

The Scroll of Revelation

Part 1 PDF

Third Edition

a commentary on

the book of Revelation

Bob Faulkner

Copyright © 2023 Bob Faulkner

ISBN: 9798856610757

Imprint: Independently published

DEDICATION

2003

To all those who, like John, are prisoners of Christ,
and therefore see what others do not see.

2021

To those who will wrestle with God
until they are satisfied they have heard from Him.

2023

To those whose names are in the Book of Life.

CONTENTS

Foreword, 3

Opening Thoughts, and a Quiz, 4

Introduction, 6

1. The things which John saw, 7
2. The things which are, on earth, 20
3. The things which are, in Heaven, 43
4. The things which shall take place after this, 55
 - a. The first six seals, 56
 - b. Close-up: the Jewish elect in the wilderness, 63
 - c. Close-up: the persecuted saints, 66
 - d. The first six trumpets and two woes (seventh seal), 68
 - e. A word for John, 79
 - f. Close-up: Jerusalem -the temple and sacrifices, 83
 - g. Three and one-half years, 86
 - h. Close-up: The two witnesses/prophets, 88
 - i. Trumpet seven/woe three, 90
 - j. Close-up: The woman, her children, and the dragon, 91
 - k. Close-up: The man of sin and his helper, 95
 - l. Close-up (revisited): the 144,000 with Jesus,
 - m. The proclamation angels, 106
 - n. Close-up: The return of Jesus, two pictures, 108
 - o. The seven bowl judgments, 110
 - p. Close-up: Babylon's description, 117
 - q. Close-up: once more, the beast from the sea, 120
 - r. Close-up: the fall of Babylon, 130
 - s. The return of Jesus and defeat of the beast, 137
 - t. The one thousand years, 140
 - u. The Millennium ends, 150
 - v. The White Throne judgment, 152
 - w. The new heaven and the new earth, 154
5. Closing Exhortations, 161

A final word, 164

About the author, 165

THE SCROLL of REVELATION

Foreword:

“Many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of” Revelation. In borrowing these words from brother Luke (Luke 1:1) I express my own thought about explaining yet again the mysteries of the Bible’s last book. But it “seems good to me also to write an orderly account” of this book (Luke 1:3). The thoughts have been there for many years, and it seems I can no longer keep all of this inside.

I was taught to love the Bible and honor it exclusively, by my original church group. I loved the Book so much that I found in It things that group had not found and was asked for that reason to leave its leadership. In several groups since then, I have had the knack of discovering things in the Book that church leadership was ignoring or even denying.

In all of this, I have learned not to follow men unless they follow Christ and His Word. I have learned to allow the Spirit of God to speak what He desires, always careful to compare the revelation with the good things I have been taught for over forty years. I recommend this process of learning for all believers.

Though I speak of listening to God, please be aware that I am not claiming that the following document is “inspired” in the Biblical sense, only that there is a desire throughout for a consistency of faith, a strict obedience to the Sacred Text. I trust you will know that, dear reader, and be led of the Spirit to discern the Truth of what I have said.

I present these words as one, like Paul, who has “received grace” both from the Church and the Spirit, to understand the Word of God, and to do and say, not what others do and say, but that which is given exclusively to me. Such is the uniqueness, I believe, of every true child of God.

A servant of God

January 2003

Some opening thoughts, and a quiz

How much have you gleaned from the Bible's final book? What a wonderful treatise, filled with praise, and promises of His coming! Granted, some of the details of Revelation are not "important" compared to the cardinal truths of our salvation, but I contend that the least important matter of John's book is infinitely more important than any ball game or TV program being aired by the enemy of our souls to distract us from the realities of Heaven. Only flesh keeps us away from God's Book. And when added to our spirit by God's Spirit, this Book can keep us from the flesh.

Would you take a minute to respond to the following statements? The answers are all in Revelation, and I'll give you my own responses following the quiz. Some of what I ask and answer may seem shocking in the light of popular Christian movies, but God's truth has always eluded the masses. When you read my study of Revelation I believe you will see why I answered as I did.

Simply answer "true" or "false". Hint: the bold words are the heart of the statement.

1. The book of Revelation is **all** about the future.
2. The seven churches of Asia (chapters 2-3) are really **seven epochs** of time.
3. When John is caught up to Heaven (4:1), the **whole church** is caught up with him.
4. Jesus is an **angel**.
5. There is **no "church"** in Revelation after chapter 3.
6. The next world ruler will be **antichrist**.
7. Babylon is **America**.
8. The 144,000 **preach the Gospel** to the entire world.
9. The saints of Revelation are "**left-behind**" **compromising Christians** who finally get it together.
10. The book of Revelation is arranged **chronologically**.

11. Antichrist will be **assassinated** and then resurrected.
12. Antichrist will rise from the Middle East, and **probably be Jewish**.
13. The woman of Revelation 12 is **Mary**.
14. The saints must be taken to Heaven to avoid **God's wrath in the Tribulation**.
15. The original Babylon fell **just as God said it would**.
16. **Only saved** persons can be resurrected.
17. The final state of man is as a **spirit**, dwelling with God in **Heaven**.

Are you ready for the answers? Are you sure? Well, at least one of the above statements is pure blasphemy. Others are clearly not true. Still others are mere speculations, and if true, are not *obviously true from the written record*. My personal belief, based on years of study and prayer, is that not one of the above statements is *provably the truth*. Take some time to read Revelation, and if you feel so led, use this Revelation Study to help. God bless you as you discover His Word.

Introduction

The enigma. The wondrous conclusion to Holy Scriptures has puzzled, yea baffled earnest believers for many centuries. It is still enigmatic. Yet some have found it is also approachable, with prayer and much persistence. Though, as I say, I make no claim to inspiration for my current discoveries, and I hope I will gladly suffer the word of correction from brothers able to do such with love, still I trust that the following organization of thoughts will cause some to be able to get a handle on the subject matter of the Apostle. From that starting point, perhaps a few will be able to delve deeper.

You may recall that the book of Daniel was similarly sealed at one time (if I understand the meaning of “sealed” properly), but unsealed, in the Spirit, in our day. Such a giant as Henry Halley of the famed *Halley’s Bible Handbook* seemed to throw up his hands in despair in trying to figure out the closing chapters of Daniel. But quite a few seem to understand Daniel well today. So too it is with the Apocalypse. More and more people will unlock the unfolding of events as those events become so obvious, because at hand, around us.

Recall though, that in Revelation 22:10, the statement is made that revelation is *not* to be “sealed”. Therefore anyone who wants to know the contents of this book is allowed to do so, for “God is no respecter of persons.”

On reading Revelation. Now, the Book of Revelation presents a severe challenge to one who desires to read a work from start to finish, and feel he has “got somewhere.” Try it as one might, there’s no place to get except chapter 22 by that method. This book is not in order. Of course there are exceptions to the chronological problem: The first five chapters are in order. Towards the end of the book it would seem safe to assume that chapters 17-22 are, too. In

between, 6-16 are a true chaos of times and places that will take repeated journeys to overcome.

But think of it. I just told you that HALF the book at least can be figured out to some degree. It's the other half we will work at a little harder.

The framework. There is actually an outline for the Book of Revelation given in the first chapter, verse 19. The three divisions of the book are said to be,

- 1) the things which John saw, chapter 1.
- 2) the things which "are", that is, in John's day, chapters 2 -5, which I have divided into things on earth (2-3) and things in heaven (4-5).
- 3) the things which will take place after this, chapters 6-22.

1. The things which John saw (1:1-20)

Address of origin (1: 1-2).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ. This means the revelation *about* Jesus? Or *belonging to* Jesus? Well, what does "the book of Daniel" mean? A book *about* Daniel, or a book *belonging to* or authored by Daniel?

You will find revelations of Jesus in the book, especially at the beginning and end. But this book is about the revelation of the antichrist even more. And the tribulation even more than that. And of evil mankind. And judgment.

The next line in the text explains what the "of" means. It belongs to Jesus because God gave it to Him. And gave to Him to show to His servants, Then He sent an angel to bring it to John who passed it to us. This is holy. This is precious. But how many look at the book and say, I don't get it. Pass the milk.

John receives this document from an angel. *Even when Jesus appears to be speaking*, it is the angel that is delivering the message. Knowing just this one fact will make much of the reading in the beginning and especially at the very end of the Book, much smoother. For example, in 22:6-8, John falls down to worship an angel. *And why not?* The angel has been saying things like, "I am coming quickly!" Only Jesus should say that! But the mystery is abated in 22:6 where the angel himself explains, "The Lord God of the holy prophets *sent His angel ...*" That means the Lord God

is *not the angel* himself. As a messenger he does what messengers do, deliver word for word *messages*. But we don't praise the *messenger*, but rather the One Who sent the message!

The cultists love going to these passages to prove that Jesus is nothing more or less than an angel, and definitely not Divine, since he refuses worship from John. But here in the very first verses of Revelation is perhaps the solution to that heresy. The statement is made that Jesus sent and signified it by *His angel*.

Many want to take the "angel of the Lord" passages of the Old Testament and make them work here, believing firmly that that Old Covenant appearance was indeed Jesus. Since we are never told who that angel is, and since he does indeed seem to say some things that are very Divine-sounding, it makes some sense to go there for the interpretation. My personal feeling is that such diversions may be dangerous, and that we should not mix the two concepts, namely, the eternal Son, and the doctrine of angels.

A cursory study of the appearances of "the angel of the Lord" leads people to the same conclusion that John was brought to, but erroneously: This must be Jesus!

Angels speak God's message, and seem to be God, but are not. In Genesis 16:7-14, Hagar sees him and believes so much that he is God that she names a well, "One Who lives and sees me". But in a later confrontation of these two, Genesis 21:17, it is clear that God and the Angel are separate.

Abraham's hearing of the Angel is that of one receiving a simple message from God, the role indeed of messengers. But with Jacob, one would think that God Himself is speaking when the Angel reportedly says, "I am God (Genesis 31:11)." In Genesis 48:16 Jacob *seems* to be referring to God as "the Angel who redeemed me."

In Exodus (3:2) Moses has a similar experience to Jacob, where the angel seems to be introducing himself as God. In Numbers God's anger against Balaam is manifested through the same Angel of the Lord (22:22 ff). In Judges 2:1 the Angel again calls himself God. But later in that book (6:20) we are told that Gideon saw the Angel, and the point is made that he did not die. Before Christ was born of a virgin, could anyone look upon God and live? Judges 13:3: With Samson's family the clear distinction between God and the Angel of God is made.

When David saw the Angel, he spoke to the Lord, II Samuel 24:16. Daniel was aware likewise of the difference when he said, "God has sent His Angel" (6:22). And the prophet Zechariah is admonished by an angel, who begins, "Thus saith the Lord." Now, this phrase is missing in many of the Angel's appearances, but in my opinion, *it is implied in all*.

In the New Testament, the definite article of the KJV has been changed to the indefinite,

underscoring the fact that the translators are convinced that angelic appearances are to be kept separate from Divinity. Only in Acts 12:11 is it clear that a particular angel is being referenced, and in this case, it is equally clear that he is not God.

The point I believe Scripture makes is this: There is a magnificent Being known as *The messenger of the Lord*, perhaps Gabriel, perhaps Michael, perhaps one we have never met by name in the Biblical record. He is God's special envoy sent on the most urgent of kingdom business. His presence and power are so great as to make everyone from the unlearned Hagar to the beloved Apostle John, wise with years of knowledge of the Lord, think he/she is in the presence of God Himself. But attempt worship, and the rebuke will come swiftly, "Don't do that!" No, in comparison to Divinity, he is merely a servant, like John. A servant of God and a servant of the prophets, and a servant of all obedient to the Word. Worship, says the angel of the Lord, is reserved for God only (22:9)!

Now, lest we get caught up too early in religious controversy, let us meditate awhile on just how incredibly important the Book of Revelation must be to have been thus sent down the "chain of command" to us. The Father passes it to the Son. The Son passes it to the Angel of the Lord, "His Angel". The Angel is then the spokesman throughout the Book, assisted by other angels, and all of this is copied diligently by John. John bears witness to this word, and passes it to us. Those who are His sheep and hear His Voice, because of His Spirit living in us, pass it on and pass it on and... How very much He wants us to have this message!

Certified by an apostle 1:2. Unlike the apostle we have come to know and love in the Gospels and epistles that bear his name, the author of the book before us right away identifies himself. He declares here that he did indeed hear God and his angels speaking to him, that he did see the things you are about to read.

The blessing (1:3). The instructions regarding this 66th Book of the Bible cannot be taken lightly. Read! Hear! Keep! We know the Spirit would not tell us to do something that would bear no fruit in our lives or that was impossible to do. Away with the idea that Revelation is "beyond us", that the things of the future will somehow "work out" and need not concern us now. We are commanded to grasp this Book and let it change our lives. For the erstwhile, it will mean much meditation, prayer, re-reading, comparing, investigating. But what a joy, what a dividend is reaped!

The person who writes off this and other difficult portions of Scripture is telling on himself. He's saying, "I didn't think it was that necessary to figure out this book. There are other books that made a lot more sense to me. Let the scholars worry about all this prophecy stuff. I know Jesus died for me and I show up at church every week and listen to the preacher. I haven't got time to deal with this..."

Not the best attitude. The command is to read and/or hear. If one does not come to Bible studies or read it meaningfully on his own, when can he get the blessing promised to those who read or hear.

Not only that, but a blessing is also pronounced on those who keep these things. How do you “keep” Bible prophecy?

First, you believe it. Second you sanctify, make holy, your life because of the things that are coming. Third, you fall down and worship God as many members of God’s creation do in this book. Fourth, you rejoice with God for all the wonderful things that are coming to the planet after the tribulation. The very coming of Jesus. A new world order governed by the King of Kings, not evil men. Eventually a new heaven and earth. Eternity with God.

But if you don’t know these things, how can you “keep” all of that?

A word about method: There are so many Bible-land happenings going on right now, that the common temptation is to grab something from the news that looks promising and try to make it apply to Revelation. I strongly counsel against this method. Let the Word speak first. Paint the picture in your mind that God is painting. Then even casual glances at the news will be clearly in or out of the thinking process. For example, an American or Russian antichrist, a Chinese antichrist, will suddenly sound lame to a person who has discovered who the man of sin really is.

For the time is near. Words like these have always caused believers a bit of concern. It sounds like Jesus must come in the first century. Indeed, the first believers thought that. Certainly God had not enlightened too many people in those days about the time of His coming. Yet, the words were there. Peter (II Peter 3) said that many will come in the last days scoffing at our long wait. The warnings of Jesus in Mark and Luke mention men going on long journeys. The clues were there. It will be a long time!

Yet John is told in the same first century that the time was *engus*, near, or perhaps more truly the meaning of the word, “at hand.” Regardless of how we think we understand this book, we must constantly live under the caution that His coming draws near. We do not always see things as He sees them. Our understanding is darkened at times.

He is near. Be ready. For some, He will come in death this very day. Be ready. Antichrists abound and mean that Christ is somewhere at hand. Are you sure He will not come today? Hold on to every word of this Book. But be prepared to wait awhile too!

“Near”, or “at hand”, or as in James, “standing at the door,” must now be understood in relationship to our teaching of Sovereignty. That is, God does what He wants and when He wants. He has a day circled when He will come, and there is no question that He will come on that day.

But He has not revealed to us what that day is.

We are led to believe by John's and James' statements that Jesus hovers over the planet, ready to come at any moment. Perhaps even now the Father has not told Him what the day is. Since the Father is not willing that any should perish, could it be that each time we pray earnestly for a friend or relative to be saved, every time we call out for God's mercy to be extended, that the time is extended? No, God does not change His mind like we do, but His calculating and determining of the date – and it is determined – takes into account the prayers we will be praying for all these centuries.

He is at hand now. He could be on the verge of coming today. Then a sinner catches his eye, and a prayer goes up in faith for that sinner, and the Father, who is ready for Jesus to come, and Jesus eager to set up His kingdom, is still given the signal, wait. Another day. Another hour. Bring the brother or sister in. My house must be full.

Regarding the doctrine of Imminence. “Jesus could come at any time.” I know what the people who say this mean, but we must take objection to that statement as it stands. In fact, Heaven, as we just said, has a day circled on the Heavenly Calendar when Jesus must come. That is to say, God the Father knows when Jesus is coming. It is not random. It is clear. Jesus cannot come at just any time, but only on the day He has appointed (Acts 17:30-31).

So the problem is not that there is uncertainty in Heaven, but that we are uncertain. The question then is, just how far is that uncertainty to extend? When the disciples asked Jesus, “What shall be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? (Matthew 24:3),” why did Jesus even suggest a time frame? Why did He answer such a thing at all, if we are not to know *something*? Why not say, as we hear commonly today, “Don't worry about it! It will all pan out. I'll come when I come.”

That was not His approach. Jesus for all time laid out a clear description of a particular generation, a season, if you will, when He will come, so that those believers living in that generation will know it is time! All others of all time, not totally certain of what He was saying, since the time was not ready, have been commanded to *watch*, and be ready. Of course, as we said, the coming of Jesus at a man's death is reason enough for any person, any time, to be on guard against foolish behavior.

The importance of knowing a particular *season* is confirmed by our dear brother, the apostle Paul, in I Thessalonians 5. First, he says (verse 2) that Jesus is coming as “a thief in the night.” This is the concept that has been passed on to godly people as their own norm for looking for Jesus to come! But moving even one more verse leads us to: “For when *they* say, ‘Peace and Safety’, then comes sudden destruction upon *them*...” Who are *they* and *them*? The world! The unbelievers! The ungodly! Verse 4 insists, “*You* are not in darkness, so that this Day should

overtake *you* as a thief!”

That means we can and should know the general time of His coming, especially if we are living in or near the last generation. That generation is described further by Paul in II Thessalonians 2:3. In words that could not be clearer, Paul demands that that Day *will not come* unless there is a noticeable world-wide apostasy *and* the revealing of the man of sin.

Oh my! Jesus could come at any moment? Yes, in death. Yes, theoretically to those who walk in darkness and have not read the words of the apostles. But in fact? No! He must come when Paul says He must come, and that is *after* the great apostasy, and *after* antichrist.

Now are we absolutely sure that antichrist and apostasy have not come? I'll let you be the judge of that as the unfolding of Revelation continues. But consider this: The man or woman who is seeking God with all the heart about the coming of Jesus will see the plan unfold clearly and will indeed be watching when He comes. The ungodly carnal Christian will be loudly proclaiming His love for a Jesus who might come just any time, and for him the coming will be a surprise, for that person has never dug deeply into God's Word to find the truth. I am saying that more light is revealed to those who seek, and those who do not seek will be still in darkness and fulfill their own prophecies about how “we can never really know.”

The only thing that has been denied to us is the very day on the calendar and the very hour on the clock when Jesus will come. Let us be diligent though to comprehend with all the saints what are the *times and seasons* God has revealed to us.

A word about the specific teachings of Jesus on this matter. In Mark 13:32-37, all are admonished to watch, for “you do not know when the time is.” Even if Bible prophecy is a muddle to us, we are to be diligently living for Jesus, ready for Him at any moment. But as we grow in grace, we grow in understanding, and as He sees He can trust us with more knowledge about His coming, He gives us that light. For some, the knowing that Jesus will not come until after antichrist arrives would be a signal to let down and let up. These babies need to grow awhile before these other truths can sink in.

In Luke 21:34-36, Jesus tells people to watch and pray all the time, to be worthy to escape the horrible judgment that will come on the Day of His return. This is not to be taken lightly. Again, if prophecy makes no sense to you, and you are not sure of the validity of any of the books out there, and the Scriptures are not yet clear, just *watch* and *pray*. You will miss nothing! But, ask for more grace as the days go by to slowly get a hold of the hope of the calling of God. It can bring sunshine to a dark day, and downright overwhelming floods of joy when it is discovered even more.

Greeting (1:4-5a). Did ever a Book pronounce blessing and greeting from such a

company? Though John mentions his own name, the true greetings come from Heaven, namely:

1. **From God!** Now, this is the God “Who is and was and Who is to come.” Eternal. In the following pages we will also meet the beast “who was and is not and yet is, but who goes to perdition.” The contrast between Christ and antichrist, God and anti-God, in Revelation is an ongoing theme.

2. From the **seven Spirits!** Isaiah (11:2) sees the Branch, Jesus, to be imbued with seven manifestations of the Spirit of the Lord. No other allusion to this phenomenon is mentioned in Scripture except for the mention of the various fruits and gifts given us by the one and selfsame Spirit. God is not divided seven ways here but is seen as manifested in all His fullness. It is a concept that will take eons to behold, and then, of course, we will still not grasp it.

I am not sure that this interpretation, though common, satisfies the text. Remember that capital letters are not inspired but are the interpretation of the translators. Perhaps giving a small “s” to “spirits” and remembering that *angels are spirits*, might help. Several translations go this way: (NIV, ESV, original NASB, Holman, and others).

8:2 mentions seven angels who stand before God. It is the last of these angels that ushers in the return of Christ and the beginning of the kingdom life here. Since these spirits are not called the “Holy Spirits of God”, I would think we are on safe ground here. Better to take the easier route than to force ourselves into explaining the unexplainable. Important to remember is that when God has not spoken clearly on a matter, we are not required to be dogmatic about it. I offer these two explanations for our perusal and prayer, not as musts for our faith (see more at 5:6).

3. **From the “firstborn from the dead”.** Here and in Colossians 1:18, this phrase suggests that Jesus has led the way, not that He is the first ever to be raised. John himself remembers well the day Lazarus came forth from the tomb. He has shown us what our own resurrection shall be as we follow Him. Later we will see the beast being the pattern of the resurrected damned. Now, there were resurrections throughout the Old Testament and in Jesus’ day. But Jesus is the first, that is the number one Person, over the Church. His Body is a new creation. Glorified. None other has arisen like this, nor shall anyone until that Day that He returns and the graves are opened, and we are changed in a moment.

Prototokos, firstborn. Can mean just that in the literal sense. First child born, your firstborn. But there is with the idea of firstborn the idea of preeminence. Jacob was not firstborn, but he was preeminent. Jesus was not the first one to rise from the dead, but He is preeminent. The word implies “first” among others, first in importance. He is the Eternal Word, in everything He does, He is first.

4. **From the Ruler over the kings of the earth.** This also is Jesus. We do not see that rule

right now (Hebrews 2:8-9) but believe that all earthly rulers who submit to him shall have his blessing. Then one day the governments of this world shall become the governments of Jesus, the Christ of God (Revelation 11:15).

Dedication (1:5b-6). So we are greeted and blessed from Heaven. In return John gives his response for what Jesus did to make all this possible. In so doing He “dedicates” the book and all its readers to Jesus. In the process he mentions the priesthood of the believers, a mark that sets the true church of Christ apart from that church which divides priests from people. How much blood has been spilled over faith in this principle? And how many in our day of compromise are turning the doctrine loose?

Behold He comes (1:7-8)! Here the message begins. A preview and summary of the Scroll to come is interjected here. It whets our appetite for what shall be the theme of all: Christ will come! He will come with clouds, not as we hear today from some, that He will come in our imagination, or our collected awareness.

In my sorry association with Rome, an association that was just a natural step for me since I had accepted whatever the charismatic movement was accepting, I sat in a class taught by a nun, who taught us that Jesus will not necessarily come as it says here, in the sky, in the twinkling of an eye... but gradually, gradually, the church will just wake up one morning and realize, “Oh... He’s here! He’s been here!” They will recognize Him and so on.

No, He will come in the same way He left, according to the angel of Acts 1:11. Christ will judge! And this Christ is God Almighty! He calls Himself the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, words similar to the One Who speaks later in this chapter, Who is “like the Son of Man”. Here is a clear indication of the Deity of Jesus, another theme of the Book (See also 22:13).

Setting of the vision (1:9,10). John here repeats what he said in verse 2, that the reason for his present confinement by the emperor Domitian in the mid 90’s A.D. is “the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” In saying this he relates himself to the suffering church found later in the Book, martyred for that same reason (6:9, 12:11, 12:17). *Let’s keep this in mind.* He was not exempt because of his status in Christ. Nor was this punishment from Heaven to a lukewarm saint. This treatment of the people of God is the norm and has been since there was such a people.

Roman emperors who persecuted Christians, Nero (54–68) (Paul & Peter) and Domitian (81–96) were known to have blamed Christians for problems of their own administration. The legal basis for these persecutions is known from the correspondence between Pliny and the emperor Trajan around 110: If a resident did not make offerings to the Roman gods, he or she could be executed. (copied)

Patmos. Patmos is a small rocky island to which Roman prisoners were banished. It was ten miles by six miles, and just off the southwest coast of what is now Turkey. Domitian, in his hatred for Jews, allowed that hatred to spill over to anything and anyone linked to that religion. In behaving this way, he proved himself to be one in a series of Satanically inspired men who have wielded enormous power in the world, hated Jews, and therefore blasphemed God and earned themselves a place as antichrist. John, as the last surviving apostle, a Jew and a Christian, would be an especially desirable target in this regard.

John was “in the Spirit”. Those who desire God’s best and wish to hear the Word of God whispered to us must join John in that Holy Place. The secrets of Heaven are not revealed to those caught up with worldly pursuits, but to those hungry for what only Christ can give. Let us be filled with the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, and always be in a place where God can reveal to us more of Himself.

To be filled with the Spirit, we simply must ask. To walk in the Spirit, we must listen. We’ll not receive new revelations as doctrine, but God has a way of revealing His truths to us personally as we read and listen to God’s written word. Be careful about going beyond what is written, however compelling the inner voices.

“The Lord’s Day”. From the Day of Pentecost, there seems to have been a signal to the Church that the first day of the week was a time for the believers to get together and celebrate the Lord who was raised on that day, and this they did. Whether this “cancelled” the seventh-day Sabbath, the day of rest, has been a bone of contention among us through the centuries. It is my sense of Scripture that early Jewish Christians kept the Sabbath rest, and still met on the first day. These are not mutually exclusive activities. It is inconceivable to me now that well-trained Jews would abandon the seventh day rest and start resting on the first day. It seems that it was not until Constantine’s later edicts (after 300 A.D.) that the “day of the Sun” became an Empire-wide holiday. I have yet to find one passage in Scripture, or one incident in history, giving justification to the “cancellation” of a day that has been with us since the creation of the world.

So why do we hold the first day as the “Lord’s Day?”

1. Within the book of Acts we see the church meeting on that day. Taking up offerings on that day. Gathering together, though at night because everyone had to work seven days.
2. The first day was when Jesus rose from the dead.
3. The first day was when the Spirit fell and the church was officially born.

But people of the Spirit can meet any time. Pray any time. Worship any time. Worship anywhere. That’s what John 4 is all about. It was Rome that came along and said that if you don’t

go to church on a Sunday that you have committed a mortal sin. The early Christians met just about every day.

The Voice, the Message (1:10-11). At first, John is commanded only to write what he sees, namely, this vision. In Verse 19, the content is expanded to include the messages to the seven churches and the scroll of the future. The Voice itself is of the Lord and has the awakening quality of a ram's horn. We must for the moment exclude from our thinking the sounds of modern trumpets and think in terms of the startling cry of the Hebrew instrument.

Address of destination further defined: Seven church fellowships in "Asia." Today we think of "Asia" as the largest land mass on earth. The name means "eastern", and the idea truly encompasses that portion of today's world. Not so in John's Day. Nor is it Asia Minor of which we speak, that area roughly equal to modern Turkey. No, this is actually, per *Nelson's Bible Dictionary*, 1986, a small Roman province, nearly equal in boundaries to the earlier kingdom called Pergamos. This territory became independent during intertestamental times from the Seleucids, with the help of Rome. Rome then created a province and made Pergamos its capital. Nelson also mentions that these seven cities are along two main north-south roads of the old province, beginning with Ephesus, the largest city, and ending with Laodicea.

Let us not forget that the letters sent were real letters, that the people receiving the letters were real people, and that these people lived in real cities. The seven churches of Asia are simply *the seven churches of Asia*, with this added thought: every church that has ever been in existence from that day to this, has qualities – good or evil – that they share with one or more of these churches. They were set up deliberately by God Himself as an instructional model for our long perusal. They are mirrors. They are meant to cause us all to repent.

The candlesticks (1:12, 20). What John sees first upon turning around is a vision of the seven churches, represented, according to Jesus, by seven golden lampstands called *candlesticks* in other versions. The seven churches then, and all churches with them, are seen as *potential* bearers of Light. It is important to keep this in mind when thinking of the vision of our own "local" assembly. The church is to be a light "on a hill", a beacon for the community to see, a place where Jesus' true character can be manifest in word and life. Potentially, every church can do this.

It is not merely coincidental that the lampstand of the Jewish temple, aka the "menorah" (Exodus 25:31-40), had seven individual lamps on it, seven lights representing the fullness of God's character, but manifested through His people on earth. Such is the character of these seven churches that they represent all the strong and weak points of the Christian people of all times. There is not a church in existence to this day that cannot draw instruction from one or more of these letters, even feeling it is being addressed personally to itself! Such is the living nature of these correspondences. One need look no further to discern some mystical meaning, some

supposed church ages. All seven churches are in every age known to man.

One like the Son of Man (1:13-15). Ezekiel saw such a Man (Ezekiel 1:26). And Ezekiel more than any other Bible man except Jesus, is also referred to as “Son of Man” by the Lord. What does it mean? A representative of mankind that pleases God? A true man among men? Daniel wears the title in Daniel 8:17, but also sees “one like the Son of Man” coming with the clouds (Daniel 7:13). Notice that in Daniel, in Revelation, and in all the Gospel references to Jesus as being the Son of Man, the definite article is used, separating Jesus from the others who may seem to have the same title. (Luke 7:33-34, 9:58, Mark 8:31, 14:21, all refer to *The* Son of Man.) Stephen calls upon that Son as He dies (Acts 7:56).

So how is Jesus the Son of Man? The prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 9:6) talks of a Son to be born who will also be the Everlasting Father. It is “unto us” that this Son will be born! He is *our* Son, born of a virgin. The Son of God indeed. But mankind’s Child also. Our purest, our finest, our favorite Son.

And He is Son of Man and Son of God all at the same time. Emmanuel, God with us. All God. All man. Not 50/50. The God-Man. Mary is told, “You will bring forth a son. That’s Son of Man.” In the next breath, He will be called the Son of the Highest. Son of God.” Here the eternal Word of God becomes flesh, as in John 1:14. The mystery of the ages. God has truly visited His people by becoming one of them, to save them.

Now this is not the first time that John has seen the glorified Christ. He, his brother James, and of course Peter once trekked to the top of a hill with Jesus and there Christ was transfigured before them. John has also seen the risen Lord, even to the point of His ascension into the heavens. But this vision is different somehow. This is glory that is beyond anything John has ever seen. And it has the same effect on John that it did on Daniel 700 years earlier. In fact, there are many similarities to point out between these two men and their visions.

1. Both Daniel and John are being held by the State when their visions occur.
2. Both men are quite elderly.
3. Both men had a vibrant relationship with God from their youth.
4. Both have overcome evil for many years and been a blessing to many.
5. Both are told the future.
6. The vision of Christ in His glory is their finest moment. As one looks at the Man they both saw, it is interesting to compare notes. See Daniel 7:9 (seen as part of end times) and 10:5 (personal encounter). As John, Daniel sees Jesus.

7. They both see a Man clothed in a special garment, the chest/waist of which is pure gold. Daniel sees him just before the final prophecy of his book. "A certain man" D. 10:5 R 1:13
8. The hair is white like wool. D 7:9, R1:14. Called the Ancient of Days.
9. The eyes are like fire. D 10:6, eyes like torches of fire. R 1:14
10. The feet like brass, refined.. D 10:6 feet like burnished bronze (color)
11. The voice huge. Like the sound of many waters. D 10:6, sound of his words like the voice of a multitude. R. 1:15
12. Daniel goes to sleep. He is awakened by the hand of Gabriel? And the Lord Himself? "Do not fear." (v. 17) John falls at His feet as dead. Jesus lays His hand on him, and comforts. Do not be afraid.

Away with the casual meetings of Jesus we hear of today.

Jesus commissions and comforts John (1:16-20).

The stars in his hands (v 16, 20) are said to be the angels of the seven churches. Now, the Book of Revelation is *filled* with angels, from that special angel known as "His angel" in verse one above to the angels of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, to the angels guarding the pit, and even to fallen angels. Knowing this, I have believed that the Spirit would not seek to confuse us here by having "angel" suddenly mean "pastor" or "Preacher". I believe it is always safe to stick with what is written. *Angellos* is nearly always translated "angel" in the New Testament.

You say, wait! That would mean that each of the seven letters to follow are written by John first to an angel? And the angel then speaks to the church? That could well be. Just like the entire book came to John through the ministry of angels. Angels take their orders from God. And God perhaps here is speaking to them through a Spirit-filled human, while they deliver the message from God's mouth to John?

It was angels who communicated the coming destruction of Sodom, Genesis 19:1. They met Jacob in 32:1. I have documented the very busy life of the "angel of the Lord" above, and how He communicated often the word of the Lord to God's men. Angels were active in Jesus' life and in the lives of the men of Acts. Paul mentions his catching up to glory, where we are sure he was ministered to by angels. The Book of Revelation then just follows suit and is likewise an angelic book. Here we are offered the details of a specific message they are given to pass along to the Church. The job of a messenger, after all, is to pass on messages. They pass the message on to John, he writes it, and they take it on to the churches.

See again verse 1, "[Jesus] sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John." The seven

messages to the churches come first from God, through Christ, then John is directed to write the message to the specific angels watching over particular congregations. How the angels enable the particular saints involved to hear the message of the Spirit, is not given us, and it seems we get a little too curious when we want to go beyond what is written. Enough to be content with the network of angels protecting God's people individually and corporately. Enough to know that the Law (Gal 3:19) and probably the entire Bible was communicated in some way through the ministry of angels. Enough to believe that we are encompassed about with an innumerable company of angels, yes and by the grace of God one day we shall judge those angels that fell.

For the record, also, John was the shepherd of the Ephesian Church, and maybe all of these churches, and would not be writing a letter to himself (2:1). And, never are leaders of the church (always spoken of in the plural by the way) called "messengers" in the writings of John or any of the other epistles.

But having said that...

...I must add that the simplest and most popular interpretation of this process is that the word *angel* means *messenger*, and it does, and that the messenger of the individual church is simply the one that delivers the message each week. Do we not use that word regularly? "And now for his message, here is Pastor Ron."

The interrelation between *stars* and *people* is in Daniel 12:3. And then there is Acts 12:15. One of those curious passages we overlook. What did the praying people of Mary's house mean when they said that the person at the door was not Peter, but Peter's "angel"?

We will not discuss the ins and outs of guardian angels. It could well be that each of us has nearby a guardian angel that protects us every day. Surely angels minister to the people of God according to Hebrews 1:14. That's not the question here.

Why would these people think that an angel stood at the door, and not Peter himself? And why would that angel look just like Peter? More than one commentator, and this is echoed by MacArthur, says that the Jewish superstition was that not only did each person have an angel assigned to him, but that that angel took the form of the person, so you couldn't always tell if you were talking to an angel or a person.

This is what happens when we go too far outside what is written. What is written is that angels minister to God's people, and that each child (probably adult too) is cared for by an angel. What is *not* said is how many people are guarded by one angel. If one angel can kill 185,000 Assyrians, I imagine one angel could care for countless thousands of children. They are powerful beings. And what is definitely not said is that angels take the appearance of the person they are guarding, though they can take human appearance.

The sharp two-edged sword, 1:16 (Rev 19:15). *Distomos*. two-edged. Why double edged? Aren't all swords double-edged? No, two-edged swords are more easily broken because both sides are tapered down. There is less steel. But...

“One of the reasons some swords are forged into two-edged swords is because it allows better stab attacks. Due to the two blades, a double-edged sword is more lethal when pierced.

“Double-edged swords are also more effective at penetrating armor than single-edged swords.

“The third benefit of the double-edged design is that it prevents the enemy of the warrior from grabbing the blade ... If the enemy tries to grab a double-edged sword, he is likely to be severely injured.” (Copied)

See also Isaiah 49:2, referring to Messiah, and Ephesians 6:17, “The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.” He is called the Word of God in Revelation, and Hebrews tells us that the Word of God is sharper than a 2-edged sword.

So, is Jesus the Word or does He *speak* the Word. *What He speaks, He is*. What comes out of His mouth is truth. And He is truth. What comes out of His mouth is life. And He is life. You cannot separate the words of Jesus from Jesus Himself. When you try to do it, you go off into heresy. Jesus spoke through the prophets. Jesus spoke by His own actions when He was here. Jesus speaks through the apostles. Go off to the left or right of those words and you miss the mark.

Comfort (1:17). John's counterpart Daniel had similar problems with the Vision of his day: (Daniel 10:8) “...no strength remained in me; for my vigor was turned to frailty in me, and I retained no strength...” As for John, he falls at Jesus' feet “as a dead man”. Who can comprehend the glory he saw and felt at that moment?

Jesus simply tells him to be unafraid, and then further identifies Himself.

There follows a clear definition of His Deity for those who need one, such as the cultists who continue to prey on God's people. This One Who died and rose is the First and Last (1:8, 1:11) Alpha and Omega (Isaiah 41:4, 44:6, 48:12-13!) Yahweh said this. Did Jesus claim to be God? Yes He did!

1:18. Claims to be the resurrected one. He has the keys of Death (Psalm 68:20). He is eternal. What need we more witness? He is God Almighty!

Regarding Hades. This Greek word for hell is not in the KJV. Simply, “hell” is the translation. There are two Greek words translated “Hell” in KJV:

Ge-Hinnom, the valley of the son of Hinnom. Used figuratively for everlasting punishment. There was such a place. There will be a place that resembles it but far worse. Not used in

Revelation, but in the Gospels & James. Soul and body go there. There is fire. A place of damnation. A place causing the fear of God. Not just death.

Hades. The other word *is* in Revelation, Luke (Rich man & Lazarus, Capernaum), in Acts translated from Sheol in Hebrew. “You will not leave my soul in hell,” said Jesus through David in Psalm 16. The grave. But *more*. And it is here in Revelation.

It means simply “unseen”. The place of departed souls. Translated grave or hell. Definitely a place of torment, but some have speculated that since it merely means unseen, there is a portion of Hades that we know of as Paradise. In other words, everyone everywhere goes to hades, but not all go to Gehenna. Hades is the destination of all, death is the transportation to get there, and Jesus has the escape from the Gehenna side. When we die, we will bypass Gehenna and go right to be with Jesus.

2. The things which are (on earth) (2-3)

The communication to the seven churches of Asia is just what it appears to be: seven letters addressed to seven real churches, blessing them and/or warning them. All the fantasies of theologians through the years attempting to make these churches into church “ages” have failed.

These seven churches, however, do represent problems and principles by which the Church universal has been edified in every age, and so it will be until Jesus comes. These congregations were chosen because churches like them will always exist. They exist today. Loveless, persecuted, compromising churches. Corrupt, dead, faithful churches. And the lukewarm church. They're around, like the poor, "always with us."

Your church is one of these, or a combination of more than one. It behooves you to discern which one you are.

In the above sense, the seven churches of John are no different than the seven churches to which Paul wrote letters: Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, Thessalonica. Thankfully, no one –that I have read– tries to weave strange tales about the mysterious epochs that those letters represent. They are simply congregations that had problems and graces worthy of our consideration. It can be argued, as it is by some, that *most of the New Testament was written in response to difficulties that arose in that early church*. The Spirit-sent responses serve as the basis for the normalizing of the Christian Church of all time.

The letters follow a **set format** of five parts:

- 1) **Address of destination**: "To the angel of the church of _____, write." We discussed above the role of angels in the writing and preservation of these letters.
- 2) Personal **description of Jesus** as He relates to this particular Church.
- 3) **The condition** of the church as viewed by the Only One who can truly know it. Seven times God says, "I know your works." Seven times He proceeds to prove that fact.
- 4) Then comes a **recommended course of action**. Five of the seven are told to repent! The other two are comforted and blessed.
- 5) Finally comes the **promise** to the overcomers, the obedient, coupled to an **invitation**: "He that has ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

Within that context of sameness, let us look at the letter's variations:

Ephesus (2:1-7). Jesus is seen here (2:1-2) as the One Who knows all about them, the One from Whom they can hide nothing. Most persons looking at the Ephesian Church probably praised it, based on the very catalogue of good things that Jesus saw, too (2:2-3). But Jesus knows their need and addresses it.

The city of Ephesus was the largest and most prosperous of the seven addressed. As Paul

discovered (Acts 18), its prominence was further enhanced by its devotion to the goddess Diana.

In Roman art Diana usually appears as a huntress with bow and quiver, accompanied by a hound or deer.

Diana was associated at once with virginity and fertility. As a goddess of virginity, she provided an opportunity for young women to worship her and to choose to become virgins in her temple.

Aspects of Diana and Artemis were taken over by the church more than 1,300 years ago. The Festival of Torches (Diana's main holiday) became the Feast of the Assumption (Mary assumed into Heaven). The temple of Artemis at Ephesus in Turkey was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, with an awe-inspiring statue of the "many-breasted" Artemis. The temple was destroyed and replaced by the Church of Mary. The Virgin Mary even assumed some titles once given to Artemis, including Queen of Heaven. (copied)

Nevertheless the Gospel prospered greatly here, after the initial struggles. Following Paul's work there, Timothy ministered to the dynamic church. Later still, John himself was an elder in this congregation. One can only speculate about what went through John's heart as he sees his own people being rebuked so in the Spirit's words (or did John minister in part to all seven of these churches?)

Look at the GOOD things Jesus says about this church. Can He say this about your church, our church?

- Works. Individual acts of kindness, projects of mercy, programs of evangelism
- Labor. This is what makes the "works" happen. Works are the finished product. The bag of groceries is in someone's hands. The labor: making a shopping list, going to the store, finding the house & delivering. Over & over.
- Patience. As in v 3, but this one is general. You keep doing things. Bravo.
- Can't bear THOSE WHO are evil! Not just EVIL, but those who are evil. Have we learned to tell the difference between good people and evil people? People who want to destroy and people who are at least trying to do the right thing?
- Tested apostles and found them to be frauds. How do you test an apostle? We've covered this in the Romans study (will cover). Generally speaking you ask them, have you seen the risen Christ and do you have proof of such? Can you work a miracle (not pray for one)? Let's see the scars? What are you teaching?

- Persevered (in these last items). Even when people didn't like what you were doing. Even though apostle after apostle showed up at the door. "Hello, I'm an apostle. This is my wife, she's an apostle too." That gets wearying after a while! But they kept going.

Nevertheless... however... the word you do not want to hear when someone is patting you on the back. There's a problem, Ephesus.

Now, church, listen to the problems and the praises of these seven congregations, and picture your own life or church; then write yourself into these letters because that is why they were written!

But. The great love of God which permeated the congregation at one time, due to the ministry of 40 years of work by Paul, Timothy and the apostle of love, is now fallen from its first intensity (2:4-5). Though this is the "only" charge against it, the sentence is clear: repent, or else!

"I will remove your lampstand," is the threat. Your light. Your influence for my kingdom. Church destroyed? No. Bombed out of existence? No. But the church is so caught up in entertainment or politics or self-gratification of some sort that souls are not coming and being saved in that place. The light has gone out. Ephesus is given a warning. Get back into loving people, or I will cancel your influence and you will be as good as dead.

But, but, our doctrine! Our works! God says, *love*. You can have pure doctrine with no love and your church is worthless. You can be veritable busy bees with your works but do it all for the wrong motives. *love*.

However, there is still praise and encouragement coming from the Lord. Read on.

Here we are introduced (2:6) to the *Nicolaitans*. It would seem that their identity must remain one of the unsolved mysteries of Revelation. In verses 14-15, speaking to the church at Pergamos, there is a possible link to the teachers of the "doctrine of Balaam", those in the early days and our own who put stumbling blocks in front of God's people, such as sexual issues and participating in the idolatry of this world. And, based on the name, some have speculated that they were followers of one Nicolas. Did the deacon of Acts 6 fall away, or is there another Nicolas?

From the "Got Questions?" website: *The exact origin of the Nicolaitans is unclear. Some Bible commentators believe they were a heretical sect who followed the teachings of Nicolas—his name means "one who conquers the people"—who was possibly one of the deacons of the early church mentioned in Acts 6:5. It is possible that Nicolas became an apostate, denying the true faith and became part of a group holding "the doctrine of Balaam," who taught Israel "to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality." Clement of*

Alexandria says, "They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence." Their teaching perverted grace and replaced liberty with license.

Other commentators believe that these Nicolaitans were not so called from any man, but from the Greek word nicolah, meaning "let us eat," as they often encouraged each other to eat things offered to idols. Whichever theory is true, it is certain that the deeds of the Nicolaitans were an abomination to Christ. They, like the Gnostics and other false teachers, abused the doctrine of grace and tried to introduce licentiousness in its place (2 Peter 2:15, 19; Jude 1:4).

Since this party is no longer with us, it is just as well that we do not know who they were. One thing is certain: the *Ephesians* knew who they were and knew how to hate their deeds. The lesson for us is clear. *Hate what God hates*. Enemies of God are our enemies. With David we can pray prayers of vengeance on these enemies. However, in Christ, there is the balance of mercy, whereby we pray that those enemies will not remain inimical to God. It would seem that the Church at Ephesus had left behind its compassion for the lost.

Overcomers in this church are promised greater things than the prosperity of Ephesus can produce. for example, nourishment from the tree of life in Paradise itself (2:7).

So Paradise still exists? Somehow what we first see in the first chapters of Genesis, has been lifted up from earth for now, guarded by angels, getting ready for God's true people to enter, where they will partake of the tree of life. See 22:2.

Is this a real tree? With real fruit? And real leaves? Why not? Maybe not real in our present definitions of trees and fruit and leaves, but real just the same, and expressed to us in words we can understand. This tree is in the middle of a street on either side of which is a river flowing... we'll come to that again when we get to the end of the book...

The "stick" of having the lampstand removed from its place coupled to the "carrot" of eternal pleasure ought to be enough to entice the true believer to carry on to the end.

Smyrna (2:8-11). Here they are again. We've met John already. Now here is a whole church full of suffering saints, pastored by an appointee of the apostle John named Polycarp, one who was burned alive for his faith. *Christians suffer*. Christians die at the hands of antichrists. We simply must see and believe this. And the greatest encouragement given is that if we overcome, that is, stay faithful until death, we will not be hurt by the second death (2:10-11). In fact, Jesus' personal ID here is "the One Who was dead, and came to life" (2:8).

"I know your works..." said to all of them and all of us.

Tribulation. Spoken of throughout the New Testament. Through much tribulation we enter the kingdom.

Our poverty and the world's poverty are not the same. Blessed are the poor *in spirit*. The physically poor do not get a free pass because they are poor. But it is most often those poor that seek after Jesus. Here was a group of poor Christians.

The "synagogue of Satan" is mentioned here (2:9) and in 3:9, and seems to refer to Jews who, as the ones mentioned by Paul in Romans 2:17, want to claim the blessings of being Jewish, but take no delight in that which is Israel's true glory, the Messiah. Any congregation of people, Jewish or so-called "Christian" that openly denies the Person and work of Jesus are in Satan's camp.

2:10, A promise. You are going to have a time of suffering. Some of you will go to prison. You are going to have tribulation. Ten days, but "be faithful until death."

I imagine there are attempts to spiritualize *ten days*. But nowhere in Scripture is "ten days" some code language for something else. Ten days is ten days. See for yourself:

Genesis 24. Laban wants to keep Rebekah from leaving for at least ten days. Abraham's servant says, no, this will not be good. Too much of a chance for her to be persuaded to change her mind. Ten days, then, is a time of temptation and testing.

Daniel 1:12-15. Daniel and his friends are tested for ten days and at the end of those ten days they are looking better than all the others who are on the king's diet, a diet which we can only imagine. Lots of meat and fat and wine.

Is there any reason to be figurative here in Revelation? Can we imagine the horrors of the persecutions that are coming? This is not the wrath of God, but the wrath of Satan and the wrath of Satan's men who hate Jesus Christ and all who follow Him.

Ten days? You say, why, that's nothing. Wurmbrand was in prison for 14 years. What is ten days?

Actually ten days, even ten minutes, can be pretty awful.

"With an imperial gesture, Domitian orders his men to throw John into a cauldron of boiling oil... John emerges unharmed, a miracle..." (Copied).

This is legend, tradition. All we know for sure about Domitian is that he did indeed persecute Christians, but usually by banishment, as John's exile proved.

And we do know that imprisonment, which is promised here, can be filled with excruciatingly painful experiences. The lions?

Do you see the flow of the text here? Ten days. Only ten days. You will have tribulation. After being imprisoned. Just be faithful. You are going to die in prison. But that's not the end. From your prison cell you will be elevated to the courts of Heaven where I will reward you with a crown of life.

Notice also: a synagogue of Satan in verse 9. And imprisonment by the devil in verse 10. Their reason for going to jail was quite possibly betrayal by unbelieving Jews. As happened to Paul, so will happen to these.

Smyrna. Included in its growing power was the resultant faithfulness to Rome and Rome's religion, expressed in emperor worship. The church's rejection of this devotion brought on the persecution alluded to in the letter. The comfort given by the Spirit is that, although believers are not promised exemption from the first death, the second death will not be an issue (2:11).

The second death is referenced and explained in Revelation 20, a most important chapter that gives the sequence of events after the Tribulation very clearly. Satan is bound, the Millennial reign of Christ takes place, the final battle with Satan follows, Satan is delivered to the lake of fire, the heavens and the earth as we know it pass away, the great judgment day occurs, death and hades and everyone cast there are placed in a lake of fire, and the Spirit tells us, "this is the second death" (20:14).

For a final identification of that second death, we move into chapter 21, where there is a new heaven and earth, and another look at that awful lake in v. 8, and its ID again, the second death.

So if you are born only once, you must die twice. First death we all understand, second death is the lake of fire. But if you are born twice, you die only once.

So far we have seen the loveless church and the persecuted church. Now, a compromising church.

Pergamos (2:12-17). Pergamos is said to be the place of "Satan's throne" (2:13). Here, Satan actually "dwells". Halley (*Halley's Bible Handbook, 24th edition, p. 704*) explains:

"Pergamum was a seat of Emperor Worship, where incense was offered before the statue of the emperor as to God... also, an altar to Jupiter. And a temple of Esculapius, a healing god, worshiped in the form of a serpent, one of the names of Satan. Besides these, it was also a stronghold of Balaamite and Nicolaitan Teachers. Thus, as a notorious center of heathenism and wickedness, it was called 'Satan's Throne'"

And, as stated above, Pergamos was the capital city of the province known as *Asia*. Quite often the great cities of the world are great capitals of evil.

Talk of a dwelling place for Satan is in antithesis to the reality of a future time when God Himself will dwell with us, Throne and all, as described later (21: 3, 22:3). Here in Pergamos, further, is more talk of Christians *dying the martyr's death*, as will be spoken of in greater detail in chapters 6 and 7. These deaths come about because of refusal to participate in the falseness going on around the believers.

Do we know anything of this "Antipas" mentioned in 2:13?

Wikipedia: *According to Eastern Orthodox traditions, according to the Commentary on the Apocalypse of Andreas of Caesarea, it is believed that Saint Antipas was the Antipas referred to in the Book of Revelation 2:13, as the verse says: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." According to Christian tradition, John the Apostle ordained Antipas as bishop of Pergamon during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero. The traditional accounts go on to say Antipas was martyred during the reign of Nero (54-68)^[1] or Domitian,^[4] by burning in a brazen bull-shaped altar for casting out demons worshiped by the local population.*

That's tradition. But, there was an Antipas. He lived in Pergamos. He was faithful. His name means *against all*.

Notice that, as in the letter to Ephesus, Jesus brings out the good things first, letting the church know that they are not all bad. But then He in all honesty must come to the rest of the story. Our own dealings with men need to be of this same order. When you have to correct someone, you let him know that he is not some worthless individual. Encourage. But be real, be honest. Tell the whole truth.

The doctrine, or teaching, of Balaam (2:14). Balaam was a man for all seasons, for all religions, for all philosophies. His bottom line was not prophet but *profit*. His tribe has increased and is with us still in the Church. Numbers 22-25 and the first 16 verses of chapter 31 will explain the incidents to which the Lord is referring here, and how it all ties in with sexual immorality.

We all know the story of how, when Israel came near the Promised Land on their way out of Egypt, the king of Moab, named Balak, became very nervous about the approaching Israelites, and hired a well-known prophet of the day, a prophet for profit, a hireling, who dabbled in the arts of magic and the supernatural and could be invited to bless or curse your enemy for a small, or exorbitant, fee.

We know how Balaam refused, how he heard from God, how he asked again, and got a different message. We learn that he was guided by greed. And now Revelation tells us that he “taught” Balak. Several times he showed Balak exactly how to put a curse on Israel. You offer sacrifices on specially prepared altars, you then turn it over to me, I will pray, and God will do the rest. Balak learned the process quite well. Except, it didn’t work. We remember also how the Lord used this false prophet actually to utter a promise that came to pass about a Star that would come out of Jacob, not right away, but eventually, and that a Person would come to destroy Moab and Edom and more.

Though the main actors leave the scene at the end of chapter 24, the drama goes on in 25. It says there that Israel stayed in the same place they were, at the border of Moab, and Israelite men began to have unhealthy relationships with Moabite women. And through their enticements the Israelites were led to worship Moabite gods! The Lord had to move in and kill the offenders. 24,000 of them died.

So we see that Balaam, before he left, taught Balak another lesson, namely, how to bring the people of God to idolatry by the enticements of a woman. Then, according to the further account, a Midianite woman showed up in the camp of Israel and offered herself in adultery to an Israelite man. All those involved were eventually condemned to death. Sexual and idolatrous behavior was considered an attack of the enemy, and it was rewarded with military might.

The story teaches us that men can fall in more ways than one. The enemy of our soul will try one way and if that doesn’t work he will try another. Some of us are proud about having overcome him on one front but blinded to the fact that everyone around us can see, that they have not overcome him on other fronts.

Here in the church at Pergamos was a group of false teachers or perhaps just false people that gathered with them at the fellowship dinner and started sharing their insights with people. And they taught them the teaching of Balaam, the man who first unsuccessfully, then successfully, cursed the people of God. His own demise is spelled out in Numbers 31:8, where it says that Israel killed the kings of Midian. And “Balaam the son of Beor they also killed with the sword.” Church, don’t let the false ones come in and start spreading their ways among us. Guard the truth that the Lord has entrusted to you. If you don’t, these men you love so much will be killed with the sword like Balaam was. Only this sword will be the sword of His mouth.

Yes, Jesus says to the church here that unrepentant sinners are going to have to deal with the sword coming out of His mouth (2:16). That is even the way He *introduces* Himself to this Church (2:12).

I am skipping over verse 15 since we dealt with the Nicolaitans earlier.

What is **hidden manna** in 2:17? When the Israelites first saw the bread from Heaven, they said, “What is it?” In Hebrew they were saying words that sound very much like our English word *manna*. Now at the other end of the Book we are confronted with some new *manna* in our future, and we, like them, want to know what it is. Good question. Commendable curiosity. Keep asking! Keep looking forward to it. We know for sure that when it comes to us it will be delicious, abundant, delightful.

But then, we must pause a moment and ask, are these promises only about our future? Is there something of the fulfillment even now? Is *overcoming* a life-long thing, or only at the end of life as we finally have overcome to the point of entering eternity with Jesus?

For example, in verse 7, do we eat from the tree of life now? “He that has the Son *has life...*” And do we eat hidden manna now? Is it not true that manna, the bread which came down from Heaven, is hidden to the world? The world is blind and cannot see what we see. So, when we partake of Jesus by faith, whether in His Word, or in the Spirit, or at communion time, are we not partaking of hidden manna even now? Then what is this *hidden* manna promised for our future? Man-hu, man-hu, What is it? I leave it there...

As to the **white stone** also promised, Matthew Henry’s Revelation commentary suggests that it was an ancient custom to give those acquitted at a trial, a white stone, as opposed to a black one for those condemned. This may or may not be the case on that coming day, but there is a ring of truth to it. Our sins are forgiven. We are declared righteous because of the blood of Jesus. He will say “Not guilty,” if the enemy tries to accuse us of past wrong-doing.

Then comes the **new name** written on the stone, which speaks of our adoption, also per Henry. At birth we are given our parents’ name, but if we are adopted we are given a *new name*. So it was with us, adopted into the family of God, given His own special name. See also 3:12, where we read that the very name of God will be written on us, along with the name of the City, and a special new name of the Lord, according to 19:12. We will certainly be well identified in that day when He claims us for His own, puts His brand on us and says, “This is mine.”

See Hebrews 12:23 regarding our “registration” ... You don’t show up at a hotel or a conference unless you have been registered. This is no last-minute thing. You must be born again now, and saved now, and assured of salvation now. Otherwise, you join the ranks of those false religions that will tell you, you can’t really know. In Catholicism this is called “presumption.” The god of Islam, Muhammad, may let you in and he may not. In false religions you trust in the Heavenly scale, which will measure your good and bad deeds, and hopefully you will do enough good ones! That’s why some Christians “work”, you know. They realize how bad they have been, so they try to make up for it by piling on the good works. Still they aren’t sure. Who can know which works will be weighed in which way?

Those who by faith overcome the world have already been registered in Heaven. The decision was actually made, not by you, but by God before the world began.

Thyatira (2:18-29). This church, spoken to by One who sees right through them with eyes like a flame of fire (2:18), is with us today and in all ages, as are all seven churches: the corrupt church, being corrupted by a woman who calls herself a prophetess (2:20). Great tribulation is promised the unrepentant who follow her, also (2:22).

From Wikipedia, this description:

In early Christian times, Thyateira was home to a significant Christian church, mentioned as one of the [seven Churches of the Book of Revelation](#)According to Revelation, a woman named Jezebel (who called herself a prophetess) taught and seduced the Christians of Thyateira to commit sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.^[2] ... commentators such as Benson and Doddridge have concluded that what is being here practiced in Thyatira is the same apostasy promoted in Israel by [Jezebel](#) as mentioned in the [Books of Kings](#) and that use of her name here is a direct reference to such. Indeed, as Doddridge notes, "the resemblance appears so great" that, in his view, it is the "same heresy which is represented".^[8]

The [Apostle Paul](#) and [Silas](#) might have visited Thyateira during Paul's second or third journey, Acts 16:13-16. They visited several small unnamed towns in the general vicinity during the second journey. While in [Philippi](#), Paul and Silas stayed with a woman named [Lydia](#) from Thyateira, who continued to help them even after they were jailed and released.

2:20. It is good that we mention a godly woman from Thyatira, a woman who became involved in a meaningful way in the ministry of the apostles. Because Thyatira, the church of, is not known for a godly woman, but a decidedly ungodly one, code-named "Jezebel." Probably not her real name. Can't imagine that name being popular in a Christian community, but who knows...

2:21. There is a growing presence of female leadership in today's church. Paul forbade women to lead men, or even to speak in the meetings, especially if it was interruptive. Ask your husband at home, was the general rule. and that was that. But here already in Thyatira, was not only a woman, but an evil woman, teaching immoral doctrines in the first century church. Why is no one stopping her? Here is a church of love, service, faith, and patience. Here is a church that has grown better, not worse. But Jezebel prospers (2:20).

Notice the commentary on her ministry by the Spirit: she "calls herself" a prophetess. In the name of God, she is telling the people of God to ease up on their sexual restrictions. She preaches "liberty", and the people love it, as people in all generations have loved that word. But it is liberty

that leads to bondage. She also majors in the popular issue of that day, the idea of violating the conscience of weak believers by indulging in habits that cause people to sin. It was clear that eating something sacrificed to an idol was not in itself bad, because those idols were nothing.

And today we see Christians “innocently” frequenting bars and gambling dens and imbibing all forms of alcoholic beverages in the name of freedom, but in the process causing those with weak consciences and inability to control bad habits, plunging right back into the sin that bound them for decades.

She was a libertarian in the oldest sense. “Be free. If it feels good do it. Follow your heart.” Twisting the word of God that says, “For freedom Christ set us free.”

There are Jezebels in every generation and in a good many churches. Some preach from the pulpit, others just spread their venom at the fellowship meal where they exhibit their gluttonous ways.

God’s remedy for His people, after giving the woman ample time to change her ways **(2:21)** is separated living. He Himself will cause a division between the immoral and moral in the church of Thyatira **(2:22-23)**. The one segment is encouraged to hold fast (2:25) and overcome (25-26). The other is to be judged, and soon, if repentance does not follow.

2:23. And what could it mean to “kill with death”? Doesn’t all killing lead to death? I believe the Lord is speaking about that slow and painful death we call sickness and disease. Perhaps cancer. This matches with the idea of the “sickbed” of verse 22. Whatever, those who name the name of Christ but continue to live after the flesh are bound for a horrible judgment. This judgment will become known to other churches and serve as a warning not to misrepresent Who Jesus is by a wicked lifestyle.

And so the Word must go out to faithful believers today, not that they are to try to take the reins of the Church, but rather that they should take to the knees, to be faithful, be consistent, and allow God to do what He must. “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them,” says the apostle (Ephesians 5:11). Yet we are not to be pulling weeds, either (Matthew 13:29). Not before the time.

There are faithful members of the Thyatira church, and of the corrupt churches of our own day. It is worthy of note that never does God ask anyone in any of the five bad churches to “come out” of the church. We are always called to come out virtually by living a holy life, but we are not expected to keep changing our church home when imperfection shows up. Notice the encouragement in verses 24-29, by far the largest portion of the word to the corrupt church.

The faithful, who are not connected to the libertine party, and who have not known the

“depths of Satan” are given several promises: But first...

2:24-25. ... what is meant by the “depths of Satan”?

It is speculated here that there were those among the false teachers who were letting it be known that they knew all about the ways of Satan. Even today there are believers who seem to know more about the enemy than they do about Jesus. They will tell you how to bind Satan, rebuke Satan, cast out Satan... everything except resist Satan with the Word of God, which is all we are commanded to do. They will tell you elaborate descriptions of the various categories of Satan’s legions, and how he has this and that plan, and on and on.

Jesus says to these people, you are not responsible to know all about Satan. You are not responsible to yield to this evil woman and her followers. You do not have to go with the flow of sexual freedom that much of the church is talking about. You do not have to offend your weak brothers by taking substances into your body that could harm you and wound the consciences of the weak. Just hold on to what you have. Keep doing what you have been doing, that is your good works, your love, your service, your faith, your patience. You true believers are going the right direction. Keep it up!

2:26. And your reward? A promise to overcomers that they will rule the nations with a rod of iron. The coming kingdom of Jesus will be a kingdom of laws and rules. It will be a time of perfect government. The planet will function as it was meant to from the beginning. How incredible that we shall actually reign side by side with God Himself in a world being made perfect by the Son of God.

But wait! This is a first-century church! So is Philadelphia, coming up in the next chapter. But promises made to Thyatira and Philadelphia are promises regarding end-time events. This lets us know that the church-age theory does not work. People who want to put Thyatira in one church age and Philadelphia, two churches later, in a different church age, are sadly lacking evidence.

Jesus is not telling Thyatira that their first century church will be around until the end of history. He is saying that any Christian of any age that overcomes the evil one will one day reign with Jesus. Here Jesus actually quotes from His Book of Psalms, chapter 2, about the coming Messianic kingdom. That Psalm pictures Messiah ruling over all the nations, but Jesus here inserts the fact that we shall reign with Him!

As an added bonus, overcomers will receive **the morning star**. What could that mean? See Revelation 22:16. Jesus will give Himself to the overcoming believer.

Poole’s Commentary: Christ himself is the Morning star, Revelation 22:16, because he excelleth all other stars in glory, and scattereth the darkness of ignorance and error by

the light of his gospel: I will make him partaker of myself.

Yes, Satan is called a morning star, and Job speaks of the morning stars singing together. But in these references there is no definite article. Jesus is *the* morning star, and He will be given to His people.

It is hard to imagine a physical star being given to one person. But that every individual overcomer will receive of the fullness of who Jesus is, seems to be what is being said. We will become the essence of light and wisdom along with our risen Lord.

Consider: 1 John 3:2

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Time to move on to the next city.

Sardis (3:1-6). From One Who by His Spirit and angels is and gives life, and knows what's going on in Sardis, comes the message, "You have a name that you live" (3:1). A reputation in the city. A history. A fine building. Nice people. Your sign says "church". And church means "called out." Surely you must be alive, recognized by God. But no, only death here. You have long forsaken the call.

Perhaps, like churches today, you have heard instead the call of the world, and you have responded to it. Your music, your mission, your messengers, are all of this world. The mixture is lord in your church, the desire to conform, the flow of ecumenicity. "All things to all men" has turned into bald-faced idolatry and man-pleasing.

God tells the sleeping, *nearly* dead ("strengthen the things that remain"), church, to wake up (3:2), to repent, and that to it He will come like a thief (3:3). The idea of a secret, startling coming is always in the context of a church like Sardis, in need of repentance, never a church that is watching and waiting for Christ. "You are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief" (I Thessalonians 5:4).

Notice that even in this saddest of churches there are a "few names" (3:4). These folk are not encouraged to come out of the Sardis congregation, but to continue on to their certain reward. What if you found yourself in a church like Sardis, with a great reputation, but filled with members who have defiled their garments? Would you stay? The temptation would be to get out of that bunch, be separated. But that is not the message. Your job in a situation like that is to be

holy yourself and encourage others to be holy.

What about this “defiled their garments”? How do people defile their garments? *Garments* is used later in the book, as the bowl judgments are being poured out on unbelievers during the tribulation, and as Jesus is speaking to his people there (16:15), “Blessed is he who keeps his *garments*, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.”

So you can defile your spiritual clothing and even lose your spiritual clothing, according to Jesus Himself. We better figure out what our clothing is, and how to keep it from being defiled or lost altogether. Then we need to understand what “defile” means.

What is the clothing of the child of God? I think the book of Revelation actually answers that question. The very next verse talks about how overcomers will be clothed in white one day. Later the lukewarm church is told to buy from Jesus *white garments* so that they can be clothed and not naked.

A multitude of saints is seen in chapter 7, having just come out of the great tribulation, slaughtered by the antichrist. They all have white clothing. How did they get white? They were washed in the blood of the Lamb. Whoever these tribulation saints are, they are saved the same way we are saved, by washing their robes in the blood, by coming to Christ for forgiveness and being made clean and pure, even here.

Revelation 19:8 spells it out even more clearly. The wife of the Lamb is invited to a feast, and she is dressed in clean bright white clothing, “for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.” Soon after that you see Jesus coming with His bride, now called an army, clothed in that same white linen following him to the earth.

Sardis. You seem to be alive. Everywhere people talk about the megachurch over in Sardis. The music is spectacular. The speakers there are dynamic. But your people, most of them, have defiled their clothing. Some of them may not even have clothing. There is no holiness in your church. People don’t want to talk about holy living and a pure testimony before the world. What Jesus did to make them righteous and holy is not talked about.

Only a few have kept themselves from defilement.

To defile is to stain or dye with a different color. Jesus has made your garments white. You have stained those garments with your immoral lifestyle and your caving in to this world, to this culture. You are not special to me. You look just like the world. You have a name – in the world – that you are alive. But you are dead to me. What would happen if one of your great preachers would preach a sermon on holy living, on separation from the world? How many would stay in the Sardis church then?

So you see, Sardis does not necessarily represent a tiny little church, or a boring church, or an old church that needs to shut down. Could be quite the opposite. Sardis could be a big, well-known, on-the-move, culturally relevant organization with a popular preacher and the best musicians, and a positive message. That is your dead church.

Want your small Bible fellowship of Christians to grow? Just put aside the teachings that separate you from the mainstream. Get woke. Get musical. Get with it. Follow the culture. See what the culture wants and give it to them! Your little church will have to rebuild and resettle and rehire and think big. It can happen. If what we want is a church that's well-known, that's all we have to do...

I will not blot out his name from The Book of Life (3:5)

The Book of life is in Revelation more than once and the idea of a "Book" of some sort appears in other portions of Scripture from Moses to David to Daniel to Isaiah to Jesus to Paul (Exodus 32:32, Psalm 56:8, Daniel 12:1, Isaiah 4:3 Luke 10:20, Philippians 4:3). More of interest here, though, is the idea of "blotting out". Is it possible for a man to lose his place in the Book?

God says to *Moses* (Exodus 32:32) that anyone who sins against God will indeed be blotted out! Then are we being led to believe that every man who is born is put into the Book, a book of "life", as it were, to begin with, then "blotted out" when sin occurs? Then everyone has been blotted out?

David was aware of a book that contained a record of his tears. The life story of every believer, and even every person?

An angel tells *Daniel* that a time of trouble, or tribulation, is coming to the planet. Unprecedented evil. This matches with the words of Jesus and the book of Revelation. Daniel is told that at that time, somehow connected to this tribulation the people of Daniel, the Jews, will be delivered "everyone who is found written in the book." The two resurrections to follow are then mentioned.

Isaiah sees a time at the beginning of the Millennial reign when all the remaining people who come to earth after the Tribulation will be called holy. They are called "everyone who is recorded among the living."

Jesus Himself mentioned a list of names written in Heaven.

Paul uses the same terminology as does John in our passage. He claims that there are certain true believers surrounding him "whose names are in the Book of Life."

Then there are those other references in Revelation. Look at 13:8. Anyone whose name is

not written in the Lamb's Book of Life, will worship the beast. Notice the order. *Your name is written first.* Your actions follow. We tend to think as Moses did before he was corrected. "If I do something wrong, I am out. If I do the right thing, He'll put me in." Here it is clear. God writes the Lamb's book ahead of time. Those in the Book won't be worshipping the Lamb.

A similar statement is made in 17:8. The Lamb's people are not enthralled with the antichrist. They know better.

Other books are opened in Revelation 20:12-15. These are the records, it seems. Judgment is placed on all humanity based on the records. The records will show every sin of every person who ever lived. Their place outside the book of Life will be verified and justified.

21:27 tells us of the entrance requirements into the final City of God. Only those written in the Lamb's Book come in.

In 22, a final mention of the book and one's being taken out of it if they would dare to change the record of Revelation in some way.

A summary of all of this: Upon birth man is placed in the general book of life until he sins. When a person, because of the blood of Christ, looks to God for salvation, he is added to the Lamb's Book of Life, the only one that matters at the end, for the other book has no names in it.

Or, there is only one book to begin with. It is populated with names of God's saints from the beginning of time.

We can argue about this Book, but I think it wiser to question with the songwriter Mary Ann Kidder:

*1 Lord, I care not for riches, neither silver nor gold;
I would make sure of heaven, I would enter the fold.
In the book of Thy kingdom with its pages so fair,
Tell me, Jesus, my Savior, is my name written there?*

Refrain:

*Is my name written there
On the page white and fair?
In the book of Thy kingdom,
Is my name written there?*

*2 Lord, my sins they are many, like the sands of the sea,
But Thy blood, O my Savior, is sufficient for me;
For Thy promise is written in bright letters that glow,
"Though your sins be as scarlet, I will make them like snow." [Refrain]*

Philadelphia (3:7-13).

To the Philadelphia Church, Jesus introduces Himself as the One Who is holy and true. So, He is the One Who has the right to make judgments about the churches. The congregation might have trembled a little when they heard the opening words. Holy? True? And we? Have we been holy and true to Him?

Not only that. He is the “door opener”. He has the Key. He can open the door of Heaven to this church. Or shut it, just as easily. Earlier we saw Jesus with the key to death and hell. What is this key of David?

The key shows up in Isaiah, in the days when Assyria was threatening to destroy Judah. Hezekiah was king. A man named Shebna was a high-ranking Jew who had become corrupt and who needed to be replaced. He was replaced by Eliakim, who becomes a type of Christ, and a man that Jesus uses here as a previewer of His own actions.

Isaiah 22:20-23. As you continue reading the story you will see Eliakim, and not Shebna as the new head over the household. Very important position in the Royal structure of the day. To have the key of King David meant you decided who could and could not be in the kingdom.

That “virtual” key was passed on through the centuries until it rested as it does now, in the hands of King Jesus. Jesus, who took upon Him the form of a Servant, like Eliakim, has been given the Key to the kingdom, the position of highest honor, and through Him, God will establish the very reign of God on the earth.

Jesus gives the Key to whomever He will. Peter was given a Key for the Jews and a Key for the Gentiles. His message of introduction of God’s forgiveness opened to them eternal life forever. The Key has been passed down to all believers willing to use it in the proclaiming of the Good News. To this end, doors open and close, as predicted here to the Philadelphia Church, and thence to believers of all ages.

The trembling of that Philadelphia crowd, listening to the letter being read by the messenger, continues. He can shut us out. He can bring us in. What is it going to be?

“I know your works.” As He has said to every church so far. Then the next line. “I have set before you, by virtue of the key I hold in my hand, an open door.” You are going in. No one will stop you. You’ve been faithful. You kept My Word. You haven’t denied Me. You aren’t as strong as some others in some ways, but you are pleasing to me in the things you do.

Think of Hezekiah in this regard. When Assyria threatened, Hezekiah fell apart. But He stayed

faithful. He took His burden to the Lord, and the Lord shut out the Assyrian army. You don't have to be a Samson in every undertaking for the Lord, but you do have to stay standing.

Note how Jesus praises the little-but-pure strength of Philadelphia over the little but *waning* love of Ephesus.

(3:9) For comments on the **Synagogue of Satan** (3:9), see under "Smyrna." It shows up in both of the faithful churches. The passing of this test by both churches has certainly been one factor of their strength. A church that can identify and deal with liars is a church that is pleasing to the Lord!

Verse 3:10 causes the same kind of interpretive difficulty as what was said to the church of Thyatira. We're talking to a first-century church about some end-time issues. Thyatira is told to hang on to the end and therefore rule the nations. Well, they have been gone a long time as a first century church. But those who overcame are a part of the church gathered in Heaven now, and that will return when Christ comes to set up His kingdom.

3:10 talks about an hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I cannot believe otherwise than that is talking about the Great Tribulation spoken of in much of Revelation, and by Jesus Himself, and by Daniel. As with Thyatira, here is an event that is centuries away from Philadelphia, yet the text seems to connect Philadelphia to the Tribulation.

This passage has been seen by many as the starting point of the church-age theory, that is, all of church history is divided into periods of hundreds of years, dominated by the kind of church John is talking about. For example, there is the age of the persecuted church, like Smyrna. Well, we've always had a persecuted church. There is the age of the corrupt church, as in Rome. But Rome is with us still.

There is the age of the faithful church, like Philadelphia, and because of their faithfulness they will not have to go through the Tribulation. And the Tribulation itself is the time of the Laodicean, lukewarm church. But we have had faithful and lukewarm churches in all ages. The theory just doesn't work.

I take you to Daniel for a possible solution. Chapter 12. Daniel has just been told of the Great Tribulation in the first few verses. Trouble. Resurrections. Damnation. Daniel is concerned, as he hears angels discussing the number of years involved. He has figured out the 70-year prophecy and realizes it was about to be fulfilled. But this one is out of reach.

Verse 9. Daniel. Go your way. Oh yes, trouble is coming, but you are not going to be a part of it. Your job is finished. You were faithful. You got the message, you passed it on. That was your

role. You'll be sleeping soon and rising to your inheritance.

Could it be that this Philadelphia church, knowing what Jesus said about the coming tribulation, probably knowing what Paul has been saying about a man of sin and all the trouble he will bring, could it be that Philadelphia is just like Daniel here? "Is it coming in our lifetime? Was Jesus talking about us? Are we going to have to go through all this?"

No, says Jesus, go your way, you have been faithful, you are going to enter into my glory soon enough.

Is it not possible that this message is indeed given to a church known in the days of John, and that the promise was kept? Did not Philadelphia escape the last times altogether, whether the tribulation, or the even greater wrath, the second coming of Jesus?

Are there not churches in every generation who can claim this promise of escaping the judgment of God if they are faithful? Is it not possible at the very least, that God is able to keep His People from harm in the midst of judgment? Were either Noah or Lot removed from the earth? Do not the 144,000 escape Satan's plan? When the bowl judgments fall, is it not stated explicitly who is being targeted? Other than persecutions allowed, are God's people ever harmed when God is pouring wrath on His enemies?

(3:11) He comes quickly. Suddenly. I hate to dissect words and their meanings to come to a right interpretation, but we must take a look at this word. Jesus, in first century Asia Minor, said to a church there, "I come quickly." At the end of the book, chapter 22, He says it three more times to all of us. By any standard we humans want to measure, Jesus has not come quickly. But that's if you think the word quickly means soon. Does it? The word is *taxu*. It can indeed mean "without delay". "Soon." It can also mean, "by surprise" or "suddenly."

Every time in the New Testament when this word is used, it seems to me that the context demands "soon." But if Jesus said in the first century that He was coming "soon" and He didn't come "soon", humanly speaking, we have two alternatives:

1. Jesus was speaking from Heaven's viewpoint, where one day is as a thousand years. From God's point of view, His coming is soon. I found that 12 of the 40 translations on the Bible Hub used the word "soon." That's a valid view if you want to acknowledge that it is a Heavenly view.
2. The other valid meaning of the word is intended. Suddenly. By surprise. Without warning. One day I will just be there. Remember that Jesus gave two examples from nature about His coming. It will be as the lightning flash that suddenly lights up the sky, and the immediate gathering of eagles or vultures where there is a dead body.

In either case, Philadelphia is told, Listen! You are doing great. Don't take all this praise as a reason to let up now. I can come at any time. Be ready.

And we should all understand that our own personal exit from life, Jesus' personal coming for us individually, is truly imminent. Can happen any time.

Be ready at a second's notice! Your very **crown** is at stake! Now there is another interesting study. What crown could be taken away by letting up? What crown is available to the believer? Paul, Peter, James, and John all talk of a crown that is ours. From them we learn:

1. That Jesus promised a "crown of life" to those who love Him (James 1:12). Now, we have no record of such a saying of Jesus in the Gospels, but it is loud and clear in Revelation 2:10: "Be faithful unto death and I will give you *a crown of life*." John may have received this message before and perhaps James heard it from him. Or Jesus may have spoken this directly to James as he walked closer and closer to Him after His resurrection.

2. That this crown will be given to, not only those that love Him, but to those who *love His appearing* (II Timothy 4:8). Those who pray for and long for the return of Christ are obviously walking in such a way as not to be ashamed at His coming.

3. This crown is permanent (I Peter 5:4), incorruptible (I Corinthians 9:25), unlike the fleeting glories of this life.

4. The 24 elders, seeming representatives of the saints before and after Jesus' incarnation, all have crowns, but they quickly remove them and cast them before Jesus. We will soon realize the inappropriateness of wielding power in the light of the greatness of this Lord, Who wore a *crown of thorns* on our behalf. We will know that it is pure grace that we even *have* a crown to throw at His feet.

So I ask you again, is it possible to "lose" the crown? If indeed there are a set number of crowns, one for every elect child of God, how could someone take mine? I submit that warnings such as this fit into the same category as things Paul said to the churches He wrote. Immediately comes to mind II Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves... Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you are disqualified". Disqualified? Someone else take my crown? That is, the crown I thought was mine? Is it possible that members of the congregation, upon taking Paul's simple test, will find that they are *not* members of the church, and be born again?

The security of each believer is as strong as the promises of God, but when warnings are given, the godliest in the church need to examine themselves. The rest God will take care of.

(3:12) More promises to overcomers: Have you noticed yet that the promises at the end

of each church are not for that church alone, but to anyone who overcomes? And who are the overcomers and what do they overcome?

Read these passages in Revelation: 3:21; 12:11; 21:7.

First to overcome is Jesus, John 16:33. Then us, see 1 John 5:4-5.

There are Christians who are trying to physically overcome or overpower the world today. Kingdom Now people believe that God's people take over the planet by becoming a part of the world system and rising to the top of it. Jesus never said to do that. We overcome by His blood. We overcome by our testimony, in the face of persecution and martyrdom. We win the battle over the world by saying no to the temptations of the Enemy.

Remember Jesus in the wilderness: all these things I will give you. Just worship me. Jesus said no, then He overcame the world at His death. God overcame the plans of the devil at His resurrection.

When you see overcomers in Revelation, they may not look like overcomers. They are going to be slaughtered for Jesus' sake. Not world conquerors, but the scum of this planet! If that picture discourages you, just keep reading these promises to the seven churches!

Now would be a good time for you to go back and review the overcomers' promises we have covered so far, and include the ones given to the last church on the route.

Now to the next promises in Philadelphia's letter.

An unremovable pillar. The temple is the house of God. In Revelation, in the final eternal manifestation of the people of God, chapter 21:22, the temple is the Lord and the Lamb. But wait. There's more. Overcomers will be pillars in that temple. You know what pillars are. They are huge and beautiful and they don't move. Ever tried to push a pillar somewhere? "He shall go out no more." Pillars don't go in and out of a temple. Wherever you are in that day, the temple will be.

We have a bit of that now. Paul says we are the temple of God. The Spirit fills the temple individually, corporately when we are together. This is a picture of a much greater reality in that day.

Now what about all these names written on us?

God's name and New Jerusalem's Name and Jesus' new name, on him.

As we move to this promise, remember it is connected to the pillar promise. Pillars were often inscribed with the name of the owner! God says He is going to put His own Name on each of us, signifying ownership of the temple and the Pillar.

Exodus 28:36-38. God's priests are to have an engraved plate placed on the turban. It will read "Holiness to the Lord." This was the Aaronic priesthood but is a type of the new one. We too will bear the name of the Lord on our forehead.

Solomon made two special pillars of bronze (1 Kings 7:15ff, and actually gave them each a name. Another preview of pillars with names.

Three names. The very Name of God Himself: I AM? Yahweh?

The name of the city of which we will forever be a citizen, the city of peace, Jerusalem. The Spirit here anticipates what shall not even be announced until the end of the Book, and which perhaps will not even be revealed, until 1000 years after Jesus comes.

And a new name for Jesus, which has not yet been revealed. Why would Jesus have a new name? Because His identity with the Father will be so real that it will have to be recognized eternally? Remember that Isaiah saw a child that was to be born Who would be called "everlasting Father" one day. Will that be His Name in eternal glory? Whatever it is, it will be inscribed on us, and given to us to wear.

The pillars of God are not the only ones inscribed in the book of Revelation. See the antichrist, feverishly trying to look like the real Christ, 13:17. He too will inscribe His Name on unbelievers, a name that will actually be a number that in the alphabet of the day will equal 666. More on that later.

See the harlot Babylon in 17:5, "On her forehead a *name* was written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth."

So here is another way of God describing to us His claim on our lives. We will be recorded in a Book. We will have His very Name stamped on our person for eternity.

These are pictures, images, but they demonstrate a literal truth in a way we cannot conceive of right now. But keep the image in mind. A priest with a plaque on his hat. An ID that announces to all that you are His. Do we wear that name proudly now? When people see us do they see God the Father somehow, the great I Am, the creator. Do they think thoughts of a Heavenly Jerusalem, an eternal residence with God? Do they see Jesus? Are these names and ideas visible to people even now? For there is a sense in which we bear His identity even in our own time (1 Corinthians 3:16.)

Wonderful thoughts given to the faithful Philadelphians. But we must move on to Laodicea.

Laodicea (3:14-22). The **identification** of Jesus here as Faithful and True (3:14) is clearly meant to let the Laodiceans know of His unerring diagnosis. He cannot be wrong about the assessment to follow. “May I have your attention please! I know what I am about to say is true...”

(3:14) Jesus identifies Himself here as *the beginning of the creation of God*. Cultists prey on this verse to remind us that Jesus is merely a created being like us, not God Almighty, not the very Son of God for eternity. It can be made to sound like Jesus is saying He is the first one who was created, or even the most important one who was ever created.

But in a quick look at another of John’s books, the Gospel of John, 1:1-3, the message is clarified. Jesus was the Beginning because He was *in* the beginning of the creation, creating everything. He was the originator, the author, the first mover of creative matter to form worlds and people and all that we can see and cannot see. The Greek word is *arkay*, “*what comes first and therefore is chief (foremost), i.e. has the priority because ahead of the rest (“preeminent”).*” Not that He was first created, but that He was the first and only creator. Without Him, there is no creation.

(3:15-16) Is it conceivable to comfortable Westerners that Jesus is saying here that He actually *prefers* an enemy to a sometime friend? How often we deceive ourselves into thinking that Jesus must be happy with whatever He can get from us. Okay, we reason, I’m not perfect, but I’m not as bad as I used to be and look at all the folks in worse shape. Jesus ought to be so happy with me! This Pharisaical attitude brings on us the fires of purification if not something worse.

(3:17) I suppose that the scariest part of this message is that Laodicea is unaware of its poverty as much as - it seems— Smyrna is unaware of its riches (2:9).

Now, I suppose I am to say here that, hey, it’s okay to have a lot of money, as long as you spend it wisely etc. I don’t want to say that here. I believe that too many of us in the West have come to the point where we think we deserve what we have, and sorry about the rest, and we don’t keep going back to Jesus to ask if there’s something more we can do for our hurting brothers.

What does lukewarm really mean? Lukewarm means what Jesus says it means in verse 17: I need nothing. I have my security blanket. Nice warm place to live. In our day it means I push buttons and everything happens. A button starts my car. A button raises the elevator. A button cooks my food. And if there is some button I don’t have, I simply pull out that plastic and take care of that too.

I don’t need anything. Don’t need you. Don’t need more than an hour a week at church. Don’t need all that Bible reading and prayer. Maybe a five-minute devotional each day. I’m not a

pagan. Don't need long sermons and lessons, I can always listen to the internet preachers if I get hungry for more, which I don't very often. I don't need charity, and I do give a dollar a month to feed the poor wretches in other lands.

Remember now, we are talking about believers, or people who thought they were believers.

Like a certain rich man Jesus talked about elsewhere, many Christians have torn down their original barns, or closets, or sheds, or garages, and built greater ones to store all their stuff. Stuff they will never use. They say I don't need anything now. I'm set for life. Got my insurance policy, my savings, my investments. I'm secure. And of course, I've got my religion. There's a Bible right in the middle of our living room to prove it. Got my 200 channels on the TV and uncounted videos on my phone. I'm a happy man. I need nothing. If I don't sleep well, I've got pills.

We remember what Jesus said to the man in his story there in Luke 12. You're an absolute fool. You laid up treasure for yourself, but you weren't rich toward God.

But maybe it's not too late for the Laodiceans. Jesus is offering a way out.

(3:18) The counsel of buying from God brings us again back to Isaiah, in chapter 55. Here the prophet invites God's people to buy their necessities without money, and to listen to God, for their needs to be met. In Revelation, God's gold is similarly offered, but the price for such gold may be the fire. Is he calling His people to go to persecuted lands and minister where their lives might be at stake? Or to give substantially to those of our brothers there who are suffering for Christ?

The cost of fine spiritual clothing to cover our nakedness before Him is all-out commitment to Christ. It is to be sure that Christ's righteousness purchased at the cross is applied to our lives.

The price of spiritual eyesight is a substance known only to Heaven and purchased there. We can only imagine how high that price is. But it starts with reading more and more of God's Word. His Word is a light. With more light you can see better. Anoint your eyes every day with generous portions of the eye salve and see if you don't start having a different worldview.

(3:19) We've heard our parents say things like this: "I only spank you because I love you!" We forget where they got this idea, and that it really is true. God the Father knows how to raise kids. These words to Laodicea echo the Hebrew letter, 12:5, "Whom the Lord loves He chastens," and this itself is a quote from Psalm 94:12.

(3:20) As with all the other churches, every age, and not just our own, has a lukewarm type that needs addressing. Here are Christians who believe they have it all but have nothing. Here are satisfied materialists who show up at church, but who seem absent from the Lord. Jesus

stands at the door of such a Church, pleading to come in. As always. Any member of the church that hears the pleading will be blessed.

The Laodicean Church, and all Laodicean types today, can be grateful that this letter amounts to a severe warning and not an announcement of a judgment to come “regardless.” What starts out as that message of doom turns into a serious shaking into awareness, a pathway out for those who desire it.

Once more the overcomer is promised a reward, for even in Laodicea overcomers exist and get the message. Here the victorious one is actually promised a place on the Throne with Jesus. Did ever a people have more to look forward to? Think of it! Food from the tree of life, freedom from eternal death, personalized identification from God Himself, power over the nations with Jesus, an entry into the registry of Heaven, absolute sinless perfection as though sin had never spotted the garments, the security of being an actual “pillar” in God’s temple. Here, sitting on the very Throne of God?

Oh! Then how shall I overcome, Lord? Show me the way! Let me not miss this! That way is begun in the Book of Revelation itself, 12:11, as we saw before. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony. That is, what Jesus did for us on the cross, and telling *others* what Jesus did for us at the cross. And don’t forget the rest of that verse: “they did not love their lives to the death.” For the overcomer it is all *for Jesus, all for Jesus, all my being’s ransomed powers...all my days and all my hours* (from the Mary D. James hymn).

Overcoming, like many subjects in Revelation, is not new to Revelation. In Romans 12:21, Paul tells us not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good. And in John’s first epistle, the fathers and the young men in Christ are told that they have *already* overcome the wicked one because the Word of God lives in them (I John 2:13-14). Even little children, in the Spirit (I John 4:4), have overcome the world because the One in us is greater than the one in the world.

In summary, Jesus is already the Overcomer (John 16:33). He, His Word, His Spirit are in me. As I continue in His life, I am an overcomer too. And if an overcomer, an heir to every promise given, that wonderful list of blessings handed down to us so forcefully in these seven up-to-date and very important letters.

3. The things which are (in Heaven) (4-5)

(4:1) Come up hither. Oh the strange work that popular theologians have done with chapter 4, verse 1. In this simple passage, John is addressed by Jesus, and told to come up to Heaven for further revelations. Incredible to me is the notion that here, Jesus is actually calling His *entire Church* to Heaven! The statement is made by believers in this interpretation, pre-tribulation rapturists all, that, from this point on, the Church is absent in the book of Revelation! And when it is pointed out in several places that *believers are indeed on earth*, the response is made that these believers are really not the Church, but “tribulation” saints, whatever that means. A conclusion is made, and facts to the contrary are explained away. This is not good exegesis, to say the least!

Evidence. For those who desire to look at it, the evidence for the Church being in the book

of Revelation *after* chapter 4 is strong:

1. Definition. First, we assume that by “Church” we mean the saints, or as in Daniel, “holy ones”, a term used over *40 times* by New Testament writers to refer to the Body of Christ, the people of God. We also assume we are talking about a people who have been promised by Jesus, Paul, and Peter a life of persecution often ending in martyrdom.

2. Passages that don’t say “Church” but are Church:

The absence of the word *church* in the rest of Revelation must be dealt with before we move on.

Notice, I said the *word* church. You must determine whether the saints we run into many times in the book of Revelation are the church, or a special group of people called saints who got serious about God after Jesus took His church up into Heaven.

That separate taking up of the church into Heaven *is not mentioned in Revelation*. But many in the evangelical and mostly western church are passionate about the fact that somewhere here the church is caught up and we never see them again.

There are good men and good arguments on both sides. We will not have to talk much about this in the study before us, since, as I say, the catching up is not mentioned in the book. What we will have to deal with as we move through Revelation, though, is the identity of these saints.

I remind you that the church is called saints 40 times in the New Testament and that there are entire books of the New Testament that do not use the word *church* at all, but rather they are called saints. The absence of the word does not prove anything. Let me give you a preview of these people that God calls *saints*, or holy ones, in the book of Revelation. For some, you will see the church. For others you will see a separate group of believers. But they are our people, in some way.

5:8, The worshipers in Heaven pour out before God prayers **from the saints**.

6:10-11, **martyrs** are here received to God and told that their fellow-martyrs will soon join them. They have been slain for the Word of God and their testimony.

7: 13 ff, the same **believers** referred to in chapter 6 are now standing before the Throne, having come out of the Great Tribulation by means of martyrdom.

8:4, The **prayers of the saints** are now seen as incense.

12:11, The **same saints** as in chapters 6 and 7 are seen in a flashback in the context of the Beast who persecuted them.

12:17, Those who keep the **commandments of God**, as brother John loved to talk about in his writings (John 12:49-50, 13:34, 14:15,21,31, 15:1-12, I John 2:3-8, 3:22-24, 4:21, 5:3-6, II John 4-6) *and* have the testimony of Jesus Christ, are distinguished here from the persecuted Israelites who are in the process of being hidden and sealed, and therefore unreachable by antichrist. He now vents his fury on the only “saints” left, the Church.

13:7, As in Daniel 7, the man of sin is seen here being given the authority to **conquer the saints**. He overcomes their body, and they overcome him by going straight to Jesus.

14:6, The **everlasting Gospel** is being preached all over the world. I wonder who does this job? A company of angels? The 144,000? Why not the same group that has always preached it?

14:13, Blessed are the dead who **die in the Lord**. To die in the Lord is to be a member of Christ. Members of Christ are the Church.

15:1-4, Singing the song of Moses **and the Lamb**, those who died in the Lord, those who seemingly were conquered by antichrist, now are around the Throne.

16:15, In the worst of the worst hours comes a **message from Heaven**: I am coming. Keep your garments clean! Who is He talking to, if not the Church?

18:4, Also in the midst of devastation, **God’s people are called out**, but not *up*, first. Who are they? The Church!

3. Passages that all persons agree are the “Church” but *still* don’t use that word:

19:7, The marriage is announced. We know this is the Church! But the word “Church” is **not used**.

19:14, The armies of Heaven follow Jesus to earth. Everyone agrees this is the Church. But the word “Church” is **not there!**

20:4-6, They live and reign with Christ 1000 years. Who? Everyone knows it is the victorious Church. But not by the word “Church”.

22:17. Once more, the word **“bride”, not “Church”**.

Neither is the word “church” used in all the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John. Nor does Paul mention it to Titus. Jude does not mention it at all. What does that mean? Nothing. By the way, Jude uses the word “saints” to communicate the same concept.

What a holy people are described in fourteen out of eighteen chapters of Revelation, portions of which are supposed to be “Church-free”! Who among us is claiming some priority

over these saints, some separation from them? Is it only those who have not dug deeply into God's Book and have rather relied on the shallow teachings of men? Oh, brothers and sisters, these saints are ours!

4. The wrath of God is not for the saints! Paul says God's people are not appointed to wrath (I Thessalonians 5:9). Indeed! And two chapters before (3:3, 4), he tells us to what we are appointed in this life: "...that no one should be shaken by these *afflictions*; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we should *suffer tribulation* just as it happened..."

Trouble is a way of life for the believer, and the Lord delivers him out of it all! As to the word "wrath", God's anger and judgment on sin: Noah and Lot were on the planet when the wrath fell. Both were kept from it. In the Book of Revelation, the pouring of wrath is reserved for those end-of-all-things manifestations, especially the coming of Jesus, at which time, God's people will indeed be caught up to be with Him. From other wrathful times, such as the bowl judgments, God's people are excluded, as were Noah and Lot.

For example, a) **The bowls**, in which "the wrath of God is complete," 15:1, are aimed at the men who took the mark (16:2), the sea creatures, the rivers, "men" (16:8), and the beast's kingdom (16:9). Saints are not mentioned, except to warn them to stay clean until the end (16:15). Obviously, Christians are not in Heaven here, if God is talking to them on the earth!

b) When **Babylon** is to be destroyed, God's people are called out (18:4) for the express purpose of keeping them from her plagues.

And as stated, c) When Jesus comes to execute the wrath of God by treading the winepress (14:20, 19:15), God's people are securely with Him.

God has not appointed us to *wrath*. But he has appointed us to *trouble*.

Having given what I believe to be a Biblical defense for only *one* second coming of Jesus, may I simply suggest that Revelation 4:1 is no different from Revelation 11:12, where the same statement, "Come up hither!" is made to the two witnesses. No one that I know of suggests another rapture there!

So, as you can see by now, I will not be aligning myself in this study with those who have followed the recent (1830's) teaching of a pre-tribulation rapture. I align myself rather with the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:29-30, Who said that the gathering of the elect to Himself occurs *after* the tribulation. To quote Him exactly:

"Immediately **after the tribulation** of those days the sun will be darkened...Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in Heaven..."

Such clear language. There is no verse among pre-tribulation theologians that states their case in this way.

In the following verses of chapter 4, John is graced once more, as in chapter one, to have a glimpse of Deity and those who surround Him. Whereas before, and at the end of the book, Heaven comes to earth, in these verses John goes to Heaven.

Here is where part three of the outline is *introduced*, but it doesn't *take place* until chapter 6 and following.

John sees a door. He is invited to come up, and ...

(4:2) Immediately I was in the Spirit. Now, was he not in the Spirit in chapter 1? I believe that that reference is to the fact that John was worshiping the Lord on the island of his imprisonment. He was lost in love and joy in the Spirit when all of a sudden, His worship service was interrupted. Jesus Himself appears, the messages to the seven churches are introduced and then dictated. Then, to continue His heavenly time, He is invited to Heaven itself, taken there by the Spirit, and in the Spirit he is now made aware of the splendors of Heaven.

He sees a Throne, mentioned often in this book. And He sees One sitting on the Throne. Note, this is in the Spirit. We cannot see God with our natural eyes. All that he sees and that we see through John, is because of the Spirit overwhelming his spirit.

(4:3) There is manuscript evidence suggesting that the "He Who sat there" of verse three could be omitted, making the gem-like attributes to follow a description of the Throne of God, and not of God Himself. The stones mentioned, besides being some of those called for in Aaron's breastplate (discussed in chapter 21) are likewise found in the make-up of the city (21:11). The city has the glory of God on it, making it seem like these very substances mentioned here. Please understand, further, that the appearance was only "like" the gems. Oh, but our language is too pauperized to describe what John *really* saw!

The rainbow. That is still our symbol, not the world's. The sign of Noah. In the Hebrew, the same word translated "bow" in Noah's instance is meant for the bow and arrow of warfare. When we see the bow, yes we see beauty and peace, but we should also see the fact that judgment is coming to this world in another form.

Chapter 10:1 mentions the rainbow again, this time on the head of an angel.

(4:4) 24 saints who have lived on earth but have overcome, are there with Him. If this is twelve apostles and twelve Old Testament saints/prophets, we are faced once more with the possibility that John is seeing himself in the vision.

Or we may have to concede that we simply do not know who these 24 are. They are called elders. The term is a generic one that is used all over Scripture. Jews had elders. Secular nations had elders. The church had and has elders. These are men who are “older” in faith and love, men who have overcome, men who are highly regarded men of God.

We must assume for now that we are still in the first century. Again, that is problematic if we are going to include John as one of the elders, as an apostle. We are tempted to think John just stayed in Heaven, never came back, until we read in chapter 10 that he is told he will be prophesying to many nations after this encounter with Heaven. But even that may be explained differently, as we will later.

If the apostles account for half of the eldership, who are the other 12? One each from the twelve tribes, we must assume. Throughout eternity God is going to honor the twelve tribes of Israel, their names inscribed on the gates of the city; and the names of the apostles, inscribed on the foundation stones of the city. It has long been assumed that these 24 elders match those inscriptions.

Regarding the white robes and golden crowns: they are standard clothing for those made righteous by Jesus’ sacrifice.

(4:5) Here is mention of “lightnings, thunderings, and voices.” The storm-like quality of the Throne Room, in concert with a myriad of voices, is seen elsewhere: 1) in 8:5, just before the sounding of the seven trumpets. This scene seems to be visible on earth, and is accompanied by an earthquake; 2) also see 11:19, 16:18, **just after** the sounding of the trumpets, where all of the above, with hail added, occur. Such drama foretold for the planet as Heaven’s wrath draws near!

Seven lamps of fire are said to be equal to the seven spirits of God, mentioned in 1:4 and 3:1. Again, are these ministering spirits, angels who according to Hebrews are flames of fire? (Hebrews 1:7).

(4:6). The “**sea of glass**”. A “sea” is simply a large body of water, at least large in comparison to the features around it. The Sea of Galilee is large when seen in the context of bodies of water in Galilee. It would not hold up well next to the North Sea. So then, an indoor body of water, such as Solomon set up in his classic temple, could be considered huge next to a simple water-pot. The description of such a sea is found in I Kings 7:23-26. Solomon created a 12,000-gallon cylindrical tank out of cast bronze, 15 feet in diameter, eight feet high. He then mounted it on 12 sculpted oxen, faces pointing outward in a circle. Later in the chapter is recorded his placement of ten other bronze water containers called “lavens”, five on either side of the temple.

This spectacular arrangement of purification containers far outdoes the single portable

laver made for the tabernacle, though the concept was the same (Exodus 30:21): Wash or die! You are dealing with holy things here, and you must be ceremonially clean. All of this was a picture of our own cleansing and the totally perfect priesthood He is making of us. The concept of cleansing of the people of God was an ordinance in Israel, but it originated in Heaven. Ezekiel sees a future temple (Ezekiel 47) from which will flow healing waters. Perhaps the origin of this water is the very sea of glass we are viewing with John. "Glass" because calm and peaceful, but a sea speaking of the living water. And all of it declaring, perhaps, our own cleansing.

(4:6-8) The four living creatures. Four very similar creatures are seen by brother Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1, 10). But Isaiah sees creatures with six wings called *seraphim*, whereas Ezekiel's are called *cherubim*. So are these in Revelation, seraphim? Read carefully the passages involved and compare the characteristics. John here shows us the six wings, and the cry of "holy", as in Isaiah, but also mentions the four faces of Ezekiel, plus an entire body filled with eyes.

There are only four of them. But somehow they are in the middle of the Throne and around it. Are they stationary as opposed to the beings we see in Ezekiel that are always moving around?

Notice the word "like" again as they are compared to lion, calf, a man, and an eagle. In what way they were like these beings, we do not know. But something about their power, their intelligence, their swiftness? Ezekiel sees creatures, *each of which* resembled all four of these animals. (Ezekiel says ox, instead of calf, but it can be the calf of an ox).

We want them to look exactly like the Old Testament beings, but our God can have a variety of beings we have never seen or heard of, and Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John, could well have seen three different species.

What man among us can describe these awesome ones? It seems their entire reason for being is to give praise to God. Their song is recorded for us. and we are pointed once more, at the end of the chapter, when the elders join in, to the Deity of Christ when we compare the song of the living creatures to the words of Paul in Colossians 1:16. The One Who created all things for Himself and by Himself is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, One with the Father.

(4:9-11) The end of this chapter records a song sung by the 24 elders, the ones we have believed are representing the people of God through the years. It is sung as a response to the song of the seraphim and cherubim or whatever they are called. Now, if the living creatures are singing praise day and night, then the 24 elders are responding day and night. That's what Heaven does to a person. When that Heavenly vision becomes more and more a part of who we are, we too will be people of constant worship. Is it not then true that the creation of humans was for a similar purpose to that of the seraphim and cherubim? We will see the answer to this as the people of God arrive in Heaven throughout the Book. We were made for His glory!

Is this not Peter's conclusion in I Peter 2:9? We are chosen, royal, and holy, yes, but in order that we may "proclaim the praises of Him Who called you..."

In chapter 5 we are introduced to the "Book" which in one sense is the "Book of Revelation." It is this Book, or more accurately, *scroll*, which throws the unwary reader into fits of confusion and dismay. Some finally give up and say, "Not for me." But it *is* for us, and a blessing is placed, recall, on *all* readers in 1:3: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it..."

(5:1) The scroll has writing on the inside and out, as did the one which Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:9, 10) received. But unlike Ezekiel's scroll, this one is sealed, and cannot be opened by just anyone. In fact, a challenge is issued to Heaven and earth by one of the many ministering angels of the book of Revelation.

(5:2) Does anyone dare step forward and unlock the mysteries of God? Can anyone see what will take place in the far-flung future? Is there a glimmer of understanding in all of creation about the ultimate purposes of Heaven? A resounding silence follows.

For all of recorded history, all of the stories of Genesis, all the adventures of the Israelites, through all the kingdom years, and the years of the prophets, and even through the life of Jesus on earth and the history of the young church He began, never has there been a secret kept so well. Yes, little hints of an unprecedented trouble in Daniel and through the lips of Jesus. But no details. No substance. Hidden in this sealed book is the end of the story of mankind told in advance by thousands of years. Who is worthy to reveal to humankind what certainly will be on our planet?

And who is worthy among us to look at the mystery unveiled and receive it into our spirits and believe it and live accordingly? We are not looking any longer at a sealed book, but one that is unsealed. From chapter 6 on we are looking at information that was hidden for millennia from humanity, but now is revealed. Yet we still say it's a mystery, we can't understand it.

But this book we are reading is *not the book of Mysteries*; it's called the *book of Revelation, apocalupsis*, the unveiling, the uncovering. God's people are to understand this book.

(5:3) a silence so long and so threatening as to bring tears of dismay and confusion to the waiting apostle.

(5:4) He has seen the Scroll, and heard the invitation go unheeded. Has John been caught up in Heaven's priorities so much that he realizes the import of that Book? More to the point for us, do we weep when the seals are not opened to us? Do we struggle and cry and pray and beg God to give us grace to understand the things which shall surely come to pass? The seals have

been *opened*! The Revelation is before us! Blessed is he who cares enough to dig into its depths!

Daniel, 700 years earlier, received a message that is closely linked to Revelation. And what was Daniel told? (Daniel 12:4). “Daniel, shut up the words, seal the book until the time of the end.” The book of Daniel was for all purposes a sealed book through the centuries. But here in the time of the end, an era identified as a time when transportation and knowledge will increase exponentially, so that we would identify the end time, now the book of Daniel is being understood by many. The book is being unsealed before us, and somehow is linked in the Spirit world to the book of Revelation before us.

We should be tingling with excitement and wonder and tears as John was, when he was waiting for Someone to please step forward and open this book and read it! For those who still cannot understand why John is crying, we just say as is often said in moments like these, “You would have to have been there.”

I take pictures of birds and post them on Facebook. When I am describing them sometimes, I just have to say that same thing. There is no way you can understand what I am saying about this bird. You would have to have been there. We can’t fathom what John was feeling at the moment and why, but if we had been there, we would have been in tears too. I tear up sometimes trying to imagine this scene.

(5:5) Regarding the elders. This is the very term, *presbuteros*, that John applies to himself in his second and third epistles. Is John one of these elders later? The actions and words of these people seem to point to human qualities. Here, an elder is John’s personal comforter. In 7:13, “one of the elders” is his educator, quizzing him on a portion of the vision he experiences. Nearly every other time we see these “elders”, they are worshiping prostrate before the Throne of God (4:10, 5:8, 5:11, 5:14, 7:11, 11:16, 19:4).

Don’t cry, John. There is One, and only One, worthy. He is the Lion of Judah. (Genesis 49:9-10). He is the Root of David (Isaiah 11:1).

Notice the wording here: This Lion has *prevailed* to open the scroll. Look in 3:21. Jesus didn’t just breeze through life when He was here. The great magician, touching and blessing and... He fought His way to victory over Satan’s plots, and eventually had to overcome death itself to get to the place where He was the only one worthy to tell the future. And how could Jesus tell the future in this book? He made the future! We forget at times that this is the God who ordained all the events of humankind from beginning to end. Of course He is the one to open the book! Not only did He ordain all things, He lived them out in His life at His first coming and will live them out again at His second coming.

(5:6) The Lamb. Verse 5 introduces Jesus as the lion. Verse 6 directs our attention to the

midst of the Throne, where the four living creatures are and the 24 elders are, and what do we see? A Lamb. But wait. Chapter 4 opens with John seeing that same Throne, those same elders, those same living creatures. One sitting on the Throne. Here is Jesus in the same location. Close your eyes and you see the rainbow and the precious jewels and the creatures and the elders calling out praises to the Almighty God Who created all things. And immediately we go back to John's Gospel, that tells us that without Jesus nothing was created that was created. Open your eyes and there stands a Lamb before you.

Bring a Jehovah's Witness with you and ask Him to look at this scene. Who is being worshiped here? Who is the center of attention? Who is the One Who is worthy? Worthy to receive honor and glory. Worthy to open and read the scroll.

...and He steps forward, and we see him more clearly. Not just any lamb, but a Lamb who has just been sacrificed. Not an earth-type lamb, either. This one has seven horns and seven eyes, which John reminds us are those seven spirits of God that we have seen three times already.

He has seven horns **(5:6)**. In the coming animals of Revelation, as well as the past revelations of Daniel, the presence and number of horns on an animal has great significance, and can usually be traced to a nation or nations. For example, the ten horns on Daniel's fourth beast and John's beast from the sea, are clearly an end-time amalgamation of nations arising from the long-sleeping Roman Empire. But the Lamb has horns also. Seven. The Dragon we will meet later has a similar array. Those seven horns are said to be the empires of all time. One day all the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ! Seven, as in seven days, and seven Spirits and seven angels, is a number indicating the perfection of an event or a series. Jesus rules all.

The Lamb also has seven eyes. We are told that the eyes and the seven spirits are the same. Now, we have seen the seven spirits enough times as to be forming a clear conclusion about their nature. 1:4 3:1 4:5, and here. Taking all four passages together (the only ones in this or any other Book that clearly mention seven spirits) we find the following:

1. The seven spirits are **before God's Throne**, that is, have instant and constant access to God (1:4).
2. They are **dispensers of grace** that seem to have authority from Father and Son (1:4).
3. **Jesus "has" these spirits** in a similar way that he "has" the stars or messengers of the churches. They both are in His hand. (3:1) In Hebrews 12:9, God is called the Father of spirits. God has created and given to His Son all power over things in Heaven and earth.
4. They are equated to **lamps of fire** burning before the Throne (4:5). See Hebrews 1:7,

where God says that He makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.

5. They are equated to the **seven eyes** in the Lamb (5:6). This strange expression is from Zechariah 3:9 ff, where the High Priest Joshua, in filthy clothing, is made clean, even as our Joshua is made into our righteousness. Before him is laid a stone with seven eyes carved on it. Zechariah 4:10 says, “These seven...are the eyes of the Lord, which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth” See also II Chronicles 16:9 in this connection.

6. They are **sent into all the earth** (5:6). This connects, in my thinking, to Hebrews 1:14, “Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister...?”

I definitely lean here to the seven spirits being seven powerful **angels**. Continue to study and pray on your own and see what you come up with.

(5:7-8) He - Jesus - takes the scroll from Him – the Father– and then He, the Lamb, like the One on His Throne (4:9) begins to receive praise! Who but God can be thus worshiped? In chapter 4, it seems there is one Person there (vs 2-3, 8,9, 10). But now we see the Father *and* the Lamb. Look at the comparison of the praise to Father (4:11, glory, honor, power) and Lamb (5:12 glory, honor, power + riches, wisdom, strength, blessing). We will see them again on side-by-side Thrones later. “I and My Father are One.”

Of harps and harpists. Notice first that all the main worshipers have a harp and know how to play it! It was Jubal (Genesis 4:21) who created this wonderful instrument. He is called the “father of those who play the harp.” We see harpists and harps all throughout the days of the patriarchs (Job 30:31, Genesis 31:27) and the Kings, especially the sweet Psalmist of Israel himself, King David. Several of his Psalms and those of the sons of Korah and also of Asaph mention the harp. David even set aside certain special people in his kingdom to play it and prophesy (I Chronicles 25:1-3)!

The harp was known to the school of unnamed prophets of I Samuel 10:5, as well as seers Isaiah and Daniel. One prophecy of Isaiah suggests (24:8) that the harp will be with us to the end of time, as it indeed has been through the centuries in one form or another. Its broader family includes harpsichord and piano. In Revelation we are introduced to the Heavenly edition of harps, “harps of God” (15:2). One wonders what those who refrain from instrumental music in the church will do when confronted with such a thing in the New Jerusalem.

Of prayers of the saints. God said “of” not “to”. But one need not try to cover up that the prayers coming from earth saints are somehow in the presence of saints gone before us. Those same prayers are seen in the presence of angels in chapter eight. The angel, not one of the elders, finally sends that prayer up, on the altar before the Throne (8:3-4). Now, nowhere is a believer ever told to pray to a deceased Christian. We pray to the Father, through the Son. But

here is a behind-the-scenes look at the Heavenly postal system. It is only a glimpse, mind you, and no theology ought to be formed around it, but know that angels and saints above are at the very least aware of our struggles and needs. The kingdom to which we belong is a family and God's heart is shared liberally with all His own both here and there. Truly in coming to Jesus we have come to "Mount Zion... the Heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in Heaven" (Hebrews 12:22-23).

So there is a church in Heaven, and there is a church on earth. There are saints in Heaven, and saints on earth. The term "church" and "saints" can be used interchangeably. Chapter 4 is telling us about the things that are, not things of the future. How do I know? The book of Revelation – the scroll of this passage – is still sealed. John is letting us know, through the Spirit, what is going on above our heads even now, as the church functions on earth at the same time.

And what is going on? Praise to the Lamb. Prayers from God's people.

After the Lamb takes the Scroll the focus of the chapter is on the Revelator, not the Revelation! May it be so with us as we read. Let us join in the praise songs that follow, often and with a whole heart. Jesus is worthy to tell our future for He made our future happen! He was slain. He redeemed us. He elevated us. The word *worthy* in 4:11, 5:9, 5:12 is the English word whence comes "worth-ship" or *worship*. The heart of true praise is not how we feel or what praise will do for us, but rather His eternal *worth* coupled to our eternal acknowledgement of it.

Let me say for the first time here that nearly *all* of the rest of Revelation is included in the seven seals that are about to be opened. You'll see one seal after another opened. You'll hear seven trumpets, see seven judgment bowls, and a myriad of background information; but it's all a part of "the scroll." In fact, by the time the seventh seal is opened (8:1), the Scroll of Revelation is finished. Everything else in the chapters that follow is background, commentary, and detail. The scroll before you now *is* the book of Revelation.

(5:9) As for the three-verse-long new song (here and in 14:2-3, where we will discuss it again) that ends chapter 5 and the introduction to the scroll's unveiling, it is the song of redemption, glorifying Jesus for His actions. It is a praise of the *new* covenant, the *new* birth. All things are new in Christ Jesus, Who takes away the old forever. The people who know only Moses cannot sing this song. The people who have no hope of a coming kingdom cannot sing this song.

Notice the words "out of" preceding the tribes and tongues. We do not teach, nor does God's Word, universal salvation. We are a people called "out of" the nations. Every nation, even every tribe within that nation. Jesus will come when every tribe on earth has been reached with the Gospel, and a people has been called out of that tribe. The call to be a missionary to new tribes has got to be an exciting call, as Jesus checks off His list one by one of the tribes of earth.

Various agencies tell us differing numbers as to how many tribes are unreached, but the number is dwindling.

In 5:10 is proclaimed the coming authority and priesthood of all the redeemed. The reign on earth that is to come is by those who will serve as intermediaries in the Jesus' new world order. There is a sense in which we do this now, interceding on behalf of a lost world, begging God to send forth laborers into the harvest. God has always had a true priesthood in the world and always will. The Old Covenant priesthood of Aaron was true in form but was only a preview and a picture of the true priesthood of Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18 ff), our King of Righteousness. And we cannot forget that in our day the false Babylonian/Roman priesthood is being mixed in with the true. That will all be gone on that day.

Older manuscripts use the words "them" and "they" in place of "we" in the last line of verse 10. When you consider who is singing the song, so far, that makes more sense. It seems as if only the four living creatures and the 24 elders are singing here. Are they the future rulers of earth with Jesus? Or are they speaking of those who will reign, not of themselves?

5:11 speaks of the enormity of what John was privileged to see. It is verse 2 of the song. He starts with a ballpark figure of one hundred million Heavenly beings, but soon abandons that number for a broad "thousands of thousands" (millions). What has been added to the original 28? Angels! Oh, I want to be there and see this myself! What glory for Jesus!

(5:12) See here the progression of the music festival unfolding. In 4:8 it seems wonderful enough, with the four living creatures. They sing a song of God's holiness. In 4:11 the 24 elders respond to their song with a song of their own, of God's worthiness. In 5:8-9, the two groups are combined to sing a new song to Jesus, for what He did. Now, a third group, more than a billion angels, add their agreement to Jesus' worthiness.

In verse 13 we then see Heaven's choirs joined to earth's, in a preview of the anthem that shall fill the universe when "every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess" the Lordship of Jesus (Philippians 2:10). Every imaginable member of creation, whether in Heaven or earth, joins in to bless the Lamb *and* the One on the Throne. All of God being worshiped by all He has created all at once! Finally He receives His due. Only now is all well! Only now can we proceed with the opening of seals, the unveiling of the tragedy that shall surely play itself out on this planet. God is on His Throne and will be eventually worshiped by all!

Know the outcome of all first, and this little blip in time called the Tribulation will be bearable. Soon we will be home to enjoy Eternity and His abiding Presence. Thank God that in this book He reveals *Himself* before and above all that He *does*.

And for those who still need evidence of the absolute Deity of Jesus, note that the One

who has told us He will share His glory with no one (Isaiah 42:8), is receiving *blessing, honor, and glory* at the same time as is the Lamb.

(5:14) Now listen carefully and you will hear someone saying *Amen* to your praises. That's how this magnificent scene ends, and as the lights lower we leave the 24 elders totally and absolutely caught up in praising the Eternal One.

Hold that position, brothers and sisters. Difficult times are coming soon. But keep praising God through it. Now, I realize that many don't believe they will be going through the Tribulation that is about to come. But praise the Lord through it anyway, because if it happens in our generation, there are people that you know and love who will be going through it. Allow yourself to imagine the reality of what is coming to the earth. Remember that saints, some saints somewhere, will go through all of it, even though it may not be you. As we read of what is coming, let us also ask ourselves, is the condition of things in our world such that it could happen today? That is, could the Tribulation begin at any minute?

