**Revelation Commentary**

**Revelation Chapter 1**

Rev 1:1

**“which God gave to him to show to his servants.”** Revelation 1:1 shows us a “chain of command” in the spiritual world. God, who has all knowledge, informs and directs His Son Jesus, who has limited knowledge, who then tells an angel, who then gives the information to John. God or Jesus certainly can and do communicate directly to humans on occasion, but sometimes, as we see here, the message is given by an angel. Not surprisingly, in both Hebrew and Greek, the word “angel” means “messenger.”

[For more on Jesus Christ not being God and having limited knowledge, see Appendix 6: especially point #14.]

Rev 1:3

**“the one who reads ... and those who hear.”** One person would read aloud, and others, who probably could not read, would listen. See commentary on 1 Timothy 4:13.

**“keep.”** The Greek word is *tereō* (#5083 τηρέω), and it has several distinct meanings. One is to “obey,” and some English versions think that is the definition here. However, it also means “guard,” “safeguard” “watch,” or “pay attention to,” and that seems to be more the meaning in this verse. Note the following examples, which have tereō used in that sense (OT verses are from the Septuagint; all these examples are from the NET translation): Proverbs 2:11: “Understanding will guard you.” Proverbs 3:21: “safeguard sound wisdom and discretion.” Proverbs 4:6: “Do not forsake wisdom…and she will guard you.” Proverbs 4:23: “Guard your heart with all vigilance.” Ecclesiastes 11:4: He who watches the wind will not sow [the seed]. Matthew 27:36: “Then they [the guards at the crucifixion] sat down and kept guard over him there.” John 2:10: “You have kept the good wine until now!” Acts 12:5: “So Peter was kept in prison.”

Rev 1:4

**“to the seven congregations that are in *the province of* Asia.”** When John penned the book of Revelation, he sent it to the “seven congregations (or “churches”) in the Roman province of Asia, which today is in western Turkey. These seven congregations were Christian Churches that existed at the time John wrote and were in the cities of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (cf. Rev. 1:11).

Because John penned the book of Revelation and sent it to those seven churches, many commentators have falsely assumed that the letters to those churches, which are in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, are written to Christians. They are not. The scene changes from John’s lifetime to the distant future in Revelation 1:10-11. Revelation 1:10 says that John was “in the spirit on the Lord’s day,” which is usually referred to as “the Day of Yahweh” in the Old Testament. In other words, The Lord gave John a vision in which he was transported into the future, to the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord was future in John’s lifetime and it is still future today.

Starting in Revelation 1:10, John has a detailed vision of the future, and his writing about that vision is what the rest of the Book of Revelation is about. The letters to the seven congregations in Revelation 2-3 are about the future, in the same way that Daniel 12:2 is about a future resurrection and Ezekiel 40-48 is about a future Temple and a future city of Jerusalem. A lot of material in the prophetic books concerns events that are still future, and Revelation is a prophetic book that speaks of the future, including the future of the seven congregations in Asia after the Rapture.

In Revelation 1:13, John sees Jesus in his glorified body. In Revelation 2-3, Jesus dictates a letter to John that is addressed to the “angels” (messengers) of the 7 congregations (see commentary on Rev. 2:1), and the letter has to do with the state of affairs in those churches at the future time of John’s vision. In Revelation 4-5, John sees God’s throne in heaven surrounded by throngs of angels and Jesus Christ getting the scroll of judgment from Him. In Revelation 6 Jesus Christ breaks the seals of judgment and disasters strike the earth; part of the wrath of God (Rev. 6:16-17). John’s vision continues chapter after chapter, all about the future.

There are several reasons that God gave the vision of the future to the Apostle John during his lifetime instead of waiting for someone in the future to write about their own time. One reason is the same as the reason that through the centuries God gave revelation about the future to people—so they could know what is coming and have hope for the future. Another reason is that a book about the future by someone as well-known and well respected as the Apostle John would be received and believed by the Christian churches of the time, whereas it is likely that it would be difficult in some future time to find a person whose vision of the future would be widely accepted and believed. Still another likely reason that God had John write Revelation when he did is that the Day of the Lord will be so dangerous and disastrous, and likely so many believers will be killed (cf. Matt. 24:9-11; Luke 21:12-17), that there may not be anyone who could write it and no way to distribute it. So, although John sent the book of Revelation to Christian Churches on earth during his lifetime, the book of Revelation contains a letter to the future people who come to believe in those cities after the Rapture and during the Great Tribulation, which is why those letters are so different from the seven Church Epistles of Paul. This is similar to Ezekiel writing his book during his generation but including information about the future of Israel that was millennia in the future. One last point needs to be made. Currently, there are no large congregations in the seven cities mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3, but that does not mean that there will not be at some point in the future. Currently, there is no place at Megiddo where the leaders of the army of the Antichrist can gather, but there obviously will be such a place in the future (Rev. 16:12-16).

[For more on the differences between the Church Epistles of Paul and the letter to the seven congregations penned by John, see commentary on Rev. 2:1.]

**“him who is and who was and who is to come.”** This is a reference to God (cf. Rev. 1:8 and 4:8. All these are about God, not about Christ). Jesus Christ is mentioned in Revelation 1:5.

[For more on Christ not being “God,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“the seven spirits that are before his throne.”** The seven spirits before God are seven spiritual beings who are of great rank and authority, and help God administer the spiritual/physical world. If the seven angels who stand before God (Rev. 8:2) are the same as these seven “spirits,” then these spirits are angels. However, it is also possible that these seven spirits are not technically angels but are different spirits. Angels are only rarely called “spirits” in the Bible (cf. verses such as Heb. 1:14 and 12:9). However, the Bible does often call demons, which are fallen angels, “spirits.” Furthermore, in early Jewish literature angels were sometimes called “spirits,” and the Qumran literature, produced close to the time of the New Testament, refers to angels as “spirits.”[[1]](#footnote-15899)

Trinitarians have postulated that these seven spirits are actually just one spirit, “The Holy Spirit,” but that is suggested because of their Trinitarian doctrine. David Aune writes on Revelation 1:4: “Many modern commentators, for various reasons (but often implicitly from the perspective of later trinitarianism) understand the seven spirits as representing the Holy Spirit.”[[2]](#footnote-10299) There is no valid textual reason not to take these seven spirits literally, as seven spiritual beings, especially when the scope of the Bible makes it clear that God works with a council of spirits that help Him administer His creation.

E. W. Bullinger, at one time the secretary of the Trinitarian Bible Society in England, defended the position that the seven spirits were in fact seven distinct spirit beings. He wrote: “This fact that they are ‘before’ or in the presence of, God’s throne, shows that they occupy the position of servants (see 1 Kings 10:8), and of created beings (Rev. 4:5, 10; 7:9, 15; 8:2; 11:4, 16; 12:10; 14:3, 5, 10; 20:12). This one fact ought to have precluded the idea that these seven could be one, and that one Divine! ...On the other hand, angels are constantly represented as occupying this position. And angels are again referred to in Revelation 4:5 under the symbol of seven lamps (to which other spiritual creatures are likened in Ezek. 1:13).”[[3]](#footnote-29353)

Revelation 3:1 says that Jesus Christ “has” the seven spirits of God, which makes perfect sense if these seven are spirit beings that help administer the world and Christ is Lord of all creation. In that case, Jesus would have the spirits in the same way any ruler has servants. But Revelation 3:1 is also very good evidence that the seven spirits of God are not “the Holy Spirit.” If Trinitarians are correct and “the Holy Spirit” is one Person of a three-Person One God, then none of the Persons, “has” any other Person. As the doctrine of the Trinity states, the three Persons are co-equal. More evidence comes from the phrase “seven spirits of God,” which occurs in Revelation 3:1, 4:5, and 5:6. These are the “spirits of God” in the same way that the angels are the “angels of God” (Gen. 28:12; Luke 15:10), they are spirits who have their allegiance to God and thus are God’s spirits (cf. “men of God”).

Revelation 4:5 also mentions the seven spirits and also says that they are “before” the throne of God, and Revelation 5:6 mentions them in the context of being connected to Jesus Christ. This is more evidence that the seven spirits serve God, and are not “the Holy Spirit.” Standing before the throne of God is a posture of service, not of being an equal ruler (see commentary on Isa. 14:13, “sit”). Revelation 8:2 then mentions “the” seven angels who stand before God, but up to that time there were no “seven angels” mentioned, only “seven spirits.” However, the use of the definite article, “the” seven angels, is evidence for identifying the seven spirits with “the” seven angels. Thus, when we gather evidence from all the verses that mention the seven spirits and God’s council of spirits, we can see the seven are not “the Holy Spirit.”

It is possible that these seven spirits are, or are part of, the “chosen angels” mentioned in 1 Timothy 5:21. God and Jesus work closely with angels and humans to administer creation. Thus, we see that Jesus told his apostles that when he came into his kingdom, they would sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). God tells us that there is safety in a multitude of counselors, and apparently, He takes His own advice.

That God has a council of seven spirits that are before His throne should not surprise us. There is information about God working with a council of spirits in quite a few places in the Bible. Genesis 1:26 is one place where God uses “us” or says “let us,” and so do Genesis 3:22; 11:7; and Isaiah 6:8. Daniel 4 shows God working with a council of “watchers” (see commentary on Dan. 4:17). Daniel 7:10 and 7:26 show God working with a panel of spirit judges to judge the Antichrist, and it is likely that those judges are the same as the 24 elders in Revelation 4:4 and the judges in Revelation 20:4 (see commentaries on Dan. 7:10; Rev. 4:4 and Rev. 20:4).

[For more information on God’s divine council of spirits, see commentary on Gen. 1:26; Job 15:8; Ps. 89:7 and Jer. 23:18.]

Rev 1:5

**“freed us from our sins.”** There is a textual variant. Some manuscripts read “freed” (“released,” “loosed;” Greek: *lusanti*) while other Greek manuscripts read “washed” (Greek: *lousanti*). “Freed” has better manuscript support, it better fits the Old Testament imagery (cf. Isa. 40:2 in the Septuagint), and it better fits the New Testament imagery of people being enslaved by sin but “freed” by Jesus Christ, so it is generally considered the original reading.

**“by.”** The Greek word *en* (#1722. ἐν) is often used to denote instrumentality. And when the context indicates such, it is better translated as “by.”

Rev 1:6

**“kingdom.”** Collectively God made believers to be a kingdom.

**“priests.”** God appointed believers as individuals to be priests to Him. Although it is not clear how everyone could act as a priest in the sense of mediator if everyone was a priest, it may have to do with the fact that in the book of Revelation there were both believers and unbelievers. The designation “priest” might also be to emphasize the access that believers have to God.

Rev 1:7

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“mourn.”** This is not a mourning of repentance, because by the time every eye sees Jesus it will be too late for repentance (not that the unbelievers would repent anyway, even at seeing Jesus), but rather mourning “because of” him, that is because of the loss they will suffer because of his justice. Nyland has, “grief-stricken because of him.”[[4]](#footnote-27637)

Rev 1:8

**“‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God.”** These words apply to God, not to Christ. The one, “who is, and who was and who is to come” is clearly identified in the context as God, not Jesus Christ. Revelation 1:4-5 reads: “Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, **and** from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” The separation between “the one who is, was and is to come” and Jesus Christ can be clearly seen. The one “who is, and who was and who is to come” is God.

This verse is made slightly more ambiguous in the KJV than the REV because the word “God” is left out of the Greek text from which the KJV was translated. Nevertheless, modern textual research shows conclusively that it should be included, and modern versions do include the word “God.”

The phrase “the Alpha and the Omega,” has caused many people to believe this verse refers to Christ. However, study of the occurrences of the phrase indicates that the title “Alpha and Omega” applies solely to God. Scholars are not completely sure what the phrase “the Alpha and the Omega” means. Lenski concludes, “It is fruitless to search Jewish and pagan literature for the source of something that resembles this name Alpha and Omega. Nowhere is a person, to say nothing of a divine Person, called ‘Alpha and Omega,’ or in Hebrew, ‘Aleph and Tau.’”[[5]](#footnote-16613)

Although there is no evidence from the historical sources that anyone is named “the Alpha and Omega,” Bullinger says that the phrase “is a Hebraism, in common use among the ancient Jewish Commentators to designate the whole of anything from the beginning to the end; *e.g*., ‘Adam transgressed the whole law from Aleph to Tau’ (Jalk. Reub., fol. 17.4).”[[6]](#footnote-30059) That would make the expression the figure of speech polarmerismos, similar to ‘and there was evening, and there was morning,” which stands for the whole day in Genesis 1. The best scholarly minds have concluded that the phrase has something to do with starting and finishing something, or the entirety of something. Norton writes that these words, “denote the certain accomplishment of his purposes; that what he has begun he will carry on to its consummation.”[[7]](#footnote-13349)

God is truly the beginning and the end of all things. He is “the Alpha and the Omega” because He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the One who brings all things to their consummation, and the One who ensures that His purposes are fully accomplished.

The opening eight verses of Revelation (Rev. 1:1-8) are very choppy, as are the openings of many of the Epistles. The multiple doxologies make the opening choppy. As we read we notice: the first two verses explain a couple of things about the book of Revelation. Then Revelation 1:3 changes the subject, and is a blessing upon those who read and those who hear. Then, Revelation 1:4 and the first half of verse 5 are the “to whom” the book of Revelation is addressed. The last half of verse 5, and verse 6, are a doxology to Christ (this would have been easier to see if verse 6 had started with “To him who loves us,” which is in the middle of verse 5). Verse 7 is an exclamation to the people that Jesus Christ is coming. Verse 8 is a doxology to God, who is “the Power” behind the Return of Jesus Christ. That verse 7 is about Jesus’ coming while verse 8 is a doxology to God should not confuse us; as we have just seen, the opening verses change subjects a lot.

[For more on the figure of speech polarmerismos, see commentary on Josh. 14:11. For more on Rev. 1:8, see J. S. Hyndman, *Lectures on the Principles of Unitarianism*, 1824; and Donald Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*, 1998.]

**“who is and who was and who is to come.”** This is a reference to God (cf. Rev. 1:4 and 4:8. All these are about God, not about Christ). Jesus Christ is mentioned in Revelation 1:5

[For more on Christ not being “God,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Rev 1:9

**“the affliction.”** The Christian life, like all life on earth is filled with hardships. But because the Devil fights against Christians in all kinds of different ways, they often face persecution and special hardships (see commentary on John 16:33).

**“Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony about Jesus.”** John was banished to the small island off the coast of the Roman province of Asia (now Turkey) because of his Christianity, which Nero had made illegal. Patmos is a small, irregularly shaped island about 6 by 10 miles (10 by 16 km), and it served as a place of banishment during the Roman Empire. John would have been banished to Patmos during the reign of Domitian, and there received the revelation of the book of Revelation. Some have suggested that John was not banished there but went there to teach, but that is very unlikely. The Roman records show that the island was used as a place where exiles were sent, and there were even some mines there where apparently people were sent as prisoners to do hard labor. Also, the island had a very small and isolated population, so there would have been no reason for John to go there if his intention was to preach; there would be many places much better suited for the spread of the Gospel than Patmos. The ancient tradition is that John was banished to Patmos, and there is no good reason to challenge that.

Rev 1:10

**“in the spirit.”** There is no definite article “the” in the Greek text but we supply it because the preposition *en* can make *pneuma* (spirit) definite without the article. See commentary on Revelation 4:2, “in the spirit.”

**“the Lord’s Day.”** This is “the Day of the LORD” (more accurately, “the Day of Yahweh”) that is so often mentioned in the Old Testament (see commentary on Dan. 12:1). It is not “Sunday,” which always in the New Testament is referred to as “the first day of the week” (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). It would be very unusual for this to be a reference to Sunday because it would be the only place in the Bible where Sunday is called “the Lord’s Day.” Actually, there is no evidence that Christians called Sunday “the Lord’s Day” for centuries after the NT was written, and even then it is because they assumed that John saw the vision on Sunday.

Some people argue that if this was referring to the Day of the LORD, then the grammar would match the grammar of the Hebrew OT, but that is not a valid argument. The Hebrew language has no adjective equivalent to “Lord’s,” but has to use the double noun, “day” and “LORD” in the phrase “Day of the LORD.” The Greek does not have to follow that construction. There are places in the NT where the construction “Day of the Lord” is similar to the Hebrew (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10), but the construction in Greek does not have to follow the Hebrew construction to communicate the same meaning.

There is a reason that the Greek construction of “the Lord’s day” is the way it is in Revelation 1:10. In the Greek text, “the Lord’s day” of Revelation 1:10 is directly contrasted with “man’s day” in 1 Corinthians 4:3, which reads literally, “and to me it is for a very little thing that by you I may be judged, or by man’s day…” (YLT). Sadly, many translations have the reading, “a human court,” in 1 Corinthians 4:3, which misrepresents the Greek text and misses the connection between “man’s day” when man does the judging and man vents his wrath, and “the Lord’s day,” when the wrath of God will be poured out upon mankind.

Lastly, there is no reason in the text or context for the Bible telling us John saw his vision on “Sunday.” Why would the Bible tell us that? Furthermore, if Revelation 1:10 tells us John got his vision on a Sunday, then there is no verse that clearly directs us that what he saw was in the future and during “the Day of the LORD.” Actually, Revelation 1:10 is a huge anchor verse that directs us as to how to understand the rest of the book of Revelation.

The things that John was shown in his extensive 22-chapter revelation vision that we know as the book of Revelation were not for John’s lifetime or, as it has turned out, even for millennia to come. John saw his vision that we know as the book of Revelation about AD 90, during “man’s day,” but by the spirit he was taken into the future to “the Lord’s day,” and thus he recorded for us what will happen during that great Day of the LORD when God pours His wrath out upon the earth and judges the earth.

Rev 1:11

**“and…and…and,”** etc. This repetition of “ands” is the figure of speech Polysyndeton (“many ands”), and the purpose is to give emphasis to each member of the list.[[8]](#footnote-22811)

[See Word Study: “Syndeton.”]

Rev 1:12

**“the voice.”** This is the figure of speech metonymy,[[9]](#footnote-13955) the “voice” is put for the person speaking. Without the figure of speech, we would say, “I turned to see the one who was speaking to me.” This is also the figure of speech catachresis,[[10]](#footnote-23482) a forced and incongruous use of language. A “voice” is invisible, so we cannot “see” it.

[See Word Study: “Metonymy.”]

Rev 1:14

**“as white wool.”** This is a good example of how a simile can communicate a lot of information in a little phrase. Many things are brought into mind by Jesus’ hair being described as “white as white wool.” One is that is the way God is described in Daniel 7:9. White hair was a sign of age and wisdom (Prov. 16:31), and elders were to be respected (Lev. 19:32). We do not see a reference to age here, but rather the wisdom that usually comes with age. Also, white was a symbol of holiness and righteousness. Important to the book of Revelation is that Jesus is called “the Lamb” 26 different times, while in all of the four Gospels, he is only called “the Lamb” twice (John 1:29, 36). Here in Revelation 1:14 the imagery of the Lamb is brought forward and Jesus is said to have hair “as white wool.”

Rev 1:15

**“his feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace.”** The word we translate as “burnished bronze” (*chalkolibanon*; #5474 χαλκολίβανον) does not occur in any known Greek writings except the book of Revelation. Scholars have suggested different possible meanings, but “burnished brass” (or bronze or copper) is very likely, especially due to the symbolism that brass had in the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) and Temple. The phrase “when it has been made to glow in a furnace” is also likely given the symbolism of the book of Revelation itself. Although it can also perhaps refer to brass “that has been refined in a furnace,” the fact that Revelation deals with God’s wrath and judgment makes Jesus’ “burning feet” more likely.

When Jesus comes in judgment, he tramples the enemies underfoot, and those enemies become ashes underfoot of Jesus and the righteous ones: “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing (Isa. 63:3 NIV84). “‘Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,’ says the LORD Almighty” (Mal. 4:3 NIV84).

Bronze (or brass) played a very important part in both the Tent of Meeting and the Temple. Both were considered holy, and it was dangerous to ignore God’s commands concerning those sacred places. Not only were the altar and washing basins of bronze, but also the bases, or “feet” of the posts that supported the outer wall of the Tent of Meeting (Exod. 38:10, 11).

The glowing bronze feet of Jesus Christ reminds us of his holiness and that he is coming in judgment, and also intimately connect us with the fact that he is the “meeting place,” where we meet God. Bronze, brass, and copper are burnished, that is, brought to a shiny glow by rubbing them, usually with a polishing cloth of some kind.

**“many waters.”** That is the deep and powerful sound of a rushing river, like the Colorado, a huge waterfall, like Niagara, or crashing ocean breakers. It is a sound so deep and powerful that you don’t just hear it, you “feel” it. It would be nice to be more specific here than just “many waters,” but that is the way the Greek text reads. Since John was writing on the island of Patmos, he likely quite often heard the surf of the Aegean Sea when it was roaring.

Rev 1:16

**“out of his mouth came a sharp, two-edged broadsword.”** This sword is the Word of God (cf. Eph. 6:17), in this case, prophecies that are spoken by Jesus Christ. (See commentary on Rev. 19:15; 1 Cor. 14:12 and 2 Thess. 2:8).

**“broadsword.”** See commentary on Luke 2:35.

Rev 1:17

**“I am the first and the last.”** The phrase, “the first and the last, ” is a title that is used five times in the Bible, twice in Isaiah of God (Isa. 44:6; 48:12), and three times in Revelation of the Son (Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13). Trinitarians sometimes make the assumption that since the same title applies to both the Father and the Son, they must both be God. However, there is no biblical justification on which to base that assumption. When the whole of Scripture is studied, we can see that the same titles are used for God, Christ, and men. Examples include “Lord” (see Word Study: “Lord”) and “Savior” (see commentary on Luke 1:47) and “King of kings.” If other titles apply to God, Christ, and men without making all of them into “one God, ” then there is no reason to assume that this particular title would mean God and Jesus were one God unless Scripture specifically told us so, which it does not.

In the Old Testament, God truly was “the first and the last.” The meaning of the title is not specifically given, and so scholars debate it, but it seems that a key to its meaning is given in Isaiah 41:4, in which God says He has called forth the generations of men, and was with the first of them and is with the last of them. Isaiah 41:4 says, “Who has worked and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I, Yahweh, the first, and with the last, I am he.” Thus, the Bible connects the phrase “the first and the last” with calling forth the generations.

While God was the one who called forth the generations in the Old Testament, He has now conferred that authority on His Son. Thus, it is easy to see why the Lord Jesus is called “the first and the last” in the book of Revelation. It will be Jesus Christ who will call forth the generations of people from the grave to enter in to everlasting life. God gave Jesus authority to raise the dead (John 5:25-27). His voice will raise all dead Christians (1 Thess. 4:16-17), and he will change our bodies into new glorious bodies (Phil. 3:20-21). However, even when Jesus said he had the authority to raise the dead, he never claimed he had that authority inherently because he was God. He always said that his Father had *given* authority to him. While teaching about his authority, Jesus Christ was very clear about who was the ultimate authority: “the Son is not able to do anything on his own…the Father…has given all judgment to the Son…For as the Father has life in himself, so He has also given to the Son to have life in himself. And he gave him authority to execute judgment” (John 5:19, 22, 26-27). If Jesus had the authority to raise the dead because he was in some way God, he never said so. He said he had his authority because his Father gave it to him. With the authority to raise the generations came the title associated with the existence of the generations, and so that is a major reason that after his resurrection Jesus Christ is called “the first and the last.”

Another way that we can tell that the title “first and last” does not make Jesus God is simply the way Jesus used it. Note what the verse in Revelation says: “I am the first and the last, and the Living One, and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever, and I have the keys of death and of the grave” (Rev. 1:17, 18). Patrick Navas observes:

“Jesus is the one who ‘was dead’ but now lives.... In two out of three instances where Jesus describes himself as ‘the First and the Last’ in the book of Revelation, the statement is made in association with his death and subsequent resurrection. …If ‘the First and the Last’ in this case means, or ultimately implies, ‘God (Almighty), the Eternal One,’ in what way would it make sense for Jesus to say, in effect, ‘I am the Eternal God, I *died* but came to life’? How strange and how unlikely—if not impossible—would it have been for God to have died or said that he died? Even many Trinitarians teach that ‘God,” or the ‘divine nature/aspect of Christ,’ did *not* die, in any way. …So Trinitarians would have to argue, ultimately, that Jesus is identifying himself as God by calling himself ‘the First and the Last’ and, immediately after, switching to, or speaking out of, his ‘human nature,’ due to the fact that he died. This would clearly be a case of ‘playing fast and loose’ with Scripture.”[[11]](#footnote-16364)

The fact that when Jesus used the title “the first and the last” he connected it with his death and resurrection shows us that, far from a claim to being God, it showed how, as the Son who obeyed his Father all the way to the cross and death, Jesus now had authority from God to even raise the dead. We can see this especially since he finished Rev. 1:18 by saying that he had the keys of death and the grave, which would only make sense for him to say if his having those keys was not inherently part of his nature. If he were God, why say he had the keys of death and the grave? Of course God has those keys, but the human Son of God would only have them if God the Father gave them to him.

[For more discussion on this verse, see Charles Morgridge*, True Believer’s Defense Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians*, Boston, Benjamin Greene, 1837, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship, p. 122; *The Racovian Catechism*, in Polish 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818, available through Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 157-161; Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition*, Authorhouse, 2011, pp. 585-588.]

Rev 1:18

**“I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever.”** Jesus died and then God raised him from the dead. Paul said the same basic thing about Jesus as Jesus himself does here in Revelation 1:18.

That Jesus was dead and was raised to life by God is a very important fact that needs to be examined. First, it gives every believer comfort and knowledge that God can and does raise the dead, which is the foundation of the Christian’s hope of everlasting life. Second, it shows that Jesus was a fully human being. God cannot die.

[For more on dead people being totally dead and not alive in any way, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the fact that the soul can and does die, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’” For more on why Jesus had to be fully dead in every way, not just have his “body” or “human nature” die, see commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:20. For more on why it cannot be that the human part of Jesus died but the God part did not, see commentary on Matthew 27:50. For more on Jesus being fully human and not “God in the flesh,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.” Also see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matt. 1:20.

Rev 1:19

**“the things.”** The Greek is more properly “what,” (“Write what you saw”), but in Greek the “what” is plural, indicating that John saw a number of things. In contrast, in English “what” is often singular, so if the English said, “Write what you saw,” people might think he only saw one thing. Saying, “Write the things you saw” brings out the plural meaning of the Greek text.

**“signify.”** The book of Revelation is in the future. The events in it have not yet happened. Many commentators who believe the book of Revelation is about the past, or partially about the present, read Revelation 1:19 and interpret it as dividing the book of Revelation into three parts: the things which were seen (past), the things that are now (present) and the things that will happen (future). However, that is not the proper way to understand the verse. The early introduction of Revelation 1:2, notes that the book is about what John “saw.” John got the vision by revelation, and after he had seen it, was told to write it down. In contrast, Paul got some of the vision also, but was forbidden to write it down (2 Cor. 12:3-7). A careful reading and understanding of Rev. 1:19 shows that John was to write what he saw and “what they signify,” or “what they mean.”

The Greek word translated “signify” is *eimi* (#1526 εἰμί, pronounced ā-'me, like the girl’s name, Amy, but with the accent on the last syllable). It is the “to be” verb in Greek, translated “is,” “are,” etc. However, in many cases in Greek (and in English as well), the “to be” verb is used for what something “means” or “signifies.” *Thayer’s Lexicon* says the “to be” verb can express, “what does it mean?” Thayer gives Luke 8:9 as an example, which literally translated reads, “what this is, the parable,” but which we usually translate as “what this parable meant.” In Matthew 9:13, Jesus told the religious leaders, “Go and learn what this ‘means.’” The literal Greek is, “Go and learn what this ‘is.’” Similarly, in Matthew 12:7, Jesus told the religious leaders, “If you had known what these words mean.” A more literal translation would be, “If you had known what these words are.” Other examples of when the Greek “to be” verb is used for “means,” or “signifies,” include, Luke 15:26; 20:17; John 16:17; Acts 2:12 and 10:17. Adding weight to the argument that the “to be” verb in Revelation 1:19 means “signifies,” or “means,” is the fact that in the next verse, Revelation 1:20, the “to be” verb is used twice, and both times means “signifies.” The seven stars “are,” that is, signify or mean, the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven golden lampstands “are,” that is, signify or mean, the seven churches.

The Emphasized Bible by Rotherham translates the verse, “Write, therefore—what things thou hast seen and what they are….” Alford translates, “and what things they signify.”[[12]](#footnote-24148) Alford acknowledges that the Greek text can mean either “and what they signify” or “the things which are [now],” and references scholars on both sides of the argument, but he concludes that the weight of evidence is with “signify.”

English, like Greek, uses “is” and “are” to mean “signify” or “mean.” For example, if someone hears a loud siren going off at an odd hour, he might say, “What is that?” Of course he knows it “is” a siren, but he is asking, “What does that siren mean? Does it mean there is a tornado, a nuclear attack, or is it just a system test?”

Many commentators assert that the book of Revelation is past, and the events described are symbolic and apocalyptic. Others say that although Revelation is not about the past, it is about what “is” or “is now.” Neither of these interpretations is correct. The book of Revelation is about the future. Revelation 1:19 is not about the things that have taken place, and “what is now and what will take place later.” Rather, it is about “What you saw and what they mean, even those things that are about to happen.”

Many of the commentators who say that Revelation is about the past make their case by saying that the book of Revelation is symbolic. However, although there are some symbolic elements in the book of Revelation, the meaning of those symbols is often easily discerned. Furthermore, we must remember that the symbols tell us about things that are real. For example, the Four Horsemen (Rev. 6:1-8) are not literal flesh horses, but they are spiritual forces that are unleashed at that specific time. Furthermore, horses were a well-established symbol of strength and speed. When we see the effects of the seal plagues, it is clear they are future.

When we read the book of Revelation and look at the events it portrays, it makes much more sense that they are future than past or present. We need to examine all the evidence from Scripture. We look first at the Old Testament. It foretold a time of worldwide distress and destruction, not just the destruction of Jerusalem, and Daniel mentioned this happening over a period of seven years. For example, Isaiah speaks of the Day of the Lord, and says it will be a “cruel day,” when He “will punish the world for its evil” and people will become “scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir” (Isa. 13:9-12). Daniel says there will be a time of distress such as has never been known on earth, and after that will be the resurrections (Dan. 12:1-2). Joel says the Day of the Lord is “a day of darkness and gloom,” and that there will be an army so large, that it “never was of old, or ever will be in the ages to come, and at the sight of them, nations are in anguish.” (Joel 2:1-2, 6). Zephaniah says the Day of the Lord will be wrath, distress, anguish, trouble, ruin, and gloom (Zeph. 1:15), and there will be judgment upon not only Israel, but Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria (Zeph. 2:4-15). Zechariah 14:3 says that in the Day of the Lord, the Lord will fight against the nations that attack Jerusalem. That is not a description of Jerusalem being attacked by Rome in AD 70. That is a description of the wrath of the Lord on the world for all its sin.

When we look at the Four Gospels, we find the apostles asking Jesus when “the end of the Age” would be (Matt. 24:3). They did not expect, nor ask about, the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. That was not the end of the Age, and it did not immediately precede the Messianic Kingdom on earth they were so anxiously awaiting. Jesus’ answer indicated that there would be a time of distress (Matt. 24:29), and that nation would fight against nation, and there would be famines and earthquakes in various places (Matt. 24:4-7). Furthermore, after that tribulation, the Son of Man would come from the sky and there would be a gathering of people, including resurrecting the dead (Matt. 24:30-31). This is certainly not the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. It is the end of this Age and the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom.

Then, when we read the book of Revelation itself, we can see the wrath of God being poured out over a seven-year period, and the seal judgments, trumpet judgments, thunder judgments, and bowl judgments occurring in succession and including the entire world. Although there are symbols interwoven into these judgments, it is also true that most of them can be simply read and understood for what they are: a number of judgments that kept increasing in severity. Revelation 19 portrays Jesus coming from heaven and the Battle of Armageddon, then Revelation 20 shows the Resurrection of the Righteous and the 1,000-year Messianic Kingdom on earth. These records flow in such a way that we can see what is coming in the future. To make them “symbolic” is to leave us with no description of the future, and the question, if they are symbolic, what do they symbolize?

**“even.”** The Greek word *kai* can be translated “and” or “even,” and in this case, “even” is the meaning before the last phrase, which emphasizes the fact that these future things are about to come to pass. E. W. Bullinger, in *Commentary on Revelation*, does a very good job explaining this verse.

Rev 1:20

**“sacred secret.”** The REV translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

**“messengers.”** The messengers of the synagogues. See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

**Revelation Chapter 2**

Rev 2:1

**“To the messenger of the congregation in Ephesus write.”** The letters to the seven “assemblies” recorded here in Revelation 2 and 3 are not to the Christian Church but are to the believers, particularly Jews, who are left after the Rapture. From the form and content of these letters, as well as from other information in other Scriptures, we learn that the Rapture has occurred and the people who are left on earth are Jews and Gentiles, some of whom come to believe in the Lord. Revelation 1:10 says that John was in the spirit on “the Lord’s Day,” otherwise known as the Day of the Lord, and from Revelation 1:10 forward, the book of Revelation is about future events, including these congregations.

There are many reasons to believe that these letters are not to Christians, and in fact, are incompatible with the doctrine Christ gives to the Christian Church in the seven Church Epistles (Romans through Thessalonians). One reason is that the letters are not addressed to the “saints” like they are in the Church Epistles (“To the holy ones at…;” cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1), but instead, they are addressed to the “messenger” of the assembly, which makes sense in the context of the Jewish synagogue. Another is that many of the sins that Jesus Christ is upset about are sins in the Old Testament Law but not sins for the Christian church, like eating food offered to idols (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1-8 with Rev. 2:14, 20). Another is that in the Church Epistles, two major problems were Jews, because they were “enemies of the Gospel” (Rom. 11:28), and “false brothers,” i.e., false Christians. (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4). In contrast, in these letters in Revelation, the Jews are not the enemy and there is no problem with false Christians, instead, the problem is people who say they are Jews, but are not (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

We can see why these letters to the congregations in the Tribulation period seem so harsh. These believers are in the fight of their lives, literally. They are in the seventh week of the 70 weeks of Daniel 9, and live when the Antichrist has made a covenant with many in Israel (Dan. 9:27). The persecution they are in is intense, and between the persecution and Antichrist, most of them will be killed (Dan. 7:21; Matt. 24:9; Rev. 13:7, 10; 14:12-13). Jesus taught that the person who endured to the end would be saved (Matt. 24:13), and that is exactly what these letters to congregations say.

There are many reasons to believe the Rapture occurred before the events in Revelation, and they are covered in more detail in the commentary on the individual verses.

[For more on how horrendous the Tribulation will be, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on Christians being delivered from the wrath, see commentary on 1 Thess. 1:10. For more on the Rapture being a comfort, see commentary on 1 Thess. 4:18.]

**“messenger.”** The Greek is *angelos* (#32 ἄγγελος). The word means “messenger,” and can refer to either human messengers (Luke 7:24) or divine messengers, which we usually call “angels” (Matt. 1:20). Usually in English Bibles when *angelos* refers to divine messengers, the word is not translated, but is transliterated as “angel.” In Revelation 2:1, the “messenger” is human. There are a number of reasons to believe that this “letter to the seven assemblies” is a letter to the Jewish assemblies after the Rapture of the Christian Church (see commentary on Rev. 2:1, “congregation,” below). When Jesus Christ wants a letter communicated to the Jewish congregations after the Rapture, he writes to the “messenger” of the congregation. Bullinger writes about this “messenger.” After saying that there is no “angel” or “messenger” connected with the Christian Church, he says:

“But we do meet with the word Angel in connection with the *Synagogue* (though not in the Old Testament). There, there was an officer, who was called *Sheliach Tzibbur…Tzibbur* meaning the *Assembly*; and *Sheliach*, the *Angel* or *Legate* of the Assembly, and the Leader of Divine worship, from…*shalach*, to send. The chief officer [of the Synagogue] was the *Archisynagogos*, or “Ruler of the Synagogue”; and after him came the *Sheliach Tzibbur*; or “Angel of the Assembly,” who was the mouthpiece of the congregation. His duty was to offer up public prayer to God for the whole congregation. Hence his title; because, as the messenger of the assembly, he spoke to God for them.”[[13]](#footnote-28775)

The reason that Jesus would write his letter to the “messenger” of the Synagogue was so that the messenger of the synagogue would then communicate the letter to the people. The use of “messenger of the congregation” is more supporting evidence that the Rapture occurred earlier, and Jesus was writing to Jews who were left on earth after the Rapture. The Church Epistles of Paul were written to the believers, because the Christian Church did not have the type of structure that the synagogue did, and any Christian in the congregation who could read could read Paul’s letter to them. In contrast, when Jesus wanted his letter read in the Jewish synagogue, he addressed it to “the messenger,” the *Sheliach Tzibbur*, the one who was charged to read such letters to the people assembled together.

**“congregation.”** This is a Jewish congregation after the Christian Church has been Raptured into heaven. Christians who believe in the Rapture have long been divided over the issue of to whom this “Letter to the Seven Congregations” is written. Some, like E. W. Bullinger, say the Rapture happens before any event in the book of Revelation, and that this Letter is addressed to the Jews who live on earth after the Rapture, guiding them in the Faith just as the Seven Church Epistles of Paul guide Christians in the Faith. Other Christians, including those who believe in a mid-tribulation, pre-wrath, or post-tribulation Rapture, say this letter is written to Christians before the Rapture. But Bullinger makes the strongest case, and the evidence in the Letter to the Seven Congregations shows that it is not to Christians, and even contradicts some of the things that Paul wrote to the Christian Church in his Epistles. The nature of this “Letter” shows that it has the same nature as the writings to the people in the Old Testament and Gospels, before the Christian Church started in Acts 2.

One thing that has confused Christians about this “Letter to the Seven Congregations” is that almost every English version has, “to the…Church in Ephesus,” and later, to the “Church” at Smyrna, the “Church” at Thyatira, the “Church” at Sardis, and so forth. The translation “Church” is very misleading. The Greek word that most English versions translate as “Church” is *ekklēsia* (#1577 ἐκκλησία, pronounced ek-clay-'see-ah), and it refers to an assembly or gathering of any kind. The specific kind of gathering has to be determined by reading the context (see commentary on Matt. 16:18).

By far the most common use of *ekklēsia* in the New Testament is the “congregation” or “assembly” of the Christian Church (cf. Acts 8:1; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; etc.), but that is clearly because the majority of the times *ekklēsia* is used, it is in Acts or the Epistles of Paul, which are written to the Christian Church. But *ekklēsia* is also used of other, non-Christian assemblies. For example, *ekklēsia* is used for a Jewish congregation in Acts 7:38. Stephen was speaking about the history of Israel and spoke of Moses, who led the *ekklēsia*, the “congregation,” in the wilderness. Of course, the *ekklēsia* that Moses led was an assembly of Jews. Also, in Acts 19:32 we see a secular use of *ekklēsia*. The “congregation ” in Acts 19 started as a mob of Gentiles in Ephesus who assembled together to defend their goddess Artemis, but as they got noisy, more and more people joined them, and eventually the majority of “the congregation” did not even know why they were assembled. In conclusion, *ekklēsia* does not always refer to a Christian “Church,” and using the word “Church” in the “Letter to the Seven Congregations” has misled many Christians.

Since we have seen that we must determine the nature of the “congregation” from the context in which *ekklēsia* is used, we have to carefully read the “Letter to the Seven Congregations” to determine what kind of “congregation” it is written to. We will see that there are many pieces of evidence that the *ekklēsia* mentioned in Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14 are Jewish congregations that we would find in a synagogue; they are not Christian congregations.

* The Christian Church is in the “Administration of Grace” (Eph. 3:2), and we can clearly see the special grace given to Christians when we read the Seven Church Epistles. For example, the Christian Church has so much glory from God that the Law of Moses had “no glory” in contrast to it (2 Cor. 3:10). In contrast to the grace that the Christian Church lives in, when we read the Letter to the Seven Congregations, we can see that it was written in a time of wrath, not a time of grace. The guidance in the Letter is for a time of Tribulation, the time of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), a day of wrath and burning anger (Isa. 13:13), so terrible that God says, “Woe to you [Jews] who long for the Day of the LORD…that day will be darkness, not light” (Amos 5:18).  
    
  The Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus, foretold that a time of great wrath would come upon those people who were not faithful to God, and the Letter to the Seven Congregations echoes that theme over and over (see commentary on Rev. 6:17). For example, Revelation 2:16 says Jesus will make war against the Jews in the congregation who did not repent of their sin. This is in complete contrast to the information in the Seven Church Epistles of Paul, which say that Christ, who justified us, will not condemn us, and that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:31-38). To understand this contrast between the “Church Epistles” and the “Letter to the Congregations,” we need to remember that Christians are born-again children of God and are guaranteed salvation, while the people after the Rapture are not, and if they turn against Christ, they will be destroyed (this is also what we see in the Old Testament; cf. Ezek. 33:11-13).
* It was prophesied in many places in both the Old Testament and the Gospels that the “Tribulation” would be a specific time of great distress that would be worldwide and come upon one generation (for the time of God’s wrath on earth, see commentary on Rev. 6:17). This specific time of God’s wrath is spoken of in Revelation 3:10, which speaks of the “hour of trial” that will come upon the whole world. In contrast, the Christian Church is never told that Christians will go through a specific time of Tribulation, and the most logical reason for that is the Rapture. At the Rapture, all Christians will be taken from the earth, and that will happen before the Tribulation occurs. It seems certain that if one generation of Christians were going to go through the Tribulation, there would be some mention of it somewhere in the Seven Church Epistles, but there is no mention of any such specific time of trial. So while Christians are never told about going through a specific time of trial, these Jewish believers are told they will go through it, but will be “kept” during that period of time.
* Jewish believers of the Old Testament and the Gospels are told they will live forever on earth, and neither the Old Testament nor the Gospels mention them being in heaven at any time. They are raised from the dead and go back to the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:11-14). The Letter to the Seven Congregations, like the Old Testament and the Gospels, has no hint of a heavenly hope, but says that those who overcome will then get to be in “Paradise,” which is always on earth (Rev. 2:7; see commentary on Luke 23:43), ruling the nations of earth (Rev. 2:27), and being pillars in the Temple in the New Jerusalem that comes to earth (Rev. 3:12).  
    
  In contrast to the Jews who have a hope of being in Paradise on earth, part of the Christian’s hope is spending time in heaven. Christians are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), will be seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6), and are waiting for the Lord from heaven who will Rapture them into heaven (1 Thess. 4:16-18). We Christians will come back to earth with Jesus when he comes, but from the Rapture until that time we will be in heaven. Thus, part of the hope of the Christian Church is spending time in heaven, but that hope presented in the Letter to the Seven Congregations is the same hope given in the Old Testament to the Jews, and this is good evidence that the Letter to the Seven Congregations is addressed to Jews.
* When Paul wrote the Seven Church Epistles (Romans through Thessalonians), he wrote them directly to the “holy ones” (translated “saints” in many English versions), who are the Christians. Any Christian who knew how to read would then read the Epistle to the congregation. However, the Letter to the Seven Congregations of Revelation is written to the “angel” of the congregation. In a Jewish congregation, the term “angel” was used of a specific man who was charged with certain responsibilities, including reading letters to the congregation (see commentary on Reve. 2:1, “angel”). The fact that the Seven Church Epistles were written directly to Christians, while the Letter to the Seven Congregations was specifically addressed to the “angel,” is very good evidence that the “Epistles” and the “Letter” were written to two different groups of people.
* The Church Epistles teach that faith in Christ results in New Birth, which is permanent and guarantees salvation. In contrast, the Letter to the Seven Congregations reverts to the teaching of the Old Testament and the Gospels, that a person had to be faithful until death or until “the End” to be saved (cf. Rev. 2:10-11, 25; 3:5). There is no mention in the Letter to the Seven Congregations that salvation comes by faith in Christ alone, and no teaching that once a person is saved he is guaranteed salvation. Quite the opposite. Revelation 2:16 says that if the people in the congregation do not repent, Jesus will make war against them with the sword from his mouth, which is not a sword of correction or discipline, but a sword of destruction (Rev. 19:15, 21. See commentaries on Rev. 19:15; 1 Cor. 14:12 and 2 Thess. 2:8). In short, Christians have guaranteed salvation through faith in Christ, while the believers in the Tribulation period have to be faithful throughout their life, just as the Old Testament believers did. [See Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]
* The tone of the Letter to the Seven Congregations is totally different than the tone of the Seven Church Epistles. While the Seven Church Epistles open and close with “Grace to you, and peace,” the Letter to the Seven Congregations does not contain the word “grace” or “peace” even one single time. Instead, each of the seven segments of the Letter to the Seven Congregations has the stern warning: “Anyone who has an ear had better listen to what the Spirit says to the congregations!” This sharply worded warning never occurs in the Seven Church Epistles of Paul, but does appear in the Gospels, before the Christian Church started.
* In the Seven Church Epistles of Paul, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but One Body in Christ, with every Christian being a “brother” to every other Christian (the term “brothers” is general and includes women). People who are not saved but have infiltrated the Christian congregation, and Christians who have turned against Christ, are called “false brothers” (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4). At the Rapture, the One Body is taken to heaven and God again deals with two groups, Jews and Gentiles. Thus, the pretenders who have infiltrated the congregation in the Letter to the Seven Congregations are never called “false brothers,” but instead are “those who say they are Jews, but are not” (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).
* Calling part of the group in the Letter to the Seven Congregations a “synagogue” shows us that the group is a group of Jews. The Christian Church is a new creation made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and as a group they are called “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12). The Christians who oppose Paul, such as those who were promoting circumcision or preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, are never called a “synagogue.” The word “synagogue” is never used in the Seven Church Epistles because the synagogue was a gathering of, or gathering place for, Jews. Similarly, in the Gospels and Acts, no gathering of Gentiles was ever referred to as a “synagogue.” Thus, when Revelation twice refers to those people who were part of the congregation but who opposed the Lord as “a Synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 2:9; 3:9), it is clearly referring to Jews, not Christians.
* In the Seven Church Epistles, eating food offered to idols is only a problem if it is a stumbling block to those whose conscience is weak (1 Cor. 8:1-13). However, after the Rapture, the grace about eating food offered to idols is removed and believers are again under the law about it, so twice the Letter to the Seven Congregations mentions that it is wrong to eat food sacrificed to idols and Jesus is upset with the believers for doing that (Rev. 2:14, 20). If we do not understand that what Paul wrote to the Christians applied specifically to Christians, and what John wrote was to the believers after the Rapture and applied specifically to them, we would have to concede that Paul and John contradict each other. Only by knowing that Paul wrote to Christians in the Age of Grace, and John wrote for Jews after the Rapture, are we able to see how the Word of God fits together.

When we study the Seven Church Epistles and the Letter to the Seven Congregations side by side, they cannot both be guidance to the same group of people without there being some very obvious contradictions. They have to be written to different groups, and they are. The Seven Church Epistles are to the Christian Church. The Letter to the Seven Congregations is to the Jewish congregations in synagogues after the Rapture. Of course, many of the things in both sets of letters apply to every believer. For example, there are things that please the Lord and things that do not; there are rewards for obedience and faithfulness; there is a goal that every person should aspire to, which is everlasting life with the Lord. However, we must not let the similarities blind us to the fact that the differences between the Epistles of Paul and the Letter that John wrote are so stark that it is clear they are written to different groups of people.

Rev 2:7

**“Anyone who has an ear had better listen to what the Spirit says to the congregations!”** The verb “hear” is in the imperative mood, and is too weakly translated by “let him hear.” This is not just an invitation from Jesus for us to hear what he says. Jesus is Lord of all, and there will be rewards for hearing and obeying, and consequences for ignoring what he says. For this phrase and the imperative mood, see commentary on Matthew 11:15.

**“the Spirit.”** The Greek word for “Spirit” is *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα), and it has many meanings, including “spirit,” “wind” and “breath.” It is used to refer to many different things, including God, angels, demons, and to the gift of holy spirit that God gives to people. After his resurrection, Jesus Christ also became known as “the Spirit,” as we see here in Revelation. So, “the Spirit” is one of the names of Jesus Christ, just as he is also called, “the lion of Judah,” “the root of David,” “lamb of God,” etc. Jesus is called “the Spirit” in many places in the New Testament. These include Acts 2:4; 10:19; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 22:17. (also, see commentary on Acts 2:4 and the book, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ*).[[14]](#footnote-19560)

The use of “Spirit” here in Revelation 2:7 clearly refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Revelation 1:9-17, Jesus Christ appeared to John and began talking to him and telling him what to write. It is clear that it is Jesus who appeared to John, especially since he describes himself in Rev. 1:18 as “I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever.” It is also clear that Jesus is “the Spirit” because in Rev. 2:17 (and other places) it is “the Spirit” who “says” things to John, but in the very next verse, Rev. 2:18, we read, “These things says the Son of God.”

What Jesus tells John to write takes up Revelation chapters 2 and 3. Jesus commanded John to write a letter to the congregations of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, and what we refer to as Revelation 2:1 is simply the continuation of the conversation between Jesus and John that started in chapter 1.

Jesus refers to himself as “the Spirit.” We can understand this because when Jesus was resurrected, his body was still flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), but it was spiritually empowered; powered by spirit, not by “soul” as our mortal bodies are. 1 Corinthians 15:44-46 says Jesus was raised “a spiritual body,” and because of that he began to be called, “the Spirit” (see commentary on 1 Cor. 15:44). 2 Corinthians 3:17 clearly confirms this, saying, “Now the Lord is the Spirit.”

When Jesus first appeared to his disciples, they thought he was an incorporeal being, a “spirit” (*pneuma*), as if Jesus was some kind of ghost (Luke 24:37). But he told them he was not a “spirit” but was flesh and bone, and he proved that by having them touch his body to feel his flesh.

[For more on how *pneuma* (“spirit”) is used in the Bible, see Appendix 15: “Usages of ‘Spirit.’”]

**“which is in the paradise of God.”** The plan of God was to create the earth for humankind and to love and be loved by the people there. We can see both God’s plan and His love when we see that God originally put Adam and Eve in “Paradise,” a garden of delight (Gen. 2:8-5), and that paradise will exist on earth in the future and the saved people will live there (Luke 23:43; Rev. 2:7). However, it is hard to see that consistent plan in most English Bibles because the Old Testament (Hebrew) calls it “Eden” while the New Testament (Greek) calls it “Paradise.” If the whole English Bible was translated from one language it would be easier to see the consistent and overriding plan of God, which has not changed. God wanted to have a paradise for His people to live in, and that plan will be realized someday in the future.

[For more on “paradise,” see commentaries on Gen. 2:15 and Luke 23:43.]

Rev 2:8

**“messenger.”** See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

**“the First and the Last.”** For information on this phrase, which occurs three times in Revelation (Rev. 1:17; 2:8; 22:13), see commentary on Revelation 1:17.

Rev 2:9

**“slander.”** The Greek noun is *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία, pronounced blas-fay-'me-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmia*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see commentary on Mark 1:13.

[For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

Rev 2:10

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“the crown of life.”** The Greek is, “the crown of the life,” but it clearly involves a genitive of apposition, thus, “the crown, which is the life.” This can especially be seen by the next sentence which refers to not being hurt by the second death. The crown is “the” life, that is, the well-known and wonderful everlasting life in the Kingdom. People who are faithful to death win the crown, the only crown worth having, everlasting life. Royalty can wear, or an athlete can win, any other crown, and no matter how massively made of gold or how ornately encrusted with gems it is, it is worthless if the person has not also won the true crown, which is everlasting life.

Rev 2:11

**“Anyone who has an ear.”** See commentary on Revelation 2:7 and Matthew 11:15.

**“the Spirit.”** This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

Rev 2:12

**“messenger.”** See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

**“broadsword.”** See commentary on Luke 2:35.

Rev 2:13

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. See commentary on Revelation 2:9.

Rev 2:16

**“I will make war against them.”** This is one of the many statements in the letters to the congregations in Revelation 2 and 3 that show those letters were written for people who will come to believe in the Lord after the Rapture of the Christian Church. Jesus does not make war against the Christian Church, his own Body, when we sin. We have peace with God, not war with God (Rom. 5:1).

**“the broadsword *coming* from my mouth.”** This sword is the prophecies that are spoken by Jesus Christ. (See commentaries on Rev. 1:16; 19:15; 1 Cor. 14:12 and 2 Thess. 2:8). For more on the broadsword, see commentary on Luke 2:35.

Rev 2:17

**“Anyone who has an ear.”** See commentaries on Revelation 2:7 and Matthew 11:15.

**“the Spirit.”** This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

Rev 2:18

**“messenger.”** See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

**“burnished bronze.”** To “burnish” a metal is to rub and polish it until it shines (cf. Rev. 1:15).

Rev 2:19

**“and…and…and.”** This repetition of “ands” is the figure of speech polysyndeton (“many ands”), and the purpose is to give emphasis to each member of the list.[[15]](#footnote-24679)

[See Word Study: “Syndeton.”]

**“first.”** The Greek word *prōtos* (#4413 πρῶτος) is plural here. See also Luke 11:26.

Rev 2:22

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“am throwing.”** The Greek is *ballō* (#906 βάλλω), to cast or to throw, and the verb is in the present tense, active voice, indicating that this punishment is, to some extent, going on at the present. Almost all translations put the verb in the future tense “will cast,” and it certainly is true that her punishment will be more acute in the future. However, sexual sin always has harmful effects in the present.

**“a bed *of suffering.*”** The Greek simply reads, “a bed,” and the suffering is implied from the context. This is great irony. Jezebel has ruined the lives of many through sexual sin, so God will cast her onto a bed, where she will suffer.

Rev 2:23

**“her children.”** The word “children” is the plural of *teknon* (#5043 τέκνον), “child.” Jezebel’s “children” are not the children of her adultery, but her followers, her disciples. In the biblical culture, a person who was a father figure, mentor, and guide, was called a “father.” Thus, Joseph said he had become a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8), the prophet Elisha referred to the elder prophet Elijah as his “father” (2 Kings 2:12), and the king of Israel referred to the prophet Elisha as his “father,” his spiritual mentor and guide (2 Kings 6:21). Similarly, the word “mother” was used literally of mothers, but it was also used of those women who were respected and had nurtured or guided the “child” in some way. Thus Jesus pointed to his disciples, some of whom were obviously women, and said, “Look! My mother and my brothers” (Matt. 12:49; Mark 3:34). Paul referred to Rufus’ mother as his mother also (Rom. 16:13). In Revelation 17:5, Babylon is called “the mother of prostitutes” because she influenced people to become prostitutes.

In turn, just as a mentor was called a “father” or “mother,” a disciple was called a “son” (*huios*, #5207 υἱός), or a “child” (*teknon*, #5043 τέκνον). Although *huios* means “son,” it is sometimes translated as the gender neutral, “child,” and although the Greek word *teknon* is gender neutral and means “child,” if the context is clearly about males or females, it may legitimately be translated as “son” or “daughter.” A clear example of the word “son” being used for disciples occurs in the Old Testament when the disciples of the prophets were called “the sons of the prophets” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.). When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul, he said, “If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? (Matt. 12:27). The “sons” of the Pharisees were the disciples of the Pharisees. The apostle Paul referred to Timothy as his “child” (1 Tim. 1:2), and also Titus (Titus 1:4), and Onesimus (Phlm. 1:10). At the Last Supper, Jesus referred to the apostles as his “little children” (John 13:33; *teknion*, #5040 τεκνίον, the diminutive of *teknon*.)

In this case, the “children” of Jezebel are the ones she has mentored in her sexual immorality.

[For more information, see commentary on Matt. 12:27.]

**“kidneys.”** The Greek is *nephros* (#3510 νεφρός) and literally means “kidneys.” We get our modern word nephrology, the study of the kidneys, from the Greek word. The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys, and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health. We have “gut feelings,” get upset stomachs upon hearing bad news or have an upset stomach or irregular bowels when facing emotionally difficult times. Bible commentators used to think that “kidneys,” “bowels,” and “belly,” were in the Bible because the ancients did not know what they did and assumed they were the center of human emotion. Now we know that the ancients, and the Word of God, were correct all along, and the arrogance of “modern” medicine, upon discovery of the brain, had just assumed the ancients were ignorant.

Other words to study besides “kidneys” are “bowels” and “belly.” Although in our modern world, we use “mind” to place an emphasis on our thoughts and “heart” for our emotions, biblically, the word “heart” was more closely associated with the mental life while “bowels,” “kidney,” and “belly” (which is the same word as “womb”) were more associated with the emotional life. The Old Testament reveals the same truth that the New Testament does. The Hebrew word for “kidney” is *kilyah* (#03629 כִּלְיָה). Below is a list of some pertinent verses showing the relation of the kidney to our emotional life.

* Psalm 7:9 (KJV): …God trieth the hearts and reins [kidneys].
* Psalm 16:7 (KJV): …my reins [kidneys] also instruct me in the night seasons.
* Psalm 26:2 (KJV): Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins [kidneys] and my heart.
* Psalm 73:21 (KJV): Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins [kidneys].
* Jeremiah 11:20 (KJV): But, O LORD…that triest the reins [kidneys] and the heart.
* Jeremiah 17:10 (KJV): I the LORD search the heart, *I* try the reins [kidneys].
* Jeremiah 20:12 (KJV): But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, *and* seest the reins [kidneys] and the heart.

[For more on the use of “heart” see commentary on Prov. 15:21.]

**“hearts.”** In the biblical world, the “heart” usually had to do with thinking, and we would usually say “mind.” So the phrase that God searches the kidneys and hearts means He searches our emotions and our thoughts.

[For more on the use of “heart” see commentary on Prov. 15:21.]

Rev 2:24

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. See commentary on Revelation 2:9.

Rev 2:27

**“and he will shepherd them with a rod of iron….”** This quotation comes from the Septuagint version of Psalm 2:9. The Hebrew text of Psalm 2:9 says “break them with a rod of iron,” while the Septuagint says “shepherd” (or “rule”) them with a rod of iron. Revelation 2:27 is an incomplete quotation from Psalm 2:9. Missing in the Greek here in Revelation 2:27 is the subject of the sentence, which is those people who it is that will be smashed to pieces like pottery. The missing words are the figure of speech ellipsis, in which something in the sentence is omitted so that the part that is included gets a greater emphasis. (Some scholars refer to this as an anacoluthon, but in an anacoluthon the subject abruptly changes, but here the quotation simply leaves out the subject of the sentence).

The ellipsis catches our attention and reminds us that Jesus will rule with a rod of iron, and as a righteous judge, will punish those who deserve punishment. This picture of Jesus is totally different from the “namby-pamby, love-and-accept-everyone-no-matter-how-they-behave” picture of Jesus that many Christians have in their minds today when they think of Jesus. Jesus came to earth the first time as the sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and to show us what it means to be humble and obedient. He was not a king at that time in the sense of having earthly authority. In the future, when he rules over the earth as king, he will not be tolerant of sin.

The phrase “shepherd them with a rod of iron” reveals a great truth. The phrase seems harsh and perhaps a little ironic because we do not generally think of shepherds as doing their shepherding with a rod of iron. However, the only genuinely effective way to protect the safety and security of the flock is if enemies are harshly treated and wayward sheep are sternly warned. The coming Kingdom of Christ on earth will be a paradise in part because criminals and evil people will not be tolerated. There will be no “innocent victims” in Christ’s future kingdom on earth because there will not be ruthless and ungodly people who are allowed to prey on the innocent. The Good Shepherd will see to that. It is noteworthy that the Bible does not explicitly tell us how Jesus will rule with a rod of iron, that is, exactly what he will do to people who act in an ungodly manner, but whatever it is, it will be an effective way to put an end to any ungodliness. That Jesus will conquer the earth and rule with a rod of iron is a well-established prophecy and occurs four times in Scripture (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).

[For more on Jesus Christ’s kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Rev 2:29

**“Anyone who has an ear.”** See commentaries on Revelation 2:7 and Matthew 11:15.

**“the Spirit.”** This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

**Revelation Chapter 3**

Rev 3:1

**“messenger.”** See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

**“the seven spirits of God.”** These are seven high-ranking spirit beings. See commentary on Revelation 1:4.

Rev 3:6

**“Anyone who has an ear.”** See commentaries on Revelation 2:7 and Matthew 11:15.

**“the Spirit.”** This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

Rev 3:7

**“the key of David.”** Referring to Isaiah 22:22.

**“messenger.”** See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

Rev 3:8

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Rev 3:9

**“Look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20; “Look!”

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. See commentary on Revelation 2:9.

**“and are not, but are lying.”** The Greek text contains the figure of speech anacoluthon. One type of anacoluthon occurs when there is a break in the normal grammatical structure of a sentence. This type called “suspension of the subject” happens when a speaker abruptly stops before they finish their sentence.

**“bow down.”** For more information on προσκυνέω (*proskuneō*), see the commentary on Matthew 2:2 and 1 Chronicles 29:20.

Rev 3:10

**“from the hour.”** The Greek preposition *ek* can mean “out from” in the sense of “through,” or “out from” in the sense of “away from.” Many people who believe in a pre-Tribulation Rapture still think that this “Letter to the Seven Churches” is to Christians, and thus they say that being kept “out from” the Tribulation is because of the Rapture. However, the letter is the “Letter to the Seven Congregations,” and they are Jewish congregations (see commentary on Rev. 2:1). The Rapture is past, the Christians are in heaven, and now these Jewish congregations on earth are having to stand fast in their faith. Even during the Great Tribulation, however, God protects many of His faithful ones (Rev. 12:13-17).

Rev 3:11

**“takes your crown.”** This verse is one of the many that shows that we have to remain faithful to the end to receive a full reward (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or evil”). In the Tribulation Administration salvation will not be guaranteed, so it is possible that, since “crown” refers to everlasting life in Revelation 2:10, that here it refers to a believer turning from Christ and losing his salvation.

Rev 3:12

**“my God.”** For this being evidence that Jesus Christ is not God, see commentary on Mark 15:34. Also see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”

Rev 3:13

**“Anyone who has an ear.”** See commentaries on Revelation 2:7 and Matthew 11:15.

**“the Spirit.”** This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

Rev 3:14

**“ruler”** In this verse the Greek word *archē* (#746 ἀρχή, pronounced ar-'kay) can and almost certainly should be translated “ruler,” like in the CEB, CJB, and NIV. We know from Scripture that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), and in making him “Lord,” God made him “ruler” of His creation. This agrees with many Scriptures, such as Ephesians 1:21-22, which says that God elevated Christ “far above” all the other powers in His creation, even setting Jesus at His own right hand.

The Greek word *archē* can mean “ruler,” or “beginning,” or first in some way, such as “first in rank,” “first in time,” etc. In the KJV and many other versions (e.g., ASV, ESV, NASB, RSV), the Greek word *archē* is translated “beginning.” Most people who read “beginning” think of Jesus Christ as the “beginning” of God’s original creation, and this has caused some people to say that the verse is Trinitarian, because Jesus would thus have been before everything else. However, understanding the verse that way makes it a strong argument against the Trinity because Christ would then be a created being; part of the creation of God. “Arianism” is the doctrine that Christ was the first of all of God’s created things and that God then created everything else through Christ, and the translations that say Christ was the “beginning” of God’s creation are most easily understood as Arian. It is illogical and contradictory to say that Christ is both God and also the beginning of God’s creation. He can be one or the other, but not both.

There are scholars who say the Greek word *archē* should be translated “beginning” here because it is referring to the new age that Christ will establish (cf. NLT). If that were so, the verse would be similar to Hebrews 1:10. Understood that way, Christ, being the “firstborn from the dead,” would be the beginning of God’s new creation. Although it is certainly possible from a textual standpoint to say that Christ is the beginning of the new creation, that does not seem to be correct here. For one thing, from the scope of Scripture there are many verses that speak of Christ as the ruler of God’s creation, and very few that speak of him in the context of the new creation. Furthermore, Revelation 3:14 is not the new creation yet, but is still part of the “old order of things,” before the Battle of Armageddon. The context of Revelation 3:14 is Christ speaking to the Assembly at Laodicea during the “present evil age.” He is ruling over them, rebuking them sharply, and encouraging them to change so he can reward them. Thus, translating *archē* as “ruler” seems to best fit the context. No one can argue with the fact that Christ is the ruler over all of God’s creation.[[16]](#footnote-24197)

**“messenger.”** See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

Rev 3:19

**“are my friends.”** The Greek word we translate as “are…friends,” is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the Greek verb *phileō* in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of *phileō* here, and confuse it with *agapē* love. *Phileō* love has a deep attachment, like the attachment of true friends, while agapē love does not necessarily have any feeling of attachment at all, which is why we can “love” (*agapē*) our enemies. Jesus takes a special interest in those who have taken a special interest in him (“You are my friends if you do what I command” John 15:14), and he reproves, disciplines, and prunes those with whom he has a special friendship relationship. In the REV we could have tried to stick with a verb and used “friendly” or “fond,” but these seem too weak. Also, the Greek verb *phileō* is in the present tense. Given that, it seemed that using the phrase, “are…friends” was the best way to bring the meaning of the Greek into the English. For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see commentary on John 21:15.

Rev 3:20

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Rev 3:22

**“Anyone who has an ear.”** See commentaries on Revelation 2:7 and Matthew 11:15.

**“the Spirit.”** This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

**Revelation Chapter 4**

Rev 4:1

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Rev 4:2

**“in the spirit.”** There is no definite article “the” in the Greek text but we supply it because this verse makes more sense in English that way. In the Greek text, the definite article “the” is not supplied before “holy spirit” because the preposition *en* can make *pneuma* (spirit) definite without the article. In Greek, if a preposition governs a noun, it is the context that determines whether the noun is definite or not, and therefore whether there should be a “the” in the English translation. Daniel Wallace writes: “There is no need for the article to be used to make the object of a preposition definite.”[[17]](#footnote-18013) A. T. Robertson writes: “...the article is not the only means of showing that a word is definite. ...The context and history of the phrase in question must decide. ...[As for prepositional phrases], these were also considered definite enough without the article.” Robertson then cites some examples that use the preposition *ek.*[[18]](#footnote-20106)

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“someone was sitting on the throne.”** The context (chapters 4 and 5) makes it clear that this is God, who is taking on human form so we can better relate to Him. See commentary on Acts 7:55.

Rev 4:3

**“carnelian.**” The Greek text, and thus the ancient name of the stone, was a sardius (NASB), but we today refer to the stone as a carnelian. Carnelian is an orangish-red quartz and is translucent, like most quartz stones. It has been found in many ancient excavations and was used for beads, rings, seal rings, and seals, and thus was a valuable jewelry stone. The dark orange-red color has caused some people to identify it with God’s anger or potential anger, emphasizing that God is not to be trifled with.

**“jasper.”** Jasper is an opaque variety of chalcedony (quartz). The most common variety of jasper is red, but jasper also comes in yellow, brown, and green. Jasper comes in large mass stones as well as smaller stones, and it takes a high polish, so especially by Greco-Roman times it was used for pillars, mantels, vases, and other such items, and as also used for beads, rings, and other jewelry. Scholars believe that the particular jasper mentioned here in Revelation was green. The Roman author and naturalist Pliny the Elder, who was a contemporary of the apostle John, mentioned that jasper was green. If that were true, then the carnelian and jasper would be red and green, and thus would support the multi-colored glory like the rainbow associated with the throne of God.

**“rainbow.”** God loves brilliant colors, and we see them associated with God in different places, particularly here and Ezekiel 1:28. It was likely that the “rainbow” around the throne was not the well-defined rainbow arch that appears after a rain, but rather the colors of the rainbow in the bright light that surrounded God, as Ezekiel describes.

**“like an emerald.”** Since the text just told us it was colored like a rainbow around the throne, it would not tell us that it was just green like an emerald. The reference to the emerald gem apparently refers to the depth of the colors and the brilliancy of them; they were not dull colors, but glowed and shined like a gem would. We do have to keep in mind that at that time in history gems could not be faceted like we do today, but were cabochon cut. Also, however, there were native gems that had their natural crystal shape and reflected powerfully. In both cases, the precious gem had a great depth, brilliance, and reflection to it.

Rev 4:4

**“around the throne were 24 thrones, and on the thrones *I saw* 24 elders sitting.”** Who these elders are is not described here in Revelation. There have been many different theories as to who the 24 elders are, but the evidence leads us to conclude that they are, or are part of, God’s divine council of spirit beings who help Him administer His creation. There are references to God’s divine council throughout the Old Testament, and some New Testament verses point to it also.

[For more on God’s divine council of spirit beings, see commentary on Gen. 1:26.]

Based on the vocabulary of the record, and what these “elders” do, as well as evidence from the scope of Scripture, we believe E. W. Bullinger correctly concluded that, “These elders are the heads of the heavenly priesthood…the princely leaders, rulers, and governors of Heaven’s worship. They are kings and priests. They…are not redeemed…They are heavenly unfallen beings…as ‘elders’ they are also rulers.”[[19]](#footnote-20423) The evidence that these elders are spirit beings and not glorified human beings includes:

* They are elders before the First Resurrection; the Resurrection of the Righteous, which occurs in Revelation 20:4. That means they could not be any Old Testament saints. Some say they are elders from among the Christians, but there are reasons for believing that is not the case and that they are not redeemed humans.
* One of the elders asked John a question that he did not know but the elder did. This indicates the elders have information not available to even humans like the apostles. As a Christian, John would be in the Rapture, and as one of the twelve apostles, he would have a throne and help rule Israel, but these elders do not include him.
* John called one of the elders, “Lord,” a title of respect (Rev. 7:14), and there is nowhere else in Scripture an apostle calls another believer “lord.”
* The elders serve a priestly function by holding bowls full of “incense,” which is figurative for the prayers of the saints. It is important to note that the prayers are the prayers of the saints, but not “their own prayers,” so these elders are not part of the people who were praying (Rev. 5:8). Dealing with incense and bowls—usually of oils or sacrificial blood—was part of the duty of priests (Exod. 37:16; Num. 4:7; 2 Kings 12:13).
* These elders speak of those Christ has redeemed by his blood as a different group than themselves. They speak of “You [Christ] redeemed people—you made **them** a kingdom and priests to our God, and **they** will reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).
* When John cried and cried that no one could open the scroll with seven seals, it was one of the elders who pointed out that the Lamb of God could open the scroll. Thus this elder had knowledge and awareness that the apostle John did not have.
* These elders are separate from the thousands and tens of thousands of worshipers around God’s throne and around them. Furthermore, the same basic number; “thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand” is in Daniel 7:10 and Revelation 5:11. This is good evidence that the elders in Revelation 4 are the same group as the judges in Daniel 7:10 and 7:26; and especially so since both groups are very close together in time: during the Tribulation and before Armageddon.
* The judges in Daniel and elders in Revelation both have their thrones closely associated with God’s throne, and God’s ruling spirits have thrones that are apparently associated with God’s throne, which is why Lucifer wanted his throne “above” (i.e., closer to God or in place of God) the thrones of the other angels (Isa. 14:13). Therefore it is likely that these thrones and the ones sitting on them are very ancient.

Given those facts, it seems clear that, as many commentators have concluded, these 24 elders are not Christians nor resurrected believers, they are spirit beings. Furthermore, although the elders in Revelation 4 could be a separate group of spirit rulers from the spirit judges in Daniel 7:10 and 7:26, that does not seem likely (in fact, the judges of Daniel 7, the elders of Revelation 4, and the judges of Revelation 20:4, are all likely the same group). There is simply no evidence the judges and elders are different groups, and the fact that they are all high ranking, all help rule, and are all shown as judges and elders within a very short time frame is evidence they are the same group.

The spirit judges of Daniel 7 will judge the Antichrist, who will be defeated in the Battle of Armageddon. The judges of Revelation 20:4 will sit on thrones to judge those who will be resurrected from the dead. But those two judgments will be at most a few weeks apart, and likely less than that; one judgment comes immediately before the Battle of Armageddon and the other comes immediately afterward. Since God never tells us anywhere in the Bible who is on the divine council or who the judges and leaders on the thrones are, and given that the judges and elders on the thrones are pictured in a very narrow time frame, it seems likely that the beings on the thrones would be the same group of spirit elders in both Daniel and Revelation.

When studying the subject of the judges on the thrones in Daniel and Revelation, we must keep in mind that the theology of the commentator plays a huge role in determining their conclusion about what the verses mean. A theologian who does not believe in a seven-year Tribulation period or in the Millennial Kingdom on earth will draw a totally different conclusion about the elders on the thrones than a theologian who believes in those events.

The different beliefs of the theologians who comment on Daniel and Revelation in part explains why there are so many different opinions about what the verses are saying and how they are to be properly explained. That is why, when studying books of prophecy like Daniel and Revelation, it helps to read and study them for oneself and come to a basic conclusion about the events in them, and then learn the beliefs of the authors or commentators who write about them in order to better understand the conclusions they draw. Otherwise, it just seems like everyone has a different opinion and the actual meaning of the verse is just a matter of opinion.

[For more about who these judges likely are, see commentary on Rev. 20:4.]

Rev 4:5

**“the seven spirits of God.”** These are seven high-ranking spirit beings. See commentary on Revelation 1:4.

Rev 4:6

**“even around the throne.”** The Greek is difficult because it seems to be self-contradictory: “in the midst of the throne and around the throne.” This has been explained in various ways, even as a gloss [addition] to the text. The best explanation seems to be that “in the midst of the throne” referred to being on each side of the throne. These creatures are closely related to cherubim or are cherubim (see commentary on Ezek. 1:5). We can see them here guarding the throne of God.

Rev 4:7

**“And the first creature.”** This creature closely matches the description of the cherubim in Ezekiel chapter 1 (Ezek. 1:10). But the cherubim had four wings, and these creatures have six wings.

Rev 4:8

**“who was and who is and who is to come.”** This is a reference to God (cf. Rev. 1:4 and 1:8. All these are about God, not about Christ). Jesus Christ is mentioned in Revelation 1:5.

[For more on Christ not being “God,” see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Rev 4:11

**“for you created all things.”** Some of the many pieces of evidence that Jesus is not “God” are found in the book of Revelation. For example, Jesus and God are worshiped for different reasons, and also Jesus’ death purchased people “for God,” which differentiates Jesus from God. Revelation 4:11 says that the elders worshiped “God” because He “created all things, and because of your will they exist and were created.” So God is worshiped because He is the creator. In contrast, in Revelation 5, the elders fall down before Jesus Christ because “you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God *people* from every tribe, and language, and people, and nation” (Rev. 5:8-9). In those verses, Jesus is not called God or identified with Him in any way, and in fact, is differentiated from Him. Furthermore, Jesus is exalted, not for being God, but because of what he did for God. Trinitarian doctrine is that in these verses “God” refers to “God the Father,” but the text never says that—it is an assumption made to support the doctrine. The straightforward reading of Scripture is that there is Jesus and there is “God,” and they are different.

[For more information about Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**Revelation Chapter 5**

Rev 5:1

**“written on the inside and on the back.”** The fact that the document mentioned in this verse is written “on the inside” and “on the back” lets us know that in this case the word *biblion* (#975 βιβλίον) refers to a scroll and not a “book,” although the first books were being published by the time John was writing. A scroll is written “on the inside,” which is the first side written on before the scroll is rolled up, and then “on the back” when more room was needed.

Rev 5:2

**“break”** The Greek is *luō* (#3089 λύω). Normally, “loose,” but here it refers to breaking the seals, the only way to open and unroll the scroll. That was, in fact, the purpose of the seal. One could tell the scroll had been opened if the seals were broken.

Rev 5:4

**“cried and cried.”** Cf. NIV, HCSB. The literal is “cried much,” with *polus* (#4183 πολύς) meaning “much,” and the word for cry, *klaiō* (#2799 κλαίω), in the imperfect tense. The imperfect tense of the verb shows that John began crying and kept on crying. This taken together with the word for “much” is painting a picture of John continuing to cry and cry, while no one “was able” (also imperfect, Rev. 5:3) to open the scroll. For more on the word *klaio*, see commentary on Matthew 2:18.

Much crying is indeed an appropriate response because John was faced with the fact that with no one to open the scroll and start God’s judgment, the world would continue in sin and under the control of the Devil, and that misery on earth would continue indefinitely. People, and the world itself, groan as if in the pains of childbirth (Rom. 8:22-23). If no one can bring about the righteous judgment of the earth and complete the redemption of mankind, then like Paul says, “We are of all people the most to be pitied.” One thing this shows is that the world is totally unable to save itself or bring itself into a righteous state. All of man’s boasting about how we are going to improve the world is just empty words. If God and Christ do not act on our behalf, we are doomed, and crying is certainly appropriate. Thankfully, the angel stopped John’s crying by pointing out “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.”

Rev 5:5

**“one of the elders.”** That is, one of the 24 elders mentioned in Revelation 4. See commentary on Revelation 4:4. There were no chapter breaks in the original text of the Bible, so it was much easier to see that the elders here in Revelation 5:5 are the same as the elders in Revelation 4, because the general context never changed.

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Root of David.”** See commentary on Romans 15:12.

Rev 5:6

**“the middle of the throne *area* and of the four living creatures.”** Jesus Christ is the “middle,” standing as the central figure. He is in the middle of the throne area, the living creatures, and the elders. All attention is on him.

**“standing.”** Though the lamb had the markings of one that had been killed, the fact that Jesus is standing points to the fact that he is in all his authority, similarly to when Stephen saw him standing at the right hand of God in Acts 7:56.

**“*looking* as if it had been slain.”** The particle “as if” is often used in Revelation to point out what John saw. This phrase is not throwing doubt on the death of Jesus, but rather pointing out that Jesus looked as if he had been slain. He did the same when he appeared to Thomas and showed his hands and side to Thomas (John 20:27). This one picture of Jesus tells in short form the essence of the Gospel: victory through sacrifice. The most profound reason for the wounds of death being now visible is so that everyone can see the way to victory is through sacrifice.

**“the seven spirits of God.”** These are seven high-ranking spirit beings. See commentary on Revelation 1:4.

Rev 5:9

**“singing a new song.”** The believers are singing to Jesus Christ, a way of honoring and worshiping him.

[For more on singing to Jesus, see commentary on Eph. 5:19.]

**“You are worthy.”** The elders are speaking to Jesus. The Greek text places the emphasis on “worthy” by putting it first in the sentence such that it reads, “Worthy are you to take….” However, that wording is slightly awkward in English, and furthermore, the emphasis implied by the Greek wording does not transfer well into English.

**“with your blood you purchased for God.”** The reason the elders honor Christ is different from the reason they worship God (see commentary on Rev. 4:11).

Rev 5:14

**“worshiped.”** In this verse, the elders fell and worshiped the Lamb, who is Jesus Christ. As God’s only begotten Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ is certainly worthy of our worship.

[For more on worship, see commentary on Matt. 4:10.]

**Revelation Chapter 6**

Rev 6:2

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“a white horse.”** The white horse at first looks like a horse bringing a righteous person, but even though the one on it had a crown, we find out that he was only bent on war and conquest. The seals are the beginnings of birth pains (Matt. 24:8), and the first seal is a false Messiah, just as Jesus said there would be (Matt. 24:5; Mark 13:5-6; Luke 21:8). A false Messiah seems at first to be the real thing and can inspire hope and joy, but after their true nature is revealed people who are paying attention can see them for who they really are. That is why Jesus told his disciples such false Messiahs would come and said, “See that no one leads you astray” (Mark 13:5).

[For more on the seals and the Tribulation period, see commentary on Matt. 24:8.]

Rev 6:4

**“earth so that.”** The Greek has a *kai* (and) between the words “earth” and “so that,” which places more emphasis on the last phrase. The sentence would then read, “…to take peace from the earth, even so that they would slay one another.” The *kai* (and, even) makes the English more difficult to read without really changing the meaning, and so many versions omit it.

This second seal involves the wars that Jesus foretold would come about as part of the “beginnings” of the birth pains in the Tribulation period (Matt. 24:8). Jesus said there would be wars both close to Israel and far away from it (Matt. 24:6-7; Mark 13:7-8; Luke 21:9-10).

[For more on the seals and the Tribulation period, see commentary on Matt. 24:8.]

Rev 6:6

**“a voice.”** We are not told who is speaking.

**“A measure of wheat.”** The “measure” is the Greek word *choinix*, which was about two pints, and was the measure of grain given to slaves for food for a day, which was barely enough to sustain them.

**for a denarius.”** A denarius was a day’s wage (cf. Matt. 20:2, 9). Ancient records show us that a denarius would buy 16 *choinix* in the time of Cicero, and 20 in the time of Trajan. So this would have been a great famine even by ancient standards, but for us in the USA today, it would be a huge famine indeed if a day’s wage only bought two pints of wheat or six pints of barley.

This third seal involves the famines that Jesus foretold would come about as part of the “beginnings” of the birth pains in the Tribulation period (Matt. 24:8). Jesus said there would be famines during the birth pains of the Tribulation period (Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:11), which is the first half of the Tribulation, before the Antichrist comes to full power.

[For more on the seals and the Tribulation period, see commentary on Matt. 24:8.]

Rev 6:8

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“Death and the Grave.”** Both Death and the Grave are personified in this verse, and likely refer to real demons by those names, as well as the concepts their names represent. The Adversary holds the power of death, so it is no surprise that there are demons called “Death” and “Grave.”

**“authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill.”** To understand this we must understand that this was part of John’s vision of the future great tribulation which people knew was to come over the whole earth (see commentary on Dan. 12:1). Between the 7 seals and the other judgments (trumpets; thunders, and bowls), no wonder humans left alive on earth will be scarce as gold with very few left (Isa. 13:9-13; 24:1-23). Although sometimes in the Bible the “world” is the Roman world, given the prophecies of the Great Tribulation that occur in the Old Testament and Gospels, there is no reason to see that meaning here. Frankly, even if the judgments killed one-fourth of what at that time was the Roman Empire, which included Europe, North Africa, Egypt, Turkey, and much of the Middle East, the devastation would be horrific beyond description.

**“broadsword.”** See commentary on Luke 2:35.

**“and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth.”** This fourth seal involves death by many different ways, and kind of summarizes the troubles that Jesus foretold would come about as part of the “beginnings” of the birth pains in the Tribulation period (Matt. 24:8). Jesus said there would be wars, famines, and plagues during the birth pains of the Tribulation period (Matt. 24:5-7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:9-11), which is the first half of the Tribulation, before the Antichrist comes to full power. The “plagues” of Luke 21:11 are well represented here in Revelation 6:8 by the word “death.”

[For more on the seals and the Tribulation period, see commentary on Matthew 24:8.]

Rev 6:9

**“souls.”** See commentary on Revelation 20:4.

Rev 6:10

**“they cried with a great voice.”** This is the figure of speech “personification,” whereby inanimate things are said to speak. These souls (people) are dead.

**“Master.”** The Greek is *despotēs* (#1203 δεσπότης) means master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cf. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). It is used both as a title for God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24), and a title for Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4). Here it is used of Jesus Christ, since he is the one breaking the seals and they speak to him in response to his actions. See commentary on Luke 2:29.

**“holy and true.”** Both “holy” and “true” are substantives, adjectives used as nouns.

[For more on substantives, see the commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

Rev 6:11

**“a long white robe.”** The robe was the outer garment that people wore for warmth and protection from the weather. A white robe was beautiful and a sign of purity and honor.

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

Rev 6:12

**“sackcloth.”** The Greek is *sakkos* (#4526 σάκκος). “Sackcloth” is the rough cloth from which sacks for carrying or storing things were made. It is quite similar in texture to burlap. It was made of “hair,” but culturally it was made from goat hair, which was long and black.

[For more on goats and goat hair, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

**“a great earthquake.”** This sixth seal involves a great earthquake, and earthquakes are part of the tribulation that Jesus foretold would come about as part of the “beginnings” of the birth pains in the Tribulation period (Matt. 24:8). Jesus said there would be wars, famines, and plagues during the birth pains of the Tribulation period (Matt. 24:7; Mark 13:8; Luke 21:10-11), which is the first half of the Tribulation, before the Antichrist comes to full power.

[For more on the seals and the Tribulation period, see commentary on Matt. 24:8.]

Rev 6:15

**“hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains.”** This is foretold in Isaiah 2:19.

Rev 6:16

Referring to Hosea 10:8.

Rev 6:17

**“the great day of their wrath has come.”** Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, people have had troubles, trials, and tribulation in life. However, because of the sins against God that mankind has committed, God foretold that there would be a relatively short and specific time during which the wrath of God would be poured out upon the whole world. This time of wrath, which many Christians refer to as “the Tribulation,” is referred to by many names in the Bible, often as “the Day of the Lord,” which is sometimes just called, “the day,” or “that day.” Although the references to this specific time of wrath are far too many to list here, a sampling includes: Isaiah 13:9; 63:1-6; Ezekiel 30:3; 38:19-23; Daniel 12:1; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 31; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Zechariah 14:1-6; Malachi 4:1; Matthew 3:7; 13:37-43 and 24:4-14.

The book of Revelation is the clearest picture of the time of the wrath of God in the Bible. The whole period of tribulation will take place over seven years, and will be a time of judgments that increase in severity. There are the seal judgments in Revelation 6, the trumpet judgments in chapters 8 and 9, the thunder judgments in chapter 10, the bowl judgments in chapter 16, and finally the Battle of Armageddon in chapter 19.

The seal judgments, which start very early in the tribulation period, are part of the wrath of God, as we see here. The people who are saying that the day of wrath has come are speaking of the wrath they are experiencing at the time; they do not know about the following judgments because they neither know nor believe the Bible.

[For more about the Old Testament prophecies of the tribulation, see commentary on Dan. 12:1.]

**Revelation Chapter 7**

Rev 7:9

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Rev 7:12

**“The blessing, and the glory.”** Revelation 5:13 is quite similar.

Rev 7:14

**“made them white in the blood of the lamb.”** This is a paradox. Washing in blood makes a garment red, so the paradox catches our attention and forces us to think about how the blood of the Lamb could make garments white. The truth is even more profound than that, because the only way to be white and clean is by washing in the blood of the Lamb.

**Revelation Chapter 8**

Rev 8:9

**“soul *life*.”** Contrary to common Christian teaching, God created animals with “soul,” which is what gives them life (note the Hebrew text of Gen. 1:20, 21, 24, 30, etc.).

Rev 8:13

**“How terrible!”** The Greek word is *ouai* (#3759 οὐαί, pronounced ooh-'eye). For an explanation of the meaning of *ouai*, see commentary on Matthew 11:21. In this context, *ouai* is an expression of declaration and warning about the grief and disaster that is coming to people of earth in this time of great tribulation.

**“high overhead.”** The Greek *mesouranēma* (#3321 μεσουράνημα) literally means “middle heaven,” and it refers to the highest point in the sky, in other words, straight overhead. It is the point the sun occupies at noon. The eagle was not far off at the horizon, but directly overhead, where his voice could be clearly heard by those on earth.

**“saying with a loud voice.”** God has the power to give human speech to animals. God once made a donkey speak (Num. 22:28-30).

**Revelation Chapter 9**

Rev 9:2

**“smoke from the pit.”** The Greek, “smoke of the pit,” is a genitive of origin, meaning smoke from the pit.

Rev 9:3

**“locusts.”** These are not ordinary locusts. They appear out of smoke coming from the abyss, which appears to be another name for Tartarus. Since the “locusts” come from the smoke from the abyss, and thus likely from the abyss itself, they are either demons or the creation of demons, perhaps some kind of genetically modified creature. For one thing, the Bible says ordinary locusts do not have a king (Prov. 30:27), but these “locusts” do, and his name is “Destroyer,” (Rev. 9:11; “Abaddon” in Hebrew, and “Apollyon” in Greek, both mean “Destroyer”). Furthermore, the description of these “locusts” is nothing like normal locusts. They do not look, or act, like large grasshoppers. Their shape is like horses, and they have human-like faces, gold crowns on their heads, lion-like teeth, and scorpion-like tails that sting people. Furthermore, they don’t eat green plants, they torment humans.

[For more on the abyss, see commentary on Rev. 20:1. For more on Tartarus, see commentary on 2 Pet. 2:4.]

Rev 9:12

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Rev 9:16

**“the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice ten thousand times ten thousand.”** If literal, this would be an army of 200 million. However, it may be a figurative number or a hyperbole. It would not in any case be “exact.” Also, despite the number of commentators who believe this is a human army, it seems clear from the description in the next several verses that this is some kind of demonic army.

It has been estimated that at the time of Christ the population of the earth was between 200 and 300 million. If Revelation 9:16 is understood to be a human army, one thing it does show is that when John penned Revelation, he penned it as a future prophecy, not as the preterists believe, that the events of Revelation had already happened. By this time in Revelation at least 25% of the world’s population was already dead (cf. Rev. 6:8), so there is no way an army of 200 million could come from the area of Russia and Asia proper.

**Revelation Chapter 10**

Rev 10:5

**“lifted up his right hand.”** One way a person swore a solemn oath was to raise his hand and swear. See commentary on Genesis 14:22.

Rev 10:7

**“sacred secret.”** The REV translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

**Revelation Chapter 11**

Rev 11:1

**“Get up and measure.”** That the angel tells John to go measure the Temple connects this section of Scripture and the temple of the Great Tribulation period to the vision of Ezekiel’s Temple that the angel measured, which will be built in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom (cf. Ezek. 50:5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 19, etc.). Herod’s Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in AD 70. Another one will be built that will exist during the Great Tribulation, as we see here, and that the Antichrist will enter (2 Thess. 2:4). That one also will be destroyed. Then after Armageddon, when Jesus Christ sets up his Millennial Kingdom, he will oversee the building of another Temple as described in Ezekiel 40-44 (Zech. 6:12-13). Measuring this temple where people worship in the Tribulation period not only connects this temple back to Ezekiel’s vision of the Millennial Temple, but also connects it to the New Jerusalem, the everlasting dwelling of God and His people (Rev. 21:5).

**“sanctuary.”** This is the temple that will exist in the future, in between the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 and Armageddon. It is not the Temple described in Ezekiel, which will be the Millennial Temple. Although there is not a temple in Jerusalem now, the Bible assures us that there will be a temple during the time of the book of Revelation. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:4, the Antichrist will enter into that temple, and Jesus said that the Abomination would be in the Holy Place (Matt. 24:15).

In this case, the word “sanctuary” is correct. The Greek word is *naos* (#3485 ναός, pronounced nä-'ŏs), which refers to the “Temple proper,” consisting of the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. The word is not *hieron* (#2411 ἱερόν, pronounced he-err-'on), which refers to the entire temple complex, including the temple courts (cf. Mark 11:15).

A large number of scholars insist that this “sanctuary” is the Church (or believers), but that is not the case and there is no reason not to take the text literally. There will be a literal temple in Jerusalem at this time. We can see why people would want to make this temple into a figure of speech. Preterists, who believe the events of Revelation have already occurred, could not be correct in their interpretation if this referred to a literal Temple, because the Temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed by the time John wrote.

We do not need to invent allegories for the sanctuary, the altar, and the temple courts. They are all literal and will all be present in the temple during that future time.

**“altar.”** The Temple has two altars: the altar of incense inside the Holy Place and the altar of sacrifice just outside it. Since we cannot see into the sanctuary to see the altar of incense, and John was not a priest and could not go in there, this must refer to the altar of sacrifice. Thus it seems clear that Jewish sacrifice will restart before or during the Tribulation.

**“those who worship there.”** These people who are worshiping, who the angel tells John to count, will not be unbelieving Jews, but believing Jews who come to Christ after the Rapture. These believing Jews return to the Law of the Old Testament but believe in the Messiah. There would be no need to measure (i.e., “count”) unbelievers because there will be countless thousands of them. That there was no need to count unbelievers is also shown by the fact that the angel tells John not to measure the Temple court because it was given to the Gentiles, the unbelievers, and that is in stark contrast to the angel who was with Ezekiel and who measured the Temple court of the Millennial Temple (Ezek. 40-44, cf. esp. Ezek. 42:15-20). At the Millennial Temple described by Ezekiel there will not be any unbelievers worshiping, so the courts are measured.

Rev 11:2

**“42 months.”** Daniel 9 speaks of 490 years from the command to build Jerusalem until the Messiah (Dan. 9:25-27). This will consist of two periods of sevens, one for 62 and one for 7. The sevens are years. After the 69 sevens (483 years) the Messiah is killed.

After 483 years there was to be another 7-year period (Dan. 9:27). The “ruler who will come,” the antichrist, will make a 7-year covenant with Israel. However, in the middle of the 7 years, he will break that off. The last 7 would have followed the first 69 sevens immediately except God intervened with the Administration of the Sacred Secret.

After 3 ½ years of the seven years of Tribulation, the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and rules the world. During these last 3½ years, God protects some of the people of Israel from the antichrist. This 3½ year period is referred to in three different ways in Scripture.

1. Time, Times, and Half a time (i.e., a year, 2 years, and half a year): Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 12:14.
2. 42 months: Revelation 11:2; 13:5.
3. 1260 days. Revelation 12:6. (1260 days is 42 months of 30 days each).

Daniel 12:11-12 refer to an extension on the 1260 days needed to gather the nations for Judgment (probably 30 days), and then judge them (probably 45 days): (Matt. 25:31ff), Also, the 1260 days that the two witnesses prophesied (Rev. 11:3) started in the first 3½ years and ends in the second, and does not equate to the 1260 days of Revelation 12:6. After the 1260 days, 42 months, or 3½ years of the reign of the Antichrist, comes the battle of Armageddon.

Rev 11:3

**“1260 days.”** The 1,260 days of Revelation 11:3 is 3 ½ years, and is the same length of time as the 3 ½ years that the Antichrist will be in power during the last half of the Tribulation. However, the two witnesses will not be active during the same 1,260 days that the Antichrist will be in power. The time periods overlap, but they are not the same. It is especially important to notice that the time periods are not the same because one might assume they were the same because Revelation 11:2 and 11:3 are right together and both mention the same time duration (42 months is 1,260 days). Nevertheless, the two time periods do not start and end at the same time. The two witnesses start before the Antichrist comes to power, and they are killed by him before he meets his end in the Battle of Armageddon.

Before the Battle of Armageddon, there will be a time of great tribulation (cf. Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21). The Tribulation will last seven years, starting with the covenant made between the Antichrist and Israel, and ending with the Battle of Armageddon, when Jesus defeats the Antichrist. We learn about the seven years from Daniel 9:25-27, which speaks of a “week,” which in that context is a week of years, or seven years. We also learn the duration of the seven-year time period of the Tribulation from the fact that half of the seven years is 3 ½ years, a figure that is stated several different ways. The Antichrist is in power for “a time, times, and half a time,” that is, “a year, [two] years, and half a year” (Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 12:14). That same time period is also recorded as “42 months” (Rev. 11:2; 13:5) and 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6). All these time periods equal 3 ½ years, and they refer to the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation.

The Antichrist, also called the “beast” (Rev. 19:19-20), and the “little horn” (Dan. 7:8), makes a covenant with Israel for the “week,” (seven years), but in the middle of the seven years, he breaks the covenant and comes to his full power. The Antichrist will be exercising the fullness of his power during the last 3 ½ years of the seven-year Tribulation.

The two witnesses start witnessing before the Antichrist comes to power, and are killed by him (Rev. 11:7) before the end of the Tribulation. We can see this because after they are killed and then raised up to heaven by God in a special resurrection (Rev. 11:11-12), the third “Woe” comes (Rev. 11:14); and the seven bowl judgments come (Rev. 16:1-21). Then later, the Antichrist is killed in the Battle of Armageddon that ends the Tribulation (Rev. 19:19-20).

It is appropriate that the two witnesses have the same amount of time to witness for God as the Antichrist has to turn people away from God, and that is especially clear because those time periods are given one right after the other, in Revelation 11:2 and 11:3. The Tribulation period will be a horrific time, and the stakes for serving God and not serving the Devil will be very high. The injustice to, and killing of, believers will be so widespread during the last half of the Tribulation that it will be difficult for anyone not to take sides with either God or the Devil. God’s people will be persecuted, often to death (Dan. 7:25; Rev. 13:7). Anyone who gives in to the Devil during that time will suffer greatly for it (Rev. 14:9-11), while any person who stays faithful to the Lord even though it costs him his life will be “blessed” because that person will receive everlasting life and rewards in Christ’s kingdom on earth (Rev. 14:13).

The two sides of the conflict between God and Satan will be so pronounced, and each person’s choice to serve God or the Devil will be so clear, that those people who survive the Tribulation and Armageddon will be divided into two groups, the “sheep” and the “goats.” The goats will be thrown into the Lake of Fire very soon after Armageddon, while the sheep will be allowed into Christ’s kingdom (Matt. 25:31-46).

In closing, we would like to say that it does not have to be the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation that God’s people need to be prepared to die for the Faith. Although the Devil will have great control over the earth in the Tribulation period, he has always exercised his power against God’s people and holds the power of death (Heb. 2:14). Over 2,500 years ago Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego understood this when they told Nebuchadnezzar they would rather burn to death in his furnace than worship his gods (Dan. 3:17-18). Christians need to have such confidence in their being raised from the dead to everlasting life that they lose their fear of death and are bold for God and faithful until death no matter what the circumstances are—there will be great rewards for that kind of service.

[For more on the duration of the last half of the Tribulation and the start of Christ’s kingdom on earth, see commentary on Dan. 12:11. For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on Christ’s future kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the rewards people receive for serving God, see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

Rev 11:8

**“Sodom.”** This is the figure of speech antonomasia (“name change”) where the real name is not used, but another name is used in order to import the characteristics of that other name.[[20]](#footnote-19149) Here, Jerusalem has been called “Sodom” to ascribe to her the sexual immorality and ungodliness of the city of Sodom in Genesis, which God destroyed by fire from heaven (Gen. 19). Jerusalem is called “Sodom” in Isaiah 1:10, and compared to Sodom in Ezekiel 16:46-56.

[See Word Study: “Antonomasia.”]

Rev 11:12

**“And they went up into heaven.”** The fact that the two witnesses went into heaven is evidence that heaven has some physicality; some properties of a physical place. See commentary on Acts 1:11 when Jesus was taken up to heaven.

**“the cloud.”** We would expect the text to say “a” cloud. The word “the” ties this incident back to the cloud that appeared at historic events such as the cloud that covered the men at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5), and the cloud in which Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9).

Rev 11:13

**“gave glory to the God of heaven.”** The meaning of this verse is hidden in the use of “glory,” which often refers to the honor, power, or prestige that one gets who is the best at something. For example, a victor in the gladiator arena can get “glory” from the loser while being despised by him. In this case, the people on earth granted that God had the power to bring the earthquake, but in the honor-shame society of the first century, the fact that they gave God “glory” did not mean they believed and repented, or that they somehow now worshiped God (cf. 1 Sam. 6:5).

Rev 11:14

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Rev 11:15

This quote from Exodus 15:18 is similar to Psalm 146:10 and Daniel 2:44.

**“has become the kingdom.”** This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect, the Greek using the aorist tense. The kingdom was not yet the possession of Christ and God, but it soon would be.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**Revelation Chapter 12**

Rev 12:1

**“a woman.”** The “woman” in this chapter is basically Israel, but with somewhat different meanings in the different verses, which can be determined from the verse itself. The woman in Rev. 12:1 may refer to the constellation Virgo, but in any case, it represents Israel, which throughout the Old Testament was portrayed as a woman. The woman in Rev. 12:4 is also Israel, but is personified in Mary. The woman in Rev. 12:6 and 12:13, from whom the Messiah came, is Israel, but more specifically the faithful in Israel who are marked by God and part of the 144,000, whom the Dragon ruthlessly persecutes during the Tribulation.

So again in Revelation 12, we see that the book of Revelation is not about the Christian Church, but is about Jewish and Gentile believers as individual groups, with a special emphasis on Israel (cf. Rev. 7:1-9). The Dragon (the Devil) has a special hatred for God’s historic people, the Jews, and goes out to specifically attack them, while God, who has a special love for Israel, especially protects them.

Rev 12:3

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

“**Dragon.”** The Greek word *drakōn* (#1404 δράκων) means “dragon.” One of the New Testament names for the Devil is “the Dragon.” Since the Devil is not literally a dragon, this is the figure of speech hypocatastasis comparing the Devil with a dragon. The name “Dragon” emphasizes his fierce, ferocious qualities. Like a dragon, the Slanderer (Devil) is powerful, ferocious, pitiless, merciless, dangerous, and deadly.

[For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

[For more on Dragon and the other names of the Slanderer (Devil), see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil”.]

**“diadems.”** The Greek is *diadēma* (#1238 διάδημα). The diadem is different from a “crown.” Diadem is an English loanword, “properly the sign of royalty among the Persians, a blue band trimmed with white, on the tiara, hence a symbol of royalty generally; *royal headband*.[[21]](#footnote-23352)

Rev 12:4

**“a third of the stars of heaven.”** This verse contains historical facts without being focused on the chronology. Satan’s rebellion against God was before mankind was created, while his attempts to kill the baby Jesus were only about 2,000 years ago. The “stars of heaven” are angels and spirit beings. The Bible refers to angels and spirit beings as “stars” in a number of places (see commentary on Isa. 14:13).

Revelation 12:4 tells us that a third of the angels of heaven followed the Devil in his rebellion against God. That lets us know that Satan has a large army of spirit beings, but exactly how large is unknown. Also, some of Satan’s host is imprisoned in Tartarus (2 Pet. 2:4); nevertheless, from the spiritual devastation evidenced around the world, the Devil has many thousands of demons who follow him and wreak havoc on earth. Matthew 25:41 also implies that the Devil has a large number of fallen angel followers, but again we are not told how many.

Rev 12:5

**“a rod of iron.”** That Jesus will conquer the earth and rule with a rod of iron is a well-established prophecy and occurs four times in Scripture (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15), and for more detail see commentary on Revelation 2:27.

Rev 12:6

**“woman.”** In this verse the “woman” is Israel, but not all of Israel. Here it refers specifically to the 144,000 (Rev. 7:4-8) or to part of that group which are sealed and protected by God. Obviously, not every Jew fled into the desert. (See commentary on Rev. 12:1). The 1,260 days is the last half of the seven-year Tribulation.

Rev 12:7

**“the dragon and his angels.”** Ages ago, when the Devil originally turned against God and became God’s enemy, some of the angels joined the Devil. These are referred to here in Revelation 12:7 as “his (the Devil’s) angels” (cf. Matt. 25:41). The Bible often refers to the Devil’s angels as “demons.”

Rev 12:9

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the commentary on Mark 1:13.

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“thrown down to earth.”** In the future, the Devil and his angels will once and for all be expelled from heaven and thrown down to earth. That will be the result of the war described in Revelation 12:7-9. Most Christians believe that the Devil and demons were thrown to earth when the Devil rebelled against God early in history, before the creation of Adam and Eve, but that is not the case.

We sometimes refer to the angels who follow Satan and oppose God as “fallen angels.” But we must remember that the Bible never uses the term “fallen angels,” we have invented that term to describe the angels who follow Satan. All the angels, both good and bad, are spirit beings and still naturally reside in the spirit world and in heaven. But the angels who decided to follow Satan now are “fallen” from obedience to God, and they now spend much of their time on earth afflicting God’s earthly creation. Perhaps it would be more accurate, or at least less misleading, to call them “Satan’s angels” or “rebellious angels” instead of “fallen angels.”

Satan’s angels are like Satan himself in that they divide their time between heaven and earth. Isaiah 14:12 says Satan was “fallen from heaven,” but that refers to his falling from his exalted position in heaven, not that he fell in some physical sense from the sky down to earth. When we read the Bible we can see that both the Devil and Jesus, and angels and demons, move back and forth between heaven and earth. Jacob’s vision of the great stairway (“ladder”) going into heaven had angels both going up to heaven and also down to earth on it (Gen. 28:12).

Scripture makes it quite clear that Satan goes back and forth between heaven and earth. In Genesis 3:1-5, Satan was in the Garden of Eden. Then, in Job 1-2, he was in heaven at a gathering of spirit beings. In Matthew 4:3-11 and Luke 4:3-13, Satan was again back down on earth personally tempting Jesus Christ. Then, he went back up to heaven, but came back down when the 72 people Jesus sent out to heal and cast out demons were disrupting his kingdom (Luke 10:18). Then, in Revelation 12:10, the Devil is in heaven accusing the believers.

Revelation 12:4 says that the dragon’s tail dragged away one-third of the “stars” (angels) in heaven and cast them to earth, but that does not mean they do not have access to heaven. The demons are evil and now “of the earth,” but they have the same access to heaven as the Devil does, which is why they have to be once and for all cast out of heaven in Revelation 12:7-9. Satan and his demons still have access to heaven and can also inhabit the air above the earth, which is why angels and demons war in heaven (Dan. 10:12-14; Rev. 12:7-9), and why Christians fight “against the spiritual *forces* of evil in the heavenly *places*” (Eph. 6:12).

The Devil actually spends a good deal of time in heaven, because “day and night” he stands before the throne of God, which is in heaven, accusing the believers (Rev. 12:10). Furthermore, the godly angels who put up with the Devil’s evil presence are fed up with him and cannot wait for him to be finally thrown out of heaven and eventually cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10). When the Devil is finally cast out of heaven in the future, Scripture says, “rejoice, O heavens, and you who live in them.” But the Devil is thrown to earth, so Scripture then says, “Woe to the earth and the sea because the Slanderer has gone down to you, having great anger, knowing he has but a short time” (Rev. 12:12). So the Devil and his angels still have access to heaven, but that will come to an abrupt end sometime in the future.

**“his angels.”** What we refer to as “demons” (or “devils”) today are fallen angels, who joined Satan in his rebellion against God and became part of Satan’s demonic army of evil spirits, which is why demons are referred to as “his” angels in Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 12:9. The Bible refers to the spirits aligned with Satan as “angels” in Matthew 25:41; Jude 1:6; and Revelation 12:9.

[For more on these fallen spirits, see commentary on Matt. 25:41.]

Rev 12:10

**“Accuser.”** The Greek word is *katēgoreō* (#2723 κατηγορέω), and it means to accuse, to accuse before a judge. The Devil knows that God is righteous and just, so he uses people’s sin against them, and relentlessly accuses people. Often when tragedy strikes a person who has sinned, it is said that the person has “walked out from under the umbrella of God’s protection.” The teaching that God can do what He wants, when He wants, has completely obscured the truth that God wants to bless and help people, but He must be just, and if a person sins willfully over and over, eventually in the “heavenly court,” which is attended by angels and demons (cf. Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6), Satan will get to harm the person. Satan asked to harm Peter and the other apostles, but Jesus’ prayer stopped him (Luke 22:31). Because the Devil is the god of this world, there are some evil things he can just do without God’s permission (Satan is a lawbreaker, liar, and generally dishonest), and the war between God and the Devil is a real war, not a fake war.

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.” For more on the control over the world that Satan has, see the commentary on Luke 4:6.]

Rev 12:11

**“lives.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay). It is often translated “soul,” but it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here, “soul” primarily means their physical life (which is why many English versions have “lives”), but it includes the core of their being and mental and emotional life as well. There was nothing in their life these martyrs loved more than God and the Lord, so they did not give up their testimony even though it cost them their lives.

[For a more complete explanation of *psuchē,* “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Rev 12:12

**“the Devil.”** See commentary on Revelation 12:9.

Rev 12:13

**“woman.”** This “woman” is Israel, but especially the people of Israel who believed and were sealed, as we can see from the context. See commentary on Rev. 12:1 and 12:6).

Rev 12:14

**“a time, and times, and half a time.”** This is the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation, also counted as 1,260 days (Rev. 12:6).

Rev 12:17

**“to make war with the rest of her seed.”** This war is separate and distinct from the war that occurred when the Devil originally fought with God and dragged a third of the angels down with him (Rev. 12:4). This war occurs in the time of the book of Revelation when the Devil is cast out of heaven and no longer is able to come before God (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; Rev. 12:10).

Since “the woman” in Revelation 12:6, 13, 14, 16, is the part of Israel—the 144,000, that believed God and were sealed by Him for protection (Rev. 7:3-8; see commentary on Rev. 12:6)—in this case, “the rest of her seed” is most likely the Jews who are scattered around the earth who were not able to go into the wilderness to escape persecution. It is understandable that not every Jew would have the ability to join the Jews who left Israel to escape persecution, and furthermore, there are many Jews around the earth who would be horribly persecuted at this time. Because the verse says, “her seed, who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus,” it is also possible, although there is no way to know for sure, that “her seed” also includes Gentiles who believe at this time. After all, Gentiles who believe are children of Abraham, so it is possible they are included in the ones the Devil is said to make war on at this time. But the primary emphasis is that “her seed” would be Israel.

This verse gives us the explanation of why the Jews are so hated around the world. The Jews are only a very tiny part of the world’s total population, not even one percent. And they live on a very tiny piece of land that doesn’t have a lot of natural resources. Yet they are hated the world over simply because they are Jews. This does not make sense from any natural point of view, but it makes perfect sense when we understand that the Jews are God’s chosen people and that Satan hates them and instigates acts of hatred against them wherever they are.

**“And he stood on the sand of the sea.”** Moved to Revelation 13:1. For more information, see commentary on Revelation 13:1.

**Revelation Chapter 13**

Rev 13:1

**“And he stood on the sand of the sea.”** This phrase is the last sentence in Revelation 12:17 in most versions, but it should be the first part of the sentence of Revelation 13:1, which then reads, “And he stood on the sand of the sea, and I saw a beast coming up out of the sea….” The point is that the Dragon, the Devil, is directly related to the “beast” who gets its power from the Dragon and is the image of the Dragon (compare the description of the Dragon in Rev. 12:3 with the description of the beast in Rev. 13:1).

This is one of the places where the chapter break in the Bible is misplaced, and sadly, in this case, the misplacement causes us to miss a very important point in the Scripture; the intimate relationship between the dragon, who is the Devil, and the beast. Some other versions do what the REV does in just moving the phrase to the beginning of Revelation 13:1 (RV, NASB, NIV). Other versions leave the phrase at the end of chapter 12, but do not end it with a period after “sea,” but with a comma or semicolon, and then start Rev. 13:1 with a lowercase “and” (cf. ASV, CJB).

**“a beast coming up out of the sea.”** This beast, like the beasts of Daniel 7:2-8, is the figure of speech hypocatastasis, comparison by implication, and is an empire (in this case, a conglomeration of kingdoms) but it is an empire ruled by men, one of which is the “horn” who is also the “little horn” (Dan. 7:8), who is the one we sometimes refer to as “the Antichrist.” Thus the beast is clearly an empire in some verses such as Rev. 13:1, but refers to a person who is over it in Rev. 13:8. It is simply understood culturally that an empire has someone who is in charge.

The “sea” is a hypocatastasis for the people of the world (Rev. 17:15). That this beast comes out of the “sea” is indication that the Antichrist is a Gentile, not a Jew. This beast is much different from the beast in Rev. 13:11, who comes from the “earth.” The Greek word translated as “earth” is *gē* (#1093 γῆ, pronounced “gay”) can refer to the whole earth, but is often associated with Israel. Thus, the beast that comes up from the “earth” and who is called “the false prophet” (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10) is almost certainly a Jew.

[For more on hypocatastasis see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

**“ten horns.”** It is important to notice that the Dragon (who is the Devil; Rev. 12:9), is described the same way as the “beast,” the demonic system he promotes and maintains: (Rev. 12:3), “Look!, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.” Here, in Revelation 13:1, the beast is described in the same basic way: “I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns, and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems.” This does not mean that the beast is the Devil, but it does clue us to the fact that it is a system created and maintained by the Devil, in a very real sense made in the image of the Devil just as Christ is the image of God. If we want to see what God is like, look at Jesus. If we want to see what the Devil is like, look at the system that is made in his image.

The horns are ten kings (Rev. 17:12), and are also the ten “horns” of Daniel 7:7. They are called “horns” because they are powerful. The horns, like the horns of a bull, represented power, and horns were an ancient symbol of power. When someone was exalted and feeling “on top of the world” (either rightly or out of arrogance), his horn was up. Thus Psalm 75:5 says not to raise your horn against heaven, and Psalm 89:17 says that by God’s favor (grace) our horn is exalted. When someone’s power was broken, their head was down and their horn went into the ground. Thus, Job, who lived about the same time as Abraham, said that he had “thrust his horn in the dust” (Job 16:15). Sadly, as people are less and less connected with animals and how they hold their heads, the image of the horn being up or down is lost, and so many modern versions omit the word “horn” altogether and find other ways to translate the verses that have the idioms with horns. However, that makes verses such as Revelation 13:1, which calls the kings, “horns,” much harder to understand.

**“diadem”** See commentary on Revelation 12:3.

**“blasphemous.”** The Greek noun is *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία, pronounced blas-fay-'me-ah) and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. The very names of the evil described in this verse blaspheme God.

[For more on *blasphēmia*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Rev 13:2

**“and the dragon gave him his power.”** That the dragon, the Devil, gives the beast his power is alluded to in prophecy in Daniel 8:24, but it is not as clearly stated there as it is here. Then it is stated much more clearly in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. Here in Revelation 13:2 it is stated again.

Rev 13:5

**“blasphemies.”** The Greek noun is *blasphēmia* (#988 βλασφημία, pronounced blas-fay-'me-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmia*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Rev 13:6

**“utter blasphemies.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. This verse contains the verb, while Revelation 13:1 and 13:5 have the noun.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

**“those who dwell in heaven.”** “Those who dwell in heaven” are the angels and other spirit beings that are faithful to God and thus are enemies of the Devil and his people.

Rev 13:7

**“it was given to him to make war with the holy ones, and to overcome them.”** In the second half of the seven-year Great Tribulation, the Antichrist will come to power and rule the earth, and will make things very hard for believers. This was foretold in Daniel 7:25. Things will be so difficult for believers that the Bible says, “‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘let them rest from their labors’” (Rev. 14:13).

**“every tribe and people and tongue and nation.”** There is disagreement among commentators as to whether the antichrist will rule the whole world, or part of it. Although we lean toward the belief that he will rule the entire world, there is room for the possibility that he will not. The Bible often uses language referring to the whole world when it only means the whole world known at the time the Bible was written. Examples of when references to the whole world only referred to the world that was known or controlled at that time include 1 Kings 4:34; Daniel 4:1; and Luke 2:1. It is possible that there are places in the world that will not be directly controlled by the antichrist.

Rev 13:8

**“slain from the foundation of the world.”** The versions of the Bible are divided as to how the Greek text should be translated. The KJV, for example, translates the Greek the same way as the REV. In contrast, the NASB does not connect the word “slain” with the prepositional phrase, “from the foundation of the world,” but connects it with the phrase about being written in the book of life, thus having, “*everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”

Both of the above interpretations involve God’s foreknowledge and foreplanning. “Slain from the foundation of the world” is the natural reading of the Greek text, the phrases being in that order in the Greek. There should be no problem understanding this. First, we must remember that Jesus Christ is not only the redeemer of the human race, he is the redeemer of all of God’s creation. Ever since the fall of Satan the whole creation has been groaning (Rom. 8:22) and waiting for a redeemer. Thus, before God even created Adam, God had a plan for the restoration of His creation that involved the sacrifice of Christ.

God also planned for the fact that mankind would sin. Even if Adam lived without sinning, God would have known that at some point Adam’s progeny would sin, and thus He planned for their redemption. Thus, Jesus was both known, and we, the Church, were even chosen in him, before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20; Eph. 1:4). The Church, and Jesus did not literally exist before the foundation of the world, but were in the mind of God. God then revealed what He had in his mind via the prophecies He gave in the Old Testament.

The Church could not be said to be chosen in Christ if the plan of salvation was not plotted out beforehand, so Ephesians 1:4 makes no sense if the sacrificial death of Christ was not plotted out beforehand. Thus it makes perfect sense for the text to say that Jesus was slain before the foundation of the world—it was part of God’s plan for the salvation of His creation (cf. Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:18-20).

That being said, if the natural reading of the Greek text is “slain from the foundation of the world,” what would be a reason for moving the words of the Greek text around to create the reading in the NASB? The major reason is that the concept that the lamb was “slain” from the foundation of the world is “difficult,” and so some think that it is more natural that the Author meant the verse as the NASB has it. However, as we have seen, the death of Christ was part of God’s plan from the foundation of the world. Thus, there is really no problem at all if the verse says he was slain from the foundation of the world.

Another reason some theologians like the translation as the NASB has it is that then it is more clearly espousing the Calvinist doctrine that people’s names are written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, i.e., God predestines them either to salvation or damnation long before they are born. After all, if people’s names are written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, then God knows, and even determines, the fate of every person. This is not what Scripture teaches. God gives each person free will to make his or her own choices. God wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and we are the ones who decide whether we are saved or not.

Rev 13:9

**“he had better listen!”** The phrase “he had better listen” is the translation of the singular verb *akousatō* (ἀκουσάτω), a third-person singular imperative verb from *akouō*, “to hear, to listen.” In this case, the imperative mood is better translated “he better listen” or “he must listen” rather than “let him listen,” which is too weak for this context (see commentary on Rev. 2:7 and Matt. 11:15). The consequences for disobeying Christ and worshiping the Antichrist are so severe that anyone who values their future after the resurrection had better listen to Christ and not worship the Antichrist.

Rev 13:10

**“into captivity.”** This “captivity” can be any kind of captivity, including prison or being taken as a hostage by an enemy.

Rev 13:14

**“will deceive...by the signs.”** Signs in the physical world are never in and of themselves proof of God or godliness. Both God and the Devil have power, and so throughout history, both good and evil “prophets” have demonstrated power. The power must be in conjunction and agreement with the Word of God. Similarly, when it comes to the spoken Word, sincerity is no guarantee for truth. Many sincere people are wrong about what they believe.

**Revelation Chapter 14**

Rev 14:1

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Rev 14:5

**“without blemish”** See commentary on Ephesians 1:4.

Rev 14:6

**“And I saw another angel flying high overhead.”** The book of Revelation has a lot of angelic activity, and John saw many angels in his vision. We should realize that angels have always been as active throughout history as they are in Revelation. In this case, when John writes that he saw “another angel flying high overhead,” it is not that he had seen an angel flying overhead before, because no such angel is mentioned, but rather the text is saying, “And I saw another angel, this one flying high overhead.”

**“high overhead.”** See commentary on Revelation 8:13, where the eagle is flying high overhead.

**“having the good news.**” Jesus had foretold that the Good News of the kingdom would be preached to the whole world, and then the end would come (Matt. 24:14). Any study of the Tribulation period shows how difficult preaching the Good News will be because the Antichrist and evil people will pretty much control the world. But the prophecy of Jesus will be fulfilled—by an angel flying high in the sky and proclaiming the Good News to the people of earth. Furthermore, soon after this angel proclaims the good news, the seven last plagues, the bowl judgments, come upon the earth (Rev. 16:1-21), and then Jesus comes from heaven and conquers it and defeats the army of the enemy (Rev. 19:11-21).

Rev 14:8

**“fallen, fallen.”** The word “fallen” is repeated twice for emphasis. It is the figure of speech epizeuxis.[[22]](#footnote-12321) In the Greek text, “fallen” is in the past (aorist tense) even though the event has not happened yet. This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect. “Babylon” was not yet fallen, but its fall was certain.

[For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Eph. 2:6.]

**“Babylon.”** This is almost certainly not the literal city of Babylon. There have been many Babylons since Nimrod first built Babylon soon after Noah’s Flood (Gen. 10:8-10). The Devil is constantly promoting centers of power and influence through which he can work to corrupt others. Evil people cannot successfully work the soil (Gen. 4:12), which is why Cain, after killing Abel, went off and built a city (Gen. 4:17), and cities have been centers of evil ever since.

Nimrod’s Babylon was a center of evil, and was followed by many other Babylons which promote cultural, commercial, spiritual, and personal rebellion against God and against righteousness. Literal Babylon lost influence as powers like Egypt grabbed the limelight, but it rose again in time to become a world power and destroy Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah, who wrote: “Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD’s hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad” (Jer. 51:7). But Daniel’s prophecy of the succession of kingdoms (Dan. 2:36-45), made it clear that literal Babylon would fall again, then would come Persia, Greece, and then Rome. Rome was the clear frontrunner for the designation “Babylon” during its day, but its candle grew dim too.

The centuries have seen “Babylon” shift from place to place. The evidence is good that end-times “Babylon” will be a city, but it will have rulers and rule over a territory and empire, which are often included in the meaning of the city name. The Devil is constantly working, always trying to spread his evil across the globe. We do not know how long God will wait before the Great Tribulation and we can be sure that the fortunes of the cities of earth will continue to shift, but no matter which city is “Babylon” when the End comes, the Devil is always the power behind the throne. Thus, one of the beauties of using the name “Babylon” here is that it reveals the evil power behind the city, but is not tied to a specific city.

[For more information on “Babylon,” see commentary on Rev. 17:1.]

**“of the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”** The Greek text’s use of three genitives in a row, as well as vocabulary that is used in two different senses, has caused quite a division among commentators. The Greek word translated “passion” is *thumos* (#2372 θυμός, pronounced thoo-'mos), and means “anger, wrath, passion, excitement.” Because it is mostly used in Revelation to refer to anger, many commentators assume this is a mixed metaphor, somehow referring both to the Whore’s wine and sexual immorality, and God’s anger and wrath. But that mixed metaphor is unlikely and unnecessary. It is well established in Greek literature that *thumos* can refer to passion or excitement, and there is no reason it cannot mean that here as well in the other verses in the Bible that refer to the passion of sexual immorality, especially as it is excited by wine. E. W. Bullinger says in his commentary: “If we take the word *thumos* as meaning ‘inflammatory’ or ‘exciting,’ as it does when used of wine, all difficulty is taken away.”[[23]](#footnote-25192) David Aune says, “The term *thumos* is used here meaning ‘intense desire’ and in verse 10 meaning ‘fury, intense anger.’”[[24]](#footnote-23439) Aune recognizes this shift of the meaning of the word *thumos* in this section of Revelation, and refers to it as one of the many instances of a play on words in the book of Revelation.

Lenski points out that the phrase here in Revelation 14:8, and the same phrase in Rev. 18:3, and the very similar phrase in Rev. 17:2, all are governed by the pronoun “her.”[[25]](#footnote-26292) Thus the introduction of the idea of God’s wrath simply from the vocabulary is not satisfactory, especially since there are other explanations of the phrase.

The two genitives, “passion” and “sexual immorality” can be constructed either as “passionate sexual immorality” or as “sexually immoral passion.” The REV favors “passionate sexual immorality” because throughout the Bible, “sexual immorality” was used both literally for the sin of sexual immorality and also used figuratively for idolatry and other immoral acts. When we keep in mind that some idolatry was intertwined with actual sexual immorality, it seems more consistent with the whole Bible that God is speaking against her “sexual immorality,” than “sexually immoral passion.” However, we should realize that that idea is basically the same.

It has been known for ages that wine inflames passions that lead people to set aside moral and physical restraints and behave immorally. Habakkuk shows us that the ancients understood the connection between wine and sexual passion: “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies” (Hab. 2:15 NIV84). Since it was well-known that wine could lead to passionate sexual immorality, we can see why God used “wine” figuratively in Revelation.

The “wine” that has been flowing from Babylon is a figure that goes back into the Old Testament. Jeremiah 51:7 says, “Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD’s hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad.” The nations and people who drink of Babylon’s wine act like insane people: they rebel against their Creator as if there was no consequence for it.

Actually, rebellion and idolatry did not start with Babylon in Jeremiah’s time, but were rooted in Babylon all the way back in Genesis, and spread all over the world. This fact is expressed in the use of the perfect tense of the verb “drink” in the Greek text, which is hard to exactly translate into English, because it implies a past action that is still going on. Lenski has, “has been making all the nations to drink,”[[26]](#footnote-32584) that is, Babylon has been making people drunk with immorality for a very long time. We see this even more clearly when we understand “Babylon” to be a central location for Satan’s power over God’s people, be it Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome, or the Islamic caliphate. This also in part explains why “Babylon” is referred to as a “mystery,” or more accurately, “a sacred secret.” From the great prostitute, Babylon, flowed the wine that inflamed people and got them to participate fully, or passionately, in unrestrained behavior and rebellion against God.

What we see in this verse, and Revelation 17:2 and 18:3, is that the people of the world have been and are still today intoxicated by sexual immorality, idolatry, and rebellion against God. In the end, the people who join Babylon will be like Babylon: “Fallen, fallen,” and “will drink of the wine of the fury of God” (Rev. 14:10). God’s people need to honor God by following His commands and staying separate from the world’s way of doing things.

Rev 14:9

**“If anyone worships.**” By sending this angel with a warning, God makes sure that everyone on earth is aware of what will happen to them if they worship the Beast, the Antichrist. God loves people and gives them a choice, and a chance to avoid the torments of the Lake of Fire.

Rev 14:10

**“will drink of the wine of the fury of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his wrath.”** This is the same basic terminology that is used in Revelation 16:19, where it refers to the wrath being poured out upon people during the Great Tribulation. Given that vocabulary, Revelation 14:10 could well be saying that those who worship the Antichrist will get the fullness of God’s wrath during the Tribulation and then also suffer in the Lake of Fire. There are six uses of the Greek word for “wrath” in the book of Revelation, and five of the six clearly refer to the wrath that people experience during the Tribulation (Rev. 6:16, 17; 11:18; 16:19, 19:15). So, given that and given the similarity between the vocabulary here in Revelation 14:10 and in Revelation 16:19, it seems that this use of “wrath” also refers to the wrath that is poured out during the Tribulation.

Rev 14:11

**“for ages of ages.”** The Greek is αἰῶνας αἰώνων αἰών; literally, “for ages of ages.” This is a hyperbole, an overstatement. See the commentary on Rev. 20:10, which has similar wording.

**“day and night.”** The meaning of this phrase can be seen by noticing how it is used in other verses. Paul preached “night and day” to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:9), and later prayed for them “night and day” (1 Thess. 3:10). First, we see it does not necessarily mean “constantly,” although it could in the context of future torment. Second, it does not mean it goes on forever. Both Paul’s preaching for the Thessalonians, and his prayers to see them, came to an end at some point. Similarly, the person who sows seed in the ground sleeps and gets up “night and day” while the seed is growing (Mark 4:27). In this example, as with the one involving Paul, the phrase “day and night” does not mean he sleeps and rises all day every day, but rather that there is a general pattern of sleeping and rising. Furthermore, there is an end to his activity. Another example is when Satan is said to be in heaven accusing the brothers “day and night” (Rev. 12:10), but we know that there were times he was on earth, not in heaven, so the phrase does not necessarily mean all day every day, and we know Satan’s accusations will come to an end. The point the verse is making is that those thrown into Gehenna have no guarantee of rest, and likely will have no rest at all, either day or night, until they are consumed and annihilated.

Rev 14:12

**“trust in Jesus.”** Now that Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of God, we are to trust him as well as God. When Jesus was alive on earth, he taught his disciples to trust God (cf. Mark 11:22) However, he made it clear that God gave him all authority (Matt. 28:18), and it would be at his voice the dead would be raised (John 5:25).

Rev 14:13

**“in the Lord.”** See Word Study: “In the Lord.”

**“the Spirit.”** This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

**“let them rest.”** It seems best to translate this indicative verb as a command (cf. HCSB, NAB). See commentary on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him.”

**“their works follow them.”** The people may be dead, but their works follow them. They are like Adam’s son Abel, who “though he is dead, he still speaks” (Heb. 11:4) because of his righteous life. So too, the righteous believers in the Great Tribulation who will be martyred for their faith will have exhibited obedience and faithfulness to God and will have given a godly and powerful testimony that follows them even in death. The world is a very evil place, and it takes constant and diligent effort to live a godly lifestyle and constantly endure the persecution that comes with it (2 Tim. 3:12). When the godly believer who lives in terrible times finally does die, they “rest” from their hard work and await their resurrection into a new and wonderful life, with a healthy and powerful new body and loads of wonderful people and great food, and of course the personal presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev 14:14

**“look.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“I saw.”** This is John seeing by revelation vision the Lord Jesus in his exalted state.

**“and sitting on the cloud *I saw* one like the Son of Man.”** The one sitting on the cloud is Jesus, and here he is described as “one ‘like’ the Son of Man” because he is in his exalted state and about to come to earth and fight the Battle of Armageddon, so it is likely that his countenance was stern and focused, not relaxed and peaceful.

Rev 14:15

**“And another angel came out of the sanctuary.”** Here we see that God is still the one in charge of the timing of the End Times events, and still giving direction to Jesus Christ even in his exalted state. Jesus had said that no one, not even the Son himself, knows the timing of Jesus’ coming (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32), and here we see that is precisely the case: God in His Temple sends an angel to tell Jesus that the time has now come for him to return to earth and fight the Battle of Armageddon, which he does (cf. Rev. 19:11-21).

Rev 14:19

**“the great winepress of the fury or God.”** The “winepress of God” is the Battle of Armageddon. This is clear from Revelation 19:15, which uses the same terminology, and from Isaiah, which refers to the battle the Messiah fights to conquer the earth and says, “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing” (Isa. 63:3 NIV84).

Rev 14:20

**“blood came out from the winepress.”** The volume of blood from the Battle of Armageddon is huge, and impossible to express well. Here in Revelation 14:20, there is so much blood that it flows for 180 miles. Isaiah 34:3 hyperbolically expresses the huge volume of blood by saying that there is so much blood rushing down the mountains that it “melts” them; it carries them away. Jeremiah 7:32 says that there will be so many dead bodies people will be forced to bury them in the unclean Valley of the Son of Hinnom, the Gehenna.

[For more on the chronology of what happens in the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32, “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the duration of the last half of the Tribulation, as well as the days of Judgment following Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:11. For more on the terrible death and destruction in the Great Tribulation and Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the first and second resurrection, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1.]

**“180 miles.”** The Greek text reads 1,600 stadia. A Roman stadia is about 607 feet. Thus, the total distance is about 180 miles (290 km).

**Revelation Chapter 15**

Rev 15:1

**“seven plagues.”** These seven “plagues” are the seven bowl judgments of Revelation 16. The judgment and destruction of “Babylon,” Revelation 17-18, occurs over time, including the time previous to and during, the seven bowl plagues. The next event chronologically after the seven bowl plagues is Jesus coming from heaven and fighting the Battle of Armageddon and conquering the earth (Rev. 19:11-21).

Rev 15:4

**“sacred.”** The Greek word is *hosios* (#3741 ὅσιος), not *hagios* (#40 ἅγιος), which is the usual word for “holy” (and occurs over 230 times in the New Testament). *Hosios* occurs 8 times in the New Testament and means “devout, pure, dedicated, holy.” When used of people, it is used of those who observe their duty to God and fulfill their obligations to Him. *Hosios* has a range of meanings and can also refer to things that are generally used in worship to God and are “pure” (“pure hands” 1 Tim. 2:8), or “sacred” (Acts 13:34, “sacred promises”). *Hosios* also sometimes refers to the outward standard of that which constitutes holiness, and in those cases, because English does not have a good equivalent for *hosios*, “holy” may be the best translation even though an English reader cannot tell it from *hagios* (cf. BDAG). *Hosios* is also used to refer to the inner nature of God and Christ, which is pure and devout. In this verse, God alone is “sacred,” *hosios*, because God alone has the full inner nature of holiness and yet brings that nature out in His unfailing devotion and dedication to His creation.

[For more on *hosios* and how it differs from *hagios*, “holy,” see commentary on Titus 1:8.]

Rev 15:5

**“the sanctuary.”** The Greek word translated “sanctuary” is *naos* (#3485 ναός), which means the inner sanctuary, and then, occasionally, by association, the temple building that houses the inner sanctuary. In contrast, the Greek word *hieron* (#2411 ἱερόν) refers to the temple building along with its vestibules, outer courts, and all associated outbuildings. In Jerusalem at the time of Christ, Herod’s *hieron* (ἱερὸν) was a massive complex inclosing some 37 acres. Here in Revelation 15:5, we can tell from the context that the *naos* refers to the Holy of Holies, the inner room of the Temple. We know that because what the Bible normally calls the “sanctuary” in heaven (or “the temple” in heaven) is here referred to as the naos of the Tent of the Testimony. The “Tent of the Testimony” is a name for Moses’ Tabernacle, which only had two rooms, so the *naos* of the Tabernacle was the innermost room, the Holy of Holies.

[For more on the *naos* versus the whole Temple, the *hieron*, see commentary on Eph. 2:21.]

Rev 15:8

**“filled with smoke from the glory of God.”** The Temple in heaven was filled with smoke that came out from the “glory of God,” which is the brilliant light that surrounds God. Smoke is sometimes associated with the presence of God. We see that here, and in Isaiah 6:4. Also, when God came down on Mount Sinai shortly after the Exodus from Egypt, the top of Mount Sinai was enveloped in smoke (Exod. 19:18).

[For more information on the glory of Yahweh indicating the personal presence of Yahweh, see commentary on Ezek. 1:28.]

**Revelation Chapter 16**

Rev 16:3

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the mammal, fish, or other sea creature that is animated, made alive, by *psuchē,* “soul,” which is why many English versions say, “every living creature,” or “every living thing” in the sea died. This is one of the verses that shows us that *psuchē* is the life that animates both humans and animals, and it is not immortal.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

The bowl judgments that are at the end of the Great Tribulation fulfill many of the prophecies of the Old Testament about the destruction of the earth (cf. Zeph. 1:2). The end of the earth as we know it will come soon after the bowl judgments because when the life in the ocean dies, the rest of the life on earth will follow relatively quickly.

[For more on the horrific destruction that will occur in the Great Tribulation, see commentary on Dan. 12:1.]

Rev 16:6

**“they poured out the blood of the holy ones.”** The saying that they “poured out” the blood of the believers is an idiom, meaning they shed that blood in abundance.

Rev 16:9

**“blasphemed.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Rev 16:11

**“blasphemed.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

Rev 16:12

**“the great river, the *river* Euphrates.”** The Euphrates is one of the great rivers in biblical history and one of the great rivers of the world. In New Testament times it was the eastern boundary of the ancient Roman Empire, with Parthia to the north and east of it (although wars moved the boundary back and forth). It was also the boundary of the land God promised Abraham and Israel (Gen. 15:18, Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:4). Isaiah 11:15, which is referring to the time of the Messianic Kingdom on earth, says that the Euphrates will be dried up and scattered so that people can cross it in sandals, so after the river is dried up it never returns to its former size and strength. It is possible that Zechariah 10:11 also alludes to the Euphrates drying up.

**“kings *that come* from the east.”** The word “east” is *anatolē* (#395 ἀνατολή), in the plural, and literally means “sunrise” or “sunrising.” The kings come “from the sunrising,” which, of course, is east. Although we use “east” in the REV for clarity, it is always good to remember that although our Western world is oriented to the north (which is why on Western maps, north is always “up”), the biblical world was oriented toward the east, the sunrise.

[For more on *anatolē* see commentary on Matt. 2:2.]

These are nations and kingdoms that will be gathered to fight against Jesus Christ and his army at the Battle of Armageddon. Today these nations would include Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, India, etc. After the Rapture, these nations and more will become, like the rest of the world, much more aggressive against Christ, and their rising influence in the world today makes this prophecy very believable.

Rev 16:13

**“frogs.”** There are many fanciful guesses as to what the frogs refer to. Two ideas seem to be solidly founded: In Rev. 16:12 the angel struck the Euphrates and it dried up. When the Nile was struck by a plague of blood (Exod. 7:19ff), the next plague upon Egypt was frogs (Exod. 8:1ff). This seems clearly to be pointing back to this: the Euphrates dries up in verse 12 and then frogs go forth in verse 13. The second thing is that frogs were known for their loud croaking, and it would take some loud “croaking” to get the leaders of the earth to come to Israel to fight Jesus.

Rev 16:14

**“spirits (that is, demons).”** The Greek construction is a genitive of apposition; “spirits of demons” is “spirits, that is to say, demons.” These demons were in some sense like frogs, but they were demons.

**“to gather them together to the war of the great day of God.”** The war is the Battle of Armageddon. The Bible clearly expresses in this verse why the armies are gathering: it is to fight God (by waging war on His Son and His army; cf. Rev. 19:11-21). Many commentators have a hard time believing this, thinking that there must be a different reason, one more logical to our sense knowledge, for these armies to gather together. Speculations include that they are gathering to fight one another or to take over Israel or the land of Israel. However, there is no verse that says anything like that, and at this time in the book of Revelation, the Beast (the Antichrist) is in control of the world and Israel.

The Bible tells us that it is demons who gather the great Satanic army together (Rev. 16:13-14). The clear truth is that Satan has had an ancient battle with God since he lost his exalted position in God’s sight and became God’s enemy. Satan tried many times and in many different ways to defeat God. He tried to keep God’s Savior, the Messiah, from coming, but those efforts failed. Then, when the Messiah came, Satan tried to turn him against God (Matt. 4:8-10), and when that failed, he tried to get him to sin and to kill him. That failed too. Jesus went to the grave having never sinned, and gave up his life for us. In the future, in the Tribulation period, Satan will try to retain his ability to approach God in heaven and accuse the believers (Rev. 12:10), but Michael and his angels will be too strong for him and Satan will even lose his ability to enter heaven (Rev. 12:7-9). The only option that will be left for Satan will be one final desperate showdown: Satan and his army against the Son and his army. But we know the outcome. Satan and his demons will be defeated and chained in the Abyss (Rev. 20:1-3) and his army will be killed and will be food for the carrion birds, such as the vultures (Rev. 19:17, 21). Jesus will rule the earth and will set up his kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven.

This great gathering of Good versus Evil is also spoken of in Joel (see Joel 3 and commentary on Joel 3:12)

Rev 16:15

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“stays alert and *thus* keeps his clothes.”** This seems to be an allusion to a custom of the Temple during the time of Christ. The Temple was guarded by priests who had the duty of Temple police (cf. John 7:32). At night, if any of the guard was found asleep, he was beaten or his clothes were set on fire.[[27]](#footnote-32505) Jesus is not going to set anyone’s clothes on fire, but fine linen clothing represented the righteousness of the believers (Rev. 19:8). During this time of tribulation, believers are to watch their behavior closely so they do not become unrighteous and thus “lose their clothing” and walk naked before the Lord.

Rev 16:16

**“they gathered them.”** Although this verse depicts the armies being gathered at the hill of Megiddo, the army is too large for just this area. Other verses, such as Isaiah 63:1-6 and Zechariah 14:3-5, show that the Battle of Armageddon will be fought in Jerusalem also. Since the blood flows for 180 miles (Rev. 14:20), it is likely that the Battle of Armageddon is war that covers much of the land of Israel.

**“called in Hebrew, Armageddon.”** “Armageddon” was the Greek spelling of the Hebrew phrase “Har-megiddo,” which means “hill of Megiddo.” There have been many attempts to explain what the Greek “Armageddon” refers to, but none is more likely than the simple explanation that it refers to the hill of Megiddo, the hill on which the ancient city of Megiddo was built adjacent to the pass in the Mount Carmel range that allowed people and armies to cross from north to south.

Megiddo is a fitting place for the final battle between good and evil, and had been the place of many earlier battles. It controlled one of the most strategic places in Israel, the pass through which the major trade route the “Via Maris” (“the Way of the Sea”) went. Solomon saw the importance of Megiddo and fortified it (1 Kings 9:15). The “Valley of Megiddo” to the north of Megiddo was the scene of some important biblical battles, including the battle between Deborah’s forces under commander Barak when they defeated the Canaanite king Jabin and his commander Sisera (Judg. 4:6-16, 23), and the unfortunate battle between Pharaoh Neco and Josiah, in which Josiah was killed (2 Kings 23:29; 2 Chron. 35:20-24).

The town of Megiddo fell from importance during the Persian occupation of Israel, and was an abandoned ruin by the time John wrote the book of Revelation, so his audience would not have easily known about it in the way they would have known about thriving cities such as Jerusalem or Damascus. Furthermore, the Hebrew word *har*, which means hill or mountain, depending on the context, does not transliterate well into Greek because Greek does not have the letter “h.” Thus the Hebrew word *har* becomes *ar* in Greek. Furthermore, in Greek, words that end in “o” are verbs, but the name of Megiddo is a noun, thus it makes sense that in the Greek writings “Megiddo” was modified so that it ended in an “on” instead of just an “o.” So “har-megiddo” in Hebrew becomes “Armageddon” in Greek, and the text has to tell us the place was “called in Hebrew” Har-megiddo” because that town did not exist as a thriving town when John wrote the book of Revelation.

The “Battle of Armageddon” is called that because that is where the leaders of Satan’s army will headquarter (Rev. 16:14-16). The Battle of Armageddon itself will cover more than even the entire traditional land of Israel, which is from Dan in the north to Beer-sheba in the south, about 130 miles (208 km). The Bible describes blood flowing from the battle for 180 miles or 290 km (Rev. 14:19-20).

[For more on the chronology of what happens in the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32, “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the duration of the last half of the Tribulation, as well as the days of Judgment following Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:11. For more on the terrible death and destruction in the Great Tribulation and Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the first and second resurrection, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1.]

Rev 16:18

**“a great earthquake.”** This is foretold in full or in part in Ezekiel 38:19 (see commentary on Ezek. 38:19).

Rev 16:21

**“talent.”** The Greek is *talantiaios* (#5006 ταλαντιαῖος) The Roman talent weight varied from place to place and also over time. Estimates range from over 60 to well over 100 pounds. Most scholars place this talent at somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 pounds (about 45 kilograms). To give us an idea of the damage those hailstones would cause, golf ball size hail causes a lot of damage, but the hailstones only weigh about .08 (eight one-hundredths, or about a tenth) of a pound. These hailstones would be just over 38 inches in diameter, about the size of many beach balls. The largest hailstone ever recorded in the United States was 8 inches in diameter and fell in Vivian, South Dakota in 2010 and weighed nearly 2 pounds (according to Fox Weather; accessed 6-30-2023).

**“blasphemed.”** The Greek verb *blasphēmeō* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation.

[For more on *blasphēmeō*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3.]

**Revelation Chapter 17**

Rev 17:1

**“the great prostitute.”** The Great Prostitute is called by the name “Babylon” in Revelation 17:5. The Great Prostitute is not a person, but a city (and the rulers and surrounding territory) that dominates the rulers of the earth (Rev. 17:18. Joel Richardson, in his book, *Mystery Babylon*, has given good reasons that the city is likely Mecca). Eight times in Revelation 17 and 18, “Babylon” is called a city (Rev. 17:18; 18:10 [2x], Rev. 18:16, 18 [2x], Rev. 18:19, 21). Furthermore, it is a city in the desert (Rev. 17:3). The city sits at the top of, and thus initially dominates a scarlet beast, which is a religious system and empire that is created in the image of the Devil himself (see commentary on Rev. 13:1). Currently there is strong evidence that religious system is Islam, although the person who will be “the antichrist” may alter that.

It is very Semitic to portray a city, country, or belief system as a woman. Israel is portrayed as a woman many times in the Bible, including “daughter” (Mic. 4:8); “virgin daughter” (Jer. 14:17); “virgin” (Jer. 18:13; Amos 5:2); “sister” (Ezek. 16:45; 23:11); “espoused” or “bride” (Jer. 2:2); “wife” (Ezek. 16:8; Isa. 54:6; Hos. 2:7); and mother (Ezek. 16:20; Hos. 2:2). Babylon is portrayed as a woman a number of times (cf. Ps. 137:8; Isa. 47:1; Jer. 50:42; 51:43; Zech. 2:7). The book of Proverbs portrays both Wisdom and Folly as women (cf. Prov. 1:20; 8:1; 9:13. See commentary on Prov. 1:20).

Reading Revelation chapters 17 and 18, as well as prophecies of end-times Babylon such as are in Isaiah 47, gives us good information about the city and those who rule the city that will be end-times Babylon. For example, it will be a city with great influence, spreading its abominations around the globe (Rev. 17:5; 18:3-4). “Babylon” (actually, its rulers) will be wealthy and huge consumers of goods (Rev. 18:11-13). “Babylon” will promote the killing of believers, God’s holy ones (Rev. 17:6; 18:24), and it will also promote slavery (Rev. 18:13). The woman will initially be in league with and supported by the “beast,” the religious and political system that will dominate the end-times earth (see commentary on Rev. 17:3). But she will eventually be destroyed by the beast (Rev. 17:15-18). When she is destroyed, it will happen quickly (Rev. 18:10).

**that sits on many waters.”** In Revelation 17:1, “Babylon” “sits on many waters,” that is, on the masses of the people of earth (“waters” represent the masses of people, see Rev. 17:15). That “waters” or “the sea” means “people” is a well-known biblical figure; cf. Isaiah 17:12-13; Daniel 7:2-3; Revelation 13:1. In contrast, in Revelation 17:3, the woman sits upon 7 “mountains,” that is, seven empires ruled by kings.

The fact that she “sits” on the people of earth is profound, and in biblical idiom means she rules over them (see commentary on Isa. 14:13). That the Great Prostitute is successful “sitting” (the verb is a present participle) on the people of earth is in part a testament to the fallen nature of mankind. While “Babylon” rules over many in a forcible way, many others follow her and willingly submit to her rule. In general, the Devil would rather lure people to sin willingly than try to force people to sin. History shows us that there is an abundance of people who, for many different reasons, fall right into the Devil’s ways of thinking and acting. The Devil sets up the system, and people willingly become his sycophants, using and oppressing others. In fact, the Devil often uses religion and the ruse of “being right” or “being godly” to oppress others. It should not be lost on us that it was not to the “sinners” of his time such as the prostitutes and tax collectors, but to the religious leaders that Jesus said, “You are of *your* father the Devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:44).

It is worth noting that in Jeremiah 51:13, Babylon is said to sit on “many waters.”

Rev 17:2

**“with the wine of her sexual immorality.”** See commentary on Revelation 14:8.

Rev 17:3

**“in the spirit.”** There is no definite article “the” in the Greek text but we supply it because this verse makes more sense in English that way. In the Greek text, the definite article “the” is not supplied before “holy spirit” because the preposition *en* can make *pneuma* (spirit) definite without the article (see commentary on Rev. 4:2, “in the spirit”).

**“a woman sitting on a scarlet-colored beast.”** The woman, end-times Babylon (see commentary on Rev. 17:1, “the great prostitute”), sits on the “beast” which is the dominant political and religious system of the End Times. At the beginning of the end-times, the woman “Babylon,” sits on top of the beast, indicating that they have a mutually supportive relationship. The woman “sits” on the beast, which is idiomatic for having a ruling position (see commentary on Isa. 14:13). The beast is scarlet (Rev. 17:3) and the woman is dressed in scarlet and purple (Rev. 17:4). The woman is drunk on the blood of God’s holy ones (Rev. 17:6), while the beast makes war with God’s holy ones (Rev. 13:7). Nevertheless, a disagreement arises between the city of “Babylon” and its rulers, and the ten horns of the beast empire, and they will fight against her and destroy her (Rev. 17:15-18).

**“blasphemous names.”** See commentary on Rev. 13:1.

Rev 17:4

**“purple.”** Purple dye was rare and very expensive, and affordable only by royalty and the upper class. The fact that this woman is clothed in purple presents her as a rich and powerful woman, and of course what she represents in John’s vision is great power in the world (for more on purple, see commentary on 2 Chron. 3:14).

**“pearls.”** Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued.

[For more on pearls, see commentary on Rev. 18:12.]

Rev 17:5

**“SECRET.”** The REV usually translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. However, in English, the word “sacred” typically refers to something godly. However, the secret of Babylon is an evil, Satanic secret, so the REV simply translated it as “secret” in this context. The Greek word, however, indicates a secret in the religious or “sacred” category. A secret in the secular realm was referred to by the Greek word *kruptos* (from which we get the English word “crypt”). Furthermore, *mustērion* does not mean “mystery,” that is, something incomprehensible, something that cannot be understood. Instead, *mustērion* means “secret,” something that some people know but others do not. That certainly fits with this Babylon evil. Satanic evil has existed for millennia behind the scenes, covered by lies and propaganda, hidden in covert groups and secret societies, and it has sometimes even been in plain sight but covered by tradition and calling evil “good” and good “evil.”

The word *mustērion* is a huge key to understanding “Babylon.” A *mustērion* was not a “mystery,” but was a secret that was hidden from the general public until it was revealed. Here the “secret,” this secret which has dominated the religious realm, is called “Babylon.” Furthermore, she is called “the mother of the prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.” What John reveals in the book of Revelation about Babylon was a secret, known to God and revealed by Him. In fact, it seems that it was such a good secret that although John revealed it in Revelation, it is only recently that some people have actually understood what it refers to, and even on that point there is much discussion and disagreement.

[For more information on the translation “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9 and 2 Thess. 2:7.]

**“Babylon the Great.”** That she is called “Babylon,” does not mean she is just the literal city of Babylon (or even a literal city at all), which we can see from the full description of her in the chapter. At the very least, she is a city ruling over a territory. She seems to be called “Babylon” because she relates to “Babylon” in an important way. In this case, “Babylon” was the first city built by Nimrod after Noah’s Flood (Gen. 10:10). It became a center of religious apostasy and rebellion against God, even though it likely looked “very religious.” Ever since Nimrod (although likely before him), “religion” has been a powerful force on earth, and sadly, there is usually a lot of evil at the center. This includes practices that are overtly ungodly, like human sacrifice, but the fact is that oppression, guilt, and control have been at the center of almost all religions.

That this woman is called, “the mother of the prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth,” points to the fact that she is the starting point and nurturer of the sexual immorality and godlessness in the world. She is the personalization of the Devil’s system of evil infiltrating religion and masquerading as truth, just as the woman “Wisdom” in Proverbs is the personalization of God’s way of doing things. The false religion is not an enemy to, but to a large degree works symbiotically with, the political systems of earth. Thus the “mountains” (kingdoms and kings) let her sit on them, and in a practical sense, they support one another. This is certainly true historically. The Bible has many examples of false prophets supporting evil rulers, just as Ahab and Jezebel had their false prophets (1 Kings 17, 18; cf. Ezek. 22:25-28). Recently, some people have asserted that the use of “mother” here means the greatest, like we would say, “the mother of all parties” to describe the greatest party, or “the mother of all headaches” to describe a huge and debilitating headache. Although there may be a hint of that meaning in the context, there is not good biblical evidence to support it, and in fact, that use of “mother” may be a very late idiom. Biblically, a “mother” was a progenitor, nurturer, and supporter of something.

Furthermore, although false religion has “sat” on the “waters” (people) of the earth (Rev. 17:1), and on the kingdoms of the earth (Rev. 17:3) for millennia, she will come to an abrupt end when Christ conquers the earth and sets up his kingdom.

Rev 17:6

**“martyrs.”** The Greek word is *martus* (#3144 μάρτυς, pronounced 'mar-toose), which technically means “witness.” However, especially after AD 64 when Nero made Christianity illegal and the execution of Christians started, the most profound “witness” was to die for the faith. Thus *martus* came to be used of those who witnessed for Christ and those who died for the faith, and the English word “martyr” comes directly from the Greek *martus*. It is challenging to translate the word in this context because if we say “those who testified of Jesus” (NET), it may not be clear that they died for him, but if we say “martyr,” we might lose the connection with the fact that dying for the Faith was considered a very powerful witness.” That is why the English versions are split on the translation: “martyrs” (ASV, ESV, KJV, NJB, RSV), versus “witness, testify” (HCSB, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT, Rotherham).

Rev 17:7

**“sacred secret.”** The REV translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *mustērion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm.

[For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

Rev 17:8

**“*they* whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.”** Many scholars believe that Revelation 17:8 supports the idea of predestination and that the verse is saying that some people’s names are written in the book of life in eternity past, before they are physically born, while other people are not written in the book of life before they are born and those people are therefore doomed to hell by God. However, this is not the way that we should understand the phrase “from the foundation of the world.” To understand what the phrase means, we need to understand the distinction between the phrase “from the foundation of the world” and “before the foundation of the world.”

Often interpreters understand these two phrases to be synonymous, in other words, they think that “from the foundation of the world” and “before the foundation of the world” both mean before the creation of the world in Genesis 1. However, when we look at the occurrences of these two phrases, they clearly have different meanings. “**Before** the foundation of the world indicates **before** Genesis, whereas **from** the foundation of the world indicates **from** Genesis to present” (Soteriology101.com). Below are a couple of examples that show that “from the foundation of the world” does not mean “before the foundation of the world.”

Luke 11:50-51 (ESV) says, “so that the blood of all the prophets, shed **from the foundation of the world**, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary.” This verse uses the phrase “from the foundation of the world,” (*apo katabolēs kosmou*; ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου), and it clearly means from the time of Adam and Eve to the present day because no blood of the prophets was shed before the creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:27).

Hebrews 9:25-26 (ESV) says, “Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world.” The phrase “since the foundation of the world” is the same Greek phrase as in Luke 11:50, “from the foundation of the world,” and the passage is talking about paying for sins. But since no humans sinned before the Fall of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:1-7), this is clearly talking about after the Fall to the present, not about eternity past.

More examples could be given, but in studying them it is clear that “from the foundation of the world” means from Genesis to the present day. Therefore, Revelation 17:8 does not teach predestination, instead, it is saying that from the foundation of the world, more and more people have been written in the book of life (because they believed and obeyed God), while other people have not been written in the book of life (meaning they will not be saved) because they did not believe and obey God.

Rev 17:9

**“mountains.”** This is the figure of speech hypocatastasis, a comparison by implication, and it refers to empires ruled by rulers. In the Bible, a “mountain” is one of the figures of speech used to represent a kingdom and by extension, the king who rules it. David called his kingdom a mountain (Ps. 30:7). Babylon was called a mountain (Jer. 51:25). The Messiah’s kingdom will be a mountain that will fill the earth (Dan. 2:35), and cf. Zechariah 4:7 as well. Thus here in Revelation we again see vocabulary being used in the way it was used in the Old Testament.

[For more information on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2.]

The mountains are also immediately said to be “kings,” so in this case, the empires are not “general,” but also include the kings who control them. The mountains cannot refer to Rome, although many commentators think they do.[[28]](#footnote-28697)

It is important that we notice that the woman sits upon the mountains. She is not a mountain, but sits on them. Bullinger thinks all the kingdoms are future, while other scholars think that the empires have existed through time. In any case, the empires are bewitched and controlled by the woman—not forcibly, but by the lure of what she offers. The Bible refers to this as them being “made drunk with the wine of her sexual immorality.”

Rev 17:15

**“are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and languages.”** This verse is a huge key to understanding both the Old and New Testaments. Daniel 7:2 speaks of the “four winds of heaven.” In Hebrew, the word *ruach* (#07308 רוּחַ) is used of both “wind” and “spirit.” In Daniel’s case, although he likely saw a vision of a great ocean being stirred by the “winds,” he knew his own language and the meanings it had, and would have understood that this was a vision meant to communicate that spirits (referring to both demons and angels) were stirring up the “great sea,” (the people of the world), and “beasts” (i.e., nations) were coming up out of the sea. That verse in Daniel is a great example of how the figure of speech hypocatastasis can be confusing and how important it is to understand the key words involved. In Daniel, the “winds” were spirits, the “sea” was masses of people, and the “beast” was an empire. So too, here in Revelation, the “sea” is clearly said to be the masses of people on earth. Other verses that represent huge numbers of people, especially unruly Gentile peoples, as water, include Psalm 124:4 and 144:7.

Rev 17:16

**“hate the prostitute.”** In an amazing turn of events, the false religious system that has supported, and been supported by, the rulers of the earth will suddenly be attacked by them. The beast (the Antichrist) will no longer be content to share his glory with another false religion and will move to control the world’s religions and garner all worship for himself. Thus begins the universal, one-world religion controlled by the Antichrist that will dominate the final period of time before Armageddon.

Rev 17:18

**“the great city.”** Here, “Babylon” is called “the great city” although it is not a literal city, which we saw from Rev. 17:1, where she sits on many waters, Rev. 17:3, where she sits on empires, and Rev. 17:5, where we saw that she was, as a sacred secret, called “Babylon,” not because she was literally the city of Babylon, but because Nimrod’s Babylon was the source of all evil empires, having its origin in the Devil and ruled by people given over to the service of the Devil. However, in a sense, she is “the great city” because she is the power that has dominated and directed all the cities of the earth. In a sense, she is.

**Revelation Chapter 18**

Rev 18:2

**“haunt.”** The Greek word *phulake* (#5438 φυλακή) can mean either a prison or the prison guard, or the act of guarding or watching. In this case, the demons (unclean spirits or “birds”) are not in prison in Babylon, but live there and keep watch there. Thus “haunt” is a good translation to communicate that.

Rev 18:3

**“the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”** See commentary on Revelation 14:8.

Rev 18:7

**“I sit** ***as*** **a queen.”** In the language of biblical custom, Babylon is saying, “I rule as a queen.” The word “sit” was often used to refer to ruling. See commentary on Isaiah 14:13, “sit.”

Revelation 18:7 hearkens back to Isaiah 47, which is about the fall of Babylon and which is an example of a prophecy with a double fulfillment. Isaiah 47 foretells the destruction of Babylon, which happened when the Persians conquered Babylon during the reign of Belshazzar (Dan. 5:31). However, “Babylon” will fall again, as described in Revelation 17-18, and the prophecy in Isaiah 47 has application to both of Babylon’s falls from power.

Isaiah 47:5 and 47:7 refer to Babylon as a queen, but Isaiah 47:1-3 describes the fall of Babylon in graphic language and says that Babylon will be without a throne and will have to sit on the ground and grind grain like a common woman or servant, with Isaiah 47:3 going so far as to say that her private parts, with which she has so freely committed whoredom, will be exposed to the world.

**“and am not a widow.”** This phrase hearkens back to Isaiah 47:8, where Babylon says, “I will not sit as a widow.” Babylon boasts to herself that she is not a widow, which in her case speaks to her arrogance and self-confidence in contrast to the sadness, depression, and even despair experienced by most widows in biblical times. For example, in the book of Ruth, Naomi changed her name from “Naomi” (“pleasant”) to “Mara” (“bitter”) after she became a widow and lost her two sons (Ruth 1:20). Of course Babylon would not have been a literal widow because she was a prostitute, not an adulteress. These statements of Babylon in Revelation 17-18 can be much better understood in light of reading Isaiah 47 and understanding the arrogance of ancient Babylon which was suddenly ended when it was conquered by the Persians.

Rev 18:12

**“pearls.”** Pearls are mentioned in a number of New Testament verses because in the biblical world pearls were incredibly expensive. The Roman historian, Pliny the Elder (AD 23-August 24, AD 79), said this about pearls: “The topmost rank of all things of price is held by pearls.” Round, white pearls are amazingly rare. When pointing out that women should not dress extravagantly, 1 Timothy 2:9 says women should not dress with gold and pearls. Jesus told a parable about a man who found one very expensive pearl and sold everything he had to buy it (Matt. 13:46).

Part of the mystique about pearls in the first century was that people were not sure where they came from. Expensive pearls that came into the Roman world from the Persian Gulf and from India had traveled far and had an air of mystery about them. Although some pearls did come from shallow water, most pearls in the ancient world were brought up from quite deep in the ocean. In the Persian Gulf region, a fruitful source of pearls in biblical times, they were often at a depth of about 40 meters (about 45 yards or half a football field).

To get down to the oyster beds, pearl divers held a weight on a rope to make a quick descent to the bottom. Once the diver was on the bottom, he let go of the weight, which was pulled back up to the ship by the rope, while the diver swam back up after he put the oysters he had gathered into a sack he carried with him. Until the invention of scuba gear, this diving-with-a-weight method of pearling was the common way of pearling, with only slight improvements over the years, such as hand and foot protection from the sharp oysters and face masks so the diver could see better and to protect the eyes. This dangerous way of getting pearls was the major reason natural pearls were so expensive until our modern times.

In the early 1900s pearls lost much of their value and the pearl industry collapsed because the Japanese invented a way to grow cultured pearls. Also, shortly after that, plastics and resins began to be used to produce very realistic-looking pearls. Then finally, the invention of the scuba diving system made getting the real pearls much easier, safer, and more reliable. The result of all this was that pearls, which for millennia had been a mark of high culture, social standing, and financial wealth, were suddenly being worn by anyone and everyone, so they were less a status symbol and thus less attractive. As their attraction wore off, they were worn by fewer and fewer people, even being ignored by those who could afford the “real” ones.

Rev 18:13

**“*slaves*, the souls of human beings.”** The word for “slaves” is actually “bodies,” and slaves were referred to as “bodies” in the Roman Empire. God created people to be relational and to interconnect with one another, so in order to be with other people and treat them horribly, it is almost a necessity to “dehumanize” them. This is very common in war. Germans were not people, they were “krauts,” Italians were “wops,” Japanese were “nips,” and people from the Middle East have been called “towel heads” by many in the armed forces.

This dehumanizing was done in Bible times as well. In the Bible, the Jews called themselves “the People” (and you will see “People” with a capital “P” in the REV translation), which meant that non-Jews were not “people.” Similarly, in ancient Egypt, the Egyptians called themselves “people,” and the foreigners were specifically the “no-People.” The ancient Greeks thought of themselves better than everyone else, and thus everyone else was a “Barbarian,” an onomatopoetic word based on “ba-ba-ba,” which is what the Greeks thought everyone else’s language sounded like—just a bunch of “ba’s” strung together. Thus it is no surprise that in the Roman Empire slaves were called “bodies.” They were certainly often used that way.

**“soul.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here “souls of human beings” is a phrase that primarily refers to “people,” but by including the word “soul” it includes the mental and emotional life. People were bought and sold, but their thoughts and feelings were disregarded. Similar uses of *psuchē* are Romans 2:9 and 2 Peter 2:14.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Rev 18:14

**“soul.”** The Greek word is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή). Here it refers to the seat of the mental and emotional life. People did not just want the fruit, they wanted it from the core of their being.

[For more on “soul,” see commentary on Rev. 18:13.]

Rev 18:16

**“pearls.”** See commentary on Revelation 18:12.

Rev 18:20

**“Rejoice over her.”** That is, rejoice over her fate.

**“her judgment of you.”** This is not just a pronounced judgment, but a judgment involving action; “for the way she treated you” (NIV84).

Rev 18:21

**“a large millstone.”** Likely a large commercial millstone (see commentary on Mark 9:42).

Rev 18:22

**“the sound of a *grain* mill.”** When Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by the Babylonians, Jeremiah prophesied that the sound of the millstone would not be heard in her (Jer. 25:10). It was a happy sound that was a staple of family life. The women would grind meal together and enjoy each other’s company, and there would be fresh bread to eat. When the sound of the millstone is not heard, family life is pretty much nonexistent.

Rev 18:23

**“the voice of the groom.”** In many English versions, the older term “bridegroom” is used, but it just means the groom. As in Rev. 18:22 above, Jeremiah 25:10 also mentions the voice of the bridegroom.

**Revelation Chapter 19**

Rev 19:3

**“Her smoke goes up for ages and ages.”** This verse does not tell us who the great multitude is. It may be the multitude of angels and spirit-creatures who have put up with the Devil and his minions for millennia, and it could also include Christians who have been Raptured. But even so, it strongly seems that this section of Revelation is proleptic and actually takes place in the future, after the first resurrection, but is moved to here to show the joy that will occur when God’s justice is done on earth. The evidence that the section is actually future includes Revelation 19:2 saying that God “has judged” and “has avenged” His servants, the fullness of which is still future, and also saying “her smoke goes up” implies that the Great Prostitute is already in the Lake of Fire, but that does not happen before Armageddon, which is still future. Also, in Revelation 19:7 the marriage supper of the Lamb “has come,” and that also occurs after the Battle of Armageddon, in fact, the Bride cannot be ready (v. 7) until she is raised from the dead, and the first resurrection also occurs after Armageddon (Rev. 20:4-6).

One thing that we see in Revelation 19:20 is that the multitude does not recoil in horror at the punishment of the wicked. They realize that God gave angels and people free will, and they knew, or could and should have known, that there would be punishment for defying God. In that, Revelation 19:3 is somewhat similar to Psalm 58:10: “The righteous person will rejoice when he sees *God’s* vengeance. He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked person.” Sometimes here on earth there is punishment given that does not fit the crime, but that is never the case with God; His judgments are righteous.

**“for ages and ages.”** The Greek is αἰῶνας αἰώνων αἰών; literally, “for ages of ages.” This is a hyperbole, an overstatement. The phrase “to the ages of the ages” refers to a very long time, but exactly how long we do not know. See the commentary on Rev. 20:10, which has similar wording.

[For more information on the eventual annihilation of people thrown into the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Rev 19:9

**“the marriage banquet of the Lamb.”** There will be a huge feast, referred to as a wedding banquet, during Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth, in fact, the banquet will likely occur soon after Christ sets up the Kingdom. Isaiah 25:6 speaks of this feast, and Jesus taught about it. We learn from Revelation 21:2, 9-10, that the “Bride of Christ” are those people who are saved, both Jew and Gentile, and we can see this also in the way Jesus speaks of the wedding banquet—that both Jews and Gentiles are there (Matt. 8:11).

The Greek word translated “banquet” is *deipnon* (#1173 δεῖπνον), and in the Greek and Roman world *deipnon* usually referred to the large formal and elaborate meal at the end of the day. However, it was used in other ways as well; sometimes it referred to just a regular meal, sometimes to a feast or banquet (Matt. 23:6; Luke 14:17; 20:46), and sometimes it was used of ritual meals, such as the Christian Love Feasts (which later became more commonly known as the Lord’s Supper or “communion;” 1 Cor. 11:20; cf. Jude 1:12). So the exact meaning of *deipnon*, and thus how to accurately bring it into English, depends upon the context. Here in Revelation 19:9, it refers to the great banquet that will occur in the Kingdom of Heaven, so “banquet” is a good translation.

Due to the long tradition of versions such as the Geneva Bible (1599), the King James (1611); and the Douay-Rheims (1899), which all read “marriage supper of the Lamb” the feast in the Kingdom is often called the “marriage supper” by theologians and Bible teachers. That should not keep us from translating the verse more accurately, however, as “marriage banquet,” “wedding feast” (CJB, NAB, NJB, NLT), “marriage feast” (HCSB), or something similar that puts more emphasis on the fact that this meal is a feast or banquet, and not just a “supper.”

[For more information on this feast, or “wedding banquet,” see commentary on Matt. 8:11. For more information on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more information on the Bride of Christ, see Appendix 12: “The Bride of Christ.”]

Rev 19:10

**“the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”** The testimony “of” Jesus (genitive of relation: testimony about Jesus; most likely also includes the sense of the genitive of origin, i.e., the words or testimony that Jesus gives) is the spirit (the general attitude, the essence, “the inner content”).[[29]](#footnote-12419) In contrast to false prophecy, true prophecy will elevate Jesus.

Rev 19:11

**“behold.”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“he who was sitting on it is called Faithful and True.”** The person sitting on the horse is Jesus Christ, who is coming from heaven to fight the Battle of Armageddon, conquer the earth, and set up his worldwide rule.

[For more on the order of events in the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the duration of the last half of the Tribulation, as well as the days of Judgment following Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:11. For more on the terrible death and destruction in the Great Tribulation and Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the first and second resurrection, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1.]

Rev 19:12

**“diadem.”** See commentary on Revelation 12:3.

Rev 19:13

**“robe.”** The outermost garment worn by the people in the ancient Near East.

**“sprinkled with blood.”** This record of Jesus coming down to earth to fight the Battle of Armageddon was written from the perspective of things after the battle had occurred, and so the “cloak sprinkled with blood” pictures the cloak that Jesus was wearing as it looked after the Battle of Armageddon. The text means that Jesus was wearing “a robe—the one that became sprinkled with blood.” Isaiah 63:1-6 foretells Jesus getting blood sprinkled on his garments as he kills his enemies.

Rev 19:14

**“armies.”** Although the reason for the plural “armies” could be a plural of emphasis to show the large size of the army, it is more likely that it is plural because of the compound nature of Christ’s army. Christ’s army will include both spirit beings such as angels (Matt. 25:31; 2 Thess. 1:7), and also Christians, because they were Raptured into heaven and now are returning to earth with Christ (see commentary on 1 Thess. 4:17). There are verses that indicate that we will participate in the destruction of Satan, such as Romans 16:20, which speaks of Satan being crushed “under your [the Christian’s] feet.” Also, 1 Corinthians 6:3 speaks of us judging angels, which almost certainly includes participating in the defeat of the fallen angels we know as demons. Also, 1 Thessalonians 4:17 speaks of us always being with the Lord after the Rapture, so it is unlikely that Christ could come to earth and fight without us participating.

**“clean.”** The Greek word translated “clean” in Revelation 19:14 is *katharos* (#2513 καθαρός), and it can mean “clean” (as in “clean” versus “dirty”), or “pure” i.e., unmixed. Also, *katharos* is often used in the sense of Levitically “clean” (pure; unmixed; unblemished) and thus fit for God’s purposes. It seems that “clean” is the best translation in this context for several reasons.

One is that in contrast to these robes worn by God’s holy people which are “clean,” the robe of Jesus is not “clean;” it is dipped in blood. But the blood on Christ’s garment sets him apart from those he has redeemed. Christ not only shed his own blood for us but also will fight the Antichrist and his army and splatter his garments with their blood (cf. Isa. 63:1-6). So Jesus’ garment is not “clean,” but for a very good reason.

Another reason “clean” is better than “pure” here in revelation 19:14 is that since the garments of the holy people are made of “fine linen,” the linen would not be mixed with other materials. Thus, even though the garments are “pure” linen, the emphasis here is not that they are pure, but that they are “clean.”

Rev 19:15

**“out of his mouth came a sharp broadsword.”** That there is a sharp sword coming out of the mouth of Jesus is also stated in Revelation 1:16; 2:16 and 19:21. What this “sharp sword” is, is made clear in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, which says that the Lord will destroy the lawless one with the “spirit from his mouth,” where “spirit” is used for prophecies spoken by Jesus Christ (see commentaries on 2 Thess. 2:8 and 1 Cor. 14:12). That the Messiah would destroy his enemies by his prophetic word was foretold in Isaiah 11:4 (see translation and commentary on Isa. 11:4).

Christians should be used to thinking in terms of the Word of God being a two-edged sword from Hebrews 4:12 and Ephesians 6:17. Jesus Christ is not depicted destroying people with a physical sword, but rather with the “sword of the Spirit,” which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). Powerful words from God come out of Jesus’ mouth and destroy his enemies.

**“broadsword.”** See commentary on Luke 2:35.

**“and he will shepherd them with a rod of iron….”** This quotation comes from the Septuagint version of Psalm 2:9. The Hebrew text of Psalm 2:9 says “break them with a rod of iron,” while the Septuagint says “shepherd” (or “rule”) them. That Jesus will conquer the earth and rule with a rod of iron is a well-established prophecy and occurs four times in Scripture (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15), and for more detail see commentary on Revelation 2:27.

**“winepress.”** “Winepress” is the name this verse and several others give to the Battle of Armageddon. The name “winepress” ties this huge battle back to the Old Testament, which also calls it the “winepress” of God (Isa. 63:2-6; Joel 3:13; cf. Rev. 14:19-20; 19:15).

The name “winepress” graphically portrays the extent of the killing and carnage of this huge battle in which Christ and the armies of heaven fight and destroy the “beast” (the Antichrist) and the armies of earth. The name “Winepress” is appropriate for a couple different reasons. For one, in making wine a person became covered with red juice, and in fighting the Battle of Armageddon the warriors will be covered with blood (cf. Isa. 63:1-4). Also, in making wine, as the grapes were trodden in the winepress, the grape juice flowed out of the press and was caught in containers. In the Battle of Armageddon, there will be so much bloodshed that the blood will flow from the battle in streams, sometimes as deep as a horse’s bridle, for 180 miles, about 300 km. Revelation 14:20 (ESV) says, “And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1,600 stadia [about 180 miles; 300 km].”

Rev 19:17

**“high overhead.”** See commentary on Revelation 8:13.

**“great banquet of God.”** There are two great banquets in Revelation 19, and they are very different. Chronologically, the first “great banquet” is the “great banquet of God,” and it occurs in the aftermath of Armageddon, the “war of the great day of God” (Rev. 16:14). Before the Battle of Armageddon, Satan gathers his evil army from around the earth to fight with God’s army, led by Jesus Christ. But Satan’s army will lose and there will be millions of dead bodies on the ground—a great banquet for all the vultures and other carrion birds and animals of the field (Rev. 19:17-18, 21). This “great banquet” was the banquet that accompanied the great sacrifice of God and the birds and beasts were the invited “guests” (Zeph. 1:7; Ezek. 39:17).

Then the second banquet, or feast, is the marriage banquet of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). This is the great banquet that God will put on for all the saved people in the Millennial Kingdom. This wedding feast will occur after the Resurrection of the Righteous, which is why Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will be at that feast (Matt. 8:11). This great feast is foretold in Isaiah 25:6 and it will have “the best of meats and the finest of wines” (NIV). Jesus spoke of this banquet several times, and many Jews were aware of it, which is why Jesus could speak about it without explaining what it was. Sadly, most Christians are not aware of it at all.

[For more information on the Feast, see commentary on Matt. 8:11.]

[For more on the great marriage banquet of the Lamb, see commentaries on Matt. 8:11 and Rev. 19:9. For more on the Battle of Armageddon, see commentary on Rev. 16:16.]

Rev 19:18

**“so that you may eat the flesh of kings.”** These are the dead bodies on the ground after the Battle of Armageddon (see commentary on Rev. 19:17).

Rev 19:19

**“And I saw the beast.”** Here in Revelation 19:19, the “beast” is the man commonly known as “the Antichrist,” something that is made plain in Revelation 19:20, where the beast and false prophet are clearly said to be two men.

Rev 19:20

**“sulfur.”** The word “brimstone” is an old word for “sulfur.”

Rev 19:21

**“the rest were killed with the sword of him who sat on the horse.”** When the Messiah, Jesus Christ, comes back to earth and conquers it, he will kill the wicked people on earth. That is one of the reasons that the next life will be so wonderful—no wicked people will be there. The “beast” (the Antichrist) and the false prophet are going to be thrown into the Lake of Fire immediately after being defeated in the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:20). In contrast, the people who make up the army of the Antichrist will be killed in the Battle of Armageddon, but like other unsaved people, they will stay dead until the second resurrection. The unsaved of all time will be raised and judged at the second resurrection, which comes at the end of the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth (Rev. 20:4-6, 11-15). At the second resurrection, anyone who is judged to be unworthy of everlasting life is thrown into the Lake of Fire, where they will eventually be annihilated (Rev. 20:11-15).

[For more on the wicked being killed by Christ, see commentary on Isa. 11:4. For more about dead humans being dead in every way until they are raised from the dead at a resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.” For more on the people who are thrown into the Lake of Fire being annihilated instead of burning forever, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, his 1,000-year reign on earth, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on earth.” For more on the chronology of the End Times events, see commentary on Matt. 25:32.]

**“sword.”** We know from the context that this sword is the prophetic utterances that are spoken by Jesus Christ (see commentary on Rev. 19:15. For commentary that this is a “broadsword,” see commentary on Luke 2:35).

**“and all the birds were filled with their flesh.”** To not be buried but instead to be eaten by animals and birds, which was considered a terrible curse (see commentary on Jer. 14:16).

**Revelation Chapter 20**

Rev 20:1

**“abyss.”** “Abyss” is actually a transliteration of the Greek word *abussos* (#12 ἄβυσσος, pronounced 'ä-boo-sos), and it means an immensely deep place, a very deep pit, canyon, or chasm in the earth: “depth,” “abyss.” *Abussos* is also used to describe a spiritual place (that may be somewhere in the depths of the earth) where the imprisoned spirits are being held; and the Devil will be chained there for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-3, 7). The demons that Jesus confronted did not want to be thrown into the abyss (Luke 8:31).

We believe that in this context the “abyss” is another name for Tartarus (see commentary on 2 Pet. 2:4). In Greek mythology, Tartarus was a very deep place, deserving of the term “abyss.” For example, the Greek poet Hesiod, in his *Theogony* (c. 700 BC), said that a bronze anvil would take nine days to fall from heaven to earth, and another nine days to fall from the surface of the earth to Tartarus. About that same time, Homer, in *The Iliad*, depicted Zeus as saying that Tartarus was as far below Hades (not just “the earth”) as heaven was above the earth. That fact, along with the fact that Tartarus is named in 2 Peter 2:4 as a prison for evil spirits, and here in Revelation 20:1-4 we see that the Devil is imprisoned in the abyss, is good evidence that the abyss and Tartarus are the same. We also learn about this prison for evil spirits in 1 Peter 3:18-19; Jude 1:6, and in other verses that mention the abyss.

**“great chain.”** The fact that the Devil cannot be chained by any chain we humans can make, such as an iron chain, should not keep us from believing this verse. God created the spiritual world and the physical world, and He has realities for both worlds. The Devil is chained for 1,000 years and then is loosed, at which point he is not at all reformed, but goes out and convinces some of the world’s population to attack Jerusalem (Rev. 20:7-10).

Rev 20:2

**“dragon.”** Names such as those used in Revelation 20:2, “dragon” and “serpent,” are descriptive terms for the Devil, which is made clear in the verse. They are the figure of speech hypocatastasis (pronounced hī-poe-cä-'täs-tä-sis), a “comparison by implication.”

In the Bible, there are many uses of the three common figures of speech of comparison, which are simile, metaphor, and hypocatastasis. These are commonly used in English speech as well, but only simile and metaphor are generally known by name. A *simile* is a “comparison by resemblance,” that is, the two things being compared resemble each other in some way. A simile in English usually uses “like” or “as.” If a person is a sloppy and noisy eater, someone might say, “You eat **like** a pig.” Psalm 1:3 uses a simile when it says a righteous person is **like** a tree planted by the water.

More intense than a *simile* is the figure *metaphor*, a “comparison by representation.” In a metaphor, one noun represents another. In the pig example above, a metaphor would be, “You **are** a pig.” Jesus used a metaphor when he said to his disciples, “I **am** the vine; you **are** the branches…” (John 15:5 NIV).

Even more intense than metaphor is the figure hypocatastasis, which is a “comparison by implication.” In the pig example, instead of comparing the messy eater with a pig by saying he is “like” a pig, or even using metaphor and saying the person “is” a pig, in hypocatastasis, the comparison is just implied. One person looks at the other and simply says “Pig!” and the meaning, although it is just implied and not specifically stated, is effectively communicated.

Hypocatastasis is used very effectively in our everyday language. If a person helps us when we need it, we might say, “You angel!” If someone lies to us, we might say, “Snake!” When someone is being overly hesitant, he gets mocked by the hypocatastasis, “Chicken!”

The examples, “Pig,” “You angel,” “Snake,” and “Chicken” show us that in hypocatastasis, the person is being compared to something else, and by that comparison, the qualities of the pig, angel, snake, or chicken, are being assigned to the person. As long as the comparison is well-known in the culture, the implied meaning is not confused.

Figures of comparison are helpful in communication because they quickly bring both meaning and emotional impact to a situation that would otherwise take a lengthy description. Imagine how long it would take to describe the way a person was eating and how it was affecting you emotionally, when all you have to say is, “Pig,” and the meaning is clear.

The figure of speech hypocatastasis can be confusing, however, for three major reasons. First, since the comparison is implied, it may not be clear who the subject of the comparison is. For example, in Ezekiel 19:5, a king of Judah is being called a “lion,” but which king is it referring to? The scholars are not sure. Most of them say either Jehoiachin or Zedekiah, but we do not know for certain.

The second reason hypocatastasis can be confusing is that sometimes it is not clear what meaning is being implied. It may be quite easy to figure out why the Devil is called a “serpent” (Rev. 20:2), but we may not understand what Jesus meant when he called Herod a “fox.” A study of the word “fox” in the biblical culture reveals that Jesus was calling Herod a destructive nuisance (cf. commentary on Luke 13:32). In Song of Songs 1:15, the man told the woman that her eyes were “doves,” but there are at least 5 major possibilities that have been set forth as to what that complement actually meant.

The third reason hypocatastasis can be confusing is that the figure can be missed entirely, and people think that the hypocatastasis is literal. When Jesus used the figure hypocatastasis, sometimes even people who knew him well were confused. For example, Jesus told his apostles to beware of the “leaven” of the Pharisees, but they did not recognize the hypocatastasis and thought he was speaking of actual bread. He was using “leaven” to represent “doctrine,” something he made clear to them after he realized they had misunderstood what he said. (Matt. 16:6-12 KJV).

Another good example of people mistaking the hypocatastasis for something literal is the way many Christians think that Genesis 3:1 is speaking of an actual snake when it refers to the Devil as a “serpent” by the figure hypocatastasis. The figure should be clear because literal snakes cannot talk, the Devil is referred to as the serpent in other verses of Scripture, and when 2 Corinthians 11:3 (KJV) says “the serpent” beguiled Eve, the context is Satan and his ministers (2 Cor. 11:14). Furthermore, Revelation 20:2 calls him, “that ancient serpent,” which refers to the “serpent” being very old, which is true, since “the serpent” of Genesis 3:1 is the very first reference to the Devil in the whole Bible. Nevertheless, many people miss the hypocatastasis and think that the “serpent” in Genesis was some kind of actual snake, and artists do not help the situation when they paint pictures of a snake in the Garden of Eden. Some people think that the snake was possessed by the Devil, but why would Eve believe a snake? She would be immediately suspicious of something so out of the ordinary. The Devil would have appeared to Eve in an unthreatening way as a wise and helpful being, but his crafty nature and intent are clearly set forth by the hypocatastasis: “serpent” (E. W. Bullinger has an extensive appendix (19) on the serpent being the Devil in his *Companion Bible*).

The Bible has many examples of hypocatastasis: Solomon’s Beloved is called a “dove” (Song 2:14); destructive people are called “wolves” (Acts 20:29); the strong enemies of God are called “bulls” (Ps. 22:12); powerful male leaders are called “rams” (Exod. 15:15; Ezek. 17:13); vicious and unclean people are called “dogs” (Ps. 22:16; Matt. 7:6) and “pigs” (Matt. 7:6); the people of God are “sheep,” and unbelievers are called “goats” (Matt. 25:33). People are sometimes called “trees” or “plants” (Jer. 11:19; Matt. 15:13). Each of these terms imports a meaning into the text that is important for us to understand.

Sometimes very different people are compared to the same thing, as long as the comparison is valid. A lion usually typified irresistible power and destructive strength, and so many things were compared to a lion. These include God (Job 10:16; Isa. 38:13; Jer. 49:19); Jesus (Rev. 5:5); Israel (Num. 23:24; 24:9); the tribe of Gad (Deut. 33:20); wicked people (Ps. 17:12; 22:13); false prophets (Ezek. 22:25); Jehoahaz, king of Judah (Ezek. 19:3); the officials in Jerusalem (Zeph. 3:3); Babylon (Jer. 4:7); Egypt (Ezek. 32:2); the enemies of Israel (Jer. 2:15); and the Devil (1 Pet. 5:8).

Hypocatastasis is a powerful figure in that it can bring a wide range of possible meanings to the text from just one illustration, and thus invites us into prayer, thought, and study. A good example of this occurs in Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 34:8**

As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock,...

In the above verse, God uses hypocatastasis to compare His people to sheep, calling them “My flock.” Then He again uses hypocatastasis to explain what has happened to them: they became food for the “wild animals.” If God had tried to explain in paragraph form who the “wild animals” were who had eaten His people (i.e., taken advantage of, hurt, and killed them), it would have taken Him at least a paragraph, and the punchy impact of the figure would have been lost. No doubt the list would include cruel leaders, ungodly priests, ruthless businessmen, foreign enemies, and even demonic forces. God covers all these possibilities, forces us to think broadly about the verse, and brings emotion into the text, simply by using the figure hypocatastasis and saying “wild animals.”

Here in Revelation 20:2, the Devil is referred to by hypocatastasis as a dragon, comparing the Devil to a dragon and importing to him the characteristics of evil, fierceness, viciousness, etc. When a figure of comparison uses animal characteristics to describe a person, then the figure falls under the broad category of being a zoomorphism.

[For more names of the Slanderer (Devil), see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.” For more on the figures of speech personification and zoomorphism, see commentary on Prov. 1:20.]

**“Serpent.”** The Slanderer (the Devil) is not a literal serpent, so his being called that is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication; see entry on “dragon” above). Calling the Slanderer a “serpent” compares him with a serpent and imports the characteristics of a serpent onto the Slanderer. Thus we can see that, among other things, the Slanderer is hard to see and recognize (he is very good at hiding), crafty, and deadly. Places the Slanderer is referred to as a serpent include Genesis 3:1, 13, 14; 2 Corinthians 11:3; and Revelation 20:2.

[For more names of the Slanderer, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see commentary on Mark 1:13.

[For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“and bound him for 1,000 years.”** The 1,000 years is the time of Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth. The phrase “1,000 years” is repeated six times in the six verses of Revelation 20:2-7. This repetition emphasizes the time that Christ will reign on earth while Satan is bound. The emphasis is needed because Christ’s Millenial Kingdom was not clearly spoken about before John wrote the book of Revelation. Many people do not believe that there will be a literal 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth, but that is problematic for a number of reasons. For one thing, if a person believes the six repetitions of 1,000 years are not literal, then the person needs to invent their own number, but where will they get that number and why would it be more valid than the number Jesus showed John? There are dozens of reasons to believe the 1,000 years is a literal figure (see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”).

Revelation 20:2 only mentions the Devil being chained because he is the leader, the instigator, and the Adversary of God. However, we know from the scope of Scripture that all Satan’s fallen angels are also put in the Abyss with him. The Bible says, “In that day Yahweh will punish the army of the heavens who are in the heavens, and the kings of the earth on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; and after many days will they be visited” (Isa. 24:21-22). In this verse in Isaiah, since the “kings of the earth” are also shut up in prison, this is speaking about the fallen angels on earth who “pull the strings” and rule the earth. Isaiah 24 is not speaking of human kings, because they are not shut up in a prison, they die and are dead until the resurrection, at which point if they are judged unrighteous they are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). Daniel 7:12 also alludes to the demons being shut up in prison during this period.

It is common in Scripture to speak of only the leader even though the leader and many followers are involved in doing something. For example, Joshua 5:3 says Joshua made knives and circumcised the men of Israel, but Joshua did not do that alone. 1 Samuel 27:9 says “David” attacked the land, but it was David and his army. 1 Kings 6:14 says “Solomon” built the Temple, but it is unlikely he carried even one piece of wood; he was the leader who instigated and oversaw the work. Many such examples could be cited.

[For more on the fallen angels being in prison, see commentaries on 1 Pet. 3:19; 2 Pet. 2:4; and Jude 1:6.]

Rev 20:4

**“and those seated on them.”** The ones seated on the thrones who had authority to judge is not specified in the verse and commentators disagree about who these individuals are. There are two major positions as to the identity of these judges. The first is that they are spirit beings, and likely the judges, or are part of the group of judges, mentioned in Daniel 7:10 who are part of God’s court and divine inner council. The second position is that they are the people who have been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and who have not received the mark of the beast or worshiped his image, and that they come to life and rule with Christ.

The first position and explanation—that the individuals on the thrones are spirit judges—is the better one for a number of reasons. For one thing, the Bible shows us that God does not rule over His created beings as a tyrant, making every decision by Himself and commanding His creation to carry out His wishes. Rather, God works with His created beings and allows them to help Him govern, just as He would have a panel of spirit judges who would help Him judge the people who are being raised from the dead.

We know there are different positions of authority among the angels, and some of them help Him rule. Similarly, God gave Adam and Eve rulership over the animals (Gen. 1:28), and later, as the human population on earth increased, God commanded that rulers and judges be appointed to help Him rule (Exod. 18:21-23; Deut. 16:18). Also, he gave His Son, the Lord Jesus, “all authority” in heaven and on earth, and made him ruler of His creation (Matt. 28:18; Rev. 3:14). When the Christian Church started, God again enlisted the aid of His creation. Through His vice-regent and second in command, the Lord Jesus Christ, He set up the “equipping ministries” of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to help administer the Church and “to prepare God’s people for works of service” (Eph. 4:11-13 NIV84). Even in the future Messianic Kingdom God will have “under-rulers” who will help Him and the Lord Jesus to rule the earth (Isa. 1:26; Jer. 3:15; 23:4; Ezek. 44:24; Matt. 19:28; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 2:26).

The pattern of God enlisting His created beings to help Him administer His creation helps explain why God has a ruling council of spirit beings with whom He consults, and there are a number of verses in the Bible that show God working with a divine council. Of course, God would not need to have a divine council, He is certainly capable of doing things on His own, but His having such a council is in harmony with His loving nature and His desire to work together with His creation.

[For more on God’s divine council of ruling spirit beings, see commentary on Gen. 1:26.]

A strong piece of evidence that the beings on these thrones are God’s divine council of spirit beings is found in Daniel’s vision of the Tribulation and Judgment. In Daniel 7:9-10, which takes place at the end of the Great Tribulation, thrones are set in place; then God takes His seat; then His court convenes; then the “little horn,” the beast, is judged and killed. We know from Revelation 19 that the Antichrist is killed in the Battle of Armageddon, which is the battle that ends the Great Tribulation. Then the Son of Man sets up his kingdom on earth. The First Resurrection is not mentioned in Daniel 7, but we know from Revelation 19:11-20:6 that it comes very quickly after the Battle of Armageddon.

The events in Daniel’s vision come immediately before the events in John’s vision. Daniel’s vision of the thrones and royal court being convened occurs during the Great Tribulation and before the Battle of Armageddon. In contrast, John’s vision of the thrones and judgment occurs after the Battle of Armageddon and at the time of the First Resurrection, also called the “resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15). The time period between Daniel’s and John’s visions of the thrones and judges is short. Although we are not told the specific time period, it is possible that the events of these visions take place only a few weeks apart. The length of time depends on how long the thrones in Daniel’s vision are set up before the Antichrist, the “Little Horn,” is judged and killed in the Battle of Armageddon.

If the thrones in Daniel 7 are set up just prior to the Battle of Armageddon, and the thrones in Revelation 20:4 are for the judgment of those resurrected in the First Resurrection, then there is very little time between those two judgments. In that case, it would be likely that the thrones in John’s vision in Revelation 20:4 are a continuation of the courtroom scene in Daniel 7:10, and the beings who judge in Daniel 7 would likely be the same judges as those in Revelation 20. That would help to clarify why the beings, who are not described or named in Daniel 7, are not named in Revelation 20. Furthermore, it would then make sense that this panel of judges are, or are some of, the 24 elders mentioned (but not named) in Revelation 4.

The beings who sit on thrones and judge in Daniel’s vision are spirit beings. They cannot be the people in the First Resurrection because Daniel’s vision occurs before the First Resurrection chronologically. It seems most likely that the judges in Revelation 20:4 are spirit beings too, and that the thrones and judges are in place before the First Resurrection. It would not be at all unusual for the judges here to be spirit beings. God has a divine council of spirit beings who judge, and this divine council appears with more or less clarity in a number of verses (cf. Gen. 1:26; 11:7; Job 15:8; Ps. 82:1; 89:7; Isa. 6:8; 14:13; Jer. 23:18; Dan. 4:17; 7:10, 26; Rev. 4:4). We see them working in concert with God to judge human beings in Daniel 7:10, 26; and also in Daniel 4:17. Thus the precedent for these judges to help God judge those who are in the First Resurrection is established in the Old Testament.

Further evidence that the people of the First Resurrection are not the ones on the thrones in Revelation 20:4 is that the First Resurrection includes every righteous person who has died from Adam until the end of Armageddon, except Christians, who will have been taken to heaven in the Rapture. It does not fit with Scripture, nor does it make logical sense, that every person in the First Resurrection will reign with Christ on a throne. Jesus promised that the apostles would sit on thrones (Matt. 19:28), and that there would be others who would help him rule (Isa. 1:26; Jer. 23:4), but not everyone in the First Resurrection will be a ruler or sit on a throne. The Scriptural picture of the Messianic Kingdom on earth is that there will be some judges and rulers, and then there will be the majority of people who are not rulers.

While it is true that in some English translations of the Bible, Revelation 20:4 reads that those who come to life and reign are only the ones who are beheaded and who have not worshiped the beast or taken his mark on their hands or foreheads, the Greek text is not that exclusive. The Greek word *hoitines* is the masculine plural of the noun *hostis* (#3748 ὅστις), and it is translated “such as” in the REV (as well as in the ASV, RV, Rotherham). It allows people who are the same kind of people as the martyrs to be included. R. C. H. Lenski writes: “The nominative *kai hoitines* with its finite verbs is not an ‘irregular construction.’ By dropping the governance of *eidon*, the *hoitines* clause becomes deictic and practically independent, the very thing intended. John saw many, many more souls than those of the martyrs, namely all the departed saints.”[[30]](#footnote-12298) Lenski is correct that John saw many more people than just the martyrs. The First Resurrection is for all the righteous saints of the Old Testament and Gospels, not just for those who were martyred during the rule of the Antichrist.

That the First Resurrection is for all the righteous people of the Old Testament and Gospels can be easily seen by reading the verses on the resurrection. For example, Jesus taught that if you did good for people who could not repay you, God would repay you at the Resurrection of the Righteous (Luke 14:14). Jesus also taught that those who had done good in their lives would be in the First Resurrection, the “resurrection of life,” not the “resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29 ESV).

Commentators who believe that the ones on the thrones in Revelation 20:4 are those who are raised from the dead after being beheaded for the testimony of Jesus believe this primarily because they presume that God would let us know who it is that sits on the thrones and judges. But there is no compelling reason to think that God would tell us that. The Bible has many verses that refer, with varying degrees of clarity, to a divine council, yet in not one of those verses does God tell us who is on the council. He does not even tell us if His council is all angels or whether it includes other spirit beings such as cherubim or seraphim. Given that God has never told us who is on the council in any other verse, there is no compelling reason to think that God would tell us who the judges are in Revelation 20:4.

Also, commentators who believe that the individuals who are on the thrones are the resurrected believers have to reverse the order of the events described in Revelation 20:4 in order to explain how the individuals who are on the thrones could be the resurrected believers. As it reads, the ones on the thrones are giving judgment, but only later in the verse do the dead “come to life.” Obviously, someone has to come to life before they can judge, so in order for the ones judging to be the ones who have come to life, the order of the verse has to be reversed. But there is no compelling reason to change the order in the verse except to accommodate the theory that the ones on the thrones are the ones who have been resurrected.

While it certainly happens in Scripture that events are written out of chronological order, the correct timeline can be established from the scope of Scripture. In this case, the scope of Scripture supports the order of the events of Revelation 20:4 as they occur in the verse. However, to see that, one has to have an understanding of the 1,000-year Messianic Kingdom on earth, and the prophecies of the Old Testament that refer to that kingdom. The Millennial Kingdom will be on earth; Israel will be fully reestablished; Jerusalem will be the capital of the world; and a new temple will be built in Jerusalem and it will be a house of worship and prayer for everyone on earth. Christ’s 1,000-year Messianic Kingdom will fill the earth (Dan. 2:35; Matt. 5:5), and will function like any other kingdom: there will be rulers and judges, farmers, herdsmen, fishermen, cooks, builders, and so forth. Not everyone will sit on a throne and rule.

With that understanding of the Millennial Kingdom, it makes sense that the judges who sit on the thrones are God’s divine council. They will judge those who come to life and give them the rewards due them for the service they performed in their life on earth, just as Scripture says will happen (Job 34:11; Ps. 62:12; Prov. 24:12; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Ezek. 33:20; Matt. 16:27; Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 3:8). In contrast, “orthodox” Christianity rejects the idea of the Millennial Kingdom, and places every saved person in heaven forever. In that scenario, it makes more sense that everyone would sit on a throne, although it is unclear who the saved would be judging. But “orthodox” Christianity is wrong about the future. There will be a Millennial Kingdom on earth as described in the Scriptures, and although there will be judges (Isa. 1:26), not everyone will be on a throne or be a judge.

Given all the evidence, Revelation 20:4 is setting forth that in the future, God’s divine council of spirit beings will be the ones who judge and reward those people who are raised in the First Resurrection, the Resurrection of the Righteous.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the 24 elders in Rev. 4:4, see commentary on Rev. 4:4. For more on God’s divine council, see commentary on Gen. 1:26.]

**“had been given authority to judge.”** The spirit beings on the thrones will be given authority to judge. The Greek word translated “authority to judge” is *krima* (#2917 κρίμα), which usually means a legal decision rendered by a judge, thus a verdict; or a dispute or lawsuit; or a decision or decree. However, it can also mean, as it does in this verse, “the function of a judge, authority to judge”;[[31]](#footnote-12910) “the power and business of judging”:[[32]](#footnote-14958) “the action or function of a judge; judging”[[33]](#footnote-11315) (BDAG translates *krima* as “authority to judge” in Rev. 20:4).

The understanding that *krima* in this verse refers to the authority to judge is picked up by many different translations and commentators: “authority to judge” (CJB, HCSB, ESV, NET, NIV, NLT, NRSV, The Kingdom NT[[34]](#footnote-11277)); “the right of judging” (BBE); “allowed to judge” (GW); “entrusted with judgment” (NAB); “the power to give judgment” (NJB); “to whom judgment was committed” (RSV); “the right to judge had been committed” (H. Cassirer); “permission to judge” (The Source NT); “permission was granted them to pass judgment” (Charles Williams’ NT); “empowered to act as judges” (Goodspeed NT). Even in 1865, Henry Alford noted, “Judgment (the act and decision of judgment)” in his translation with commentary.[[35]](#footnote-21569)

Since “authority to judge” could be written much more clearly in Greek than by using the single word *krima*, which can refer to the authority to judge but much more frequently refers to a judicial decree or sentence, we should ask why God uses *krima* here. A good possibility is that it shows the connection between the judges and God. While it is true that the judges are given the authority to judge, they do not make up the sentence on their own, but judge in agreement with the judgment they receive from God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, in a sense, it is not only the “authority to judge” that is given to this council of spirit judges, but also the sentence that is to be handed down to the people. This makes Revelation 20:4 very similar to the record in Daniel 4:13-25, in which the “decree of the watchers” is also referred to as the “decree of the Most High.”

[For more on the divine council being referred to as “watchers,” see commentary on Dan. 4:17.]

It is also worth noting that this judgment is the judgment of the righteous people who have just come back to life. This is not a judgment for salvation. Everyone getting up in this First Resurrection is saved. This judgment is a judgment for rewards and positions in the Messianic Kingdom. It seems that because this judgment is not a judgment for salvation, but a judgment for rewards, that God and the Lord Jesus entrust it to the council of spirit judges. The other two judgments for non-Christians, the sheep and goat judgment of Matthew 25:31-46, and the Second Resurrection of Revelation 20:11-15, are life or death judgments: the people in those judgments do not know whether or not they will be saved and receive everlasting life until the sentence is spoken. That is perhaps the reason that at those two judgments, it is Jesus Christ himself who does the judging. If a person is to be condemned to everlasting death, Jesus Christ will make that judgment.

**“souls.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή, pronounced psoo-'kay), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is primarily for the person himself, which is why the HCSB says, “I saw the people who had been beheaded because of their testimony.” However, by using the word “soul,” God includes their mental and emotional life, and helps us see these people as the committed people that they truly were.

[For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

**“beheaded.”** This is the figure of speech synecdoche of the part, where a part of something is put for the whole of that thing.[[36]](#footnote-15775) In this case, those believers who have been “beheaded” are said to get up, but in fact, all believers from the Old Testament and Tribulation will get up. The ones who are “beheaded” are put by synecdoche for all the martyrs, but all the rest of the righteous people are included by the phrase, “and such as had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand.” Believers from every age are like those who had not worshiped the beast in that in having faith in God they deny themselves and have faith in God (OT) and Christ (NT).

Revelation 20:4 is about the “first resurrection, “the resurrection of the righteous,” when every righteous person will hear the voice of Christ (John 5:25-29) and get up from the dead (except those in the Christian Church, because they have already been in the Rapture). This verse specifically says “beheaded” because it is in the context of the Great Tribulation, when believers will die horrible deaths, and because there is an emphasis that these people are the type of people who “did not love their souls—even to death” (Rev. 12:11). This verse gives us pause to consider that beheading will become more common as a way to kill believers, and may in fact be reinstated as a way to execute the death penalty, just as it was in the Roman Empire. Christians were beheaded by Romans in the first century—this is almost certainly how the apostle Paul died—and it is currently occurring to Christians who are beheaded by some Muslim groups.

[For more information on the Old Testament believers getting up at this time and the two resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15.]

**“came to life.”** The dead are dead, and not alive in any way, but God will raise them in the resurrections.

Some theologians say that “came to life” refers to the New Birth, i.e., being saved, and that the Millennium (the 1,000 years) is happening right now. Those theologians state that the Millennium is the Church Age, the time between the ascension (or the Day of Pentecost) and the return of Christ. Saint Augustine was one person who believed that and so that is the standard position of the Roman Catholic Church. However, there are many things that argue against that belief.

* One is that there would be no reason for God to say that from Christ’s ascension to his return would be 1,000 years when that number is not even close to being accurate.
* Also, for John to write that the Millennium is going on right now and that it is 1,000 years would be confusing. John the Baptist, Jesus Christ himself, and the New Testament writers all claimed that the time of Jesus’ return was close, even in the lifetimes of those people who saw Jesus when he was alive on earth (cf. Matt. 3:2; 10:23; 16:28 [cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27]; Matt. 23:35-36 [cf. Luke 11:49]; Matt. 24:34 [cf. Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32]; Matt. 26:64; Mark 1:15; John 4:24; John 5:25; 12:31; 21:22; Rom. 13:12; 16:20; 1 Cor. 7:29; Phil. 4:5; Heb. 10:37; James 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:7; Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:6, 20). John himself wrote that the things he wrote about would “shortly come to pass” and the time was “near” (Rev. 1:1, 3; 22:6, 20). For John to then contradict himself and all the other New Testament writers as well, and say the time was actually going to be long, 1,000 years would make no sense. It makes much more sense that John agreed with the other New Testament writers when he wrote that Jesus was coming “shortly,” and that then in Revelation 20:4-7 he was writing about a different subject, that being the literal future Kingdom of Christ on earth, which would last 1,000 years.
* Also, if God was going to state a number of years between the ascension and return of Christ, it seems that He would have written about that time period sometime between Acts and Jude in the letters specifically addressed to the Church. For example, the angels at the ascension could have said it, or Paul, Peter, or James could have given the 1,000-year number instead of writing that the return would come soon. If, when John penned the book of Revelation, his simple message in Revelation 20:4-7 was that Christ’s return is a long way off, why is that not stated in the writings of Paul, Peter, James, Jude, or Hebrews, and why in fact do they say the time is short and thus contradict what John wrote? The answer to that potential problem is simple: the 1,000-year period does not contradict Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, or even John himself because it does not refer to the time of the Church Age or the return of Christ.
* Also, theologians who claim we are in the Millennium now say that the dead people coming to life is not literal but figurative, and that it refers to spiritually dead people getting saved and becoming alive in Christ; becoming alive spiritually. However the wording of the text does not fit that analysis. The people who come to life in Revelation 20:4-7 are dead because they had been “beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God” (Rev. 20:4). Taken literally, Revelation 20:4 makes sense and fits with Scripture because for millennia believers have been killed for their faith and the biblical prophecies say that will continue (cf. Matt. 24:9; Rev. 2:10; 13:7; 14:13). But if the resurrection from the dead in Revelation 20:4 is the spiritually dead getting saved and being given everlasting life, then the verse does not make sense because the unsaved were not “spiritually killed” and they certainly were not spiritually dead because of their testimony for Jesus. Furthermore, the things these believers in this resurrection are said not to have done include worshiping the beast and taking his mark, but those things were not available on Pentecost or even today, and in fact, are still future. These things point to the fact that the 1,000 years is not happening now, but is future.
* Also, Revelation 20:4 says that those people who come to life then reign with Christ 1,000 years. The verse does not say that “the Church” will reign 1,000 years, it says the people who come to life reign 1,000 years. We can understand that if the verse is taken literally because when believers are resurrected, they have everlasting life, so it makes sense they can live 1,000 years. According to Scripture, believers in this First Resurrection will spend the first 1,000 years with Christ when he reigns over the earth (see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”). After the 1,000 years, Christ will not reign on this earth anymore as we know the earth. This earth will have been consumed in fire (Rev. 20:9), the elements will have melted (2 Pet. 3:12) and the heavens and the earth will have been totally remade (Rev. 21:1) and be very different (Rev. 21:1-22:21; for example, the New Jerusalem will have streets of gold; Rev. 21:21). Believers will live forever with Christ on the new earth.
* Another problem with making the first resurrection in Revelation 20:4-7 refer to people getting saved and becoming alive spiritually is that the “first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5, 6) is closely paralleled to the second resurrection. In the first resurrection, the people beheaded for Christ “came to life” and reigned with Christ 1,000 years, while in the second resurrection, the rest of the dead did not “come to life” until the 1,000 years were over (Rev. 20:5). So the first resurrection was before the 1,000 years and the second one was after the 1,000 years, but in both resurrections, people came to life. But if coming “to life” is getting saved, then both the righteous and unrighteous people are saved and given spiritual life—but the text is not saying that. Christ and Paul made it clear that there will be two resurrections, and they are very different; one is to everlasting life and one is to condemnation (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). All that is needed to clear any confusion about the resurrections is to understand that they refer to literal resurrections. The righteous people are literally raised from the dead in the first resurrection and then live with Christ forever with no fear of the second death (Rev. 20:6). The unrighteous people are literally raised in the second resurrection and then condemned and thrown into the Lake of Fire where they experience the second death (Rev. 11-15).

[See Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

The resurrected believers of the Old Testament and the Tribulation period are in the Millennial Kingdom, so are the Christians, and so are the “sheep” from the sheep and goat judgment.

[For more on the sheep and goat judgment, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on the three “categories,” if you will, of people in the Millennial Kingdom, see commentary on Matt. 25:34.]

**“reigned with Christ 1,000 years.”** Jesus Christ will come to earth and rule a kingdom scholars refer to as the “Millennial Kingdom” (from the Latin, *mille*, 1,000, and *annus*, a year). As this verse says, it will last 1,000 years. The 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth is referred to by many theologians as the Millennial Kingdom (from the Latin, *mille*, 1,000; and *annus*, a year). Jesus Christ will come down from heaven, land on earth and fight the Battle of Armageddon, and conquer the earth (Rev. 19:11-21). Then he will set up his kingdom which will fill the whole earth (see commentary on Dan. 2:35), and that kingdom will last 1,000 years, just as Revelation 20:4 says.

Historically the orthodox Church does not believe in Jesus’ reign on earth. At least since the time of Augustine’s book, *The City of God* (c. AD 425), the mainstream church has believed that Christ is in heaven and when saved people die they go to heaven to live there with Jesus forever. Thus the orthodox teaching of Christianity is that Jesus does not come back to earth and there is no Kingdom of Christ on earth. But that teaching contradicts huge sections of the Bible and makes the Bible very hard to read and understand. Furthermore, it completely obscures the future hope people have and makes it impossible to understand how people can get rewarded for the good things they do for God and Christ. There are many reasons that we should believe in Christ’s reign on earth.

* We should take the Bible literally whenever possible. There are some figures of speech and figurative language in the Bible, but just because something can be taken figuratively does not mean it should be taken figuratively. Especially given all the references in the Bible to the earth being restored to a paradise condition, Jesus Christ reigning on earth, and Israel being restored to their land, there is no sound reason not to take the 1,000 years on earth as a literal statement.
* God keeps His promises, and He promised the Promised Land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If there is no Millennial Kingdom on earth, then God will not have kept those promises. God repeated the promise that He would give the land of Israel to Abraham and his descendants many times, and said it in slightly different ways. He told Abraham that he and his descendants would get the land (Gen. 12:7; 13:15-17; 15:7, 18; 17:8). He told it to Isaac (Gen. 26:3). He told it to Jacob (Gen. 28:13; 35:12; 48:4). Then over and over He told Israel about the promise or that He would give them the land (cf. Exod. 6:4, 8; 12:25; 13:5, 11; Lev. 14:34; 20:24; 23:10; 25:2). The Eternal City described in Revelation 21-22 is not the land of Israel. Some people say that God gave the land he promised to Israel, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but in speaking with those three men God said he would give the land “to you,” to them, not just their descendants (Gen. 13:15; 17:8; 26:3; 28:13; and 35:12). God will keep those promises and give the land to them when they are raised from the dead (cf. Ezek. 37:11-14).
* Christ comes to earth and fights the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:11-21; Isa. 63:1-6; Zech. 6:3-5). There is no record that after Armageddon he goes back up to heaven. He reigns on earth from Jerusalem.
* When Christ comes to earth he sets up his throne, gathers the people of earth, and judges them (Matt. 24:29-31; 25:31-32). So Christ has to come to earth and unregenerate people are let into the Kingdom.
* According to Revelation 20:4-12, the righteous dead are raised at the start of the 1,000 years and the unrighteous dead at the end of the 1,000 years. That scenario only works well if there is a future 1,000-year Kingdom of Christ on earth after the Battle of Armageddon.
* Judah and Israel will be reunited.
* The resurrected Jews will return to “their own land” (Ezek. 37:12-14). The New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22) is not the land of Israel.
* There are people in the Millennial Kingdom who marry, bear children, age, and die (Isa. 65:17-25).
* In the Millennial Kingdom people will eat meat and fish (Isa. 25:6; Ezek. 47:10). People only ate plants in the Garden of Eden before the Fall (Gen. 1:29-30). That will be the situation again in the Eternal Kingdom (Rev. 21:3; 22:3).
* Jesus will rule with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). That would not be in the Eternal City of Revelation 21-22. It has to be in the Millennial Kingdom where there are natural, unregenerate, and unsaved people.
* Jesus will rebuild the Temple (Zech. 6:12-13; Ezek. 40-44), but there will be no Temple in the Everlasting City (Rev. 21:22).
* The ancient cities will be rebuilt in the Millennial Kingdom, but not in the Everlasting City (Isa. 61:4).
* Strangers and foreigners will tend flocks (Isa. 61:5).
* There will be the sun and moon in the Millennial Kingdom, but neither one in the New Jerusalem (Isa. 30:26: Rev. 21:23; 22:5).
* The Millennial Kingdom will end with a fiery war (Rev. 20:9). That war is different than Armageddon. So there is a war immediately before the Millennial Kingdom, and a war that ends it.

​All these pieces of evidence point to the fact that Jesus Christ will come back to earth and reign on earth.

[For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Rev 20:5

**“this is the first resurrection.”** In the Greek text, this phrase is placed at the end of the sentence, but that can be confusing to English readers who are not used to summary phrases being inserted out of chronological order. The REV places the phrases in chronological order, as do some other versions (cf. NLT, NIrV). Some other English versions put the phrase in parenthesis to set it apart from the flow of the context (cf. CJB, NET, NIV, NRSV).

Rev 20:7

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see commentary on Mark 1:13. In this verse, “the Adversary” refers to the Adversary himself and his demon army. It is common in Scripture to only mention the leader when the leader and the followers are all involved (see commentary on Rev. 20:2, “and bound him for 1,000 years”). This “Adversary,” Satan, is further described a few verses later as “the Devil” (Rev. 20:10).

[For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“will be loosed.”** The Adversary will be bound for 1,000 years, allowing the restoration of Eden-like conditions on earth. Earth will be a place of justice, no war, plenty of food, great weather, and more. In the Millennial Kingdom, the promises God made to Abraham and to Israel will be fulfilled. But after the 1,000 years, the Adversary and his demons will be loosed and will deceive some of the natural people on earth just as Satan had deceived Adam and Eve: by suggesting that what people have is not good enough. In this way, Satan will amass an army of disgruntled people and attack Jerusalem (Rev. 20:8-9).

The good question has been asked, “Why would God imprison Satan and his demons for the 1,000 years and then let them loose to deceive the people? Why not just throw them in the Lake of Fire after Armageddon like the Antichrist and False Prophet were thrown into the fire?” Although that question is not specifically answered in Scripture, there are some very good possible answers. One of them is that Satan’s activity in the Millennial Kingdom will show once and for all that people’s happiness and contentment are less about what they actually have than what they think about what they have. The people in the Millennial Kingdom will have every reason to love it. People will be healthy and well-fed, there will be no war, no natural disasters, and not even any dangerous animals. It will be a truly joyous place. Yet those people who “have everything,” will become disgruntled and ungodly soon after Satan and his demons are released into the world, showing that godliness and satisfaction with life come from inside a person and not from outside circumstances. We see this every day even in our lives now. We see people who have very little and whose lives are very difficult yet who are very happy, and we see people who have health and money who are angry and bitter and who dislike life.

The Old Testament alluded to the period when the demons would be imprisoned and then let loose (cf. Dan. 7:12; Isa. 24:21-22; note that Isa. 24:22 is worded in such a way that after many days the demons will be “visited,” and the Hebrew word can mean either for good or bad, depending on the context. That they are “visited” can mean that they are released, punished, or both).

Rev 20:8

**“to deceive the nations that are in the four corners of the earth.”** Satan and his demons are released from their prison at the end of the 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom of Christ (cf. Rev. 20:1-3, 7-8), and when they are released they work to deceive the people on earth just as Satan worked to deceive Eve in the Garden of Eden. The “nations” on the earth during Christ’s Millennial Kingdom that can be deceived by the Devil are the nations of people who are the descendants of the “sheep” of the Sheep and Goat Judgment.

When Jesus Christ sets up his kingdom on earth after the Battle of Armageddon, the people who will be in it will be the Christians who were in the Rapture and came down from heaven with Christ; the righteous people who were in the first resurrection, which occurred after the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 20:4-6); and the “sheep” of the Sheep and Goat Judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). The “Sheep” are natural people of earth who did not die in the Tribulation or Armageddon and who Jesus let into his kingdom on earth, and they will prosper and multiply in Christ’s Millennial Kingdom. They will live a very long time, often hundreds of years, marry and have healthy children, and those children will grow, marry, and have children (Isa. 65:19-23), and the population of the earth will grow very quickly. But these “sheep” and their offspring are natural people and some of them will be ungodly just as some people are ungodly today. These natural people will need law and order, which is why Christ will rule with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15) and have people help him rule (Jer. 23:3-5; 1 Cor. 6:2; Rev. 2:26-27). Nevertheless, many of those natural people will be deceived by Satan and his demons and attack Christ’s kingdom and his city of Jerusalem, but they will be defeated in the Final War, as we see here in Revelation 20:7-10.

[For more on the Sheep and Goat Judgment, see commentary on Matt. 25:32. For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Rev 20:9

**“the width of the earth.”** This is a hyperbole, but it will be a vast army that will attack Israel, and that army will cover a lot of territory from east to west as it marches forward.

**“and fire came down out of heaven and devoured them.”** The Final Battle at the end of the Millennial Kingdom, as the Bible says, is simply fire that comes from heaven and destroys the enemies of God. This is the final battle, after Christ’s 1,000-year Millennial Kingdom. So, in chronological order, there is the Battle of Armageddon immediately before the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, and that battle is described in verses such as Revelation 14:15-20; 16:12-16; and 19:11-21. Then comes Christ’s Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules over the earth. Then Satan is loosed from the abyss and gathers an army and he, his demons, and his army attack God’s people, at which time fire comes from heaven and kills all the enemy people and at that time the Devil and his demons are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:3, 7-10).

This Final Battle is not named in Scripture, nor is it well described, which are reasons why the Christian Church knows almost nothing about it. All the human enemies of God are killed in this battle, because the intense fire from heaven will melt even the elements of the earth (2 Peter 3:12) and so obviously kill the people, who will then get up to be judged in the Second Resurrection (Rev. 20:11-15).

[For more on Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.”]

Rev 20:10

**“Devil.”** The Greek word is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος), which literally means “Slanderer,” but *diabolos* gets transliterated into English as our more familiar name, “Devil.” Slander is so central to who the Devil is and how he operates that one of his primary names is “the Slanderer.”

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

It is the Devil and his army of demons who are thrown into the Lake of Fire at this time. It is common in the Bible to say that something happens to a king or ruler but meaning that it happens to his followers as well. For example, when the Bible says “David went out and fought with the Philistines” (1 Sam. 19:8), it only mentions David by name but it means David and his army. Similarly, when the Israelites entered Israel, the Israelite men were circumcised because Moses did not circumcise them in the wilderness. The Bible says Joshua made the knives and circumcised the men of Israel (Josh. 5:3) but he certainly did not make knives and circumcise tens of thousands of men by himself—he was the leader so he is the one mentioned. Similarly, when “Satan” is thrown in the Abyss (Rev. 20:1), or “the Devil” is thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10), it means Satan and his demon army, not just Satan alone (see commentary on Isa. 24:21).

**“where both the beast and the false prophet *had been thrown*.”** The “beast,” the person who is generally known as the Antichrist, and the false prophet had been thrown into the Lake of Fire 1,000 years earlier, immediately after being defeated by Jesus Christ in the Battle of Armageddon (Rev. 19:19-20).

**“they will be tormented day and night for ages and ages.”** The Greek is αἰῶνας αἰώνων αἰών; literally, “for ages of ages.” This is a hyperbole, an overstatement. The phrase “to the ages of the ages” refers to a very long time, but exactly how long we do not know. This is usually translated as, “They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” This verse has been used to teach the eternal torment of the damned, i.e., that people who die “unsaved” burn forever in “Hell.” What the Bible really teaches is that people who die unsaved are not tormented forever, but are eventually annihilated in the flames of Gehenna. The phrase “for the ages of the ages” refers to a very long time, but exactly how long we do not know. God may not want us to know how long these people and spirits will be tormented, but the problem is also exacerbated by the fact that according to some scholars, the largest number that can be written in Roman numerals is 3,999,999 (MMMCMXCIXCMXCIX with a line over the first seven (some say nine) letters. The line over the top of a letter multiplies it by 1,000. In any case, with all the tragedy the Devil has caused over the last 6,000 years, a number that was only about four million may be far too small, which in the ancient world forced the need for hyperbolic language. Ezekiel 28:19 also seems to indicate that the Devil will ultimately be annihilated, and Isaiah 14:15 does too.

[For more information on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Rev 20:11

**“great white throne.”** What theologians refer to as “the Great White Throne Judgment” is the final judgment, and occurs in association with the “second resurrection.” The vast majority of the dead who are raised in this judgment will be condemned to annihilation in Gehenna (see commentary on Rev. 20:10). In the Bible, the color white is associated with purity and righteousness, and the white throne represents the purity and righteousness of the judgment as well as points to the righteous state of the earth once the judgment is over.

**“and him who sat on it.”** The one sitting on the throne is Jesus Christ. He will be the judge sitting on the throne (cf. John 5:22, 30; Acts 17:51; and Rom. 2:16; and see the REV commentary on Rom. 14:10).

**“from whose face.”** The Greek word translated as “face” can also mean “presence,” and some English versions read that way. However, given the importance of the face in the biblical narrative going all the way back to Genesis, fleeing from the “face,” the look on the face of Jesus, seems to be the right nuance here in Revelation 20:11.

**“the earth and the heavens fled away, and there was no place found for them.”** The enormity of the Final Judgment and the tremendous and all-encompassing change that is associated with it is difficult to put into words. The heavens and the earth that are now will be completely renewed. The elements of this earth will melt with a fervent heat and the heavens and the earth will change completely (2 Pet. 3:7-10). There will be a new heaven and earth (Rev. 21:1). What about this old heaven and earth? No place will be found for them. They are tainted by sin and evil and they will have fulfilled their purpose and will no longer be needed, so they will be done away with. The earth and the sea will have given up their dead, and there is no more reason for this old earth once that has happened. Apparently, this final judgment does not occur on earth, but where it occurs is not stated, although it could well be heaven, in fact, this “white throne” could well be the throne John saw in heaven (Rev. 4:2).

The phrase “and there was no place found for them” is true because at this White Throne Judgment, Jesus Christ, God, and the angels will be able to keep anyone from hiding and escaping judgment. Furthermore, there will be no place in the universe found where these evil people can live. As Revelation 20:15-21 says, the ungodly, unsaved people will be thrown into the Lake of Fire where they will be burned up until they are annihilated.

[For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

Rev 20:12

**“and books were opened.”** God has angel scribes that write down what each person does during their life so that on Judgment Day each person can be judged accurately and righteously. The Bible says many times that people will be repaid for what they have done, whether it be good or bad, and so to ensure accuracy over the years, what people do is written down, and those books will be opened on the Judgment Day, just like Revelation 20:12 says.

[For more on the record books that angel scribes are writing, see commentary on Mal. 3:16.]

Rev 20:13

**“the sea gave up the dead who were in it.”** This statement showed the knowledge and power of God. In the ancient cultures, including the Roman culture at the time John was writing, the seas were thought of as powerful, dangerous, and unforgiving. People who were on ships that sank and even many people who fell in the water close to shore were often drowned and never found again. Many people who sailed away from shore on ships were simply never heard from again; the ship would sail out of sight and presumably sink, but people would not really know because often neither the ship, nor things from the ship, nor any people on the ship would ever be seen again. And that situation had existed on earth for thousands of years; ever since Noah’s Flood. So for John to say that at the resurrection the sea would give up the dead who were in it was a big deal to John’s readers and showed God’s power and authority over even very powerful forces like the sea.

We must take note of the fact that the Bible says that the sea gave up the dead who were in it. This is very accurate. Traditional Christianity teaches that when a person dies they go to heaven or hell, which is not correct because it is a belief based in Greek mythology that came into Christianity. The Greeks believed in an “immortal soul,” but the Bible makes it clear that the soul is not immortal but can and does die (cf. Matt. 10:28). Where are dead people now? They are dead and they will be dead until they are raised from the dead. Revelation 20:13 describes dead people being raised and then judged. The dead people are not described as having gone to heaven or “Hell” when they died, they are dead and in the sea or grave, and God gets them up from there and judges them. Then depending on the judgment they received based on how they lived, they receive everlasting life or are thrown into the Lake of Fire (cf. Rev. 20:11-15).

**“the grave.”** The word translated “grave” in the REV is the Greek word *Hadēs* (#86 ᾅδης), which came over into English as the loanword Hades (pronounced 'hay-dees). *Hadēs* was the Greek word that was used in both the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) and the Greek New Testament to represent what the Hebrew word *Sheol* meant in the Hebrew language. *Sheol* referred to the state of being dead. *Sheol* was not the physical grave itself, but the state of being dead (the actual physical grave was referred to in Hebrew as the *qeber* (#06913 קֶבֶר). Some theologians refer to *Sheol* as “gravedom” (“the reign of the grave;” or “the reign of death”). *Sheol* (*Hadēs* in the Greek Bible) is not a place, it is a state of being—the state of being dead. In the Hebrew Old Testament, dead people are said to be in *Sheol* (cf. Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 1 Kings 2:6; Job 7:9; Ps. 6:5; 16:10; 31:17; 49:14; Prov. 7:27; Eccl. 9:10; etc.).

It is worth noting that Hebrew, which was the language that God chose to have the Old Testament written in, has a specific word, *Sheol*, for “the state of being dead.” Like English, Hebrew has a common noun for “death,” which is *maveth* (#04194 מָוֶת), and a commonly used verb for “die,” which is *muth* (#04191 מָוֹת). However, the Hebrew language also has the word “*Sheol*” which refers to “the state of being dead.” English has no such word, so what we have to say is a person “is dead,” or they are “lifeless.” In contrast, Hebrew has the advantage of being able to say that the person is “in Sheol.” This has the potential to stop a lot of confusion, because if when a person dies they are “in Sheol,” then they are not also “in heaven” or “in Hell.” They are dead, in the state of being dead, and thus they are “in Sheol.”

In Greek mythology, *Hadēs* was both the name of the god of the underworld and also the name of the underworld itself. When the Hebrew Old Testament was translated into Greek around 250 BC, the Septuagint translators translated the Hebrew word *Sheol* by the Greek word *Hadēs*. It was actually a bad choice to translate *Sheol* as *Hadēs*, because in *Sheol* people are dead, whereas the Greeks believed that in *Hadēs* the souls of dead people were alive. Greek mythology had many stories of people being alive in *Hadēs*. So when the Greek-speaking Jews in Egypt translated *Sheol* as *Hadēs*, by the stroke of a pen they turned dead people into living people, and this introduced great confusion about the state of the dead into Judaism and then into Christianity, and that confusion still exists today. Actually, that confusion continued and perhaps was exacerbated when the New Testament books of Matthew, Luke, Acts, Corinthians, and Revelation used the word *Hadēs*. Although the New Testament use of *Hadēs* was the same as its use in the Septuagint, it is understandable that most Greeks would have seen *Hadēs* in light of their traditional mythology, and believed that the god *Hadēs* (the Devil) lived in *Hadēs* and reigned over the people there. So today millions of Christians believe that the souls of dead people are alive and suffering in “Hell” (*Hadēs*) because of what came from Greek mythology into Christianity.

Why would the Greek-speaking Jews translate *Sheol* as *Hadēs*? It is possible that some of the Jews had become so Hellenized that they thought that the dead were alive in *Hadēs* and felt that *Hadēs* was a good translation of *Sheol*. It is also possible that they used *hadēs* because they did not have a Greek word that had the same meaning as *Sheol*. The Greeks believed that the human soul was immortal, and so they did not have a vocabulary word that was the equivalent of *Sheol*, which meant “the state of being dead.” Whatever the case, the Septuagint translators chose to use the Greek word *hadēs* as a translation of *Sheol*. To maintain the proper theology of the Bible, it would have been better if they had simply transliterated *Sheol* into Greek and brought it into the Greek language as a loanword. Actually, that is what David Stern does in his *Complete Jewish Bible*. When *Hadēs* occurs in the Greek New Testament, Stern translates it *Sheol*.

The word *Hadēs* occurs in the Greek New Testament ten different times (11 in the Byzantine text), and it always refers to the state of being dead or the state of non-existence except one time in Luke 16:23. In that passage, Jesus uses *Hadēs* in the same way that his Pharisee audience was using it—to refer to a place of the living dead. The Pharisees were one of the Jewish groups that took on the Greek belief that some of the humans who had died were alive in *Hadēs*, which explains why Jesus framed his parable of the rich man and Lazarus the way he did (Luke 16:23). When Jesus told that parable, he was not trying to debate with the Pharisees whether dead people were dead or alive, he was trying to make the point that they were being so hard-hearted that they would not believe the truth if someone came back from the dead and told it to them (Luke 16:31).

E. W. Bullinger writes so lucidly about *Sheol* and *Hadēs* that it is worth quoting him extensively.

“*Hadēs*. This is a heathen word and comes down to us surrounded with heathen traditions, which had their origin in Babel, and not in the Bible…. As *Hadēs* (a word of human origin) is used in the New Testament, is the equivalent for the Hebrew *Sheol* (a word of divine origin), its meaning can be gathered not from human imagination, but from its Divine usage in the Old Testament. If we know this, we know all that can be known. [At this point, Bullinger lists all 65 uses of *Sheol* in the Old Testament].

On a careful examination of the above list, a few facts stand out very clearly. …”The grave”…stands out…as the best and commonest rendering. As to the rendering “hell,” it does not represent *Sheol*, because both by dictionary definition and colloquial usage, “hell” means the place of future punishment. *Sheol* has no such meaning, but denotes the present state of death. “The grave” is therefore a far more suitable translation….

The student will find that “THE grave,” taken literally as well as figuratively, will meet all the requirements of the Hebrew *Sheol*; not that *Sheol* means so much specifically “A” grave as “THE” grave.

If we enquire of it in the above list of the occurrences of the word *Sheol*, it will teach:

* That as to direction, it is down.
* That as to place, it is in the earth.
* That as to nature it is put for the state of death. Not the act of dying…but the state or duration of death. *Sheol* therefore means the state of death; or the state of the dead; which the grave is tangible evidence. It may be sometimes personified and represented as speaking, as other inanimate things are. It may be represented by a coined word, Grave-dom, as meaning the dominion or power of the grave.
* As to relation, it stands in contrast with the state of the living…. It is never once connected with the living except by contrast.
* As to association, it is used in connection with mourning; sorrow; fright and terror; weeping; silence; no knowledge; punishment.
* And finally, as to duration, the dominion of *Sheol* or the grave will continue until, and only end with, resurrection, which is the only exit from it.

[In the New Testament] *Hadēs* is invariably connected with death; but never with life; always with dead people; but never with the living. All in *Hadēs* will “not live again” until they are raised from the dead (Rev. 20:5). That the English word “hell” by no means represents the Greek *Hadēs*; as we have seen that it does not give a correct idea of its Hebrew equivalent, *Sheol*. That *Hadēs* can mean only and exactly what *Sheol* means, vis., the place where “corruption” is seen and from which resurrection is the only exit.”[[37]](#footnote-28128)

Bullinger was correct that when a person dies they go to *Sheol*, the state of being dead, and they stay dead until God raises them up in the Rapture or one of the resurrections. The Bible compares death and Sheol with a prison that has gates from which there is no escape except by resurrection, so it uses the phrases, “the gates of Sheol” (Job 17:16; Isa. 38:10) and “the gates of death” (Job 38:17; Ps. 9:13; 107:18). Jesus Christ referred to the gates of death in Matthew 16:18, and many English versions translate the Greek words as “the gates of hell,” but “the gates of the grave” would be more correct. Once a person has died and gone through the “gates of Sheol,” only God and his Son Jesus can open them and bring the person back to life, but Jesus will open those gates and resurrect people to life. Jesus said that “the gates of the grave” would not prevail against his congregation, and indeed those gates will not prevail because he will raise dead believers to everlasting life.

[For more on the resurrections, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For information on the dead being dead until the resurrection, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead” For more on the soul not being immortal but dying when the person dies, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Rev 20:14

**“This is the second death—the lake of fire.”** People who are thrown into the Lake of Fire do not burn forever, as tradition teaches, but burn up and die. The Bible says the Lake of Fire is the “second death,” but it is not actually a “death” if people do not actually die. Unsaved people “perish” (John 3:16), they die (Rom. 6:23). The phrase “immortal soul” is not in the Bible, and the Bible teaches that the “soul” can die (e.g., Matt. 10:28). For over 1,000 years, the teaching that people “burn forever in hell” has confused and tormented people. It is a hurtful and unbiblical doctrine and has even driven some people from the Faith.

Unsaved people are thrown into the Lake of Fire where they burn up and die.

[For more on death in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on the word “soul” and that the soul is not immortal, see Appendix 16: “Usages of ‘Soul.’”]

Rev 20:15

**“anyone whose name.”** The word “name” is not specifically in the Greek text, but it is implied.

**Revelation Chapter 21**

Rev 21:1

**“a new heaven and a new earth.”** This is the new heaven and earth of the Everlasting Kingdom, and it will last forever. This new heaven and earth replaces the heaven and the earth that came before it, and it is totally different from that former heaven and earth. The heavens and earth have gone through changes and will change again in the future. The Bible describes four of those times: the pre-Fall Edenic earth; the present evil earth; Christ’s Millennial Kingdom on earth; and the New Heavens and Earth of the Everlasting Kingdom.

[For more on the chronology of what happens in the End Times, see commentary on Matt. 25:32, “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” For more on the coming Kingdom of Christ on earth, the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the duration of the last half of the Tribulation, as well as the days of Judgment following Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:11. For more on the terrible death and destruction in the Great Tribulation and Armageddon, see commentary on Dan. 12:1. For more on the first and second resurrection, see commentary on Acts 24:15. For more on how the future will unfold from this present age to the Millennial Kingdom to the Everlasting Kingdom, see commentary on Rev. 21:1.]

**THE PRE-FALL EDENIC EARTH.** When God created Adam and Eve, the heavens and earth were “very good” (Gen. 1:31). People and animals all ate plants (Gen. 1:29-30), and there was peace on earth. God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the world (Gen. 1:28), and they were apparently running it very well.

[The pre-Fall Edenic earth is not included in the chart below.]

**THE PRESENT EVIL EARTH.** After the Edenic phase, the next phase of the heavens and earth is the one we live in today, which is fallen and evil (Gal. 1:4). When Adam and Eve sinned, the dominion of the world that God gave them was transferred to the Devil (see commentary on Luke 4:6). At that point, the Devil became the “ruler of the world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4) and was empowered to exert considerable control over what happens on earth (1 John 5:19). The Devil immediately began to exert his influence over the world, and in the same way that the Garden of Eden reflected God’s character, so the world today reflects the Devil’s character. The world became a harsh and dangerous place. The plants grew thorns (Gen. 3:18), the animals began to kill each other, the weather became dangerous, and some people followed the Devil and became evil. The Devil and his demons roam the earth (Job 1:7, 2:2; 1 Pet. 5:8), and oppress people (Acts 10:38), and the Devil holds the power of death (Heb. 2:14). This is the heavens and earth we live in today.

**CHRIST’S MILLENNIAL KINGDOM ON EARTH.** After this present evil age, the next phase of this heavens and earth occurs when Jesus rules the world for 1,000 years, and that time period is called Christ’s “Millennial Kingdom.” At some point in the future, Christ will come from heaven and fight the Battle of Armageddon and conquer the earth (Rev. 19:11-21). Satan and his demons will be imprisoned (Rev. 20:1-3) and wicked people will be killed. Jesus will reign as king over the whole earth (cf. Ps. 2:8; 72:8-11; Dan. 2:35, 44; 7:14; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10). Then the earth will again reflect God’s nature and be like Eden, it will be a “paradise” (Luke 23:43). Animals will go back to eating plants (Isa. 11:6-7), rain will come in season and deserts will bloom (Isa. 35:1-2, 7). Christ will reign for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:1-7), and this time will be so different from the evil age we live in now that it is called a new heaven and earth even though for the mostpart the physical heaven and earth will be the same (Isa. 65:17). Christ’s Millennial Kingdom will end in a war in which the heavens and earth that now exist will be destroyed (Rev. 20:9).

**THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM.** After the war at the end of the Millennial Kingdom, God will make a brand new heavens and earth that will be unlike what has been before. The Bible does not say much about this new heavens and earth, this Everlasting Kingdom, likely because we just could not comprehend it. For example, the city of the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven and lands on earth will be about 1,400 miles (2200 km) high and will have streets of transparent gold; things that would be impossible today (Rev. 21:16, 18, 21). But the promises about that earth and living in it are wonderful, for example, “death will be no more, nor *will there be* mourning, nor crying, nor pain” (Rev. 21:4).

[For more on the Devil being the god of this age, see commentary on 2 Cor. 4:4. For more on the future Kingdom of Christ on earth that will not have the Devil present, see Appendix 5: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth.” For more on the future restored earth being called “Paradise,” see commentary on Luke 23:43.]

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Present Evil Earth** | **Christ’s Millennial Kingdom** | **Everlasting Kingdom** |
| Sun and moon | Brighter sun and moon (Isa. 30:26) | No sun or moon (Rev. 21:23) |
| Day and night | Day and night | No night (Rev. 21:25; 22:5) |
| Pain and death for animals and humans | Limited pain and death (Isa. 65:20) | No pain or death (Rev. 21:4) |
| Neither God nor Christ physically reign as king on earth | Christ reigns as king over the earth from his capital, Jerusalem | God and Christ are both reigning on the throne (Rev. 22:3) |
| Satan is the god of this age and ruler of this world (Luke 4:6; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31) | Satan is imprisoned (Rev. 20:1-3). | Satan is in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10) |
| Many temples: to God and pagan gods | A Temple in Jerusalem; no pagan temples when Christ reigns as king | No Temple (Rev. 21:22) |
| Worship of pagan gods and idols | No pagan gods or idols (Zech. 13:2) | No pagan gods or idols (Rev. 21:27) |
| Dangerous animals | No dangerous animals (Isa. 11:6-9; Ezek. 34:25) | No dangerous animals (Rev. 21:4) |
| Animals eat each other and sometimes people | Animals eat plants like they did in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 1:30; Isa. 11:6) | Animals eat plants (no death or pain) |
| Jerusalem is a major city in Israel | Jerusalem will be 4,500 cubits square (approx. 1 ½ sq. miles) (Ezek. 48:16) | Jerusalem will be 12,000 stadia (approx. 1,400 miles) wide and high (Rev. 21:16) |
| It has been about 6,000 years since the Fall of Adam and Eve | Lasts 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4-7) | Lasts forever |
| Ends after Armageddon | Ends by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:9; 2 Pet. 3:1-12) | Never ends |
| All people are mortal | Some people are mortal, some are immortal | All people are immortal |
| Israel is currently a small, united country; the tribes are not separated | Israel will be restored and the twelve tribes will each be given a land area (Ezek. 48:1-29) | Israel will not exist as a country but each of the twelve tribes will have their name on a gate of the city (Rev. 21:12) |

Rev 21:3

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

**“tabernacle…live with.”** There is a linguistic link between “tabernacle” (or “tent, dwelling place”), and “live with” (or “tent with, tabernacle with”) that is hard to reproduce in English without either losing part of the meaning or creating a difficult reading in English. The Greek is the noun *skēnē* (#4633 σκηνή, pronounced skay-'nay), “tent, tabernacle, dwelling place,” juxtaposed with the verb *skēnoō* (#4637 σκηνόω, pronounced skay-'no-ō), “to live in a tent, to live in a tabernacle, to dwell.” To translate the linguistic link into the verse, we could translate the verse to say that the “dwelling place” of God will be with people, and He will “dwell” with them (e.g., ESV); or the tent (tabernacle) of God will be with people and He will tent (tabernacle) with them (e.g., Lenski’s translation; “tabernacle…tabernacled”).[[38]](#footnote-18787)

We chose to translate the phrase “tabernacle…live with,” for a couple of reasons, even though the linguistic link between the words *skēnē* and *skēnoō* is lost. We felt the translation, “dwelling place…dwell with,” lost the connection the text was making between the Old Testament tabernacle and this future dwelling place of God. Also, the translation “tabernacle…tabernacled,” may be too difficult for the average reader and would just be confusing.

We went with the word “tabernacle” for *skēnē* because, while it is true that it is used in Greek as a dwelling place in general and not just a tent, it is also true that *skēnē* does refer to a tent, and “tabernacle” ties together the tent God lived in during the early periods of the Old Testament Law with His living with His people in the future. Also, there are several other Greek words that refer to a dwelling place that do not refer to a tent that John could have used if he wanted to avoid making the connection between the dwelling of God in the Old Testament and His dwelling with people in the future. Of course, in this context, the word “tabernacle” or “tent” could not refer to a literal tent because God is actually dwelling with mankind in the Everlasting City.

Why would John use “tent” or “tabernacle” here for the dwelling place of God? Although we cannot be totally sure, it seems that one thing that the text is doing, especially because “tent” is not literal, is making an allusion to the continual plan and efforts of God to be with His people. God has always tried to live among His people but was restricted by human sin. In the Old Testament, God started out with Adam and Eve in the Garden; then, after the Fall, He was with each family as they built altars and worshiped Him; then He was in a tent (“tabernacle”) in the midst of His people; and then the mobile tent became a permanent Temple. But all through that time God’s desire to be with people never changed. Now, in the Everlasting City, God will continue to “tent” with His people and live among them, but the word “tent” is somewhat figurative and ironic, because this dwelling will be forever.

Rev 21:5

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Rev 21:6

**“I am the Alpha and the Omega.** For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 1:8.

**“Beginning and the end.”** The phrase appears twice: here and Revelation 22:13. The exact meaning of the phrase “the beginning and the end” is not given. Scholars give differing explanations of the phrase, but the meaning must be closely associated with the concepts of “Alpha and Omega” and “First and Last” because these titles are associated together (cf. Rev. 22:13). We have seen from the study of the title “Alpha and Omega” that it refers to the start and finish of something, and we have seen from the title “First and Last” (Rev. 1:17) that Christ will raise up the generations of people unto everlasting life. It is clear why Christ would be called the “beginning and the end” in association with these concepts. He is the firstborn from the dead, and he will be the one to call the last people out of their graves, he is both the Author and Finisher of faith, he is the Man by whom God will judge the world and he is the one who will then create and bring to completion the next ages (see the commentary on Heb. 1:10). There is no compelling reason to assume Jesus is God simply because of the title, “the Beginning and the End.” It is common for people of similar status to use the same title.

[For more discussion on this phrase see *The Racovian Catechism*, in Polish 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818, available through Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 161-163.]

Rev 21:9

**“the bride, the wife.”** There is a lot of misinformation in Christianity about the “Bride of Christ.” There is no group of people such as Israel or the Church who are “literally” the bride. The term “bride” is one of the figures of speech God uses in His Word to bring specific meaning and emotion into the text. When we understand the subject, we can see that every saved person together is referred to as the “bride” or “wife” of Christ.

[For more information on who the Bride of Christ is, see Appendix 12: “The Bride of Christ.”]

Rev 21:10

**“in the spirit.”** There is no definite article “the” in the Greek text but we supply it because this verse makes more sense in English that way. In the Greek text, the definite article “the” is not supplied before “spirit” because the preposition *en* can make *pneuma* (spirit) definite without the article. See commentary on Revelation 4:2, “in the spirit.”

Rev 21:14

**“of the twelve apostles.”** The Bible does not say who the twelve apostles are. However, it seems much more likely that the twelfth apostle is Matthias rather than Judas Iscariot. Matthias was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot after Judas killed himself (Acts 1:26) and Jesus ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9). Matthias joined the other eleven apostles and together the twelve of them took over the work of Jesus Christ on earth and were the solid foundation upon which the first-century church was built.

While Jesus was alive, the twelve apostles, which included Judas Iscariot as one of them, were technically still in leadership training. As the Four Gospels reveal, there was much they did not know and much they had to learn, even up to the week of Jesus’ death (John 16:12). In fact, they did not even understand that Jesus was going to be raised from the dead until after he was raised and taught them about it (Luke 24:36-47).

Also, Judas never developed the heart and commitment of an apostle. Although all the apostles had to mature in the Faith and overcome obstacles such as fear, Judas never did overcome his worldly ways. During his training under Jesus, he continued his selfish and ungodly ways. For example, he was stealing from the offerings people gave (John 12:6), and he was stirring up dissension among the other apostles (cf. John 12:4-7 with Mark 14:4). Also, although we are not clear about his motives, he betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, a clear indication that he never really believed that Jesus was the Messiah and Lord.

When Judas did change his mind about betraying Jesus, instead of realizing his own worth and the value of his training under Jesus and repenting and asking for forgiveness and thus doing his best to help Jesus’ mission, he selfishly committed suicide (Matt. 27:3-5). That act revealed how little he understood about the love and compassion of God and Jesus. Therefore, given what we know about Judas Iscariot, it is very unlikely that he would be named on the foundation of the Everlasting City.

Also, Matthias was not someone who became a disciple late in Jesus’ ministry. He had been with the other apostles from the time Jesus was baptized by John until his ascension into heaven (Acts 1:21-22). Furthermore, we should trust that when the eleven apostles prayed to the Lord Jesus to “show us which one of these two you have chosen” (Acts 1:24), that Jesus did in fact somehow spiritually preside over the choosing of Matthias, and thus Matthias was Jesus’ choice for the twelfth apostle and qualified to be named on the foundation of the Everlasting City.

Rev 21:15

**“a measuring rod of gold to measure the city.”** That the angel had a measuring rod and measured the city connects the New Jerusalem as the residence of God and the place of worship back to Ezekiel’s vision of the Millennial Temple and also connects it to the Temple that is in Jerusalem during the Tribulation (Rev. 11:1).

Rev 21:16

**“stadia.”** A Roman stadia is about 600 feet. The distance is about 1,380 miles, or 2,220 kilometers. The city is probably a huge pyramid, with the throne of God and Jesus at the top. Thus it would be similar to the Holy Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom, with the Temple at the top of the mountain of the Lord.[[39]](#footnote-19506)

Rev 21:18

**“The city was pure gold, like pure glass.”** This describes a scene that we have a hard time grasping. To the eye, the city was pure gold, which likely means that the city looked golden, likely by having gold somehow part of the glass-like substance the city was made from. It may even be that totally pure gold without any impurities at all is somehow translucent, but that seems unlikely. Also, whatever the substance was that the city was built from, it was transparent “like pure glass,” allowing light to come through it, and in that sense, it was like the streets of the city that were made of pure gold but were also transparent. Since the city structure and streets of the city were transparent, the light that shown from God and His Son reflected throughout the whole city and lighted up the entire structure. There will be no “dark corners” in the New Jerusalem. Glassmakers today can make glass that looks golden to the eye but which can be seen through, so there will be no problem with God making something that is gold but transparent.

Rev 21:19

**“lapis lazuli.”** The deep blue color of lapis lazuli—a stone that was well-known in the ancient Near East—was often associated with God and his throne (Exod. 24:10; Job. 28:16; Isa. 54:11; Ezek. 1:26; 10:1). The majority English translation, “sapphire,” is almost certainly wrong (see commentary on Ezek. 1:26).

Rev 21:21

**“pearls.”** Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued.

[For more on pearls, see commentary on Rev. 18:12.]

**“and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.”** The word “street” is singular, but here it is a collective singular and refers to the streets of the city. The streets of the city will be like the city itself, transparent gold (see commentary on Rev. 21:18).

Rev 21:22

**“And I did not see a temple in it.”** There is no temple in the New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven. The Greek word translated “temple” here in Revelation 21:22 is *naos* (#3485 ναός), which means the inner sanctuary, and then, occasionally, by association, the temple building that houses the inner sanctuary, which is the meaning here. In contrast, the Greek word *hieron* (#2411 ἱερόν), which is generally translated as “temple,” means the temple building along with its porches, outer courts, and all associated outbuildings, which we could refer to as the “temple” or even “temple complex.”

Rev 21:27

**“unclean things will never ever enter into it, nor whoever does what is detestable or false.”** After the final judgment, the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15), there will be no evil people or spirit beings left on earth. They will all be dead or in the Lake of Fire. This verse is not saying that there will be unclean and detestable things on earth but they will not be allowed into the New Jerusalem, it is a restatement and confirmation of the fact that no unclean and detestable things will enter the city because there will not be any on earth. Furthermore, it is a confirmation that the unclean and detestable things in the Lake of Fire will not escape to trouble the people in the New Jerusalem. There will not be any “jailbreak” from the Lake of Fire. The human and spirit beings who are there will eventually die there.

[For more on dying in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.” For more on dead people being and staying dead, see Appendix 3: “The Dead are Dead.”]

**Revelation Chapter 22**

Rev 22:3

**“will be in it.”** That is, will be in the city, the New Jerusalem. By custom and culture, the throne of God and the Lamb will be at the highest point of the city, just like the Temple was at the highest point of Mount Zion and will again be at the highest point in the New Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom.

**“and his servants will serve him.”** One of the things that believers can look forward to in the future is being able to serve God in a meaningful way. God and Jesus will both be present in such a way that no one will wonder if they are really serving God or not—everyone will know that they are serving God and that their service is valuable.

Some Trinitarians claim that the phrase “serve him” is in reference to serving Jesus, and since the word used for serving is *latreuō* (#3000 λατρεύω), which is only used of God, therefore, Revelation 22:3 teaches that Jesus is God.

Although Revelation 22:3 mentions both God and Jesus Christ being on the throne, the pronoun “him” is singular and refers to God. This is something that we would expect from the scope of Scripture because God always has primacy over Jesus (cf. Luke 22:42; John 4:34; 8:29; 14:28; 1 Cor. 15:28; and John 13:16 paired with John 6:57). However, it is something that becomes clear from the rest of the sentence, which is Revelation 22:4 (Rev. 22:3-4 are actually one sentence in the Greek text and should be in the English versions also). So the whole sentence reads, “And there will be no curse any more, and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will serve him and they will see his face, and his name *will be* on their foreheads.” The phrase, “and they will see his face” refers to seeing the face of God, because that is a unique and meaningful change. Throughout history, it has been God’s face that has not been able to be seen (Exod. 33:20-23), and in addition to that, God’s name will be on people’s foreheads (Rev. 14:1).

Secondly, Revelation 22:6 provides more evidence for identifying who the verb *latreuō* is referring to in Revelation 22:3. Revelation 22:6 says “his servants” (*oi douloi* (οἱ δοῦλοι)), and uses the same word as Rev. 22:3, and the subject is “the Lord, the God of the prophets.” This is how John refers to the Father, whereas Jesus is often called the lamb (Rev. 1:1; 1:6; 21:22; 22:1). Also, in Revelation 7:15, the multitude is before the throne of God and they serve (*latreuō*) him. In Revelation 7:15, we have two similarities with Revelation 22:3, people are before the throne of God, and they serve (“*latreuō*”) him, yet, it is clearly in reference to the Father. Thus, when we read here in Revelation 22:3 that “his” servants are serving (“*latreuō*”) him, it is perfectly reasonable to assume that the phrase “his servants” is in reference to God the Father.

[For more on Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Rev 22:4

**“and they will see his face.”** Throughout history, the face of God was hidden. Moses was allowed to see God’s back, but not His face (Exod. 33:20-23). But God never wanted His people to be separate from him, and in the Everlasting Kingdom, the saved will all see God.

**“and his name *will be* on their foreheads.”** The people in the Everlasting Kingdom will have the names of both God and Jesus on their foreheads (Rev. 14:1.) But here in this verse, since “his name” is singular it refers to God.

Rev 22:6

**“sent his angels.”** Both God the Father (Rev. 22:6) and Jesus Christ (Rev. 22:16) sent angels. This does not mean that Jesus Christ is God.

[For more on this, see the commentary on Rev. 22:16.]

Rev 22:7

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Rev 22:11

**“Let.”** The sense of “let” comes from the imperative verb. Christians are to be ambassadors and witnesses for Christ, so why would the angel tell John to “let the one who is unrighteous be unrighteous still,” etc.? The answer is in the context. This section of Revelation is one of the many places in the New Testament that indicates the time of the End is very soon, even though God has delayed it for His own reasons (Rev. 22:6, 10, 12, 20). But from the angel’s point of view, the End was fast approaching and people whose hearts were hardened were not going to change before then.

[For more on prophecies about the Messianic Kingdom coming soon, see commentary on Matt. 16:28.]

Rev 22:12

**“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20.

Rev 22:13

**“Alpha and the Omega.”** For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 1:8.

**“first and the last.”** For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 1:17.

**“beginning and the end.”** For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 21:6.

Rev 22:14

**“wash their robes.”** There are manuscripts that read “do [keep] the commandments,” and the King James Version, done in 1611, is based upon manuscripts that read that way (as is the New King James). However, evidence of the totality of the manuscripts of the Greek New Testament today, which is over 5,700, shows that the original reading was “wash their robes.” The reading “wash their robes” is idiomatic and represents being cleansed and thus righteous in the sight of God. It seems likely that a scribe, misunderstanding the text, altered “wash their robes” to “do the commandments” because it would not involve a drastic change in the Greek—the words are much more similar in Greek than in English.

Rev 22:15

**“likes.”** The Greek verb we translate as “likes” is *phileō* (#5368 φιλέω). If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of *phileō* here, and confuse it with *agapē* love. *Phileō* love has a deep attachment, like the attachment of true friends, while agapē love does not necessarily have any feeling of attachment at all, which is why we can “love” (*agapē*) our enemies. The people in this verse do not “love” falsehood in the sense that they feel it is the right thing to do even though they do not enjoy it (that would be to confuse *phileō* with *agapē*), rather, the people being referred to in this verse have a deep connection to, and friendship with, falsehood. For a more complete understanding of *phileō*, see commentary on John 21:15.

Rev 22:16

**“root.”** This verse is alluding to Isaiah 11:1 and 11:10, where the Hebrew unambiguously uses the word “root.” What we need to understand is that roots grow from the tree, and Jesus Christ was a descendant of David. See commentary on Romans 15:12.

**“I, Jesus, have sent my angel.”** Jesus is over all the angels (Eph. 1:20-22), so it makes sense that Jesus is in charge of the angels and thus, the angels that he sends out are referred to as “his” angels.

Some Trinitarians propose that because Jesus sent “his” angel (Rev. 22:16) and God sent “his” angels (Rev. 22:6) that Jesus is the God of Revelation 22:6 and is also the one being served in Revelation 22:3. However, just because Jesus does something and God also does that thing, they do not become the same person. Both of them could rightly send the angel. This is the logical fallacy of “false equivalence” which occurs when equivalence is drawn between two subjects based on faulty reasoning. For example, this logic is fallacious:

Apples have seeds.  
Oranges have seeds.  
Therefore, apples are oranges.

Just because the apples and oranges share one similarity, having seeds, that does not make them equal objects. They are still very different objects.

So, just because God and Jesus both do the same thing in an instance, that does not make them the same person. In fact, this exact chain of command is exemplified in Revelation 1:1: God, who has all knowledge, informs and directs His Son Jesus, who has limited knowledge, who then tells an angel, who then gives the information to John. It would be as if a General in the army sent a message through a Lieutenant who sent a message to a soldier. One could pose the question, who sent the message, the General or the Lieutenant? Both sent the message. In a very similar way, both Jesus and God sent the angel. Yet, this does not turn one into the other.

Similarly, both God’s and Jesus’ names are written on the foreheads of the 144,000 in Revelation 14:1. So, one could not say, since Jesus’ name is written on their foreheads and God’s name is written on their foreheads that Jesus is God. No, both of their names are written on their foreheads, there are two names on their foreheads. The author of Revelation consistently sees Jesus and God as separate persons (Rev. 1:1; 1:6; 21:22; 22:1), so it is a mistake to assume that if they both do something, they are the same person.

[For more on Jesus not being God, see Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

**“I am the root and the descendant of David.”** The Greek word translated “root” is *rhiza* (#4491 ῥίζα), and what it means must be determined from the context because *rhiza* can refer either to a root or to a sprout, a shoot that comes up from the root. Thus, *rhiza* can be “root” or “shoot” depending on the context. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is called the “root” of David (Rev. 5:5; 22:16), meaning he is the descendant of David. We can tell that *rhiza* refers to “root,” or descendant because Revelation 5:5 and 22:16 are alluding to what the Messiah is called in Isaiah 11:1 and 11:10, where the Messiah is called the “root” of Jesse, who was the father of David. In Hebrew, the word translated “root” only means “root” and does not refer to a shoot or sprout coming from a stump. Unlike Greek in which *rhiza* can refer to either a root or a shoot, in Hebrew “root” and “shoot” are totally different words, so “root” means “root,” although it can refer to a branch of a root, which is still a descendant.

It can be confusing for Westerners to think of a “root” as a descendant, and “root” is not always used that way in the Bible, but it sometimes is. If someone, or a dynasty, was killed or mostly wiped out, the “root” was left in the ground and continued to grow. So in that kind of context, the “root” referred to the descendants. Thus the “root of Jesse” was a descendant of Jesse. Jesus Christ is called the “root of Jesse” and the “root of David,” making the point that Jesus Christ is a full heir of Jesse and David and thus showing that he is the rightful heir of David and that he would thus reign on David’s throne forever (2 Sam. 7:13, 16).

There are some places in the Old Testament where “root” can quite clearly be seen to refer to descendants. For example, in Isaiah 14:29-30 the “root” refers to descendants. Isaiah 14:30 refers to the people of Philistia (the Philistines) and says, “I will kill your root with famine, and your remnant it will kill.” God cannot say that He will kill the ancestors of the Philistines because they are already dead. Thus in speaking of the “root” of the Philistines, He is speaking about their descendants, and He confirms that with the last half of the verse which parallels the word “root” with the word “remnant,” meaning those who are left and still alive.

Similarly, Malachi 4:1 says that the wicked will be destroyed, and “the day that is coming that will burn them up, says Yahweh of Armies, that it will leave them neither root nor branch.” The Day of Yahweh is coming and it will burn up the wicked and leave them no “root,” that is, no descendants, and no branches, again referring to descendants. We can see that “root” refers to descendants because God cannot say that in killing the wicked they would not have any ancestors, but rather they would not live to have descendants. Furthermore, God made His point clear and emphasized it by using two different words that refer to the same thing: “root” and “branch.” This kind of doubling was a common Hebrew idiom used in poetry to emphasize and clarify what the text was saying. In fact, we see it in Malachi 4:1 and Revelation 22:16. Malachi 4:1 makes it clear that the wicked would be destroyed and have no descendants, a terrible fate in the Old Testament culture.

In Isaiah 53:2, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, grows up before God as a “root,” that is, as a descendant, that is, a descendant of David and an heir of the promises made to David about an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam. 7:13, 16). We could even say, based on many Old Testament prophesies, that Jesus Christ was the “promised root” (see commentary on Isa. 11:10). Isaiah 53:2 is another place that doubles the point for emphasis, saying “he [the Messiah] grows up before him [God] as a young plant and as a root,” using both “young plant” and “root” to make the point that the Messiah would be a descendant of his ancestors, most importantly King David.

Here in Revelation 22:16, Jesus is referred to as the “root” of David and the “descendant” of David, and thus God is revealing that the revelation He gave to Isaiah about a descendant of Jesse being the Messiah had come to pass. Also, we see God again doubling the point He is making by saying the same thing two different ways, using both “root” and “descendant.”

G. K. Beale writes, “But ‘root’ in Rev. 22:16 is not a metaphor of origin…but an image of derivation. ‘Root’ is explained by ‘offspring,’ so that it becomes a metaphorical synonym for descendent. …In addition, ‘root’ occurs again in Isaiah 11:10 in reference to the figure of Isaiah 11:1 and is clearly a metaphor of derivation in 11:10: ‘root of Jesse’ refers to a descendent from Jesse’s line not the originator of that line. That genealogical derivation of the idea is even clearer from the LXX [the Septuagint] of Isaiah 11:10. After ‘root of/from Jesse’ (genitive of source), the LXX interprets the MT’s ‘will stand as a banner of the peoples’ with ‘the one arising to rule over the Gentiles” (cited by Rom. 15:12). Furthermore, ‘root’ also has the idea of ‘sprout’ or ‘growth from’ in Isaiah 5:24 and 53:2, in line with similar metaphors. The main point of the title here in the Apocalypse is to identify Jesus as the one who fulfills the prophecy that one of David’s descendants will be the Messiah. Therefore, the genitive ‘David’ should be rendered ‘the root and the offspring *from* David’”[[40]](#footnote-11718)

It is often claimed by Trinitarians that saying Jesus Christ is the “root” of David is proof that he was God and preexisted David’s life, but that is not what the text is saying. At best the Hebrews and Greeks might have thought that David’s knowledge of the coming Messiah stabilized his life (cf. Acts 2:25-28), but as is stated above, this is a text showing that Jesus was a descendant of David. Furthermore, the clear evidence from Scripture is that Jesus Christ was not alive before David, but was God’s plan for the salvation of humankind.

[See Appendix 6: “Jesus is the Son of God, Not God the Son.”]

Rev 22:17

**“the Spirit.”** This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

**“as a gift.”** “As a gift,” that is, free of charge. Jesus Christ gave his life so people could have everlasting life as a gift, free of charge.

Rev 22:18

**“If anyone adds to them.”** This is stated several different ways in the Bible (cf. Deut. 4:2; 12:32).

Rev 22:19

**“God will take away his part from the tree of life.”** Tampering with God’s words, which is His communication to mankind, is a very serious sin and has serious consequences. Revelation 22:19 is part of the information the Bible gives us about the period of the book of Revelation, which directly applies to people after the Rapture, i.e. after the Christians have been caught up into heaven to be with Christ (1 Thess. 4:17). During the time of the Old Testament, Gospels, and Revelation, a person’s salvation was not guaranteed and thus a person could sin and not be saved. This is very clearly presented in the Old Testament, Gospels, and Revelation. It is especially clear in sections such as Ezekiel 33:12-16, and it is why when the man asked Jesus, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life,” Jesus answered, “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments” (Matt. 19:16, 17). It is also why the letters to the assemblies in Revelation 2:1-3:21 speak of people having to be faithful to overcome.

If a person living during the time of Tribulation takes away from the words of God, he will not receive everlasting life. In contrast, if a Christian, someone who is born again, takes away from the words of God, he is still guaranteed everlasting life.

[See Appendix 10: “God’s Promise of Salvation.”]

Revelation 22:19 does not directly address Christians because Revelation is written to people left on earth after the Rapture, but we can assume that any Christian who takes away from the words of God would suffer serious consequences just as he would with many other serious sins.

[For information on “rewards,” see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10.]

The King James Version reads “book of life,” not “tree of life.” The KJV used a manuscript that was based on the Latin text at this time (they did not have a Greek text for this section of Revelation), so Erasmus wrote a Greek text based on the Latin text. We now have early Greek texts of this section of Revelation and can translate those Greek texts, which read “tree of life.”

Rev 22:21

**“with all the holy ones.”** The extant Greek texts have four different variants for this short sentence, the shortest being simply, “with all.” Scholars disagree as to which is original. David Aune writes about this ending, especially the one many translations have, “with all,” and says, “Yet it is difficult to accept the notion that John would have pronounced this concluding *charis*-benediction indiscriminately upon all without restricting its scope to Christians alone (Charles 2:226). The distinctive phrase in reading (2), “with the saints,” is preferable since other variants can be accounted for through the influence of the Pauline letters….”[[41]](#footnote-16299) Aune makes a powerful point, especially since the book of Revelation is mostly focused on the vengeance of God including the Final Judgment when the unsaved are thrown into the Lake of Fire. It would seem incongruous indeed to tell the unsaved they would suffer horribly and then be thrown into Gehenna where they would suffer more, and then say, “The grace of God be with you.” Thus the REV goes with the translation that is represented by many Greek texts and fits the scope of Scripture best.

1. David Aune, *Revelation 1-5* [WBC], 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-15899)
2. Aune [WBC], 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-10299)
3. E. W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation*, 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-29353)
4. Ann Nyland, *The Source New Testament*, 491. [↑](#footnote-ref-27637)
5. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-16613)
6. E. W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation*, 147-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-30059)
7. Andrews Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians*, 479-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-13349)
8. Cf. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-22811)
9. See Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 538. [↑](#footnote-ref-13955)
10. See Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 674. [↑](#footnote-ref-23482)
11. Patrick Navas, *Divine Truth or Human Tradition*, 585-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-16364)
12. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-24148)
13. E. W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation*, 66-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-28775)
14. Graeser, Lynn, and Schoenheit, *The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-19560)
15. Cf. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-24679)
16. See also, Donald Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*, 470. [↑](#footnote-ref-24197)
17. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-18013)
18. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 790-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-20106)
19. E. W. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation*, 218-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-20423)
20. See Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 682. [↑](#footnote-ref-19149)
21. BDAG, s.v. “διάδημα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23352)
22. See, Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, 189, 491. [↑](#footnote-ref-12321)
23. Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation*, 454. [↑](#footnote-ref-25192)
24. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-23439)
25. R. C. H. Lenski, *St. John’s Revelation*, 432. [↑](#footnote-ref-26292)
26. Lenski, *Revelation*, 432. [↑](#footnote-ref-32584)
27. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services as they were at the Time of Jesus Christ*, 142-43, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-32505)
28. Cf. John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 532-39; Bullinger, *Commentary on Revelation*, 250-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-28697)
29. R. C. H. Lenski, *St. John’s Revelation*, 546. [↑](#footnote-ref-12419)
30. Lenski, *John’s Revelation*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12298)
31. Friberg, s.v. “κρίμα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12910)
32. Thayer, s.v. “κρίμα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14958)
33. BDAG, s.v.“ κρίμα.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11315)
34. N.T. Wright, *The Kingdom New Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-11277)
35. Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers*. [↑](#footnote-ref-21569)
36. See Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 613, “synecdoche.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15775)
37. Bullinger, *Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, 367-369. [↑](#footnote-ref-28128)
38. R. C. H. Lenski, *John’s Revelation*, 613. [↑](#footnote-ref-18787)
39. See John W. Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope*, chap. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-19506)
40. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* [NIGTC], 1146-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-11718)
41. David Aune, *Revelation 17-22* [WBC], 1239. [↑](#footnote-ref-16299)