. . . . It is not a war against flesh and blood ‘but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places’ [**Eph 6:12**]. . . . There will undoubtedly be persecution. The enemy may use physical violence. But the main weapons will be in the realm of the spirit.” (Kik 1971: 238. 240-41)

We need to recall that throughout the book of Revelation, the emphasis has been on the issues of who is one’s true Lord and remaining faithful to death. We saw that the most important aspect of Babylon the great was her *spiritual* corruption, not her political or economic corruption. The same was true with respect to “Antichrist”—the Bible’s emphasis is on his/its *spiritual* nature, not political or economic issues. Thus Christ’s primary concern regarding his return is, “*When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*” (**Luke 18:8**) As we also have seen, God’s judgment is frequently depicted as a battle or war, and when God sends “*fire from heaven*” (**Rev 20:9**) it always indicates his judgment.⁶⁷ Consequently, **Rev 20:9-10** and the other passages in the book that appear to describe God’s dramatically terminating a physical battle against the saints may in fact be figurative or symbolic descriptions of the final judgment itself that occurs in connection with Christ’s *parousia*.

b. Satan is “*thrown into the lake of fire . . . where the beast and the false prophet are*” (**Rev 20:10**). Premillennialists contend that the beast and false prophet have been in the lake of fire for a thousand years before the devil is cast there. Most English translations appear to imply this by saying that Satan is thrown into the lake of fire “*where the beast and the false prophet are*” (NASB; NKJV), or “*were*” (ESV; RSV), or even “*had been thrown*” (NIV). In fact, the judgment of Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are simultaneous, not sequential. The judgment in **Rev 20:10** is a recapitulation of the judgment in **Rev 19:20**, with the additional reference to Satan, since the defeat of Satan is the focus of **Rev 20:1-10**.

The Greek grammar of this clause is ambiguous and most naturally supports the simultaneous, recapitulation view, not the sequential judgments view. Andrew Steinmann explains why: “20:10 should be seen as a recapitulation of the judgment in 19:20 with the addition of Satan’s judgment. 20:10 literally reads: ‘And the devil who had deceived them was thrown (*ēblēthē*, aorist passive indicative) into the lake of fire and sulfur, where both the beast and the false prophet. . . . and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.’ The ellipsis of a verb governing ‘beast’ and ‘false prophet’ requires the translator to supply one in English. Most translators supply ‘where the beast and the false prophet were/are’—as if the two

⁶⁷ See Menn 2017, section **VIII.J.1.a**. “*Jesus’ reference to ‘lightning’ in Matt 24:27 may also imply judgment*” for the passages in which God sends fire from heaven.

judgments are sequential, not synonymous. But the ellipsis of a third-person-plural form of *einai* is rare (BDF 71). A more common form of ellipsis would be the omission of a verb coinciding with the preceding verb. Thus the most natural translation of 20:10 would be: ‘And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were thrown’ (cf. NIV). (Note: ‘Were thrown’ [aorist] = at the same time, not ‘had been thrown’ [pluperfect] = prior to the time when the devil was thrown in.)” (Steinmann 1992: 77-78n.18; see also Beale 1999: 1030 [Satan, the beast, and the false prophet can all be seen “as thrown into the fire at the same time whether the elided [i.e., omitted] verb is ‘are cast’ or ‘were cast’ (the latter of which would be identical to the preceding verb in regard to the devil”)]⁶⁸

11. The last judgment (Rev 20:11-15). “John has already set the precedent for the idea that the same judgment can be viewed first as a battle/confrontation, and then as a courtroom scene. . . . The scene of 20.1-15 invites understanding as a restatement, using different imagery, of the final judgment just narrated in 20.7-10.” (Mealy 1992: 177, 179) Thus, while **Rev 20:7-10** and **20:11-15** both describe the final judgment, each description has its own emphasis: “The earlier of the two [**20:7-10**] emphasizes the destruction of the devil and his agents, perhaps because the whole narrative of Rev 20 began with him as its subject. Then the closing scene which follows [**20:1-15**] places its emphasis upon God as the judge, who presents his final judgment at this time.” (Shea 1985: 49) The fact that **20:11** states “*earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them*” both recapitulates the prior depictions of the final judgment (**Rev 6:12-14; 11:13; 16:17-21**) and sums up the creation-changing nature of the *parousia* and the judgment that occurs in connection with it.

a. *The final judgment occurs as a part of the events entailed by the parousia.* There is a clear correspondence between **Rev 20:11-15** and **1 Cor 15:20-54**. In **1 Cor 15:26** Paul said, “*The last enemy that will be abolished is death.*” **Rev 20:14** says that “*death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire.*” “The symbolic description of the destruction of Death and Hades [at the eschatological judgment] corresponds to Paul’s statement in 1 Cor 15:26. . . . For both John and Paul the last scene in the drama of redemption before the inauguration of the eternal state is the elimination of death.” (Page 1980: 42) That occurs in connection with the *parousia* (see **1 Cor 15:50-54**). As we have seen, the Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation tell a coherent story: the *parousia* entails resurrection and judgment; it is the dividing point between “*this age*” and the “*age to come.*”

b. *Judgment of unbelievers only, or of all people?* Some people, primarily dispensationalists, think that there are multiple, distinct judgments in the NT: the judgment of the “nations” to see who will enter the millennial kingdom (**Matt 25:31-46**); a separate judgment of believers before the “judgment seat of Christ” to receive their rewards (**2 Cor 5:10**); and the “great white throne” judgment of **Rev 20:11-15** which they think applies only to unbelievers (e.g., Scofield 1967: 1036-37n.2, 1375n.1; Thomas 1998: 223; MacDonald 1995: 1299; Smith 1980b: 193). Others see **Rev 20:11-15** as the general judgment of all people, believers and unbelievers alike (e.g., Hendriksen 1982: 196; Ladd 1972: 271; Ngundu 2006: 1576).⁶⁹ Although the emphasis in this passage may be on unbelievers, all people are included, since the Bible indicates that there is only one general judgment of all people (see Menn 2017, chapter V. **The Eschatological Significance of Christ’s Second Coming**). “The final issue of the judgment of the nations is not the millennial kingdom but is either eternal life or eternal punishment (Matt. 25:46). This is clearly the final judgment which decides the eternal destiny of men. The judgment seat of Christ is also the judgment seat of God before which all believers must stand (Rom. 14:10).” (Ladd 1972: 271)

In keeping with the progressively parallel nature of the book, **Rev 20:11-15** is an

⁶⁸ Additionally, “The probability that 20:7-10 is a recapitulation of 19:17-21 makes unlikely the supposition that he is cast into the fire ages after his Satanic cohorts have gone into the fire at the end of ch. 19. Some think that for 20:10 to recapitulate the events associated with the demise of the beast and false prophet we would need more explicit language, something like ‘After the battle of Gog and Magog, Satan was thrown into the lake of fire along with the beast and false prophet.’ But this is not a necessary expectation, especially since the style of recapitulation in the OT prophetic literature is not characterized by such explicitness, nor are the recapitulations elsewhere in Revelation so characterized.” (Beale 1999: 1028)

⁶⁹ Some, while holding that there is only one general judgment of all people, contend that **Rev 20:11-15** describes only the judgment of unbelievers (Johnson 1981: 589-90; Milligan 1896: 357).

elaboration of the judgment that already was mentioned, although not described, at **Rev 11:18**. The statement “*the dead were judged*” shows that **Rev 20:11-15** “is an expansion of the earlier brief account of final punishment in 11:18 (‘the time [came] for the dead to be judged’). 11:18 also focuses on judgment of the wicked, but includes ‘the reward’ for God’s ‘servants the prophets and the saints and those fearing’ God.” (Beale 1999: 1033; see also Johnson 2001: 298)

The wording of **20:11-15** (i.e., “*the great and the small*”), when compared with the limitations or qualifications of that phrase when it is used elsewhere in Revelation, leads to the conclusion that all people, believers and unbelievers, are being judged. Thus, in **Rev 11:18** and **19:5** “*the small and the great*” refers to all believers, and in **Rev 13:16** and **19:18** “*the small and the great*” refers to all unbelievers. On the other hand, “in the passage before us, the only party to whom ‘the small and great’ belong—as far as appears—is ‘*the dead.*’ Are we not irresistibly led, then, to conclude that the meaning intended is, the dead—universally, or at least indiscriminately?” (Brown 1882: 200)

In its reference to the “books,” **Rev 20:12** alludes to **Dan 7:10; 12:1-2**. The allusion to those two Danielic passages again indicates the all-inclusive nature of the judgment in **Rev 20:11-15**: “The point of the books in Dan. 7 is to focus on the evil deeds of the end-time persecutor of God’s people, for which the persecutor(s) would be judged. The book in Dan. 12:1 also concerns the end time, but it is an image of redemption. Those written in the book will be given life, but those excluded from the book will suffer final judgment (12:1-2). These two Daniel prophecies are depicted to find realization at the time of the last judgment.” (Beale and McDonough 2007: 1150)

Finally, the NT makes clear that all people must appear before the judgment seat of God (e.g., **Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 9:27**). **Rev 3:5** specifically refers to believers in the book of life (see also **Rev 13:8**). Nowhere else in Revelation besides **20:11-15** does the judgment-as-courtroom-proceeding with the book of life appear. “[Rev] 3:5 assumes that the believer in Christ will appear before the tribunal of God for judgment, exactly as in this scene. If the Church is excluded from the last judgment, it can only be because it has already appeared before God in judgment. John himself gives no hint that such an event has taken place. It is wiser to recognize that John teaches that all must submit to the judgment of God, saints and sinners alike.” (Beasley-Murray 1974: 301) Because the judgment of **Rev 20:11-15** applies to believers as well as to unbelievers, the preliminary mention in **3:5** of believers’ names not being erased from the book of life is thereby tied up and fulfilled.

c. The nature of the judgment. **Rev 20:12** states that people are judged “*according to their deeds.*” We cannot work our way to heaven or do enough “good deeds” to justify our acquittal in God’s judgment; we are saved only by God’s grace through faith in Christ (**John 3:16-18; 6:28-29; Rom 2:16-17; 10:8-13; Gal 3:1-14; Eph 2:8-9**). Nevertheless, “Works are an index of the spiritual condition of a person’s heart. . . . The judgment will reveal whether or not people’s loyalties have been with God and the Lamb or with God’s enemies. John’s theology of faith and its insuperable relation to works is the same as that of Jesus Christ (John 5:29), Paul (Rom 2:6-8) and James (Jas 2), and that is why another book, the *book of life*, seems to be decisive (20:12, 15; 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27). Those who have their names in the Lamb’s ‘book of life’ will also have records of righteous deeds. The opposite will also be true. The imagery reflects the delicate balance between grace and sin.” (Ngundu 2006: 1576) Beale concludes, “The ‘life’ granted the saints in association with the book comes from their identification with the Lamb’s righteous deeds, and especially his death, which means likewise that they are identified with his resurrection life (cf. 5:5-13). They do not suffer judgment for their evil deeds because he has already suffered it for them: he was slain on their behalf (so esp. 1:5 and 5:9). The Lamb acknowledges before God all who are written in the book (3:5) and are identified with his righteousness and death.” (Beale 1999: 1037)

L. Rev 21:1-22:5: The new heaven and new earth: the New Jerusalem

In this section the new creation and the church are perfected in glory. The word for “new” (**21:1-2, 5**; also in **2 Pet 3:13**) is *kainos*. “*Kainos* refers to something new in *quality* and is contrasted with that which has seen service—the outworn, the exhausted, or that which is marred through age. . . . Thus, in the kingdom of glory, everything will be new: ‘the new Jerusalem’ (Rev. 3:12; 21:2), the ‘new name’ (2:17; 3:12), ‘a new song’

(5:9; 14:3), ‘a new heaven and new earth’ (21:1; cf. 2 Pet. 3:13), ‘all things new’ (Rev. 21:5).” (Trench 1989: 233-34) Consequently, “this passage does not teach that the heavens and earth are now brought into existence for the first time, but that they possess a new character” (Smith 1962: 1521).

1. The New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-22:15). As we have seen with many of John’s other symbols and images, there are two main camps regarding the interpretation of the “New Jerusalem”: literalists and non-literalists. Literalists interpret New Jerusalem as a literal description of an actual physical city. However, “*the bride, the wife of the Lamb*” (Rev 21:9), which obviously is the church, is equated with the city in Rev 21:2, 10. The descriptions of the New Jerusalem are more “personal than topographical” (Gundry 1987: 256). God’s eternal plan has always been to dwell in a holy place with his holy people (see Goldsworthy 1991: 76; Alexander 2008: 29). “The dwelling of God with man *in the form of a city* may . . . suggest the perfect social union of the redeemed with one another as God’s final and eternal answer to the successive societal failures littering the course of human history” (Ortlund 1996: 166n.73).

That the names of the twelve apostles are said to be the “foundation” of the wall of the city again suggests that more than just geography is being described. Beale observes an interesting relationship between the city’s wall and its gates: “Noteworthy is the observation in 21:14 that the apostles are part of the foundation, whereas the tribes are part of the gates in the wall built on the foundation. One might have expected the opposite portrayal since Israel preceded the church in redemptive history. But the reversal figuratively highlights the fact that fulfillment of Israel’s promises has finally come in Christ, who, together with the apostolic witness to his fulfilling work, forms the foundation of the new temple, the church, which is the new Israel.” (Beale 1999: 1070) Given this close identification, New Jerusalem appears to be a metaphor for God’s people and His relationship with them, rather than a description of the geography that will exist after Christ comes again.⁷⁰

2. Is the new heaven and new earth present or future? Preterists, some postmillennialists, and some idealists contend that in the New Jerusalem, “we have essentially a picture, not of the future, but of the present; of the ideal condition of Christ’s true people, of His ‘little flock’ on earth, in every age. The picture may not yet be realized in fullness; but every blessing lined in upon its canvas is in principle the believer’s now, and will be more and more his in actual experience as he opens his eyes and his heart to receive.” (Milligan 1896: 373; see also Chilton 1985: 203-09; Mathison 1999: 157-58) Thus, Christ’s giving the “*water of life*” (Rev 21:6) relates to His promises in John 4:13-14; 7:37-39 to give believers, in the present, “*living waters*.” The reference to “*the nations*” (21:24) is taken literally to be unconverted nations, as is the reference to the “unclean” (21:27), which “must be supposed to be alive upon the earth after the New Jerusalem has appeared” (Milligan 1896: 373; see also Preston 2010: 266). That position has merit in that, in principle, the New Jerusalem does exist now. Christians’ citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20); already we have come to Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22).⁷¹

On the other hand, as suggested above in chapter II. *Interpretive approaches*, although Revelation emphasizes the principles that apply to believers now and in all eras, it does more than that: it also gives us the account of the end of this age and the beginning of the age to come. The description of the new heavens and new earth as the future eternal state is a necessary counterpart to Revelation’s earlier descriptions of the end of history. Rev 17:1-19:6 describes the overthrow of the harlot city of the world and the rejoicing that occurs in heaven as a result. Rev 19:11-21 describes the *parousia*. Rev 20:1-15 recapitulates the church age, ending with the judgment at the *parousia*. Those passages indicate that there is an end of history. One of John’s purposes in writing the book was to “inspire in his readers the faith that the empire of the Antichrist and his minions is destined to be replaced by the rule of Christ

⁷⁰ New Jerusalem is the description of the consummate, eternal state that will be ushered in with Christ’s *parousia*. As such, its significance is multivalent. It includes the restoration of the earth and physical cosmos. As was the case with those seated on the thrones in Rev 20:4-6, for present purposes the meaning of the symbol of New Jerusalem at minimum includes depicting the eternal state of the church as a “*holy city*” and is not merely a description of the physical appearance or geography of the eternal “*new heaven and new earth*.” R. Fowler White puts it like this, “The saints appear as the holy city (cf. [Rev] 3:12), while the new heavens and earth emerge as the eternal dwelling place of God and man” (White 1999: 61).

⁷¹ Although the focus of the new Jerusalem is a vision of the “*age to come*,” it also has the ethical purpose in that it depicts *in principle* what our life in Christ should look like now: “The whole description of the city in 21:9-22:5 is eminently appropriate to the concept of the kingdom of Christ revealed in this world” (Beasley-Murray 1974: 316); “What we find here in Revelation 21:1-22:5 is a description of the redeemed universe of the future as foreshadowed by the redeemed Church of the present” (Hendriksen 1982: 197)

and his saints. He could not but believe that the overthrow of the harlot-city and the Antichrist would be followed by the establishment of the bride-city in the rule of the Christ.” (Beasley-Murray 1974: 315) If **Rev 21:1-22:5** does not describe in visionary form the age to come, then we would have no description of the age to come at all but would be left at the point of the final judgment. In a book that is designed in part to culminate God’s story and bring to conclusion the entire Bible, that is unlikely.

In this final part of the book, therefore, every visible and invisible threat to all of God’s people, both spiritually and physically, is eliminated: all past hurts, sorrows, and regrets are wiped away, and all is made new. There is no longer any injustice, sin, or discord, but perfect holiness, joy, and harmony reign among people and between people and God. This is not merely an idealization of the “already” of the kingdom but is a visionary depiction of the “not yet” of the kingdom. Consequently, the majority view sees **Rev 21:1-22:5** as referring to what will happen in the future, beginning with the *parousia*.
 3. “His people(s)” (Rev 21:3). This verse is the culmination of a recurrent statement throughout the Bible (with some variations): “*I will be their God, and they will be my people*” (**Gen 17:8; Exod 6:7; 29:45; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 31:1, 33; 32:38; Ezek 11:19-20; 14:10-11; 36:28; 37:23, 27; Hos 2:23; Zech 8:8; 13:9; 2 Cor 6:16; Heb 8:10; Rev 21:3**). The OT passages speak of the special relationship between God and his people. The exilic and post-exilic prophets use this phrase to speak of a restored Israel. The NT takes this same language and applies it to God’s new, true, restored Israel—the church. Revelation culminates this by applying it forever to the “holy city,” the “New Jerusalem,” the “bride,” the “wife of the Lamb” (Rev 21:2, 9-10), i.e., the transformed and glorified people of God—the church.⁷²

In the statement “*I will be their God, and they will be my people*,” all the OT and NT passages use the singular “people.” With respect to **Rev 21:3**, however, a significant number of early manuscripts use the plural “peoples” rather than the singular “people.” Assuming that to be the case, John makes the change from “people” to “peoples” in order to “make obvious that prophecies originally focusing on Israel have been fulfilled in ‘every tribe, tongue, people, and nation’ (so 5:9; 7:9)” (Beale 1999: 1046-47; see also Gundry 1987: 257; Johnson 2001: 305n.2).

4. The events described in Rev 21:1-4 take place at the *parousia*. **Rev 21:3** describes Christ’s return to the earth. In doing so, it uses the phrase “*the tabernacle of God is among men*.” The Greek word for “tabernacle” is *skēnē*. This is important, because it both links the *parousia* with Christ’s first coming and, at the same time, shows how the *parousia* fulfills the Jewish hopes of God’s coming to dwell with them. “The Jews looked for a return of the *Shekinah* in the kingdom of God. Greek-speaking Jews were conscious that the term *Shekinah* has the same consonants as the Greek *skēnē*, and this enabled them to associate with *skēnē* the conceptions of the *Shekinah*. A notable example of this occurs in John 1:14, ‘The word became flesh and pitched its tent (Greek *eskēnōsen*, from *skēnē*) among us, and we beheld his glory.’ In the incarnate Lord the hope of the return of God in his *Shekinah* glory was fulfilled. This same revelation of divine glory reaches its consummation in our text.” (Beasley-Murray 1974: 311)

The significance of the *parousia* for God’s people extends beyond the fact that now “*the tabernacle of God is among men*” (**Rev 21:3**). God’s people are described as a bride (**Rev 19:7-8; 21:2, 9**) and a city. The symbolism of the bride and the city “depict fundamentally the same thing, namely, God’s people in fellowship with their Redeemer” (Beasley-Murray 1974: 316). In **Rev 19:7-8** the bride “*made herself ready*”; in **21:2** she is seen “*coming down out of heaven from God*.” Beasley-Murray concludes, “John clearly wishes to indicate that the bride will appear in splendour along with the bridegroom, and that the marriage supper will then be celebrated.” (Beasley-Murray 1974: 315)⁷³

5. Rev 21:1-22:5 fulfills the NT promises that Christ’s second coming brings with it the restoration of creation. The new earth is an integral aspect of God’s redemptive program. The need for a redeemed creation stems from the fall of mankind and the “curse” which affected all of creation (**Gen 3:14-19**): “God now sent his Son into this world to redeem that creation from the results of sin. The work of Christ, therefore, is not just to save certain individuals, not even to save an innumerable throng of blood-bought people. The total work of Christ is nothing less than to redeem this entire creation from the effects of sin.” (Hoekema 1979: 274-75)

Earlier we saw that Christ’s *parousia* entails the destruction or cleansing of the present

⁷² The statement in **Rev 21:3** that “*the tabernacle of God is among men*” was foreshadowed in **Rev 7:15** which says that God “*will spread his tabernacle over them*” (i.e., over the “great multitude”—the church). That cross-reference confirms that the universal church is in view in both passages.

⁷³ Mealy lists six other reasons to demonstrate that the descent of the New Jerusalem in **Rev 21:1-6** occurs at the *parousia*, not a thousand years after the *parousia* (Mealy 1992: 223-25).

world. That the descent of the New Jerusalem—i.e., the restoration of creation—occurs as part of the complex of events of the *parousia* is indicated in **Rev 21:1** which states that “*the first heaven and the first earth passed away.*” The redeemed creation described in **Rev 21:1-22:5** is not merely an idealized picture of “*this age.*” Rather, the “new heavens and new earth” are “new,” i.e., new in quality. They are not like the “first earth” or the “first things” which have “*passed away*” (**Rev 21:1, 4**). Consequently, **Rev 21:4** says that, in the new earth, “*there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain.*” **Rev 22:3** adds, “*There will no longer be any curse.*”

Those facts rule out premillennialism and preterism since both hold that sin and death are still in effect after the second coming. Because the renewal of creation at Christ’s second coming includes the removal of death, mourning, crying, pain, and the curse, of necessity there no longer can be any sin. Consequently, the idea that there will be a massive sinful rebellion a thousand years after Christ returns cannot possibly be correct.

6. The *parousia* and judgment: negative and positive aspects. Although the judgment described in **Rev 20:11-15** included both the righteous and the unrighteous, the focus there was on the judgment of the ungodly who are thrown into the “*lake of fire.*” **Rev 21:1-22:5** likewise depicts the negative aspect of the judgment entailed by *parousia*, but different imagery is used: “The lake of fire signifies not extinction in opposition to existence, but torturous existence in the society of evil as opposed to life in the society of God. For which reason John is able to represent the same reality by the very different symbol of life outside the city (21:27) in contrast to life inside the city (21:24ff.), the separation being effected by the city’s wall (21:14).” (Beasley-Murray 1974: 304)

In **Rev 21:1-22:5**, while negative effects of the *parousia* and judgment are mentioned, the references to those who are excluded from the New Jerusalem are almost stated as asides. Instead, the emphasis is on the positive effects of the *parousia*. Most of **Revelation 21-22** recounts the elimination of all suffering and death, the healing of the nations, the presence of God and the Lamb, and the great glory, light, and life of the new, eternal kingdom. Mealy discusses one subtle aspect of the “positive” emphasis of the *parousia* that, again, shows the progressively parallel nature of the book: “In Rev. 21.6, the Enthroned One announces that ‘It is done’ (literally, ‘They are done’ [*gegonan*]). This echoes the equivalent phrase that was heard from the throne upon the outpouring of the seventh and final bowl of God’s wrath in 16.17 (*gegonen*). If the significance of the cry ‘It is done’ in the context of the seventh bowl was to signal the fulfillment of the *parousia* as the judgment of the world, then perhaps the positive ‘They are done’ here refers to the completion of both sides of the eschatological transition to God’s kingdom, both negative and positive. As 21.4 affirms, ‘The first things have passed away’. Yet not only has the old been judged and removed, but the new has been established in its place.” (Mealy 1992: 225)

7. **Rev 21:1-22:5** fulfills what was promised to believers earlier in the book. Earlier, when discussing the repetition of themes, phrases, and promises to the church, we noted how **Rev 21:1-22:5** fulfills the promises made to the church in the first three chapters of the book. Similarly, in **Rev 7:16-17** believers were promised that they would no longer hunger or thirst, the Lamb would “*guide them to springs of the water of life,*” and “*God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*” Those promises likewise are fulfilled in **Rev 21:4; 22:1-2**. Additionally, all of the instances of persecution, oppression, and evil committed against the church throughout the entire book now are reversed. The church finds everlasting compensation—indeed, more than compensation—in the new world of the New Jerusalem: “Not oppressive rulership and subordination but the life-giving and life-sustaining power of God characterizes God’s eschatological reign and empire” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 113).

8. **Rev 21:1-22:5** fulfills **Isa 65:17-66:24**. The only places in the OT where a “*new heavens and a new earth*” are referred to are in **Isa 65:17** and **66:22**. **Isa 65:18-19; 66:10, 13, 20** also speak about a restored Jerusalem. As he has done throughout Revelation, John draws on OT imagery but universalizes and reinterprets it to apply to God’s new, true people—the church. The parallels between **Isaiah 65-66** and **Revelation 21-22** indicate that John is describing the consummated kingdom after the *parousia*.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ John gives the authoritative and inspired meaning of Isaiah’s reference to the “*new heavens and new earth*” (see also **2 Pet 3:13**). One implication of this is that Isaiah’s statement in **Isa 65:20** about a youth dying at the age of one hundred cannot be taken literally and cannot be referring to a temporary 1000-year “millennium.” The reason is that John is talking about the *eternal state* after the *parousia*, in which “*there will no longer be any death.*” **Isa 65:19** itself states that “*there will no longer be heard in her [Jerusalem] the voice of weeping and the sound of crying.*” Arthur Lewis pointedly asks, “How could parents in that day have any joy or hope, knowing that their children will die when they reach the age of one hundred?” (Lewis 1980: 37) Isaiah’s reference to a youth dying at one hundred years of age is an example of “prophetic

Indeed, the parallel between **Revelation 21** and **Isaiah 65** reveals that “*New Jerusalem*” is equivalent to the “*new earth*.” In **Isa 65:17-18** “*Jerusalem*” appears to be equal to the “*new heavens and new earth*.” Similarly, John describes “*a new heaven and a new earth*” (**Rev 21:1**) but then immediately describes “*the holy city, New Jerusalem*” (**Rev 21:2-3, 10-22:5**) because the New Jerusalem is the new heaven and new earth (see Beale 1999: 368; Levenson 1988: 89-90, 107).

9. The references in 21:24-27 to the “nations,” “nothing unclean,” and “entering the city” are figurative portrayals of the perfect righteousness of the new creation. **Rev 21:24-27** is figurative language. The kings and nations are not separate from or outside the city but are another way of describing the nature of the city. Gundry points out, “‘Bring into it [i.e., into the city (**Rev 21:24**)]’ is spatial language, but the meaning is non-spatial, just as the dimensions of the city are spatial but their meaning non-spatial. . . . The meaning of ‘bring into it’ has to do with the glory and honor of the saintly nations of kings that make up the city, not with unsaintly traffic from countryside into city. . . . To enter the city is to help make it up—and there is nothing about leaving it once the glory and honor have been brought in.” (Gundry 1987: 264; see also **Rev 3:12** where Jesus promises that the one who overcomes will be made a pillar in the temple of God “*and he will not go out from it anymore*”) **Rev 21:24-27; 22:14** mean that only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life will be able to enter the new heaven and new earth at all, because **Rev 20:15** says, “*If anyone’s name was not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*”⁷⁵

Martin Kiddle states, “*The nations* are the redeemed, who belong spiritually but not racially to the twelve tribes. Did not Christ redeem ‘men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation’? Very well, *that* is how Christians must read these old prophecies: they are *the nations*. Similarly, the *kings of the earth* . . . (so we must infer) are the martyr monarchs, who reigned as the successors of the heathen rulers (cf. xx. 4–6); or perhaps all loyal Christians, of whom the heavenly hosts cried out: *they shall reign on earth* (v. 10).” (Kiddle 1940: 439)⁷⁶ Here again we must keep in mind a key purpose of John’s writing: the vices John lists in **Rev 21:8, 27; 22:11, 15** and his statements about entering the city (**Rev 21:24-26; 22:14**) or not being able to enter the city (**Rev 21:27; 22:15**) both warn believers not to betray their faith and values and exhort them to live steadfast lives of faithfulness, since the glorious end is so clearly in sight.

Rev 21:24-26 alludes to **Isaiah 60**. **Isaiah 60** speaks of glorified Zion. **Isa 60:3** says that in glorified Zion “*nations will come to your light*.” **Rev 21:24** similarly says, “*The nations will walk by its [New Jerusalem’s] light*.” **Isa 60:11** says, “*Your gates will be open continually; they will not be closed day or night*.” **Rev 21:25** similarly says, “*In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its [New Jerusalem’s] gates will never be shut*.” **Isa 60:20** (see also **Isa 60:19**) says, “*Your sun will no longer set, nor will your moon wane; for you will have the Lord for an everlasting light*.” **Rev 21:23** similarly says, “*The city has no need of sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb*.” **Isa 60:21** says, “*Then all your people will be righteous; they will possess the land forever*.” **Rev 21:27** similarly says, “*Nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.*”⁷⁷ **Isa 60:3-14** says that the kings of the nations will come and bring their wealth to Zion. **Rev 21:24-26** similarly says, “*The kings of the earth will bring their glory into [New Jerusalem]*” and “*they will bring*

idiom,” i.e., the OT prophets speak of Messiah’s eternal kingdom using the language and limited frame of reference of their own physical, Israelite context. However, the NT repeatedly makes clear that Israel was simply a physical “type” or “shadow” of vastly greater realities. Thus, the OT language of a youth living to age 100 is physical, typological language that points to resurrection life—eternal life—for God’s people in the eternal state (see Lee Irons n.d.; see also Lewis 1980: 37 [“Isaiah often saw the future reign of the Lord in limited and metaphoric terms”]). Postmillennialist Greg Bahnsen takes the “death at age 100” in **Isa 65:20** literally but contends that Isaiah is talking about a time in which “because of the blessing of God on His people, life spans will be so extended that dying at 100, you are considered dying as a child [i.e., the ‘golden age’ postmillennialists believe will occur in history before the *parousia*]” (Bahnsen 2015: 58).

⁷⁵ See also **Rev 21:7-8** which states that only “*overcomers will inherit these things*” whereas those who practice sin and evil “*will be in the lake of fire*.” **Rev 21:27** makes the same point but uses different imagery: “*nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it [i.e., into the city]*.”

⁷⁶ Both descriptions (nations and kings) relate facets of God’s people and life with him in the eternal state. In the same way, in **Revelation 12** the woman and her children were both metaphorical ways of speaking of the same entity, the church. Again, in **Rev 19:7-9** the church is spoken of both as the bride at the marriage supper and also as the guests at that same supper.

⁷⁷ As Kiddle points out, “The gates are ever open, but only for righteous men. They are never shut, because there is no night to fear, and no evildoers may approach the eternal radiance.” (Kiddle 1940: 440)

the glory and the honor of the nations into it.” These comparisons show how, as he has done throughout the book, John has taken OT passages and prophecies relating to Israel, and has redefined and reapplied them to the everlasting, universal church.⁷⁸

Rev 22:1-2 says that the “*tree of life*” which is along the river formed by the “*water of life*” is for the “*healing of the nations.*” The image of the water of life healing the nations does not imply that, in the New Jerusalem, “there remain diseased nations in need of healing” (Johnson 2001: 321). Instead, it is “prophetic idiom” which illustrates what is then stated in **Rev 22:3**, that “there will no longer be any curse” (see also **Rev 21:4**).

10. The New Jerusalem is the consummation of God’s eternal plan to dwell in a holy place with his holy people. God’s goal throughout biblical history has been to fill every part of his creation with his presence. Beginning at the Garden of Eden, God desired to make the entire earth his dwelling place that he would share with his holy people. Because of sin, God’s glory could not dwell completely in the old creation. Although God had walked in the Garden with Adam and Eve (**Gen 3:8**), because of their sin he drove them out of the Garden (**Gen 3:23-24**). God then progressively revealed his special presence on the earth among his people in the tabernacle and in Solomon’s temple, which served as “*a copy and shadow of the heavenly things*” (**Heb 8:5**; see also **Ps 78:69**; **Heb 8:1-10:1**).

God then inaugurated the final stage of his presence in the person of Jesus Christ. Through the Holy Spirit’s indwelling the church, his presence is now spread over the entire world. The time of the “shadows” of man-made temples has been completed, and the time of the new, true temple—his actual presence in Christ and the church—has come. However, although the true spiritual reality to which the OT tabernacle and temple pointed has been inaugurated, it has not yet been consummated. That consummation will occur when Christ returns to the earth. When he does, all creation will be redeemed (**Rom 8:15-25**).

When sin is forever eliminated from creation, the entire world (i.e., the “*new heaven and new earth*”) will be an Eden-like garden/city/temple—the perfect container for God’s glorious presence. No longer will God’s presence be housed in a physical building. Instead, the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb will fill, not just a portion of creation, but all of it (**Rev 21:22**). That is why the center of the vision is the earth—heaven coming *to the earth*. In other words, “the ‘new heaven’ and the ‘new earth’ will be a single reality, characterized by the full, immediate presence of God among his people” (Schnabel 2011: 280).

a. *Measuring the city.* The “measuring” of the city (**Rev 21:15-17**) contrasts with the measuring of the temple, altar, and worshippers, but leaving out the outer court, in **Rev 11:1-2**. As a result of that measuring, the church was spiritually protected but physically was subject to persecution and oppression. “Here the entire city is measured as another token of its complete safety from every enemy that formerly threatened its holiness and happiness” (Johnson 2001: 312).⁷⁹

b. *New Jerusalem as a Holy of Holies.* The perfect holiness of the New Jerusalem is seen by the fact that the New Jerusalem is a Holy of Holies:

- Just like the Holy of Holies (**1 Kgs 6:16-20**; **2 Chron 3:8**), the city is a perfect cube (**Rev 21:16**).
- Just as the Holy of Holies was overlaid with pure gold (**1 Kgs 6:16-20**; **2 Chron 3:8**), “*the city was pure gold, like clear glass*” (**Rev 21:18**).
- Just as the Holy of Holies was the special place of God’s presence and glory, the city is now the place of God’s presence and glory (**Rev 21:22-23**; **22:1, 3-5**).
- Only the Holy of Holies, not other sections of Israel’s temple (i.e., the holy place and the outer courtyard), is found in **Revelation 21**. God’s special presence, which formerly

⁷⁸ The phrase *tēn doxan kai tēn timēn* (“the glory and honor”) of **Rev 21:26** appears elsewhere in Revelation only in **4:9, 11** and **5:12, 13**. In those passages it refers to the praise of God and the Lamb by the living creatures, twenty-four elders, and angels in heaven. Accordingly, whereas the ungodly nations formerly gave everything they had to Babylon the great, now, in contrast, the reference to “glory and honor” in **Rev 21:26** shows the wholehearted worship, praise, and submission to God by all nations, for all eternity, throughout the entire new heaven and new earth.

⁷⁹ The measurements should not be taken “literally” as if they were the measurements of a physical city but are clearly symbolic, based on multiples of the number 12 (see Johnson 2001: 312-13). As Gundry stated with respect to people “coming into” the city, this is “spatial language, but the meaning is non-spatial.” Consequently, “it is false to infer that the city covers 144,000,000 square stadia of earth but not the whole earth or that the 144,000 Israelites do not encompass the innumerable multitude.” (Gundry 1987: 264) John’s purpose is not primarily to describe a “place.” Rather, “He is describing eternally secure peoples” (Gundry 1987: 260).

was limited to the Holy of Holies, now encompasses all of His new creation. On the other hand, the New Jerusalem consummates and surpasses the Holy of Holies with respect to our access to God.

- Only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and he had to offer sacrifices for his own sin and the sins of the nation (**Lev 16:1-28**). In the New Jerusalem, all of God’s people are without sin and will serve the Lord and reign forever and ever (**Rev 21:7-8, 27; 22:3-5**).
- The high priest could only enter the Holy of Holies one day per year, on the Day of Atonement (**Lev 16:29-31**). In the New Jerusalem, we not only will have direct access to God, but we will always be in his immediate presence (**Rev 21:3-4, 22-23; 22:3-5**).
- On the Day of Atonement the high priest had to offer incense which formed a thick cloud that covered the mercy seat so that he could not see God’s glorious appearance, or he would die (**Lev 16:13**; see **Exod 33:20**). In the New Jerusalem, all of God’s people will “see his face” (**Rev 22:4**).

M. Rev 22:6-21: Epilogue⁸⁰

The epilogue of the book is consistent with the rest of the book and with prophecy in general. Prophets spoke oracles of judgment and oracles of salvation to warn the people and exhort them to change their ways and return or stay faithful to the Lord. Revelation specifically was written to inform, exhort, comfort, and encourage the churches. Beale therefore observes: “These final verses especially tie in to the introduction in 1:1-3: both identify the book as a consummation from God (using the same wording from Dan. 2:28-29, 45); both focus on John as a ‘witness’ to the revelation that he has been given; and both speak of the revelation as a ‘prophecy’ communicated to ‘hearers.’ . . . This conclusion shows that the purpose of the whole book is to induce holy obedience among God’s people so that they might receive the reward of salvation. . . . The repeated exhortations to holiness are the main point of the epilogue, since they are supported by the exclamations about Christ’s coming. No fewer than eight of the final fifteen verses underscore the book’s intention to encourage obedience either through exhortations to obedience, through promised blessings for holy living, and through warnings of judgment for unholy living.” (Beale 1999: 150)

VIII. Revelation ties together and completes the entire Bible

A. The new creation of Revelation links with the original creation of Genesis

The last two chapters of Revelation clearly are linked, often by contrast, with the first three chapters of Genesis as follows:

<i>Genesis</i>	<i>Revelation</i>
“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1)	“I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1)
“The darkness He called night” (Gen 1:5)	“There will be no night there” (Rev 21:25; 22:5)
“The gathering of the waters He called seas” (Gen 1:10)	“There is no longer any sea” (Rev 21:1)
“Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens . . . to give light on the earth” (Gen 1:14-15)	“The city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it” (Rev 21:23; 22:5)
“In the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen 2:17)	“There will no longer be any death” (Rev 21:4)
“The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God” (Gen 3:8)	“God Himself will be among them . . . they will see His face” (Rev 21:3; 22:4)
“I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth” (Gen 3:16)	“There will no longer be any . . . pain” (Rev 21:4)
“Cursed is the ground because of you” (Gen 3:17)	“There will no longer be any curse” (Rev 22:3)

“In Genesis God created the heaven and the earth; in Revelation we read of a new heaven and earth (21:1). In Genesis the luminaries are called into being; in Revelation the glory of the Lord lights the city [21:23; 22:5]. In Genesis we read of the cunning power of Satan; in Revelation the devil is bound and hurled into the lake of fire (20:10). In Genesis we read of paradise lost; in Revelation paradise is restored. Genesis describes the divorce of humankind as Adam and Eve run from God; in Revelation the redeemed enjoy the intimate fellowship of marriage to the Lamb [19:7-9; 21:2-4; 22:4]. In Genesis nature threatens the security and hurts humanity; in Revelation nature sustains and comforts people [22:1-2]. In Genesis the tree of life is protected by an angel lest anyone eat its fruit; Revelation restores humanity’s access to the fruit (22:14). This obvious correlation between

⁸⁰ Although most commentators assume that in **Rev 22:6** the angel who showed John New Jerusalem is speaking, in **22:7** the speaker clearly is Christ Himself. That increases the possibility that it is Christ who is speaking in **22:6** and throughout much of **chapter 22** (see Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 114).

the first and last books of the Bible illustrates the fulfillment of the first messianic prophecy (Gen. 3:15) and God's faithfulness to the covenant (Rev. 21:3)." (Hamstra 1998: 123)

B. *The new creation of Revelation surpasses the original creation of Genesis*

Douglas Moo concludes our survey of Revelation by discussing the potentialities of the pre-consummate creation, how those potentialities played out in history, and how God has brought the cosmos to an even greater glory than the original creation: "The fact that there is no more sea or night in the new heaven and new earth [21:1, 25] suggests an allusion to the first creation since in both instances these elements are in some way subjugated, divided or restrained. . . . It is as if the first creation, while good in itself, had had the potential to develop in two directions: if humankind fulfilled its role and lived in harmony with God and the rest of creation, the latent powers of chaos represented especially by the sea and darkness would be forever within the scope of human dominion and would become perhaps sources of creative energy and delight—just as they were for God, for whom even Leviathan could be a plaything [see **Job 41:17; Ps 74:14; 104:24-26**]. But if the covenant between God and his creatures was broken and human beings allied themselves with the serpent and its realm, the forces of chaos would be let loose and the sea become a thing of terror, an abode of evil and an instrument of judgement. Scripture may be largely a record of humankind opting for this latter path, but John's intent is to assure the churches that they have not therefore been abandoned to a world of sorrow, pain and mourning. Instead, the triumph of the 'Lamb that was slain' means that the creator's fidelity to his creation—hinted at in the rainbow around the throne [4:3], sign of the Noahic covenant—is expressed finally through nothing less than the renewal of the cosmos, an event in which the world is brought beyond any threat of future rebellion or sin." (Moo 2009: 166-67)

IX. Implications of the Book of Revelation

The purposes of the book of Revelation, i.e., to explain to the church how God is dealing with the world, to call believers to persevere in the struggle with the powers of evil, and to comfort and encourage Christians because Christ is victor, apply as much today as they did in the first century. An example of this was demonstrated in the life of Christian martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer. While he was imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II, Bonhoeffer wrote that he found the books of Psalms and Revelation to be "unexpectedly helpful" (Bonhoeffer 1997: 128). By contrast, he observed that his fellow prisoners who did not have a Christian worldview compartmentalized their lives and lapsed into superstition or fatalism in their attempts to deal with the stress of prison life and the fear engendered by air raids (Bonhoeffer 1997: 231, 310-11).

Additionally, the book of Revelation "offers a different way of perceiving the world which leads people to resist and to challenge the effects of the dominant ideology" (Bauckham 1993b: 159). This alternative vision of the world is strongly theocentric—indeed, Christ-centered. "In the end it is only a purified vision of the transcendence of God that can effectively resist the human tendency to idolatry which consists in absolutizing aspects of this world. The worship of the true God is the power of resistance to the deification of military and political power (the beast) and economic prosperity (Babylon)." (Bauckham 1993b: 160) As we saw in connection with the discussion concerning Babylon the great, John is confronting his readers to critique their own societies. As Richard Bauckham put it, "Any society whom Babylon's cap fits must wear it. Any society which absolutizes its own economic prosperity at the expense of others comes under Babylon's condemnation." (Bauckham 1993b: 156; see also Schnabel 2011: 211-12)

Such a view provides the basis to confront oppression, injustice, and inhumanity. As Theodore Stylianopoulos says, "Revelation is above all a call for justice, a cry for the kingdom, a prayer for the disclosure of God's rule on earth as it is in heaven" (Stylianopoulos 2009: 28). In commenting on **Rev 18:24**, Bauckham notes "the sense of solidarity it voices between the Christian martyrs and all the other innocent victims of Rome. If John urges his churches to dissociate themselves from the political and economic power-structures of Rome, this is not to turn them into an inward-looking sectarian group, concerned only with their own fate. It is rather because, in their prophetic witness to the world, these followers of the Lamb, himself a victim of Rome, cannot be allied with the murderers but must witness against the murderers." (Bauckham 1989: 101)

Response frequently has come from the oppressed and the disadvantaged. They often realize what the rich and powerful do not: that the dominant culture in any land has within it the seeds, and bears the marks, of Babylon the great. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza observes, "Oppressed and disadvantaged Christians read Revelation contextually as political-religious typology that speaks to their own situation. Latin American or South African liberation theologies cherish Revelation's political world of vision for its prophetic indictment of exploitation and oppression as well as its sustaining vision of justice." (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 7) Schüssler Fiorenza gives three notable examples of such a perspective and witness drawn from the eschatology of

Revelation: “In his Letter from a Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King, Jr., echoes the language and images of Revelation when interpreting experiences and hopes in the struggle for the civil rights of African-Americans; Allan Boesak’s commentary *Comfort and Protest* contextualizes Revelation in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa; and Daniel Berrigan penned his reflection on Revelation, *Nightmare of God*, while imprisoned for his activities in support of antinuclear-war protests.” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 11)

Likewise, Revelation provides the basis for us to critique the church itself which, far too often in history, has demonstrated that it has “left its first love” and attached itself to supporting the state, the dominant culture, and the world.⁸¹ In these ways, the book of Revelation confronts us with the fundamental issues we saw recurring throughout the book: Where do my primary loyalties lie and who is my true Lord? Our responses to our own culture and to the world’s ideologies and influences demonstrate our answers to those questions.

Finally, we have seen the fundamental questions posed by Revelation raised again and again: Where do my primary loyalties lie? Who or what is my true functional Lord that is molding and motivating my attitudes and behaviors? People can only answer those questions for themselves, but they need to be aware that their socio-economic circumstances confront them with such questions nonetheless. That is not to say that only those who oppose the state, the successful, the wealthy, and the powerful, necessarily are correct. Tremendous amounts of unspeakable evil have been done in the name of opposing the successful, the wealthy, the powerful, and the privileged—witness, for example, the French Revolution, the genocide in Rwanda, and every communist revolution. The issues are one’s motivation and who is one’s real Lord: Jesus, or someone or something else. Those are the issues the book of Revelation raises. They go to the heart and core of our lives, of who we are. If we see who Christ is and understand through this book how God through Christ is dealing with the world, we will be much better able to persevere in the struggle with the powers of evil and to find comfort and encouragement because Christ is victor. That is why the book of Revelation is so important.

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⁸¹ Schüssler Fiorenza observes, “Whereas mainline Christianity has often co-opted or neutralized Revelation’s political-religious language and vision by identifying God’s empire with the institutional church or with the interior salvation of the soul, messianic-prophetic Christian movements have again and again affirmed Revelation’s visions of salvation as a vision of total well-being and freedom from oppression. They have read it as promising liberation from oppressive ecclesiastical structures and from the destructive domination of those who have power in the world.” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 128)

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